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## **MANDALAY NOTES**

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Even though we are in 2010, the picture of the Missionaries is that taken last 2009 the only time when everyone was present. In this issue of the Mandalay Notes, we would like to give you the whereabouts of everyone. With everyone assigned for the next three years, it will be nice to have the faces connected with the places. During the last District meeting, the La Salettes had pinned down the specifics for the plans for the next three years. Even with all the plans, we still have to be open to the invitation of Our Lady of La Salette to “make this known to all my people.”

This story begins with the “old man” seated at the far left of the picture. If you are a non-Burmese and find it hard to pronounce: Fr. Mya Thein, it is equally hard for the Myanmars to pronounce: Fr. Bernard Taylor. He has been fixing up the “central house” and finally it is about ready for occupation. With two big rooms and eight smaller ones, this should be enough for the missionaries for a few more years. The big hall-like building will be the multi-purpose hall. These “hotel rooms” will be run like hotels minus the staff. Fr. Philip Naw Aung, MS keeps on asking why we are having only one-storied buildings. The simple and most straight forward answer is that permission to build a house of two or more stories will have to come from the central government in the new capital: Naypyidaw. It is not impossible but it may take ages to get the approval. Another reason is that if buildings are small the authorities will be satisfied with only gallons of tea (just a manner of referring to the expedite fees or gifts to authorities). If not even barrels of tea will not be enough. All these are for the greater glory of God.

Next to him is Fr. David Kyaw Kyaw Lwin (or Fr. Chotu as he is fondly called by some). After learning all he can from the “Institute of Consecrated Life in Asia” in Quezon City, Philippines, he went to observe how things are done in Vietnam. After he comes back he will be taking the place of Fr. Nicodemus as the Spiritual Director of the St. Thomas Pre-Major Seminary in Mandalay. These are college students preparing themselves to study Philosophy. When we were planning to start our own formation program, His Grace Paul Grawng, the Archbishop of Mandalay, requested us to give one priest to help in the formation of future priests. So with the condition that we will be sending our candidates there, Fr. Nicodemus began serving two years ago. He is going to continue his Thesis on-line. Good Luck!



Fr. Nicodemus Aung Than Aye (Fr. Nico as he is fondly called) is preparing for his papers to join the staff at the Shrine in Attleboro, MA, USA. With the intention of making the Shrine an international one, the Provincial Superior requested other La Salettes to join in the ministry. Hartford Province was the founder of the Burmese Missions. As a sign of appreciation, the community decided to look for someone. Fr. Nico volunteered. He is now preparing for the papers. While waiting for the US visa he will be helping out in exploring the possibilities of establishing a new mission area in Myitkyina, where the La Salette Sisters are. He will be helping out with the new hymnal in Kachin.

Fr. Valentine San Tun, MS just left for the Holy Mountain at La Salette, France this 6th of May, 2010. He will be replacing Fr. Jerome who would have completed his three year stint there this fall. Val will be trying to step into the shoes of Fr. Jerome who will be there for this season to help him adjust to this new ministry. It was difficult to leave the parish in Sinbyu. He started a banana plantation and getting to know his flock when he was asked to go to France for three years. It is always difficult to leave your first parish especially when he had been there only for the last few months. Au revoir et Bon Voyage!



It was not by chance that Fr. Jerome Eiphan, MS was seated beside Fr. Val. He was meant to be the mentor and initiator. Since November Fr. Jerome has been putting new life into the small community in Myanmar. Almost every Tuesday, community meetings were organized. The culmination of these activities is the trip to Anisakhan, a summer resort. Study days were organized and finally a semblance of a formation policy was finalized. Meetings were lively and the colder weather helped. Camaraderie and celebration of community was a refresher for everyone. Fr. Jerome has gone back to the Holy Mountain to prepare the way for Fr. Val. He will be coming back in November and will make the final preparations for the Postulancy-Novitiate program, which he will be heading with Fr. Philip Naw Aung.

Fr. David Kyaw Zwa Latt, MS is the new parish priest of Chanthagone. He is the secretary of the District and has been managing the Mandalay Notes for a few months already. But this year because of his other ministries he has asked Fr. Bernie to take care of it this month. So do not blame him for this issue. He got elected as the president of CRMdy (Conference of Religious in Mandalay) and thus got his baptism of fire this April. He managed the program for pre-teens (ages 8 to 14) and luckily he only had a bit over 260 kids. He had to feed them, entertain them, teach them, form them of course with the help of his CRMdy. He managed it very well. Congratulations.



Fr. Philip Naw Aung, MS is the first one to be standing. He has just come back from Bangalore where he studied spirituality and counseling for two years. Since he is the only Kachin native from Myitkyina area, he has been assigned to probe the possibilities of working in Myitkyina. He has been assigned to the Pre-Major Seminary in Myitkyina as the Spiritual Director for the mean time. He is the Vicar Superior in the district. He will be taking care of the Postulancy-Novitiate program for our candidates sometime next year. He has bought some books for the community in India as it is much cheaper there. There is word that it has arrived at the border.

If this works out well, we may be able to get books into Myanmar. Many books will be needed for the formation programs. Fr. Patrick has volunteered to go and get them. Even in the age of computers, the printed materials are an absolute necessity.



Fr. Lucas Suan Za Lian, MS is at St. Aloysius of Gonzaga minor seminary in Pyin Oo Lwin May Myo is its old name. It was the summer capital. The weather is much cooler than Mandalay which is in the middle of the “dry belt”. When Mandalay is in the 100’s (F) it is still in the 80’s there. Our missionaries would come here, when they could not get reentry visas, to have a nice vacation. It boasts of a beautiful golf course and it was famous for its botanical gardens. Fr. Lucas will have his hands full as they will be taking care of the spiritual needs of the Sacred Heart parish. The seminary grounds are huge. He will have a lot of challenges to practice his pastoral skills and still be able to teach English.

Fr. Luis, the director of the seminary, was asking for two priests so they could live as a community. Unfortunately there is need for missionaries to be else where.

Fr. Robert Zaw Lwin, MS has been helping some of the Myanmar Religious in the Philippines to cope with English. With his high grades in Loyola School of Theology in Quezon City, he was eyed to prepare to teach Philosophy. But as the missionaries studied the situation very carefully, they decided that the formation of the candidates as Religious is fundamental. The preparations for priestly ordinations can come after their vows. The tendency for candidates in Myanmar is to aspire to be priests. Vocation to the Religious life is put in the background. The only real time for Religious Life is only during their canonical novitiate. So he will stay in Sinbyu the farthest from the center. The bridge has been reconstructed every time the flood come during the rainy season. The landslides fill the river with all kinds of debris. The strong current would wash away the bridge. Since the school there is only for elementary students, the older students have to attend the high school a few miles away. They had to walk or take a bicycle (for those who can afford it). They put up a temporary bridge for the beginning of the school year.



Fr. Patrick Kyaw Lin, MS is small in stature but he is the only one among the missionary priests who can start the generator without the help of anyone. He works in his own quiet way. He was formerly assigned in Chanthagone as the parish priest. He now takes care of the twin parish of Myauk Kine and Myitnge. As Sinbyu is in the southernmost part of the parishes, he is in the northern section. Myauk Kine is a “model village” as prescribed by the authorities. There are monasteries, pagodas, schools and libraries. The Catholics stay in the south western part of the village. Myitnge is a big town famous for its yards to repair trains. The Catholics are few and spread out. One of the biggest benefactors

has his quarters there and so he should not have much financial problems. His vision to build a participatory church will have help in his work.

Fr. Thomas Htang Shan Maung, MS is the first Myanmar La Salette to be ordained priest in the country. The Superior General and the Apostolic Delegate could not make it as the Buddhist monks started demonstrating against the authorities. The ordination date was postponed. All celebrations for the end of the Buddhist Lent were cancelled. Luckily the local authorities looked the other way and we could celebrate with the Archbishop Paul Grawng, DD as the ordaining prelate. He will be replacing Fr. Lucas in Zawgyi. Even though there was help for the construction of the new church, the funds were defaulted as there was a bank run and the bank never refunded any one anything. Like Sinbyu, the river swells during the rainy season and the bridge comes down. A new concrete bridge is under construction. Fr. Thomas will have his hands full there in Zawgyi.





Fr. William Phyo Wai, MS just lost his beloved mother. He was able to be with her during her last hours. Now he is back and will have his hands full. He was assigned to St. Thomas Pre-Major Seminary after his studies in the Philippines. Now he is at Chanthagone as the Director of the Shrine. He is the new Treasurer of the District. He also heads the Volunteer-Aspirancy Program with Fr. Kyaw Zwa Latt. His first problem is to create a semblance of formation for those who are coming in to observe. In this busy place of the shrine where many retreatants, pilgrims and others come, he will have to teach the volunteers to be contemplatives in action. Now he is building a small place to house those who are already there. His quiet and unassuming style of leadership should set the pace for the formation for those intending to join the community.



Bro. Nicholas Zaw Moe Aung, MS is the only one who took his perpetual vows in Myanmar. He came in together with Fr. Thomas to start his year of regency. After that he decided to continue his Theology at the local Seminary in Yangon. Due to lack of space, he had to squat with the Little Brothers of St. Francis Xavier, a local diocesan congregation of lay missionaries. Due to the lack of facilities he could not make the mark required in the Institute to be promoted to the next year. After serving as the property custodian and the bursar for a year in Chanthagone, he is ready once again to study. This year hopefully he will have a place there in the crowded seminary in Yangon. The new building for the seminarians was closed by the authorities. So some of the seminarians will have to sleep on the floors and make do with over-crowded classrooms.

May he pass his examinations this time.





Since 1996 recruitment to the La Salette Missionaries in Myanmar has been stopped. When the Missionaries reestablished themselves in 2005, one of the conditions was not to recruit any candidates. There were some English courses and some of the students heard about the congregation and they started coming in to be with the Missionaries. They were told that they would not be accepted they continued to stay as volunteers. As time went on, there were discussions on what kind of formation should be given. Before accepting candidates, people who would be involved in formation must be prepared. So the missionaries decided to sacrifice two among them to prepare.

Fr. Philip Naw Aung, MS was able to get admission to a Theological Institute in Bangalore, India. He was able to get a two-year student's visa and so in 2008 he left to start a two-year program. He finished his studies and came back at the end of April. Fr. David Kyaw Kyaw Lwin, MS decided to go to the Institute of Consecrated Life in Asia in the Philippines. Fr. Jerome Eiphan, MS is also completing his assignment at the Holy Mountain. Being there at the source of the Congregation he will be a great help to the formation program. Fr. William Phyo Wai MS, was also preparing himself for the formation program being together with Fr. Nicodemus Aung Than Aye, MS and Fr. Dominic Djodu. With these giants in the formation program, the candidates will surely have their best chance to prepare themselves to become very good and devoted La Salette Missionaries.

Formation is not only the work of the few but it is the responsibility of everyone in the community. If the candidates see in the Missionaries the double standard, they will also adopt the same attitude. Each member of the community has a role to play. Even though all formation is self-formation, the environment plays a very great role. If the candidate has always to struggle all throughout his formation, trying to answer the call of Our Lord and Our Blessed Mother will be very difficult. So at first the candidates will see the life-style of the Missionaries. At this first stage of being volunteers, they will get to know the La Salettes and the La Salettes to know them. Then as Aspirants they can find out if they want to become La Salette Missionaries. After they know that they have the basic desire to become La Salettes, as postulants they can begin to nurture their desire to be a Missionary. Then they will be ready to live the life of a La Salette Missionary. They will be ready to take the vows after the novitiate.



# Goodbye - Welcome in Chaungthagone

As the missionaries begin to take up their new ministries in their respective parishes, their flock thanked them for their efforts in serving the people. The new pastor looks on.



# Goodbye - Welcome in Myitnge



# St. Joseph's Feast May 1 2010

