

# Letter from Sadagopan (1989)

**N.S. Sadagopan**

Hemerijckx Govt. Leprosy Centre  
Polambakkam P.O. 603 309  
Dated : 29th January, 1989

Our most dear Mr Jacques and Mrs Francine,

On the joyous occasion of awarding Honorary Degree of Doctorate at Louvain University to Dr Claire Vellut, I am sharing this letter about Dr Claire which is expression of my gratitude to her for all her service to the cause of leprosy.

I have not seen Father Damien but heard quite a lot about him. But I can see Father Damien in Dr. Claire Vellut and I (like many) consider her as a real disciple and follower of that GREAT SAINT. I have written and typed this short report in hurry (as I do not have time and Dr. Vellut is constantly keeping me busy - to avoid becoming mad !). I am sharing with you all my happiness, as a member of Damien Foundation and above all as a - long associate - as a patient with a disability.

- It is nearly 3 decades since I had and still have the privilege of knowing Dr. Claire Vellut as my boss, as my physician, as my teacher and above all as family member closely and intimately attached to us.

- Her implicit faith in the "Team work spirit" is the key-note in all her accomplishment in the Research Work at this Centre. She has extraordinary talent in selecting right type of people for a particular project work. In order to achieve the goal she has employed various methods like group discussion, competition among staff, in-service training, deputation to conference, payment of incentive, and so on. She has gained full support of staff in fulfilling many field study project work.

- She is champion for fighting for the principles which she considers right. While speaking the truth she never clothed her words with sweet coat. For example in her short report to a Conference held recently at Madras she frankly said *"Doctors are supposed to go regularly to clinics/Pulse MDT therapy. Patients are expecting them. If they do not turn up, both patients and staff are disheartened. Their leadership take a negative aspect"*. We all feel happy because she has a special privilege to speak openly. On account of this straightforward trait of her she has quite a number of friends (who cannot speak boldly). They all have great admiration for her.

- The crown of all her qualities is her compassion to H.D patients which is deeply rooted in her as inborn character and no wonder she expects everyone working with her should be like her in serving the patients. Dr. Vellut cannot bear any injustice done to leprosy patients. At one time when she found the functioning of this Centre has gone down in its quality during her absence she was infuriated and burst into anger and said: *"I cannot understand why these people (meaning leprosy patients) remain so silent bearing silently all the injustice done to them. Can't they shout and fight for their right to get treatment?"*

- At one time she told her staff members in an impressive manner *"If your own brother or sister happen to be afflicted with leprosy will you ever say 'I am sorry I have forgotten to give you treatment only today!'"*. You can just imagine the depth of her love, abundant love to Hansen's sufferers. Many of her colleagues who had the privilege to work with her had imbibed this supreme quality from her which has been appreciated and marveled by many other people.

- We all speak so much about Rehabilitation of leprosy patients but how many of us are practicing it. You please make a visit to many leprosy control units, research hospitals, etc. How many ex-

leprosy patients with disability are working in them, (Forgive me, this is not the remark made by me). A team of workers from Andhra Pradesh (South India) visited this Centre some years ago for training. One of them said *'This is the only Centre where I find leprosy patients with functional deformity are employed on all branches of department - as field staff (Paramedical workers), Laboratory Technicians, smear technicians, ward dressing assistant, head of the office administration, and so on.'*

Dr.Vellut has received more 'brickbats' than 'bouquets' in employing these expatrients. But she proved that her faith in these people has not faltered. Their sincerity, honesty, hardworking and efficiency have been recognized by people at large.

Dr.Vellut even ventured to write to higher officials stating that she is employing (re-employing) retired staff members (ex-leprosy staff) due to non-availability of right type of government personnel !

In conclusion I would like to say that we are now celebrating Father Damien's service to H.D sufferers. At this juncture it is the right time to remember Dr. Claire Vellut for her great service performed in a humble manner without 'pompous and show'. - that too in a remote corner of a village in India.

It is not an exaggeration if we call her as a 'TRUE DISCIPLE OF FATHER DAMIBN LIVING IN HIS TRUE SPIRIT".

We, the patients and staff, living at this remote Polambakkam village are really proud and privileged people to work with her and we pray deep from our heart the Almighty to bless her to live and serve many more years to come.

With our very kind regards to yourself and Mrs.Francine and children,

Very affectionately yours,

(N.S.Sadagopan)  
on behalf of all patients & Staff.  
Polambakkam.