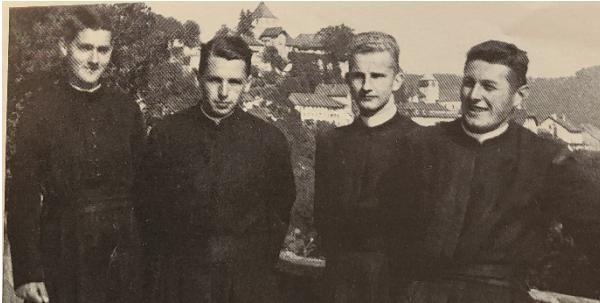


10 January

## Fr HANS BELSER

27 October 1927 – 10 January 2021



Born in Olten, Switzerland, Hans (John) Belser belonged to the Swiss province and worked in India until 1985. The following year he came to Zimbabwe and started work at Musami. He had entered the Society in 1946 in Fribourg, did his philosophy in India at Shembaganur and his theology there also at Kurseong where he was ordained in 1955. He worked in India in Songaon, Harigaon and Shevtaon for thirty years. In 1974, the Jesuit Mission in India celebrated one hundred years and there was a write up in the Swiss Missionary Magazine (see photo with Hans on left) about those who worked there. Hans was much involved in organising and building churches and a school as well as doing the pastoral work in the villages. He encouraged farmers teaching them mechanics, welding and supplying them with diesel for their pumps until such time as electricity reached the district. He then had them pass on their diesel pumps to other farmers who had no access to electricity. He had a thousand Christians in sixty villages and so spent much time in visiting his scattered flock. He worked on building outstations as a way of preparing the way for independent parishes.

He came to feel frustrated with ‘the communalism, hostility to foreign missionaries and nationalism of some of the young fathers’ in India and this led to his decision that he should leave India and offer his services, first in East Africa and failing that in Southern Africa. In Zimbabwe, he ‘was impressed by the good spirit of the missionaries and in the Makumbe Mission (on a visit), I felt at home.’ In the event Hans went to Musami for two years and then to Kariba for twelve. He then moved to Banket and Chinhoyi before spending three years as chaplain at Monte Cassino. He returned to Switzerland (Zurich) in 2008 where he died thirteen years later.

When he rose to his feet at Zimbabwe province meetings there was an almost audible sigh among those gathered, as he would invariably tell us, in a laborious monotone, how things were done in India. Clearly, he left part of his heart there. He was an indefatigable plodder, dedicated to his tasks. But he was a wearisome conversationalist as he took forever to get to the point.