



Toward the Centenary - 01

ST. MARY'S VELLORE - AN HISTORICAL GLANCE

LET US GO IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

On June 2, 1928, first Friday of the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the seven FMA: Sr. Teresa Balestra, superior, Sr. Maria Angeleri, Sr. Consiglia Tarricone, Sr. Catherine Adele Gila, Sr. Teresa Merlo, Sr. Annie Ward and Sr. Eugenia Cazzuli, reached Katpadi station at 4.a.m. Salesians received them warmly and brought them to the new mission at Vellore. After the Holy Eucharist, the Sisters got ready left for their new field of labour. The parish priest, Fr. Trideau of the Paris Mission, a calm, serene and friendly person, met the sisters and handed over the mission.

The house chronicles dated June 2, 1928 records: *"We are in God's hands. From all sides, we have heard of difficulties, poverty, hardship and sacrifices that the new work offers, but we confide in the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and our powerful mother, the Help of Christians. Our only aim is to gain souls, our motto, "Give me souls, take away all else." All united in this one and only aim, we begin our journey from Wellington to Vellore."*

Vellore town was at one time a British military station and hence populated for the most part by Europeans that their children might benefit by a good education. The military helped in building a school in 1860 and entrusted it to the Loreto Sisters. In 1862, Good Shepherd Sisters took charge of the school and remained only a few years till 1875, as the place was not hygienic and diseases prevailed. Vellore being part of Pondicherry diocese, convent and the school were transferred to the Sisters of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, Pondicherry. In 1928, Rt. Rev. Eugene Mederlet SDB, Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore, invited the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from the diocese of Thanjavur to Vellore. Mother Lusía Vaschetti, Superior General accepted the offer willingly. Thus the mission of Vellore was entrusted to the Daughters of Mary help of Christians on 2 June, 1928.

The convent offered to the Salesian Sisters was an almost dilapidated building all in ruins. The house was a quadrangle with a courtyard in the centre and four spacious verandahs running on the inside. The doors and windows could not be closed properly. Verandahs were without roof and Sisters walking along at night saw the stars. Floor was plastered with dung. All the furniture was, just two tables, two chairs and seven benches for the school. Fr. Mederlet promised to see to the repairs as soon as possible. Sisters of Pondicherry brought out their 'treasures' seventeen orphans and entrusted them to the care of the Salesian Sisters who very quickly became friendly with them.

ST. MARY'S ORPHANAGE/ ST. MARY'S HOME FOR CHILDREN:

FMA missionaries proved their love for souls through the mastery of the local language and efficient and conscientious work keeping alive the motto, "Give me souls and take away the rest". Boarding continued to be their prime apostolate aiming at giving education to the very poor catholic girls from the remote villages of North Arcot District, providing them residential facilities.

Glancing through the available records one can understand the joy that these first missionary Sisters experienced when the orphans were brought to the house. They took great interest in bringing them up in spite of poor facilities available. Sisters saw to all their needs, educated them, discovered their talents and interests and qualified them accordingly. They found suitable jobs according to their qualifications, helped them earn their livelihood, made them capable of facing society and the world. At marriageable

age all the orphans were settled with suitable partners and were well provided with all that was necessary to establish a family. As the number of orphans decreased, the boarding was officially termed as 'St. Mary's Home for Children'. The boarding continues till today with the strength of 130 children.

ST. MARY'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

The school handed over by Gonzaga Sisters had limited strength in the beginning and teachers had to go out to look for children. Parents were illiterate and Italian Sisters had to struggle to communicate with them. But their love for the poor and interest in their welfare helped them to pick up the colloquial language of the public. Classes were held in the verandah of the old building. As the sense of duty was prominent in the missionaries efficient and painstaking work was carried out. Elementary School progressed rapidly under the untiring work and capable leadership of Sr. Teresa Balestra. The school took an active part in all the activities conducted by the education department and local government. Seeing the efficient and effective functioning of the school, on October 12, 1930, the Education Department granted permission to upgrade it into higher elementary school. Sr. David Arul was appointed as the Headmistress. Today, 749 children are on roll in the Elementary School.

TEACHER TRAINING SCHOOL:

House chronicles of 1930 record the following: On August 6, 1930 the school authorities came to examine the site where the teacher training school was to be established. They found the existing classes in good order and the premises quite adequate for a Teacher Training Institute with Tamil medium. They saw that the new project would enable the girls after their scholastic studies to complete their education and be qualified to earn their living without much inconvenience. On July 1, 1931, Archbishop Mgr. Mederlet, blessed the Training School building. It was the first Catholic Teacher Training School in North Arcot. Fr. Joseph Santhanam whom the Sisters knew as an able cleric in Tanjore was just ordained on April 26, 1931. He now became the first professor of catechesis in the training school. On October 22, 1931, the new teacher training students initiated their apostolic work. They went with two Sisters to pay their first visit to the local prison for women.

Hard work and fervent prayer gave cent per cent results in the public examination of March 1933. With the passing years, student strength increased. At the end of the scholastic year the training school received permanent recognition. Demand for admission was on the increase every year. There was steady and progressive development. On June 9, 1967 the higher grade Teacher Training was upgraded as secondary grade Teacher Training School. In 1982 the Teacher Training School celebrated the Golden jubilee. At the demand of the Education Department not to have many schools on the same campus the Teacher Training School was shifted to Anmarudai in 1995.

NEW ASPIRANTATE AT VELLORE:

At the dawn of the Year 1931, the thought of establishing the aspirantate was uppermost in the mind of Mother Provincial, Sr. Tullia De Bernardinis. On January 16, Sr. Luigina Appiano found a rented house 'Villa Lucas' with a moderate rent of Rs. 60/- per month which was just a few minutes distance from St. Mary's convent. In April 1931 the aspirantate was blessed by Mgr. Mederlet and Sr. Teresa Merlo was appointed to take care of the first native aspirants. Fr. Mora the administrator of the diocese of Madras was to be their spiritual director. Every Monday morning Sr. Cesira and an aspirant would go to Pallikonda carrying two boxes of medicines visited the villages to relieve the sick and suffering and they would return late in the evening tired but happy for having served the poor.

ST.MARY'S NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOL:

St.Mary's Nursery and Primary Co-education School was started in 1931 with the aim of providing financial support to the destitute, unfortunate and underprivileged. It was meant to cater to the catholic elite of the town and that of the British regime on their continuous request to start English Medium School. Sr. Theresa Merlo was the superior and correspondent of the school. The old house functioned as the school during the day and as dormitory for the orphans in the night. The present primary school building was inaugurated and blessed on June 30, 1999, by Rt. Rev. Malayappan Chinappa SDB, Bishop of Vellore. 874 children are frequenting the Nursery and Primary School

ST.MARY'S GIRLS HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL:

In June 1944, with permission from the department of education, St. Mary's Elementary School was upgraded into Higher Elementary or Middle School. Sr. Arul David was appointed as the first headmistress but was replaced soon by Sr. Margaret Venkatasamy. On June 3, 1947, permission was obtained to start High School. Hence, Form IV (present Std. IX) in 1947, Form V (present Std. X) in 1948, Form VI (present Std. XI) in 1949 were started.

The first batch of SSLC students went in March 1950 for the public examination. In the same year, permission was granted to bifurcate form III. Thus the Elementary and the High Schools were bifurcated. The high school had Sr. Mary Vaz as first headmistress. Permanent recognition was granted in 1953.

On August 5, 1959, the site for High School building was blessed by Rev. Fr. John Med, Salesian Provincial. Sr. CongsiliaTarricone, Superior, left no stone unturned to complete the building as early as possible. On January 9, 1961 the building was blessed by Bishop David Marianayagam. In 1962, English medium sections from Std. VI to X were added to the High School. At the request of parents, High School was upgraded to Higher Secondary School with temporary recognition from July 22, 1998. The number of girls has increased steadily and now there 2328 girls are given integral education in St. Mary's Higher Secondary School.

OTHER APOSTOLIC WORKS:

Past Pupils unit was started in the year 1938, Association of Salesian Cooperators in 1974, and VIDES in 1986. All these units function well by giving their contribution to the locality by way of visits to hospitals, prison ministry, parish animation, Sunday catechism, Sunday Oratory, Liturgical animation and many more charitable works.

This year St. Mary's celebrates the 90th year of its establishment. It is the first house to be established in today's INM Province of Chennai. To mark this occasion and as an expression of gratitude to our Blessed Mother a magnificent monument is being built. We propose to have the blessing in February 2020. We request your prayers and blessings on all the members of the educating community so that the spirit of our foundress may be kept alive by our witnessing life.

**“Let us walk with Mary through the Course of the Century
(1922 2022) and beyond”**

*Sr. Christina Anthony Raj and Sisters
St. Mary's Vellore.*

