

EDITORIAL

La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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Dear Co-missioners,

John and Sharon Markowitz are a married couple who are members of St. Helena Catholic Church in Enfield, NH. They are both members of the La Salette Associates which is a lay group under the direction of the Missionaries of La Salette. Sharon is a member of the Mission Board, also serves as it's Secretary. Although they have been to Madagascar to visit the La Salette missions before, they were so touched by what they saw during a recent trip. In their own words, "it is incredible how much the missionaries and sisters give up to serve God's people; things like running water, good roads for travel, and working electricity and not to say family and friends which we take for granted. They were and still are brave, kind, and strong men and women whom we can admire! Most young people who hear God's call cannot afford to pay for their education. That is why it is so important to support the seminarians in formation."

Sharon and John have pledged themselves to help in any way they can, to make the message of Our Lady known and to bear testimony to the needs of God's children in Madagascar. During this trip, they brought with them medical supplies, and a brand-new wheel chair to disperse among many health clinics. I hope you enjoy reading this article as much as I did.



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“Taste and See the Goodness of the Lord”

Recently, Sharon and I had a chance to visit Madagascar under the excellent tutorship of Bishop Donald Pelletier who recently celebrated 61 years as a missionary in Madagascar. We brought with us medical supplies, some small vital sign diagnostic equipment, and a brand-new wheelchair to disperse among the many health clinics. We spent a month traveling the dusty, bumpy roads, across sand and salt flats, and even made a river crossing on a somewhat primitive ferry! We couldn't help but be moved by what we saw!

While waiting one hour for that primitive ferry to embark we saw how hard young men and boys had to work to make a meager living. In the heat of the day, they were seen hauling bags of rice weighing 250 kg up the steep riverbank; without education they are destined for lives of poverty and hard labor! At a quarry visited on a very hot sunny afternoon, women and men were seen hauling cobblestone sized rocks, two or three on their head and another on their shoulder out of the depths of the quarry ... barefoot at that!



And, at the crest of the huge quarry, men and women while watching their young children, breaking the cobblestones into aggregate which would eventually be used to mix with cement. Cobblestones to aggregate with small hand-held steel sledge-hammer ... HEART BREAKING at best! Schools started by the missionaries provide an opportunity for the poor and downtrodden to find dignity in themselves and a way out of poverty. We saw many schools that had been started by the early La Salette Missionaries. The early missionaries did not have ferry boats, no matter how primitive we see them now, to cross the crocodile infested rivers ... they only had hollowed out tree trunks called pirogues. To think them to be reliable was absolutely not true, and joyfully very tippy from a crocodile's perspective. During the rainy season with rivers swollen to their crest, they become impossible to cross ... period!

Around every corner was a new and eye-opening educational experience ... the trip was a National Geographic Adventure of epic proportions. We met many La Salette priests and Sisters working hard to serve the people. We visited LaSalette sisters in Antananarivo who have a residence and school for handi

capped children and in Morondava where they grow rice and raise animals for food for themselves, the novices who live with them, and the poor of the area. Their residence is in need of many repairs such as the well where they use a bucket to get water because the pump is broken. Water is a key ingredient to the ultimate success of a mission site ... where there is water, vegetables and fruits grow, flowers bloom to add color and happiness to the location, and the water is used in the health clinic to clean and disinfect ... at one mission site, we saw men and boys lowering a bucket 90 feet into the ground to retrieve one bucket of water. At another site, where money was plentiful and donated by a deceased sister's community ... a pump system operated by solar panels with a water tank high above the hospital clinic kept the water flowing and to also give it pressure. Yes, money and donations are key to the success of the missions and the missionaries who labor so hard.



The people work hard, walk far, have very little comforts but are yet attending Mass by the hundreds. They sing their hearts out and bond together as a community of believers. We were struck by how well dressed



the people and even the smallest of children were when they came to Mass. We attended Mass in a La Salette Parish in Antananarivo with about 500 people at the 6:30 AM Mass, at the La Salette Parish in Belo Sur Mer (Fr. Jeremy's Parish) that was right on the beach, in a field under a tarp with blankets spread on the ground for the people to sit on where we witnessed 12 baptisms, and in a sports arena that had over 8,000 people in attendance singing and dancing in the aisle! The missionaries work hard to accomplish their role of evangelization ... they often walk far and alone, but for the "Spirit of God" in their footsteps!

The needs of the people and the missionaries are many. The villages need clean water and electricity and trained people who can keep the infrastructures working. The seminaries need computers and help paying the bills, the health care workers need supplies and medicines, and the schools need books, supplies and trained teachers. The people need work with decent salaries, they are strong and work hard just to survive. We saw that the poor are not lazy they really want to work. The needs far exceed the resources available and that is precisely why we are giving our time to support our La Salette Missionaries worldwide through these mission appeal weekends!

The poverty witnessed on our trip was overwhelming, the simplicity was unimaginable, the singing was angelic, and the smiles were ever so moving! The people are happy and very grateful for all that anyone does to help them. We witnessed how a missionary enters a village or area and slowly gains the trust and friendship of it's inhabitants. A church that doubles as a school during the week might be built or a school that doubles as a church on Sundays and holidays may be the route taken. Then follows a health clinic to treat the children but soon expands to take care of their parents and also the entire village ... a well is dug, and the men and women begin to farm the land ...the singing increases in volume and before long throngs of people and their families are walking miles to Sunday Mass. They come from villages that are so far away that you cannot see them and they walk bare foot on the hot road or path.

Many of the missionaries that we saw or heard about were extremely multi-talented craftsmen, often with versatile and much needed mechanical skills. We visited many churches built by La Salette Priests and Brothers with their own hands over the years. The last two churches built by Fr. Arthur Lueckenotto in Morodava are a stunning tribute to the dedication and skill sets of our La Salette Missionaries. Fr. Lucke, as they affectionately called him, had his own workshops and personally worked on and constructed the churches with the help of his congregation and local workers. We watched Fr. Jan, put his own designed mold of Our Lady of La Salette together. He and several Brothers/Novices then mixed cement and poured it into the mold and ... "Walla," a five foot high statue of Mary for use



to help "Make Her Message Known!" He wanted no credit for his work and refused to have his picture taken next to the statue... it stands alone as a tribute to the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette!



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.