

EDITORIAL

La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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Dear Co-missioners,

You probably have been wondering why I haven't sent a newsletter for the past three months. It was mostly for financial reasons as we have to spend over a \$1000 for printing and postage for every month. Although the number of issues are reduced to six for this year as a test I wish to do more next year. Hope you continue to enjoy our stories from the mission fields of La Salette.

Fr. Jim Henault has been recently elected the Provincial Vicar and still continues to serve as pastor of St. Olive Plunkett Parish in Snellville, Georgia. It is my joy to introduce him to you through his article on his first visit to the sub-continent of India.

Now a favor from the readers! We will be receiving 5 La Salette missionaries from around the world who will preach mission appeals this summer. We would gladly welcome if you would like to donate your unused miles on any airlines that will help defray our expenses in travel. Please call Fr. Thomas at 314-352-0064 or on his cell: 337-287-0123. Thank you very much.



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MY JOURNEY TO INDIA – Rev. James A. Henault, MS

I had the privilege of attending the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of our La Salette presence in India. The story actually began ten years earlier when missionaries from the Philippines came to Kerala seeking vocations to the La Salette community. These seminarians would go through their formation in the Philippines and then after ordination would work in that Province. As the Indian community grew in numbers and strength they were ready to return to their native land and begin the establishment of the Indian Mission. In 1988 they began and over the years established a seminary system to train their own men. They grew into a region and then were established as a Province – capable of not only serving the people of India but also reaching out to other Provinces throughout the world that welcomed them into their lives and ministry. Fifteen years ago Fr. Thomas and Fr. William came to the United States for study and training. Although they had intended to return to India to work, instead blessed our province with their lives and ministry. Later, Fr. Cyriac was welcomed to the Province. They were followed by a steady stream of others who came on a temporary basis to work alongside us in our ministries here. The bonds between our two provinces have been developed over the years and truly strengthened.

My journey to India was not as a tourist to see the sites but as a brother coming to share this grand moment and sharing in as many events as I could in about a week's stay. I've done some traveling over the years but this 28 hour journey was extremely long especially when I found out that my luggage had been left in Paris (it did arrive a few days later.) But all changed as I was welcomed by Fr. Jojohn the Provincial at the airport in Cochin and taken to our community residence.

The highlight of the visit was the grand celebration at the foundation house in Kerala. The evening before the house was transformed as the areas for celebrations were prepared. Food preparation had begun as prepa-



rations were being made to feed the thousands who would come and share. The streets were decorated with buntings and a festive arch to remind all around the town, that special days were here. I even found my mug shot and those of the other foreign “dignitaries” posted on banners around the properties. The custom of decorating the towns and villages and people could be seen all around as the feasts of saints and Hindu deities were taking place at the same time. The day itself began with a welcoming of special guests beginning with the two bishops of the area and a procession with band and the neighbors marching to the La Salette compound from the local church. We then vested for the outdoor mass that was concelebrated by all the clergy present according to the Syro-Malabar rite in Malayalam. It was a tremendously beautiful ceremony and I thoroughly enjoyed being part of it all. After the liturgy there was a formal program of speeches and native dancers and music that was most enjoyable and then finally the festival meal. The meal of course was going on for hours even as the presentations were happening as many of the locals had other festivals to attend and after a while I’m sure they were hungry. It was a grand day that the Province rightfully deserved to host and it was a great success.



The following day a group of us went to visit the Shrine of St. Thomas the Apostle. After celebrating Sunday Mass in the Chapel – this time in English, we began our religious trek.

Our first stop on the journey was an ancient Mosque – the first one in India built at the time of Mohamed himself. This was my first time visiting a mosque and entering a sacred place of Islam. The welcome that we received was outstanding. The local leader showed us around the museum where centuries of artifacts and sacred religious items were enshrined. He then led us to the mosque where we first took off our shoes and washed our feet in preparation to enter this sacred place. Inside the mosque there were people at prayer in the central room and also at two burial spots where founders of the mosque had been interred. Over the centuries the mosque had been expanded but they now were getting ready to restore it to its original shape. A few miles away was the Shrine of St. Thomas, where the apostle had landed and from where he established the Christian faith in India. The shrine is on a river that served as a sheltered port for merchants throughout the centuries. It was clear that even in ancient times the Romans and others could easily sail between the Middle East and India. At the

Shrine there is an ancient church with sacred relics of St. Thomas and also a theatre that gives a presentation of the mission of St. Thomas establishing the seven churches (communities not buildings) that are attributed to him. After a delightful lunch we proceeded to an elephant sanctuary that is home to the elephants that have been offered to the gods through the local Hindu temple. Finally we went to visit the temple but not being believers we were excluded – also we weren't dressed properly in Hindu garb. It was impressive to see the hundreds of people waiting in line to enter the temple to pray. India is a spiritual nation whose people show great devotion and ardor in their beliefs and at least in Kerala the level of mutual acceptance was very impressive. The next day we flew to Bangalore to visit the Provincial house and philosophy center. This house has a special place in my memory as the Provinces of the United States were asked to help fund its construction. One word describes Bangalore rather superficially: TRAFFIC. It seems like everyone owns a vehicle or rents a taxi and they all do it at the same time. Rules of the roads and lanes were made up as you went along and although there were thousands of cars it seemed like very few accidents and lots of patience. Bangalore was becoming the gathering place for more members of the Province arriving for the upcoming chapter and Christmas party. The Province celebrated together the birth of Christ when they gathered together in January. Being in the upper 80's we partied outside with a bonfire and Kris Kringle arriving by dugout. No snow – no sleighs.

I really did appreciate the many meals we shared together and the camaraderie of my confreres. At the end of the Christmas party came the journey back home to Atlanta and although long this time it sped by. Although I didn't visit the Taj Majal or see the Ganges River or the great cities of Delhi or Mumbai or Calcutta as most tourists would do, I did something more important: I shared some precious moments with my brothers and experienced their homeland where they live and serve. I am most grateful for the privilege of being invited to share in the Anniversary of the India La Salette Mission and the Province of Mary Mother for the constant hospitality and fraternity that were extended to me. I was truly blessed.



You could continue your support of our Missions by including them in your will.
Should you wish to do so, our legal title is:
North American La Salette Mission Center, Inc.