

EDITORIAL

# La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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*Dear Co-missioners,*

Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice. The first foreign mission began 2000 years ago when Jesus left his Father's side and came as gift to Mary and Joseph. They shared their gift with all of Israel. Some accepted and others ignored. Jesus continued to give and live. Jesus finally gave his life as a gift and returned to God. But through his followers his gift continues to be shared. What is Christmas 2015 calling us to do? It is to share the love we have received, all that is God's gift to you and me. A gift is a gift only at the moment when we are willing to share. I wish for you all the joys of this Holy Season and strength to share that joy with others. Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of you from your friends at the La Salette Mission Center.

Very Rev. Pedro Chingandu, MS was recently re-elected Provincial Superior for the La Salette Province of Angola. From his article and personal stories we learn quickly how difficult and challenging it is to travel to remote areas to bring the Good News of God's great love. It was an eye opener for me and hope his words would be an inspiration for you as well. It is my joy to share with you this beautiful article he sent.



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# La Salette Mission in Angola: By Fr. Pedro Chingandu, MS

## When the Son of Man comes, will He still find the poor on earth?

The first La Salette missionaries arrived in Angola in 1946 from Switzerland, a year after the end of World War II and the centenary year of the Apparition of Our Lady of La Salette in France. Most La Salette missions in Angola are in remote locations reflecting the choice of the first missionaries here to work with the poor. In these rural areas churches, schools and clinics have been built along with one large hospital. There is an effort to meet the spiritual needs and also the material and academic formation of the poor.

I was elected Regional Superior of the Region of Angola in January of 2000. The third Angolan Civil War had reached the most violent phase with government troops overrunning most of the positions earlier occupied by UNITA rebels. Some of our missions were in areas controlled by the UNITA rebels. A number of missions had actually become refugee centers. Fortunately we frequently received containers with relief help from the Swiss Missio Procura which we were able to share with the refugees seeking safety. Often times I had to cross UNITA controlled areas to reach our missions. In June of 2000, after visiting Malongo Mission in an area controlled by UNITA rebels, I visited Ndunde Mission. The Mission was full of displaced people who felt safer camping at the Mission. They preferred to sleep outside rather than in buildings or classrooms. Sleeping outside facilitates flight in case of a sudden attack. The mission was in a neutral area, controlled neither by government troops nor by UNITA rebels. Evidently, both sides had their agents infiltrated among the people. At daily mass the displaced people prayed fervently for peace. On the first Sunday of my arrival, I witnessed something that has never left my mind. I saw an old woman dressed literally in rags stand up, walk toward the altar and drop in the collection basket two cobs of dry corn. Immediately I recalled the passage in Luke 12:43-44 of the poor widow whom Jesus considered had given more than all contributors because she had put in the treasury out of her poverty, while others had put in out of their surplus. Truly, the two cobs of dry corn would not suffice to make a single

meal. I am sure that on that day that woman did not have lunch. She really gave out of her poverty. The total collection that Sunday would not fill a bag and no money was collected. Fr. Hatewa's enthusiasm was impressive even when he knew that the people he was so devotedly serving would not guarantee his material sustenance. The missionary knew that his presence at the mission dissuaded both government and UNITA troops from killing or abducting the people. The mission had to close on June 20,



2000 when UNITA rebels finally attacked the mission and abducted not only the priests (Fr. Hatewa and myself), but also the nuns and all the people who had taken refuge at the mission. Fortunately we were all released a week later. This year I choose to be with Missionaries working in the Mussolo mission in the Archdiocese of Malanje for Easter. There are only two missionaries to attend to more than 30 outstations. The roads leading to these Catholic Centers have not been paved since 1975. I was to celebrate Easter in a small town called Quirima, some 90 miles from Mussolo mission. I left



Luanda, the Capital City of Angola, early on Good Friday hoping to arrive at Mussolo mission by 2 P.M. Unfortunately, when I arrived in Malanje, a torrential rain started. I tried to drive for a few miles but the lack of visibility and the slippery pavement forced me to stop. I arrived at Mussolo mission on Holy Saturday at noon. After lunch each missionary left for the community where he would minister. The road I took was really bad and my 1998 Ford Expedition was only a 2WD. Initially, I managed to overcome the pools of water and mud, but as I continued the number and dimensions of the pot holes and puddles increased. From time to time I would find cars that could no longer proceed. My turn came around 4 PM when I found a deeper depression full of muddy water covering tree trunks. The bottom of the car got stuck on the tree trunks and however much I tried to accelerate, the car would not move. Since the exhaust pipe was stuck in the water I could not stop the engine. Fortunately for me, I had enough fuel. I remained



stuck in the mud until 9 PM when I was finally rescued by a convoy of trucks. The convoy had no alternative. Unless they towed me out of the mud they could not proceed on their journey. The tow was not free. I had to pay. My rescuers insisted I join their convoy so they could tow my car if it got stuck again. Suspecting bigger challenges ahead, I decided to return to Mussolo mission. I was exhausted and frustrated. I had not celebrated

the Easter Vigil. As I was preparing to go to bed, I heard a knock on my door. Justine Mungondwe, our Scholastic on missionary experience, had come to pick me up with a Toyota Land Cruiser 4x4. We drove off praying we would not get stuck again. We arrived in Quirima at 6:00 A.M., two hours before the Easter Day Mass. I was happy to learn that Fr. Bastos, a young La Salette priest who celebrated Easter Vigil in Ndumba, a closer outstation, also celebrated Easter Vigil Mass in Quirima. The boss of the convoy that rescued me found him in Ndumba and informed him of my inability to reach Quirima. The young missionary, knowing I would not make it for the Easter Vigil Mass, borrowed a motorbike and cycled to Quirima. The Easter celebration was electrifying. People were very joyful to have a priest to preside over the Eucharist. They sang and danced. At the end of Mass, a special collection was made. Men and women filed up in different rows. One of the announcements before dismissal was that the amount collected was spectacular.

It was clear to me that the missionaries at Mussolo mission could not live on money collected for ministry. I felt the joy of the people in having priests to minister to them. But I also felt fear for the future of these young priests who work to their limits in serving the people, but lack material support. I have received 6 invitation letters from Angolan Bishops to establish La Salette missions in their Dioceses. Three of these invitations have been answered favorably and missions are already established. One common factor in these new missions is the remote location and the poverty of the people with whom we minister. I know it is evangelical and a response to Pope Francis to go to the sociological peripheries to witness God's presence. But I also know that the missionaries I am sending are going to face real material needs at a time when our Province no longer receives regular financial subsidy from our former mother Province of Switzerland. I am also aware that the decisions of the last Provincial Chapter recommended that beginning a new mission includes a certain level of self-sufficiency and, if possible, some capacity to raise funds for our Province. Our three new missions do not fulfill any of these pre-requisites. Nor do the three new missions not yet established. They only include the fundamental requisite – the existence of people hungry for the Word of God. Since the price of oil, the main export of Angola, dropped considerably Angola has been experiencing an economic crisis. Inflation has reduced the value of salaries to half, increasing the cost of living.

Are we going to stop responding to Jesus' appeal to go to the whole world to preach the Good News because we do not have the economic means? I am conscious of the resistance and fear of some members of our Province whenever a new request for the establishment of a mission comes up, especially when it is in a social periphery. Of course, I would not want to send any of my confreres to places where they feel overwhelmed. But I believe, if we accept God's appeal to serve His people, God Himself will provide for us. We shall not go hungry or thirsty. God will move the hearts of those who can help to provide for His missionaries. That is my conviction.



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Should you wish to do so, our legal title is:

**North American La Salette Mission Center, Inc.**