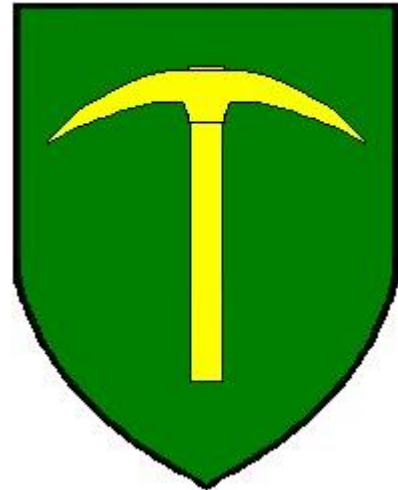


**June
2006**

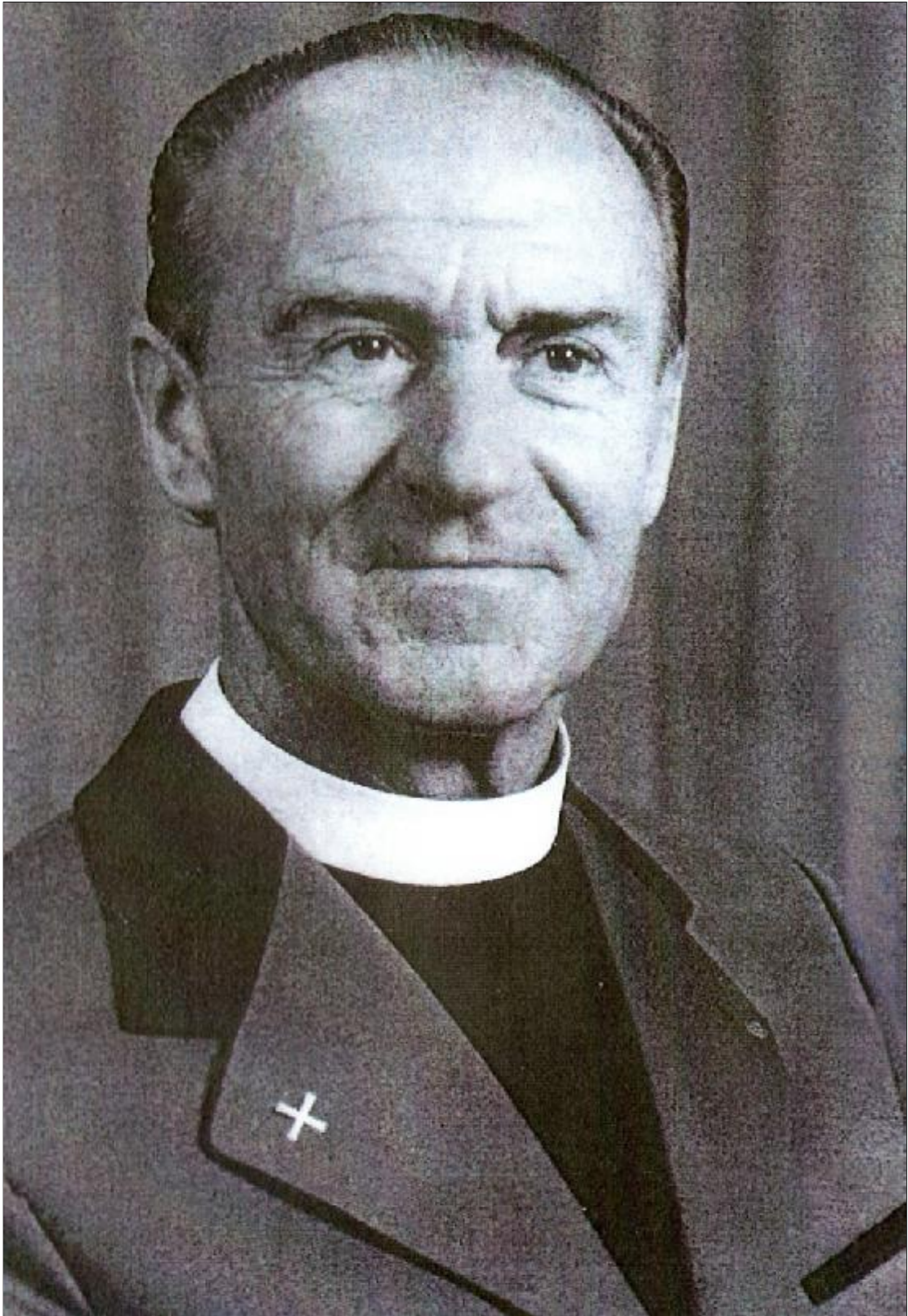
Pioneer Trail



**Meeting
Mabukuwene Nature Reserve
Friday's 19:00 - 21:00 hrs**

**Scout Leader
Norman Scott
nclscott@netconnect.co.zw**

1st Bulawayo (Pioneer) Scout Group
www.angelfire.com/sc/matabeles/troops



**A Tribute to the Memory of the Rev. Father Odilo Otto Weeger CMM,
Missionary – Philanthropist – Man of Great Vision and Action**

Under the Pseudolachnostylis Maprouneifolia

The name Father Odilo Weeger needs no introduction to us members of the 1st Bulawayo (Pioneer) Scout Troop, or the Scouts of Bulawayo, or indeed the public of Bulawayo and Matabeleland in general. Regrettably, this well-known and respected Pastor passed away on the 8th of June 2006, in his 94th year. Up to the time of his passing, he was still active in the parish of Christ The King, Hillside, where he had been stationed since 1970. In regularly administering to us Scouts, Father last celebrated Mass in Gordon Park, the Matabeleland Scout Leader Training and Scout Camping Ground in the Matopos, on the 14th of May 2006, Mother's Day. And so as a tribute to Father Odilo, the 1st Bulawayo is humbled and honoured to produce this special edition of our Troop magazine, to record in a small way the unselfish missionary work Father undertook, sometimes under trying conditions, for the people of Matabeleland.



Father Odilo in St. George's Chapel, after his last service there – May 2006

Although Father Odilo had never been a Scout in his youth, as a young priest he became acquainted with the aims, objectives and methods of the Scout programme, and on many an occasion he lamented the fact that he had not had the opportunity of being a Scout. This is understandable, for Father loved the outdoors, was ready to forego many luxuries, had a strong sense of self-discipline, was observant and questioning, compassionate and appreciated the sacrifices people made for the sake of others. He would have been an ideal Scout, for he was mentally and physically active and had great leadership qualities. As much as he loved the outdoors, he was equally at home in the arts, sport and science worlds, being an accomplished violinist and gymnast in his younger days. His great passion for history came to the fore during many an evening's conversation when a simple question was asked. He was also a linguist, being fluent in German, his mother tongue; Latin, the language of the Church; to a certain extent Greek and Hebrew; the English of his adopted country, Zimbabwe; and also Zulu and ISindebele, in which he regularly preached up to the time of his death.

Father became actively involved in Scouting in 1980, when he was appointed Chaplain of Gordon Park at the commencement of the monthly church services. Although being parish priest of Christ The King church in Hillside, as well as Provincial Superior of the Mariannahill Missionaries in Zimbabwe, Father found the time to conduct the services at Gordon Park for the Scouts, a role he continued to play up to the time of his passing. At first, he said Mass every second month, with the intervening month being taken by an Anglican priest. After about five years, a Presbyterian service was included, so reducing his commitment to every third month. Apart from when Father was away on home leave, he never missed a service and his last service was in May 2006, three weeks before he passed away. Besides these monthly services, Father would come out to the Park and conduct services for special events, or he would say to me "Don't come in for Mass this weekend, I will come out to the Park," for he knew I spent my weekends at Gordon Park and would come into town on Saturday evening just to attend mass.

Not content with this contribution to Scouting, Father volunteered his services as a member of the Matabeleland Scout Council, and by the time he retired from the Council in March 2006, he had been the longest serving member.

Scouting to Father was a practical activity, where he was always delighted to hear of the camps, expeditions, competitions and general Scouting activities that the Scouts were involved in. He would often question the Scouts about their activities, and extol them to continue taking advantage of getting out to camp, especially to Gordon Park, which he treasured. On his numerous visits to Gordon Park, he would take a keen interest in the water situation, the animals, the current projects being undertaken, and anything else that had come to his notice.

Taking his interest in Scouting a little further, I think Father wanted to be a Scout for a few days, although he was in his 70's, when he joined a group of my Scouts on two hikes in the Chimanimani Mountains. The first hike was in 1986, and the second in 1989. The following are excerpts from his logbooks:

4th December 1986

"We were about halfway through the valley when something extraordinary happened. Heavy mist descended from the mountain range and travelled with incredible speed into the valley, obliterating both view and vision. We could hardly see our feet, at the same time we heard the roaring thunder of mighty waters some distance away."



In the mountains...

"The continuous thunder of the waterfall was awe inspiring, and we could not help listening to it with every fibre of our whole being the whole night. How nice it was stretching our limbs and relaxing after a very heavy day. The ground was hard but at least we were safe from rain and any other element of nature."

24th January 1989

"At dawn we celebrated Holy Mass in an adjacent cave which reminded us of the Masses in the catacombs by the early Christians. A mouse was wondering what was happening, and jumped from rock to rock. This celebration was quite unique. A unique experience for me, not only for the youngsters, as I too had never said Holy Mass in such circumstances and surroundings, though I have said it often in the open air, under trees and on rocks whilst at missions."

Another unique experience was when Father celebrated Mass on Lake Scott, Gordon Park. When the Lake filled for the first time in 1996, a large raft was constructed, pushed out onto the Lake, and connected to the shoreline with a catwalk. Father, with a Scout assisting him, celebrated Mass on the raft, with the congregation sitting on the shoreline. (We were reminded of Jesus preaching to the crowds after asking to be taken out like this on a fishing boat.)

His love for what Scouting offered the young man was deep, and he encouraged everyone to aspire to a high level of Scouting. For his dedication he was awarded, over the years, progressive Scouting awards, culminating in the highest, The Golden Lion.

And now, until the next time, it's back to my hammock beneath my favourite *Pseudolachnostylis Maprouneifolia*, with a floppy hat pulled over my eyes as I reflect on the life of a man of compassion and love, devoted to his vocation and a personal friend and mentor.

N. Scott
Scout Leader

An Extraordinary Man – Father Odilo

Father Odilo was born in the historic farming village of Arberg, in Franken, Germany on 14th October 1912. He died on Thursday 8th June 2006, in Mater Dei Hospital, with his nephew Max Weeger there from Germany and the comfort of the Last Sacraments and prayers going up from there and all over the world.

He learned the dignity and values of honest hard work and the finest of moral and religious traditions from his modest but very good family. He was in the last group of missionaries that was allowed to leave Germany in 1938, and he gave his whole life to mission work in Matabeleland.

He was a wonderful man who committed his life fully to God, and to serving the many peoples of Zimbabwe. One of his sermons, especially at baptisms, was about living our lives like candles. He certainly did exactly that – giving light and warmth, and consuming himself in the process.

He had a genuine love for and interest in people, across a most surprising and wide range. He maintained contact personally with so many people whom he considered his personal friends, and those of us fortunate to be included knew his concern and felt his prayers.

He had a deep reservoir of natural and acquired wisdom and human understanding and he appreciated God's loving provision for us all in the beauty and complexity of creation, the earth and all life on it and the stars and all of the ever-more revealed universe.

He appreciated the finer things in life, like art, music and etiquette and supported many community presentations and efforts with his presence.

His strong sense of justice suffered greatly from the absurd removal of his own rights as a Zimbabwean resident for over 65 years, as well as the growing culture of impunity and disregard for basic rights that has done so much in our country.

He made friends from all races and religions and was especially committed to reaching out to non-Catholic Christians and many Jewish friends and his memory for names and details was extraordinary. He was a self-disciplined and totally dedicated Catholic priest, but he found an amazing amount of time to attend to sick visits and the pastoral needs of innumerable people, irrespective of race or creed.

Although we all feel his loss personally and keenly, we can be confident that he himself will be granted his heavenly reward and that we have a unique ally who will intercede for our many needs.

May his dear soul rest in peace.

John L. Sullivan



Father celebrating Mass at St George's Chapel at Gordon Park.

A Short History of Father Odilo's Missionary Life

Father Odilo was born on the 14th of October 1912, in a small town called Arberg, near Nurnberg, in Bavaria, Germany. He was the second youngest of seven children. While a young boy, World War I was declared, and the world around him descended into chaos. However, through all this, at about the age of 11, he was confirmed, and he took his first steps along his missionary path.

In 1925, he began his High School education at Lohr-on-Main, lasting for 9 years. During this period, his country was again falling apart, as Hitler began to come to power. He completed his high school education in 1933, and in the same year, aged 21, he commenced his novitiate at St Paul's near Venlo, Holland, close to the German border. In 1934 he began university at Wurzburg, on Main River. After three years at the seminary, Father took perpetual / final vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

On the 24th of April 1938, Father was ordained a priest in Wurzburg. However, war was brewing in Europe, and thankfully, Father was sent to Africa, along with 9 other priests, to Mariannahill in South Africa. A year later he left South Africa, travelling by train to Bulawayo, in then Southern Rhodesia. In 1939 he was stationed at St. Mary's Cathedral, in Bulawayo.

After four months at St. Mary's, he received his first assignment: St. Patrick's Mission, as assistant to Fr Joseph Kammerlechner. As Europe collapsed into war, Father continued with his missionary work, moving from St. Patrick's to St. Mary's Mission in Lukosi, Hwange district. Here he stayed for close to three years.

In 1942, Father was transferred back to St. Mary's Cathedral in Bulawayo. In December 1945, he commenced his Fatima Mission Project, followed by St. Luke's Mission Hospital, near Lupane.

In 1948, construction began on the Fatima Hospital, but was only completed in 1951. Father Odilo did a tremendous amount, and variety, of work from Fatima, and St. Luke's, opening numerous outschools and reaching many hundreds of people with education, health and the Gospel of Christianity.

In 1950, Father had been transferred to Empandeni for less than four months, but was soon transferred back to Fatima and St. Luke's, to resume building and development. In 1951, Dr Davis, the first Missionary Doctor, opened the hospital at Fatima. With the arrival of Dr Decker at Fatima in 1952, Dr Davis moved to the newly established mission, St Luke's, where she opened this second hospital. St Paul's Mission Hospital was also established in this huge Nkayi district.

In 1954, Father Odilo went home to Germany for 6 months' leave, after 16 years in Africa. Sadly, his mother had died in the intervening years, and he found his father thin and bent with age. At the end of 1957 he returned to his appointment as parish priest of Saint Mary's Cathedral in Bulawayo. There, in 1958, he began his radio programmes, which brought such inspiration and joy to so many people all over the country. In 1970, he became the Provincial Superior for Mariannahill Missionaries in Zimbabwe, and so had to move from the Cathedral to Christ The King parish in Hillside, where he remained for the rest of his life.



Father Odilo in a pew under the Cross at Christ the King parish

Father Odilo & the Wednesday Walk-about Group:

I knew Father Odilo for more than 25 years. He used to be a regular visitor to our home, "Coriolanus," at Douglasdale, and an ever-welcome guest at our dinner table. During Corrie's last, long illness, he came to visit frequently to pray for him, and was a tower of strength. He kindly consented to assist Father Noel Scott by taking the prayers at Corrie's funeral service at the Church of the Ascension, Hillside. This was in November 1989. Two months later I moved into town, settling in Hillside, and was invited by Father O to join the Wednesday Walking Group. We walkers met at Christ the King Church at 7:20 am on a Wednesday, for departure at 7:30. Father was very strict about that, and we had to be on time or else.

Father would have decided on the venue for the day, and Geoff was the camera bearer. Geoff Archer was one of Father's best friends, and was soon to become mine as well, as we had a common love – trees. In fact, this preoccupation of ours frequently got us into trouble.

Routinely, we would find our picnic spot somewhere in the Matopos at about 8:30 am. There we would have coffee and biscuits, put on our knapsacks, don our hats, and set off for a walk, which would take anything from four to six hours.

It was not unusual for us to have our lunch at 3 or even 4 o'clock in the afternoon. A popular lunch spot was at Lushumbi lookout in the Game Park. There we could nearly always see animals and enjoy feeding the monitor lizards, whom Father delighted in teasing.

Frequently, Geoff and I would retard the outward bound walk by stopping to examine a tree which we found particularly interesting, and in so doing earn ourselves a good-natured scolding from Father O. Every year toward Christmas time, he would promise to give us each a tail for Christmas.

Once, on the Arboretum walk, we were going through some very long grass, while still skirting the Maleme River. Father was wearing his usual little red hat. I was just behind him, but all I could see was the red hat bobbing up and down above the grass. Suddenly the hat disappeared! Next thing I came upon Father O lying scrunched up in a huge ant bear hole. The way he was lying made me think he had broken both his legs. However, he promptly extricated himself, shook the dust off, declared himself fit and just waited to see everyone safely past the danger spot before continuing.

He was particularly interested in caves and bushman's paintings. In fact, he was an avid speleologist, and was invited to give lectures at the Bulawayo Natural History Museum on the subject of rock art: which he did very ably and eruditely. He was also a good photographer, and had numerous albums of excellent photos of rock paintings. Also we walkers had sometimes to climb trees, or up near-impossible rock faces so he could get an interesting feature for his albums. Protestations got us nowhere, as he would simply insist that we have more faith. On the subject of the more obscure rock paintings, some of the comments and interpretations were amusing indeed, especially from Aubrey Pakenham.



Examples of Bushmen rock art.

We all thought that neither Geoff nor Father O could possibly get lost in the Matopos – many people had from time to time suffered that considerable inconvenience. However, Geoff did get lost once on his way back from a long walk. I still think he had suffered a touch of sunstroke, as it was a very hot day. No one missed him till they got back to the vehicle. Father had to walk 27kms that day, as he first had to walk to the Matobo Mission to borrow their vehicle (Geoff had our vehicle's keys in his pocket) then drive to town to get the duplicate keys, and then back to

the walking venue and continued to search for Geoff along with the rest of us. Geoff materialised the next day, but never lived the incident down. As a longstanding member of the Black Eagle Society, he was presented with a very fancy cowbell at their next meeting. An honour he accepted somewhat red-facedly.

On another of our walks Father stooped to remove a biggish rock from our path and underneath it was a baby black mamba. The little snake quickly slithered away towards the long grass, but Father brought it back with his walking stick to its nesting place in a shallow hole under the rock. The rock was quickly replaced, and we were told to take a detour around it and not disturb the creature.



Even the animals had to pose!

One day, we had wriggled our way through a crack between two huge rocks, and I had scratched my arm. It was bleeding quite a bit, and Father suddenly had a bright idea. We would have a blood sacrifice! The country had suffered two consecutive years' drought, and the bush was looking dry indeed. My blood was placed on a porcupine quill I had picked up earlier, and we all had to bow down and pray for an end to the drought. Lo and behold, the following day we had a very good down pouring of rain. Coincidence? Faith? His sense of humour was boundless, and sometimes paid dividends.

One of our regular walks was to a place where ancient torrents had created great erosion which has left deep ravines in the red earth, snaking their way through a valley. Their perpendicular sides are puckered, forming intricate patterns, and tree roots expose their filigreed tentacles as they reach down in search of moisture. Father enjoyed this walk particularly well, and insisted on calling it the 'Grand Canyon of the Matopos.'

The erection of the Holy Cross on Mt. Inungu and its subsequent replacement was an affair that involved most of the walkers in one way or another. Father's dedication to this project is well known and I was also roped in, in a small way. When the original cross started to deteriorate, Father went to see the then warden of the Matopos National Park. This man was an atheist, and wanted the cross removed altogether.

One day, Father went to see this warden, and said, "I am about to have the cross removed..."

"About time," said that infidel, interrupting Father's speech.

"I am going to remove it so as to put up a better, bigger one, capable of withstanding all weathers," replied our intrepid Father.



Mt Inungu: The old cross erected by Fr Renk in 1964, with the new cross under construction in the background.

The warden protested vigorously. None-the-less, a few days later Father telephoned me. "Clem, I want you to write a letter to the editor of the Chronicle (a Bulawayo daily newspaper) and expose the warden's atheism and unreasonable objection to the symbol of Christianity standing on Mt. Inungu."

I complied. One could not refuse Father O's requests. Sympathy for his cause poured in, and the new 33 foot high steel cross was erected. It is there today and, hopefully, will continue to stand for centuries to come as a monument to a man of God and his helpers who would not be defeated, no matter how great the obstacles.

Sometimes we would involve Father in deep philosophical discussions, and one or other of us would raise a controversial subject. Father would not necessarily reply there and then, but would walk on, or even change the subject. However, he had not forgotten, and obviously took his time to think about it. Later on, during the walk back, one would get his reply, or sometimes he would go back home and phone you in the evening to make his observations, clearly well thought-out and sound.

He took an interest in everything, particularly the animals in the Game Park, along with their waterholes. At Tshabalala Game Sanctuary, he would check on all the waterholes, and report to the authorities if any were empty. It was a great sadness to him to watch the deterioration of the Parks, the neglect and the depletion of the animals in consequence, along with poaching.

When I was away in Cape Town for a spell during April 2003, I received a letter from him, from which I quote the following extract:

“The Walking Group send their love and best wishes – we have been out a couple of times, but can’t go far as we have no fuel, and even Tshabalala is now unaffordable, being \$500 per person, added to the \$500 for each car. It was always a nice little outing wasn’t it?”

As I write now, it is now 300 times as much...

On our outward walks, Father was fairly indulgent. We could sniff the flowers, admire the views, and of course we also had to learn our lessons, such as the names of the hills, rivers and caves. On the return walk however, Father would set a spanking pace, and woe betide the person who then held things up. On our return drive in the late afternoon we would, invariably, encounter some warthogs feeding on the green grass on the side of the road next to Tshabalala. Father never could resist chasing them. Off the road we would go, the Kombi lurching and bumping across the rough terrain while the warthogs fled in panic, their tails standing stiff and erect, and Father grinning from ear to ear with wicked delight.

On his last walk, we visited Chipangali, the wildlife orphanage, where Father teased one of the lions with his walking stick. At first the lion seemed to enter into the fun of things, but it suddenly lost its temper, grabbed Father’s stick, and bit the end clean off! Later, at our picnic lunch, Father confessed to me that he had a pain in his right side. Three weeks later, he passed away.

He was certainly a most unforgettable person, a staunch friend, a strong ally, a keen walker and a great man of God.

We shall all miss him; and whenever or wherever I walk I can see him in my mind’s eye, striding ahead, sure, confident and enjoying every moment.

Clem van Vliet
Cape Town

Father Odilo – Chaplain of the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem

The Military and Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem was founded during the many crusades to Jerusalem from 1098. It was founded to protect and care for the soldiers, who fought in the Holy Land to regain the Holy City of Jerusalem, which had been captured by the Saracens. I have been a Knight of the Order for over 20 years. When the previous Army Chaplain left, I was very fortunate to be able to encourage Fr Odilo Weeger to become our Chaplain.

Since the end of the crusades, the Order has taken on humanitarian work in many different forms throughout the world, specifically that of fighting leprosy. In Zimbabwe, each jurisdiction is able to carry out whatever charitable work it can, and over the years we have helped a number of various organisations. In all of these, Father lent a helping hand, and he took great delight in giving of his own time and effort to help those less fortunate than himself.

We have fed the poor at Entambeni, donated ice cream to the children at the Rehabilitation Centre at the King George School for the Disabled. We have donated mattresses to Island Hospice, cutlery to Rhodes House, Barham Green. We have taken the patients from the Disability Centre next to Mpilo Hospital on a day's outing to the Matobo Hills. We have held tea parties at the Salvation Army and Edith Duly Nursing Homes, and we have fed the needy at Coronation Cottages with stew and soup during the winter months. Each year, we



Father Odilo with Frank Noble, along with a group of children

also hold a retreat to Kyle Dam or Lake Macilwane, to renew our Christian Faith.

Throughout all of this, Father's boundless energy and zeal for charitable work has been a great example for both myself, and the many others who have come into contact with him. By his every action he showed us how to live a life of giving, and a life of thanks and praise to God.

Frank Noble KLJ
Lieutenant of Matabeleland

Father Odilo and the Catenians

I first met Father Odilo in the early 1960's. I had been working for the Native Affairs Department of the then Southern Rhodesian Government, and had for part of my stay been in the Lupane area. Here I had heard a lot of things about this great priest who had worked in the area just before I had been posted there. When I returned to the city I became a member of the Cathedral Parish, and it was there that I first encountered Father Odilo. The man that I met there was a far cry from the man that I really got to know in later years

Many years before that, when I just a young pipsqueak, I remember my father leaving the Boksburg Parish Church of St Dominic, all because of the priest, who was very dogmatic in his way, always calling attention to late comers and stopping in mid-sentence during his sermon if somebody coughed. My dad could not handle this and so we left Boksburg Parish and joined the OMI Parish of Benoni.



A true Scout at heart...

Well, the priest I found at the Bulawayo Cathedral, Father Odilo, was the reincarnation of the priest I had left behind so many years ago. In those early days I did not have much to do with Fr Odilo, but as time progressed, I married and had children of my own. Sylvia and I decided that it would be to their advantage if they enrolled in the Scouting movement. This they did, and it was here that I once more encountered Fr

Odilo. To say that this was an interesting experience would be understating the fact. For suddenly here was a man who was at the same time the pillar of gentleness and understanding, yet still domineering in his pursuit of doing things the correct way, and that, to him, meant doing it God's way.

Whenever the 8th Hillside Scout Group had a function or meeting Fr O would be there, talking to the kids and their parents. He showed great interest and was always available for lending a well-defined opinion. We soon got involved in going out to Gordon Park for the monthly services, and it was here that I think Fr O showed his true self in the way he conducted a multi-faith service that made all in attendance feel that the service was for them only. Well I remember how Fr O would always check his watch at the beginning of a sermon, then look directly at Scout Leader Ed Hall, and say, "I'm keeping time!"

About the time that I became involved with Scouts I also joined a Catholic Men's Group known as the Catenians. With its meeting base at the Elmar Schmidt Hall at Christ The King, we were always coming into contact with Fr O. Although the Catenians do not have spiritual directors, Fr O was in fact the "de facto" spiritual director of the circle. With his connection with the Scouts, and his three-monthly Mass at Gordon Park, the Catenians have become regular attendees of the wonderful Gordon Park services.

The Catenian Association is a Catholic men's association primarily aimed at the maintenance of social and spiritual contact between Catholic business and professional men. It was formed in the United Kingdom in 1908. The association's Bulawayo Circle (the first Circle outside of the UK) was inaugurated in the then Rhodesia by the late Dr Bernard Pepper, in 1957. One of the

dignitaries that attended the inauguration dinner was Fr Odilo, and since that time, up until his death, he maintained a very close and personal interest in the Circle and the Association. Fr Odilo was a very close personal friend of the Pepper family, and after the tragic deaths of Dr and Mrs Pepper and their daughter, Judy, in a road accident, he was one of the priests officiating at their Requiem Mass.

Every year the Bulawayo Circle commemorates the death of our founder with a Mass celebrated on his old farm, now Zindele Safaris, owned by the Paul family. The farm is situated on the edge of the Matopo Hills, off the old Gwanda Road, past the Matobo Mission. Fr O was always called upon to celebrate these masses, with the venue being out in the open on the huge granite dwala known locally as Shumba Shava, overlooking the Umzingwane and Mtshabezi Valleys. Here Fr O was in his element, in the wide open expanse of the bush with the mighty canopy of the brilliant blue sky for a roof, and it was here that he inspired us all with a feeling of closeness to God and one another.

Recently the Bulawayo Circle celebrated its 500th meeting and at the celebratory dinner Fr O was the guest speaker. He was in fact the only person present that had attended the inauguration dinner in 1957.

Catenian Circle meetings are privy to the members only, but this did not worry Fr O and, if he wanted to address the members on some subject, he would simply come into the meeting hall, excuse himself to the President, address the gathering on the topic he wished to put across, excuse himself and leave. Whenever possible, Fr O would attend the social functions of the Circle and could always be relied upon to drop in for a quick brandy and coke with the members after a Circle meeting.

Fr Odilo engendered a wonderful respect and sense of total awe in all that he met. You did not have to be a Catholic or a member of the Scouting movement to have been able to find an immediate bond with this self-effacing, generous, happy, humble man. He was a man who, without a doubt, cast a spell on all that he met, not a spell of mysticism, but a spell of immense love and feeling that here was the one man that you could really trust and believe, without any doubts or misgivings.

After all those years with us, it is not difficult to say that with the death of Fr Odilo, the Scouts, the Catenians, his close circle of friends, the Matopos, Bulawayo, Matabeleland and in fact the whole country has lost a true Champion and Friend.

Without doubt, we all know that each and every time we gather out at Gordon Park, he will always be with us.

Let us always remember one of his favourite injunctions: "Always be ready for the call of the Lord!"

Mike Glenshaw

To Father Odilo – In Tribute

It was a gorgeous evening last month, May, a few of us were sitting with you on top of one of the kopjes in Gordon Park looking down on the kaleidoscope of colours of the beautiful Mtsheleli River Valley and the lengthening shadows on the sun kissed kopjes.

We watched in wonder as the brilliant full moon rose and the orange/red sun set behind the darkening Matopos gomo's.

I told you then, as I had frequently told you before – “Father Odilo, the Good Lord he don't want you in heaven”.



“The humour in life can only be seen by those gifted with the love of laughter...”

Guess I was wrong, after 94 years the Good Lord suddenly decided he needed you in heaven and found a vacancy for you – we can't think why.

You didn't need a pulpit to put the fear of God in your congregation. All you needed was your VW 1900cc (Christian Converter) Combi with yourself at the wheel. Driving precariously fast and wildly along the rough winding Matopos bush roads, rosary in one hand and on occasions, it seemed, with your eyes

closed in deep meditation while your passengers were all in deep petrified prayer.

Thanks for the many times we were all able to enjoy the Matopos with you, walking, attending Boy Scout functions and just appreciating the spirituality and serenity of that special place.

Remember the time you were marrying my son and forgot his name and nearly married me to my daughter in law.

Thanks for blessing our little chapel on our farm in the Matopos, and Les and my marriage

Thanks for being our friend.

The sun has set – “a kopje has fallen”.

Malcolm and Les Ross.

Matopo Conservation Society

June 2006 Newsletter

The Society records with great sorrow the passing away of our Honorary Life Member, Rev Fr Odilo Weeger CMM on Thursday 8th June at the age of 93 years. An outstanding man, who led by example and enjoyed an incredible life, he will be missed not only by the Society, but by the people of Bulawayo in general. As a tribute to Fr Odilo, we copy below the citation given to him by the Society when he was awarded Honorary Life Membership on 23 October 1998 –

“The members and committee of the Matobo Conservation Society in General Meeting, proposed and approved unanimously, that Fr Odilo Weeger be appointed as an Honorary Life Member of the Matobo Conservation Society in recognition of his considerable and exemplary contribution to the objectives of the Society.

“Fr Odilo was born in Arberg, Germany, in 1912, and following his ordination in 1938 he travelled to South Africa to take up his missionary vocation. He was posted to Bulawayo in April 1939 and so his association with this city, and with the Matobo Hills in particular, was established. Whilst Fr Odilo was posted to numerous missions in Matabeleland he frequently served within the Bulawayo Diocese, and has been permanently based at Christ the King Catholic Church, Hillside, since 1970. During this period he has built up a considerable understanding and knowledge of the Matobo Hills, its people, culture, history, rock art, flora and fauna. He is perhaps best associated with the great cross erected on Mt Inungu in 1982, and the annual pilgrimage there every 25th May.

“Fr Odilo has served as chaplain to the Boy Scouts at Gordon Park, and was instrumental in the building of an outdoor chapel there. Since 1990, Fr Odilo has served on the Matobo Committee, which oversees the management of the Matobo National Park. He supported the establishment of this Society from the first meeting held in December 1992, and whilst his Sunday duties preclude his involvement in our field trips he continues to visit the hills weekly, and as such has been able to provide a constant flow of information on the various sites and areas visited. He continues to take a keen interest in the Black Eagle Survey, and with his wealth of knowledge of the hills, frequently accompanies visitors from all over the world to our beloved hills. We the members wish to record in public our appreciation and respect for the services rendered by Fr Odilo.

“We therefore declare Fr Odilo Weeger duly elected as an Honorary Life Member of the Matobo Conservation Society. Approved at the Annual General Meeting of the Matobo Conservation Society, 23 October 1998.”

As a missionary in Matabeleland North, Fr Odilo founded 32 schools and 3 mission hospitals (Fatima, St Luke's and St Mary's), all of which are operating today. In those early days, he cycled much of the area of Matabeleland North, travelling between Victoria Falls, Wankie, Dete, Matetsi, Lukosi and other remote and far flung locations on his bicycle. Flooded rivers proved no obstacle as he would swim across and on one occasion he rescued a boy from the croc infested Lukosi River. He was well known amongst the Bulawayo hospitals, probably visiting every patient who ever stayed overnight! Fr Odilo was the recipient of the Cross of Merit – First Class (German Federal Republic), Civic Honours (City of Bulawayo), Silver Elephant (Matabeleland Boy Scouts) and the Golden Lion (Zimbabwe Boy Scouts) amongst other awards. However, it was for his love and knowledge of the Matobo Hills that Fr Odilo held a special place in the MCS.

Fr Odilo retired from the Matobo Committee in 2002, but was an ardent supporter of the Matobo Hills World Heritage Bid, which was successful in June 2003. He continued with his regular outings to the hills, but sadly this year, was prevented from holding the annual Africa Day Service at Mt Inungu.

He will be sorely missed by us all, but never forgotten.

Rev. Fr. Odilo Weeger – Requiem Mass

12th June 2006

“I have spread my dreams under your feet.
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”

Father Odilo – a complex man – an intellectual; a practical man; a man of compassion and love for his fellow human; a man of simple needs; a self disciplined man; but above all a man devoted to God with a deep love for Mary, the Mother of God.

In serving God in his missionary life of sixty-eight years, Father's dreams for us were the strengthening of our love for one another and the deepening of our personal understanding and acceptance of our spiritual lives. Is not our life here on earth a mere flash in time in our eternal life with God?

Father's parish was here at Christ The King, Hillside; it was at St. Mary's, Bulawayo; it was the Hwange District with its many mission stations; and if we take his radio broadcasts of the 1950's to 1970's in mind, it was the whole of Zimbabwe. Yes, he touched the hearts of many thousands of people, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

What of the man in the eyes of a parishioner; in the eyes of a friend?

Father knew me before I knew him, for he knew my parents, and knew me from the time I was born. I only became aware of him when I was four or five years old, and only really got to know him when I was at Junior School. As a young boy at Hillside School, Father, who was based at St. Mary's Cathedral in town, used to come to the school first thing on Friday mornings to take the Catholics for religious instruction. He was hard on us, for we had to learn of our faith, our prayers, and if after fifteen minutes of instruction we could not answer his questions, well we were in deep trouble. We would be summoned forward and given a flick on the ear, whilst at the same time he would tell us the answer. The flick was not hard, but he built up the scene so dramatically, tensioning his finger as if he was winding up a spring, and his facial contortions were so scary, he looked as if he was about to eat us alive. This treatment was reserved for the boys only. The girls were treated much more gently. Of course boys were boys and we would on many occasions purposely give the wrong answer, just to get a flick on the ear. We didn't know that he was aware of our trick, but he played along with us and the build up for the flick was even more dramatic. We all passed and took our first Communion at the end of the year.

In those days, Christ The King parish had not been established, and I used to ride my bicycle to St. Mary's from Burnside, a distance of ten kilometres, for the early morning service. It was really great fun, for I loved riding everywhere on my little bike, more so when I was alone. I think this impressed Father, and as you are all aware, Father had a fantastic memory down to the smallest detail and on numerous occasions for years after he used to comment on how as a little boy I would ride so far to attend mass.

Father saw the good in everyone. If he disagreed with you during a discussion he would bide his time and wait for an opportunity to find a positive aspect and build up on that. He would also say very quietly, “Sir, I disagree with you,” and then continue with a convincing explanation as to why he disagreed. In the end, through his remaining cool, calm and collected the dispute would be resolved. Even though some disagreement may remain, he had given enough for one to think quietly about.

No task done, however small, escaped his notice. He always commented upon it and thanked those involved. On the other hand, he was not a “Yes” man, for if one did something that he did not condone, either personally or for the good of others, he would make his feelings known, but not in a demeaning way; always in a positive way. This was an expression of his self-discipline, where he encouraged others to discipline themselves for the good of all.

Father Odilo loved the company of people and he always ensured that he was kept up to date with the news of what was happening in the world, right down to the news of individuals and their families, and he never forgot a name. This he accomplished by reading newspapers and magazines, regularly attending meetings of the many societies he was a member of, and talking to people directly. I am not sure of all the societies he was a part of, but I do know he was involved in The Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe, Rotary, The Matobo Conservation Society, for many years he was a member of the Matobo Committee, the Boy Scouts Association, he was Chaplain of the Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem, he was a member of the Rotary Club of Bulawayo and was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship, along with his frequent support of the Bulawayo Performing Arts Society, and visited Hwange National Park on numerous occasions.

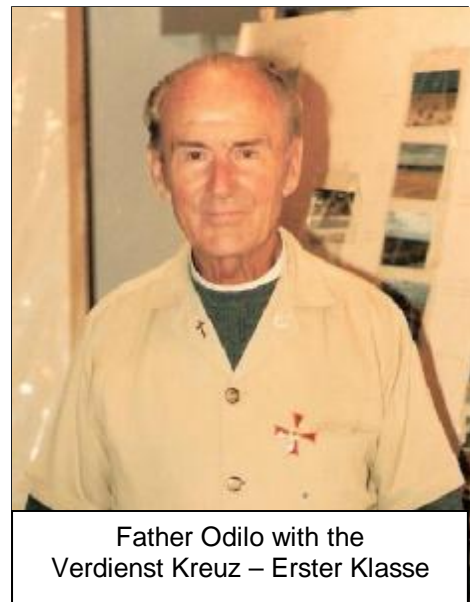
His love for the outdoors was not confined to the Matopos, which, with his 'Wednesday walk about group' he visited just about every week; or to Hwange National Park, which he visited as often as possible; but he also undertook two hikes of several days duration in the Chimanimani Mountains, and these when he was well into his seventy's.

For his missionary work, which translated for Father into not only looking after the people of his parish, but his many hospital visits and active support of the many societies he belonged to and the attendance of Municipal functions, he was awarded Civic Honours by the Bulawayo City Council. His name was inscribed in the Book of Civic Honours on the 6th day of August 1980.

For his missionary work in Zimbabwe, he was awarded the Verdienst Kreuz – Erster Klasse (Cross of Merit – First Class) by his home country, Germany, in 5th May 1989

Bavarians are known for erecting crosses on mountaintops, and so Father brought this trend to Zimbabwe. Nestling at the base of a small hill of about forty metres in height, is Fatima, one of the missions Father established in 1947 in the Hwange District. On the top of this small hill stands a large metal cross.

The cross, which most people know about, is the one on Mount Inungu in the Matopos. Father Renk erected the original cross, a small wooden one, in 1964. Wood is not a very durable material when exposed to the elements or to vandals, and so Father Odilo persuaded a number of parishioners of Christ The King to design and erect a more substantial cross. Who was brave enough to say no to Father? In 1982, the Centenary year of the founding of the Mariannahill Congregation in Africa, a mass was celebrated at the foot of the new cross, eleven metres in height and made of metal.



Father Odilo with the Verdienst Kreuz – Erster Klasse

Father's interests were wide and varied. Not only could he recognise and name the large and small animals of the bush, but he knew the major stars in the heavens, the numerous caves and bushmen painting sites in the Matopos were frequently visited, so much so that if I dared to show him a photograph of a particular painting and ask him which cave it was in, he would say, "Sir, we visited that cave on such and such a walk," and then give the name of the cave.

European history was one of Father's favourites and he delighted in talking about events of hundreds of years ago. Some of these talks put our present situation into perspective. So, not only was Father up to date with what was happening here and now, he would relate similar events, which happened centuries ago.

Father's friends were of all colours and religious persuasions. He respected them for their beliefs, provided they were in harmony with peace and the acceptance of love for one another.

At funerals, Father would say “One day I will be in that box, when that will be I do not know, but when God calls me I will be ready. One day you too will be in that box. Don’t think that because you are young that that day is a long way off. It could be tomorrow. Are you ready?” As humans we mourn the passing of Father Odilo, yet as Christians we celebrate his passing, for to be seated next to God in Heaven is our highest reward.

You all knew Father Odilo. Remember him, as you knew him. I have only given a glimpse of a great man, a great friend and a great mentor.

To use one of Father’s endings to a sermon, “Take one thing with you – are you ready?”

Eulogy given by Norman Scott on behalf of the parishioners of Christ The King, Hillside.

Footprints

One night I had a dream.
I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in
the sand,
one belonging to me and one to my Lord.
When the last scene of my life shot before me
I looked back at the footprints in the sand
and to my surprise,
I noticed that many times along the path of my life
there was only one set of footprints.
I realized that this was at the lowest
and saddest times of my life.
This always bothered me
and I questioned the Lord
about my dilemma.
'Lord, you told me when I decided to follow You,
You would walk and talk with me all the way.
But I am aware that during the most troublesome
times of my life there is only one set of footprints.
I just don't understand why, when I needed You
most,
You leave me.'
He whispered, 'My precious child,
I love you and will never leave you
never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints
it was then that I carried you.'

Margaret Powers



Father saying Holy Mass, Lake Scott,
Gordon Park