

EDITORIAL

# La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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*Dear Co-missioners,*

Each of us has a million stories to tell. We live them out in our daily lives. The greatest story of all is how God intervened in our lives when He granted us the gift of faith. When I reflect on my own faith journey I marvel at the turn of events, at the people who influenced and inspired me, at the love that sustained me, at the grace that protected me and the helping hands that encouraged and guided me.

Through our missionary efforts we reach out to others. We help them come to an awareness of God as revealed by and through Jesus. We offer them the possibility of hearing the greatest story of all – The Gospel of Jesus.

The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Thus begins the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, by which Pope Francis develops the theme of the proclamation of the Gospel. “The sign of God’s openness is that our church doors should always be open so that those who seek God will not find a closed door; nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” Sharing makes all the difference in the world – to us and to everyone. Fr. Marcelino Mesa and Fr. Eugene Flores came from the Philippines to help out in the Mission Center with mission appeals during this summer. They tell us how joyfully they serve God and the joy they have experienced by sharing the Gospel with those entrusted to them. As a people of faith I invite everyone to reach out in whatever way you can, with love, prayers and sacrifices to bring the joy of the Gospel to every one we encounter in our day to day lives.



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Sixty-five years ago Bishop Constance Jurgens, the bishop of Tuguegarao, Cagayan wrote to religious superiors inviting them to help evangelize the people under his care in the Philippines. The only religious community that responded was the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette in the United States of America. Four young La Salette American missionaries left the comforts of home, family and country and arrived in the Philippines in December of 1948 to begin work in this mission area. They began their work in the province of Isabela by establishing a school in San Mateo and beginning parish administration in Santiago. Other Americans followed and in time seven more schools and many parishes were established. Many Filipino young men were attracted to the missionary zeal and dedicated service to the people of God they witnessed



National Shrine in Silang, Cavite

In the Philippines today there are 17 La Salette parishes. The PAMANA Center of the La Salette missionaries is the arm of social action of the congregation providing educational scholarships to children of poor families. In elementary through high school there are almost 5 thousand students and nearly 7 thousand in college and graduate programs. About 70% of the native La Salette priests and brothers are graduates of these schools and many more priests for the diocese. Currently there are over 70 La Salette seminarians. La Salette ministry is enriched with the help of La Salette alumni and Lay Associates. Their formators assist with discerning God's will to become instruments of reconciliation.

in these early missionaries. Today eighty percent of the La Salette Missionaries working in the Philippines are Filipino. The tiny seed of mission planted by the early American La Salettes is now a big tree branching out to many missions as Filipino La Salettes bring the message of Our Lady of La Salette in the United States, India, Myanmar and Australia.

The National Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette in the Philippines is located in the southern part of metro Manila. Over two million pilgrims visit the shrine each year to attend Mass, receive the sacrament of reconciliation and to make retreats.



Seminarians with Fr. Job as Director





Fr. Eugene Flores, MS entered the seminary at the age of 16 right after high school. He professed his temporary Vows on May 1, 1999 and was ordained a priest on May 4, 2004. His first assignment was as administrator of Holy Rosary parish in Jones and also in charge of an adjacent mission in San Augustine, in Isabela. Then he served as Vocation Director from 2006 through 2011 and as Director of Novices from 2011 to 2014. At present he serves on the Provincial Council as counselor. He always dreamed to spread the message of La Salette in the southern provinces of Visayas and Mindanao in the Philippines and in Vietnam, China and South Korea. Upon my request, Fr. Eugene shared his experience and dreams for the Philippine Province in the following words.

“Coming here in the United States for mission appeals has widened my perspective

of mission. As I had always expressed my gratitude to the people I meet for helping carry out the mandate of Our Lady of La Salette; to bring the Good News to all parts of the world, I am surprised to have received words of appreciation from them. They say that they are the ones who should be thankful for being given the chance to participate in the mission of Christ and the Church.

Part of the proceeds of this year’s appeals will benefit our 80 seminarians in formation in the Philippines, plus our newly opened mission in the province of Pangasinan in the North-east and in the southern island of Cebu and to build a spirituality center to promote programs for lasting peace and reconciliation. The Shrine of our Lady of La Salette in Silang, Cavite needs major reconstruction to provide better services to the pilgrims and retreatants. Our parishes in different parts of the country can continue serving the poor with the help of the mission office. Programs for the Institute of Reconciliation, lay associates and many other ministries and apostolates will always necessitate continuous support. Our vocation promotion office is venturing into far-east Asia to recruit candidates as future missionaries and at the same time make Our Mother’s message known to them. So you can never imagine how far your generosity can reach. The mission entrusted to us is both a grace and a responsibility and it has always been a great joy to know that we are participating in this great endeavor. We have always believed that everything works well for those who love God.

Meeting in person the first La Salette Americans who came to the Philippines has been a wonderful and inspiring experience; knowing the stories of how they started with almost nothing and witnessed gradually the fruits of their labor of love. Here, Mission comes to me as an experience of God’s gratuity and everyone’s response of the same deep sense of gratitude. As our Missionary God became flesh and dwelt among us, may we always hold in our hearts the joy of giving.”



Fr. Marcelino Mesa, MS is 41 years old and 19 years as a La Salette missionary in the Philippines. His temporary profession was on May 1, 1995 and was ordained to the priesthood on February 5, 1999. He is currently serving as Director of La Salette of Roxas College, Isabela. I asked Fr. Marcelino to share his life and ministry with us and his dreams for the future for the La Salette community in the Philippines. This is what he wrote:

My first assignment was one of my most significant experiences as a La Salette religious. At an early stage in my missionary life I was given a dual responsibility of being parish priest of Saint John Bosco Parish and at the same time Director

of La Salette School which are both in Quezon, Isabela. Having two responsibilities was a bit daunting at the time when I was just 27 years old. I was so apprehensive of the challenges that lie ahead. It was a feeling of inadequacy that I felt when I started to face the day to day challenge of being both an administrator and pastor at the same time. I had to contend with the fact that my role as administrator of the school overlapped with my role as pastor. One role demands discipline, the other compassion.

It was my task as an **administrator** to facilitate meetings; make innovations with various programs; oversee construction of the new parish church; create linkages with local civic and religious organizations, etc. It was my task as a **pastor** to be an agent of renewal; to inspire communal or community living; to draw people to God and to his Church; to empower the spiritual and faith life of my people; and to strengthen Catholic witnessing among the greater community. This unusual mix of being both pastor and administrator taught me to work and connect with other people as well. My first mission in Quezon Isabela would have not been successful without the support of the people who journeyed with me every step of the way. It has been my greatest honor to have served the Church as a priest and in various capacities as school director, seminary formator, Provincial Councillor, Lay Associate coordinator, and chaplain to pilgrims to the Holy Land and European Shrines of Our Lady. I was instrumental to the establishment of the elementary department of La Salette of Quezon and the University of La Salette – Roxas Campus.

My dream for the Congregation of the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette is growth in membership and expansion to places where La Salette is still unknown. I dream of greater collaboration with different Provinces and Regions. My dream for the Inang Pag-asa Province is to have more members. I dream of vocations coming from all parts of the Philippines. I dream of establishing presence in the Southern part of the Philippines, in Vietnam and in China.



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Should you wish to do so, our legal title is:  
**North American La Salette Mission Center, Inc.**