

EDITORIAL

# La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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*Dear Co-missioners,*

Since the military has taken control of the country through a coup on February 1, there are many daily protests in most cities and towns in Myanmar. Overall, at least 550 people, including children have been killed since then and brutality continues by shooting at the peaceful protesters. On behalf of the Congregation of Our Lady of La Salette, Very Rev. Fr. Silvano Marissa, the Superior General wrote "I would like to express our spiritual close-ness and solidarity with the confreres in the young Region of Myanmar who are experiencing a mo-moment of great bewilderment and concern for the fate of the democratic process of the country, abruptly interrupted by the recent military coup. We hope that the state of war established by the military, which caused popular uprising and un-fortunately death of so many innocent people, will end soon..." It is heartbreaking to see the lives of innocent children brutally and needlessly snatched away from their parents. Some children witness violence and horror as they see their siblings die. This is an extremely crushing blow to Myanmar as a democracy. Fr. Bernie Taylor has been up-dating me regularly with the happenings in Myanmar. It is a privilege to share with you part of his reports in this issue of the Mission Newsletter



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## Background and the Current Events

Myanmar had elections last year in November (2020) in spite of the spread of the corona virus. The military was not pleased with the election as the National League of Democracy party won by more than 80%. There were national and international poll watchers and they all declared that it was in general a fair and peaceful election. On February 1, the newly elected members of the National Assembly were supposed to be sworn in, instead the military took over and declared a state of emergency for a year and arrested the leaders, including the president and Aung San Suu Kyi (State Counsellor).

The national leaders were arrested with flimsy excuses. The people were not satisfied. Most in the country did not know what had happened as the internet was cut off at midnight on March 31. The news reports were cut off and false news spread, especially on face book. When the internet was restored many live reports were submitted to many news casters. The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) became known and the support was overwhelming. This time there were ways of circumventing the censoring and monitoring by the government agencies who were supposedly using the latest technology acquired by the military (like face recognition to identify people). The new communication laws and curfews were disregarded by the populace. Although advised to avoid confrontation, there was no way of avoiding it as many convicts were released from prisons and sent into the crowds. They used catapults, rods, and other equipment to arouse the anger of the police and destroy the good standing of the peaceful demonstrators. Many were arrested and tortured but there were no fatalities for the first two weeks. Even when people were killed right in front of them, the people did not stop going out to the streets. Many were shot at, some with live bullets and water guns, and even tanks and bulldozers. These were used by the police to frighten the people, but they

could not stop the people from going out. Many have shifted to evening vigils, praying for the deceased. There were many real policemen who could not stomach the abuse and joined the CDM, but they were arrested and sent to faraway places and forced to quell the demonstrations. If they refused, they would be fined very heavily and sentenced for 3 years in prison.





The corona virus pandemic has been very much on the minds of the people. The demonstrators made sure that they wore masks and provided them for the people who did not have any. Many say that the corona virus can be overcome in two weeks but the political crisis is fatal. Even if they don't die, the people claim that they are just like the dead under the military. Sacrifices of the ordinary people are really something no one expected.



The ordinary people have seen the hardships under the military for the past 50 years. The previous uprisings of the people were put down very easily and in a short period of time, although many civilians were killed. The military had still control of the armed forces and the local government. With this background of uprisings in the past, the Army thought that they could control and scare the people to follow them. It is not happening. The people have tasted democracy and freedom of speech, however limited it may be. Current Covid Situation in Myanmar Myanmar received 1.5 million doses of a COVID-19 vaccine supplied by India in February to inoculate 750,000 people. The first vaccine batch was delivered to the Southeast Asian country as it fights one of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks in the region. "This is a gift from India to Myanmar," Saurabh Kumar, India's ambassador to Myanmar, told reporters at Yangon airport, where he oversaw the arrival of the vaccine. Shipments of AstraZeneca's vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest producer of vaccines, have already gone to the Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. During the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, from late March to early August, Myanmar recorded just 360 cases and 6 deaths. Early in the crisis, the government rapidly implemented measures to contain the virus. Just as it started easing them though, the country was hit by a major second wave in mid-August. Daily cases increased from less than 10 per day in early August to over 1,000 per day in mid-October. This wave has overwhelmed Myanmar's inadequate and understaffed health infrastructure. By November 20, there were 76,400 cases and 1,695 deaths. Today there are a total of over 140000 cases and 3200 deaths recorded. Myanmar has an ambitious target to vaccinate the whole population of about 54 million people this year.



Fr. Jerome (Center) Regional Superior  
Fr. Nicodemus (Left) Vicar  
Fr. David (Right) Assistant

## The La Salette Community During this Crisis

Covid 19 had forced the postponement of the Regional Chapter that would elect the leadership team and plan for the future. But the election of a new leadership for the La Salette Community in Myanmar was put on hold many times. Finally, when travel was made possible, they were able to gather and elect a new Council in December of 2020. Elected were Fr. Jerome as the Regional

Superior, Fr. Nicodemus as the Vicar and Fr. David Kyaw Zwa Latt as the Councilor. Fr. Philip was appointed as the Treasurer and Fr. Brian Joseph, who was ordained on March 19, as the Secretary. With the construction of the central house completed January of 2020, they have a place now they can call home and where most members of the Community were quarantined. There are 15 priests in total and approximately 10 seminarians in formation today in the La Salette Region of Myanmar.

### Priestly Ordinations

There were four La Salette members who were ordained to the priesthood: Rev. Antony, Rev. Henry, Rev. Michael, and Rev. Brian Joseph. . The Ordination was held on the 19th of March, 2021 on the feast of St. Joseph in Than Leh Gyi by his Excellency, Alexander Pyone Cho, D.D. the bishop from the diocese of Pyay. The La Salette missionaries worked there for almost 40 years. There were 15 priests from the diocese of Pyay and 4 La Salette priests that participated in the ordination mass, as well as 14 Religious nuns and round 300 faithful. Some of our family and community members could not join in the celebration because of the country's political turmoil, though we originally planned to hold a bigger celebration. Besides the widespread corona virus pandemic, there were

demonstrations occurring all over the country against the military takeover. The police and soldiers are ruthless in trying to keep the riots down, killing hundreds and imprisoning thousands. Due to CDM (Civil Disobedience Movement) and with banks are closed, the poor are the worst hit. It was not safe to ask the people to come to the ordinations. Even the close relatives were discouraged from coming from distant places. Only those nearby were able to attend. A thanksgiving Mass scheduled to be held at the Cathedral that weekend after the ordination had to be cancelled. The roads leading to the Church were blocked by the army. Thank God that the celebration went well without any difficulty or disturbance. Let us congratulate our four newly ordained La Salette priests, for this is the day that the Lord has made.



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