

MANDALAY NOTES

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Happy & Prosperous New Year to all 2009

As we begin this year 2009, even with all the crises in the world, we can continue to start hoping great things. Dedicating the whole year to our Blessed Mother, starting the first day with her feast, we begin again to make our own journey of faith. Just like her, we need to be in prayer and keep all these things in our heart. We need to continue to say our “Magnificat” and start counting the things that “the Lord has done for us!” Even with our questions like hers, “How can this come about”, we need to put our faith in God, in others and in ourselves and say, “Yes” to life.

After completing three years of the Missions in Myanmar, the District can start dreaming and hoping for a new future. With one priest at the Holy Mountain at La Salette, another in Bangalore, India and still another one in the Philippines, and three more finishing their studies at Loyola School of Theology in Quezon City, more than one-half of the membership is abroad. One is being assigned at the Pre-major seminary in Mandalay as a spiritual director. Two more parishes will be added to the care of the Missionaries once the time for changes will happen at about Easter.

The shrine is becoming popular and more and more devotees are visiting the place all year round. There are more and more seminars, workshops, retreats being held there in spite of the limitation of the accommodation and facilities. The date of the celebration of the fiesta is on the big feast of the Buddhists: Thadingyut, the end of lent. It is a national holiday. Definitely more activities can be organized and the shrine can eventually become a national shrine (at the moment it is diocesan). The three parishes are becoming more united as a whole.

Fr. Bernie has been elected as one of the EC members in the CRCM (Catholic Religious Conference of Myanmar) and is in-charge of formation. At the moment, he is organizing and facilitating those who are involved in formation in the whole country. He is helping out in creating a forum for collaboration, cooperation and dialogue among those involved in formation.

Two candidates have been preparing themselves to take up the TOEFL (English proficiency test) this month. Another one is preparing to take up IELTS (the British counter part of the same test) in March since they do not have any TOEFL till May. Passing these tests is required by the Seminary authorities and the Bishops to begin their Philosophy. The timing is perfect as it will be only in 2011 that they will finish their Philosophy. Philip and David, the two preparing for ministry in formation, will come back from their studies in 2010 to prepare to start the postulancy and then the novitiate. It will give them at least one full year to set up the formation programs.

The two new parishes we are accepting can open real missionary work. Zaw Gyi has a big Catholic population and it used to be the residence of the parish priest who was taking care of the three parishes we are administering to, including the shrine to our Blessed Mother. With the neglect, the number of Catholics has dwindled to quite alarming proportions. There is a real need to re-evangelization and also evangelization in these new territories (it is not that we do not have these openings in the present parishes). The general council has approved the project of starting a central house for the Missionaries as the family is increasing.

The La Salette Sisters are also doing well in the northern-most part of the country. There the Chinese cell phones work and a lot of Chinese products can be smuggled through the borders. They are involved in the diocese in many capacities and are well-appreciated. Two of the novices will be ready for profession this year. Sr. Theresa will have completed her training in formation. Sr. Mary has been involved with Catholic Charities (Karuna) and is now helping in training counselors. With the postulants and aspirants, their future is also very bright. So let us give Thanks to God for he has done great things for us. Happy New Year to you all. Thank you for your prayers and help.

Thanks to You Many will be Able to Eat



Since a few days after the Nargis storm that played havoc in the southern part of Myanmar last March, the government has been restricting the flow of relief goods to the effected areas. As the international tensions rose, the government did not give in to their pressure. After a month of waiting the American warships had to leave. Even though previously visas were freely obtained in Bangkok, many aid workers and volunteers were stuck for many weeks. Because of the intervention of the General Secretary of the United Nations, the authorities promised to let them come in.

In spite of all these difficult restrictions, help went to the victims through the mediation of the Buddhist monks. With bad publicity, the government did not want to make it worse. So when there are no other agencies or groups functioning effectively the Buddhist monasteries became centers for distribution of relief goods. Even the Catholic Church at times has to make use of these Buddhist abbots.

The government claimed that no more emergency help was necessary after a few months. They asked for help in the reconstruction stage. To rebuild after a big storm like Nargis is a very big task. Even though the catastrophe many foretold did not happen to the same degree as expected. Even though whole villages were wiped out, whole sections of land submerged under sea water, basic necessities unavailable, God took care of his children. In many areas people use the ponds to store up drinking water. But after the storm, portable water was scarce as the open areas were filled with all kinds of debris and corpses of people and animals. Being immune to many diseases (rather suffering from many diseases) people survived much more than expected.

The greatest need was to help the farmers to plough and plant rice as soon as possible after the storm. It was planting season and time could not be wasted. Many farmers were trying to sell a part of their fields to finance the planting in what is left. This is where you came in. Even though the needs were very great help was given to some. Help to buy seeds, fuel, insecticide, fertilizers was needed by practically everybody. Your help made it possible for some to keep their fields and yet get some harvest. These are the pictures of the harvested rice. They still need to be trashed, winnowed, milled but some will be able to have some rice to eat this coming year. In the name of these people, please accept our thanks.

Because of the sea water that soaked the land, in many fields (especially in areas where they were submerged for many days) the plants grew but practically no yield at all. The seeds promised by the government came in very late and were not very good. Thanks to you, some farmers were able to buy some seeds, plough their fields, use insecticides, put fertilizers and hire people. May God bless you all for your great generosity.



Msgr. Peter Maung Yin Died Suddenly in the Cathedral

The Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette administered to an area bordering Bangladesh and India starting November of 1937. They based themselves in Akyab, Burma, a seaport used by many Europeans coming from Calcutta, India to access to the East for trade. The parish records went centuries back written by hand in the books still kept with a lot of space. The Arakanese are Buddhists and very exclusive. The late Bishop Thomas Newman, MS, DD, mentioned the fact that he had never seen the back part of the houses he visited. Not even his close friends invited him beyond the parlor.

More territory was added to the area entrusted to the La Salette Missionaries and it became a Prefecture Apostolic. Later the seat was transferred from Akyab to Prome. Eventually it became a diocese.

Fr. Cornelius Kyaw Khine was the first Burmese to be ordained for the diocese and was the only one till Fr. Bernard Taylor joined him seven years after his ordination. The third priest was the first Chin priest in the diocese and a year later the fourth priest, who was also Chin, joined the ranks. This fourth priest was Fr. Peter Maung Yin. Out of these first four priests in the diocese, Fr. Maung Yin was the only one left in the diocese when Fr. Kyaw Khine volunteered to work in Kansas, USA.

A day after the Christmas, Fr. Peter Mg Yin was found in the cathedral in Pyay. But it was too late and the doctors at the hospital pronounced him death on arrival. Fr. Bernie preached at the funeral. Two other La Salette priests (Frs. Lucas and Thomas) who were in the seminary in Pyay when Fr. Peter was in Pyay, also joined in the mass. May the soul of Fr. Peter Mg Yin and all the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace!



Line Phone for Chanthagone - (95) 66 - 42452

Even though it is difficult to communicate with the La Salette Missionaries in Chanthagone, it is a bit easier now to get in touch with them. The phone line is in Sintkine, a town about five six miles away from Chanthagone. There is a transmitter there near the line and a receiver in Chanthagone. Both need to be powered up. If one is down there is no connection. There are so many things that can go wrong that there seems to be one thing or other that is not working. It may be the antenna, or the wire that is connected to the receiver, or the transmitter, or the battery or the battery charger, or the inverter, or the phone unit, or the phone line, and the list goes on. Because many people use it, if one that is more powerful, or nearer to the base, the lines get crossed. Most of the units are made in China and many can listen in to others' conversations. Suddenly the line can get cut because some one dials from some where.

In the municipality a couple of miles from the shrine, new phones were installed. Our benefactor applied one for the shrine and one for the Salesian Sisters. The problem is that it is still two more miles before one can get connected. Some took the easy way out and used the trees as posts. But to have a better reception, posts have to be put up and wires bought. Deposits have to be put up (over a thousand US \$).

Soon after the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Mother, the phones started ringing and it kept ringing. Even for emergencies, the phone lines are busy as our Missionaries have a lot of friends. Sometimes the calls last for an hour. Hopefully after they get used to having a phone, they will not be on the phone for that long. Please keep on trying because you will eventually get through.

The best way to contact the missionaries is still by email. Everybody should remember that if there is no response, the email has not been opened. The email address is: Bernie@msmym.com.

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Traditional New Year Games at Chanthagone

Imagine having classes on New Year's day! Every year, it has been a tradition to have sports and games at the Shrine in Chanthagone. Even though the prizes are very ordinary and cheap, many try their best to win at these games. It is like a mini-Olympics. It may not be as grand as the Beijing 2008 but there is a great deal of competitive spirit brought out in these friendly games. The high-light of these games is the football match between the married and un-married women. Women in short pants, midi pants and long pants can only be seen once a year, at this football match. But this year it did not happen. The games were anticipated a day before in the evening.

Just before dusk, children gathered in front of the Church and the whole village came. The biggest prize was the marathon race: going around three times in side the property. One of the orphans out-ran everyone. The first prize was raised to 10000 kyats (about 10 US \$) and the second prize was 7000. Everyone who finished the race got at least 2000 kyats. It was dark and in some sections there were "thorns and thistles".

A short break has to be given before the New Year Mass and then the celebrations continued. The next day: the New Year, children had to go to school. Happy New Year to one and all.

