

EDITORIAL

La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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Dear Co-missioners,

Rev. Rakotondraibe Maminaiina Romuald is a missionary of La Salette from Madagascar who is fondly known as Mami . He is the fifth of eight children, four brothers and three sisters. His parents were teachers. He went to the school run by the Sisters Missionaries of Immaculate Conception in Morondava, Madagascar. When he was younger, he was an altar boy at Our Lady of La Salette parish in Morondava. This was one of the reasons for his vocation to become a missionary of La Salette. After his ordination to the priesthood on May 31, 2004, his assignments were mostly in parishes in remote areas of the country, after serving as part of the provincial administration for six years. He enjoyed serving this people who are far away from the cities. His last parish before he left Madagascar was in one of the most difficult and most isolated parishes in Madagascar. Most of the people in these areas are poor and our main ministry consisted of explaining to them the importance of sending their children to school, teaching them about basic hygiene, motivating them to come together and to work for common good, before speaking about faith or catechism . Please enjoy reading the article sent by Rev. Mami.



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A little over a year ago, my provincial asked me to join our community here in Haiti. La Salette missionaries from Madagascar have been present in this country for more than ten years but the link between La Salette and Haiti has existed for many years before our arrival here. Many La Salette priests from the United States have been helping the people of Haiti through parish twinning programs or other forms of supports. In fact, our permanent presence in the country came from a proposal after the experience of one of our American brothers who was helping one parish in the diocese of Gonaives, Haiti.

Today, there are three La Salette priests from Madagascar working in this diocese. For now, the bishop of the diocese of Gonaives entrusted to us two newly erected parishes: St Augustine of Petite Riviere des Bayonnais and St Joachim and St Ann of Haute Feuille. When I came last year, I joined the community of two pioneers and zealous La Salette priests: Fr Evariste Ralohotsy (photo on the left) and Fr Maximin Rarivoarivony (right). After one year of presence in Haiti, I am still learning the language; I am still trying to comprehend the dynamism and the culture, the history of this great country and trying to understand how all of these have affected the life and the reality of Haitian people today. What I am going to share is my personal experience, which is very limited.

Haiti made the news headlines around the world lately and this is not the first time. Civic uprisings , political related violence and natural disasters have been part of the life of Haiti as a nation for years. Unfortunately, the poor people suffered the most from this political instability. It is a fact that there are two distinct categories of Haitians living in Haiti. In the one hand, there is a group of rich people. They can afford good education, three meals a day, nice and comfortable homes. Their life styles are similar to American life styles... in fact, they have at least a few family members working abroad. This group somehow met their dreams. On the other hand, the majority of the population is suffering. They barely eat once a day, they have meat may be once a week or once every two weeks. They rely on food that NGOs provide, their children go to subsidized public schools, which are struggling, without teachers and with lack of school supplies. They are the ones who suffer from the results of political problems and corruptions at all levels of the government and the public administration in Haiti.



Fortunately, the Catholic Church is present everywhere in the country. Not only the Catholic Church has been present in the country for centuries, but also almost all Haitians call themselves Christians if not Catholics. The Church played a very important role in Haitian society. With the help of benefactors and donations from churches in foreign countries, especially from the United States, the Church in Haiti is able to meet the most basic needs of the Haitian people who are suffering because of what is happening in their country. In fact, parishes and religious communities are managing and running schools, providing primary health care with the numerous church based small clinics, giving food for the children and the elderly through soup kitchen programs, providing the population with clean and hygienic water... to name a few.

La Salette missionaries in Haiti have been contributing to the local community now for more than ten years. With the help of our La Salette brothers and benefactors from the United States, we were able to open two parishes with two small chapels. In these churches, we work hard to motivate parents and parishioners that it is part of our goal as Christians to make sure that children have access to education, to convince them to send their children to school. Because of the support we received, we were able to run three schools in three different areas: Preschool to 9th grade in Haute Feuille (St Maria Goretti School), primary schools in Riviere des Bayonnais and Hatte Chevreu. Because of the limited financial resources of most of the parents, we pay teachers' salary along with the soup kitchen programs in these schools. As part of the Catholic Church in Haiti, we have the same experience as the Church in Haiti, and we face the same difficulty. However, as La Salette missionaries, we have the specificity of our charism of reconciliation to approach the reality. That is why for example, we strive to show to our parishioners that it is urgent that they reconcile themselves with their past and their history. Haitian people are very proud of their past, but without education this pride can cause them more harm than good. By education, I mean not only schools but also teaching them that they have to take control of their future. Hygiene and environmental awareness are some of the examples of the focuses of our ministry in our parishes. Today there are five hundred (500) students in our school in Haute Feuille. We continue to extend our school buildings because of the increasing numbers of students. On behalf of my La Salette brothers who are serving in Haiti, I would like to express my heartfelt



gratitude to our benefactors from the United States. Because of your support, these school children can continue to go to school, many of them cannot afford going to school, and most of them do not have anything to eat. At our schools, they can at least have one meal a day during school days. We believe that a true evangelization needs to go hand in hand with education and schools. In Bayonnais for example, we are restructuring our school for a better impact in the society. We aim to get the parents involved in a more efficient way in the education of their children. Gradually, we helped them to be more responsible for the future of their children. Bayonnais is one of the isolated villages of the diocese of Gonaives. It is also one of the poorest community in this diocese. With the help of our benefactors, we were able to feed children with the school soup kitchen program. Through these types of program, we try to educate children and family about hygiene. In Bayonnais we continue to arrange our small hall to make it suitable for a dining room for these children.

As stated above, I have been here for only one year, and I am still learning. I am certain of at least one thing: Haiti has a rich heritage and Haitians are very proud of their history and their culture. They are jealous of their freedom and their past. Unfortunately, in addition to natural disasters off all kind, the political situation does not help them to flourish and to enjoy the many blessings these people inherited from their ancestors. As I shared in the beginning, I used to minister in difficult areas in Madagascar, but what I see here in Haiti has even opened my eyes much more. People in Bayonnais and Haute Feuille, especially children, need you. With your support we will be able to help these children to go to school, we will be able to build more classrooms for them; we will be able to provide them with clean and hygienic water. With your help, many of them will have the opportunity to have better education. Yes, all of this is part of our La Salette mission and charism: To preach the good news to a people devastated with an extreme poverty, to reconcile them again with their past and their dignity as human beings. In doing so, we will contribute a lot to the future of this wonderful country.



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