

22 November

Fr JOHANNES WEISBRICH 25 November 1927 – 22 November 1969



Johannes Weisbrich was born in Ratiborg, Upper Silesia and did his theology studies in Regensburg after the war. He was ordained a priest in Neuzelle in 1953. After a short spell as Assistant Parish Priest/Chaplain he joined the Society of Jesus in 1955. After the Novitiate and some further studies he went to the then Rhodesia in 1958 as one of the first missionaries to the then newly constituted Sinoia (Chinhoyi) Mission. He then worked at the difficult Marymount Mission and later in Sinoia from where he built a centre in Banket to cater for the workers

from the surrounding farms and small mines. In order to communicate better with them who were mostly of Malawian origin he learnt a second African Language (Chichewa).

Just before turning 39, on the 31st of July 1966 he was named the new Superior of the Sinoia Mission. His calming Silesian temperament did much to soothe frayed nerves as the Sinoia Jesuits faced serious issues arising from the strong passions they experienced as they sought the best way to move forward together on their new mission. It was something akin to what happened among the first Jesuits of the Zambezi Mission in 1879/80 when serious issues threatened to divide them. And we can go back further to the Council of Jerusalem in Acts and realise that differences of opinion are a healthy sign of vigorous engagement.

Although he was always moving around to visit the companions spread out around the Sinoia Mission as superior, he always made sure that he could say Sunday Masses in the outstations of Sinoia. When he became free from being superior, he was able to give full time to pastoral work but a fatal accident intervened at the turn off to Alaska. There was much puzzlement over how he could have met that tragedy since he had used that turn-off many times. The only conclusion is there were so many issues on his mind that his attention must have slipped for a moment.

Jesuits in Germany wrote 'it is difficult to grasp that we were seeing him for the last time' (when he had been over a short time before the accident). 'African Christians and us, his companions, mourn the passing of Fr Weisbrich but our gratitude that God gifted us with such a good man is greater than our mourning. The mischievous smile that could break out of this otherwise quiet and reserved man remains in our memory. We believe that his joy now endures.'

