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# **A Study on the Contributions of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**

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## **Introduction**

A religious congregation is a type of religious institute in the catholic church. They are legally distinguished from religious order, and the other primary types of religious institutes – in that members take simple vows. At the same time, members of religious orders take solemn vows. A religious order is a lineage of communities and organizations of people who live in some way set apart from society under their specific religious devotion, usually characterized by the principles of its founder's religious practice. It is generally composed of laypeople and in some orders, clergy. Such orders exist in many of the world's religions.

Mother Scholastica was a great, legendary leader who inspired many people. Mother Scholastica was a great lady whom God called, who started the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus<sup>2</sup>. She also shows remarkable courage, simplicity, patience, and cheerfulness in her illness and old age. Her incessant and trusting prayers and sacrifices have now brought recognition from Rome for her Congregation<sup>3</sup>. As led by Mother Scholastica, the seven Little Sisters of Jesus struggled to build up the congregation to the present status of Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They Prayerfully laboured to establish their identity among people with low incomes. Mother Scholastica had a very difficult religious journey. Her long waiting in the Augustinian Convent, a new turning point in Azhagappapuram, eventually renouncing many privileges, and her travel to Kottar Diocese. Finally, the

invitation to Vellore is the best example of her great faith in god and his unfailing continuous providence<sup>5</sup>

The objectives of the society are as follows

- ❖ The general objective of this society is to work for God's glory and the members' personal sanctification.
- ❖ To follow the three ordinary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and to live according to the rules and regulations of the society as given here.
- ❖ The members must sacrifice themselves for the salvation of souls and perform the works for that purpose with complete self-dedication.
- ❖ To impart religious and secular education to the studying children and the rural people.
- ❖ To provide orphanages, professional education institutions and social service institutions.
- ❖ To work for the development of socially neglected, oppressed and backward people.
- ❖ To accept and perform a service demanding sacrifice and generosity given by the Bishop of the place according to the society's spirit and regulations.

According to the above objectives, they started orphanages, semi-orphanages, and homes for the poor, needy, and destitute<sup>6</sup>.

### **Aim of the Congregation**

The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus congregation was founded to serve the poorest of the poor<sup>7</sup>. In Indian society, people are classified as upper, middle, and lower. Especially in the lower class, there are the poorest of the poor. There are many orphan or semi-orphan children. Some are widows without houses, land and jobs. So, they dedicated themselves to serving the poorest of the poor, and their primary objective was to educate the poorest of the poor. Most schools started by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus were in the cities' villages or outskirts. The geography of these institutions itself speaks about the purpose of their services. In such places, only the poorest of the poor lives. Government schemes are not available for them like those for city people. Educational and job availabilities are almost nothing compared with cities. Going in search of them, bringing them to the residential

schools, giving them particular dignified formation and making them the best citizens of the nation are the concerns of the congregation<sup>8</sup>. Over time, the beneficiaries are also inspired to help them continue the mission forever and ever.

### **Philanthropic Activities**

The institution of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is an initiative of God. The Holy Spirit inspired Mother Scholastica (15.10.1917 – 12.10.1993), the Founder of the Congregation, to dedicate herself to the evangelisation and education of people, with preferential options for the poor, the abandoned, the physically and mentally challenged children, and widows<sup>9</sup>.

The congregation's Charism is preferential love and concern for the education and evangelisation of the poor and the abandoned, especially the orphans, women in distress, physically and differently-abled persons, old, widows and the sick. The compassionate love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the force behind their participation in the sufferings of humanity and to dedicate themselves to work for their education and evangelisation.

One of the main concerns in their mission remains the service of the poor, downtrodden, marginalised and abandoned. Motivated and urged by the self-sacrificing love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, they engage in charity for those impoverished people. They serve people through homes for the homeless, care for the differently abled and mentally retarded, centres for the aged and widows, and work for the social upliftment of the poor and the downtrodden. They extraordinarily serve the sick through their medical care for the people in remote villages without access to medical care and health facilities. They have different medical centres, dispensaries, and first-aid places with qualified and experienced sisters to cater to the sick and visit their houses, particularly whenever the elderly or the sickly people need their help and presence<sup>10</sup>.

### **Educational services:**

Education alone can transform any society. That is why the Sisters of Sacred Heart of Jesus emphasise educating youngsters. Education is the light of the world, uprooting ignorance.

Education is the immeasurable wealth of humanity. Education is the birth of all Indians, both rich and poor<sup>11</sup>.

The community helped the poor students who approached them and the inmates of their homes to get admission to nearby schools and colleges. The community helped to get a uniform dress for the students from the Vincent – -De- -Paul Society. The community visits families who have experienced poverty and finds out about the students who discontinued their education. The community advises them about the importance of education in understanding their state of being, making them know their future, and helping them in all possible ways to continue their education for a better life, creating relationships between them. So they may be helped and feel self-sufficient.

Number of Primary School -10

- Kurusady
- Thirumalapuram
- Thirumoolanagar
- Sathampatti
- Kappiarai
- Pattrivilai
- Murasancode
- Aruguvilai
- Trichy
- Chengalpet

Number of Middle School - 2

- Villupuram
- Thoothukudi

Number of High School – 2

- Azhappapuram
- Thoothukudi

Number of Higher Secondary Schools – 6

- Kanyakumari
- Kurusady
- Kolvel
- Agarakattu
- Pattrivilai
- Nagercoil

Number of Matric School – 3

- Azhappapuram
- Kanjampuram
- Kamarajapuram

Sacred Heart Nursing College – 1

- Dindugal

Annai Scholastica Arts and Science College-1

- Thangachimadam

Around 5700 students are benefitting from these Schools and Colleges

### **Social Service**

To provide a better life for the downtrodden of society, jobs for the unemployed girls and, shelter for those in need and to rehabilitate the poor children, destitute or orphans, widows, children and women, the sisters constructed homes and orphanages<sup>12</sup>.

The essential services of the congregation of Kurusady are listed below:

- a) Fr. Mathias Child Care Center

- b) Sacred Heart Day Creche
- c) St. Joseph's Weaving, Tailoring and Training Center
- d) Sacred Heart of Jesus Home

### **Fr. Mathias Child Care Center**

During the 1970s and 1980s, people who had there killed their infant girl child from the mother's womb because she was a girl. This centre was established in 1969 to care for children who do not experience the love of their parents and to civilise people who were not civilised. The aim of establishing Mathias Child Care Center is for parentless children to be brought up in the benevolent sanctuary of love. While staying here, they must feel as if a person has been caring for the children since it was established.

So far, St. Mathias Child Care Center has raised 215 children. As of 12.02.2001, there were 60 growing children. Nine of them got married, seven of them entered religious congregations, and seven of them served society.

The children are abandoned by their mothers, and their fathers are called destitute. The destitute children who have no one to look after them, or either mother or father who is unable to care for them, come to this centre before the completion of five years of age<sup>13</sup>. When they admit the children to the centre, they must register all the information about the child and the socio-economic situation. The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus met the expenditure of the children till they became grown up and reached independence and self-reliance in life.

Many couples come to this home to adopt children as they like among the children with the advice and concern of the sister in charge. When they take home, they have to register their name and their written confirmation to give love and care and raise the children as their own. From that moment, they are the parents and have full responsibility for the children, rendering enough love and care with parental affection.

The sisters have a keen and particular interest in the children who are given to adaption. They are happy if the children adjust to their adopted parents. If the children are not treated with love and care, the sisters bring them back to the home and take care of them. Since 1993, 34 children have been given to adaption. They find themselves very happy at home with their adopted parents.

The centre's original name is St. Antony's Home for Child Care. Since it was founded by Rev. Fr. Mathias in 1987, it came to be called Fr. Mathias Child Care Center. In 1989, the Kanyakumari District Collector, Mr Sundarendevan I.A.S, visited the centre, appreciated Sr. Mary in person, and presented her with a reasonable donation. During 1999-2000, the President of Rotary Club Ln. Alexander Immanuel appreciated Sr. Mary and gave her a memorable shield.

### **Sacred Heart Day Creche**

The Sacred Heart Day Creche was started with twenty-five children on 1st October 1968. This institution aims to collect all the poor children between the ages of two and four around this society. Sacred Heart Day Creche helps them develop their mental and physical health through good habits, speech ability, and free speech.

Further, if both mother and father go to the office, there may be someone to look after the children. Due to this situation, they bring the children to Sacred Heart Day Creche. Through this institution, the children and parents benefit from sending their children while they go to work<sup>14</sup>. The Government of India recognises this institution and receives financial help of Rs. 9,428 from the Central Government twice a year. The children are also taught to sing, dance, listen to stories and write alphabets.

### **St. Joseph's Weaving, Tailoring and Training Center**

The students who cannot go for higher studies come to this institution for training in sewing, weaving and many other kinds of handicraft work. They give a certificate after the completion



of these courses. The students are well trained for self-employment, and many are trained to work in different famous concerns. The sewing training centre was started in 1968 by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The main aim of this institution is to help poor students who cannot pursue higher studies to become self-employed. Homemakers who want to earn income for their families could also undergo this training and become self-employed in their homes. Several women and young girls in this society have benefited from this institution.

Sr. Roseline was teaching in this institute as the first sewing mistress. Thirty-five students completed their training. Five of the students who completed this training course were given sewing machines. During the period of Sr. Gorreity, she gave sewing machines to poor women who had completed the sewing training course. Because of that, those women could run their families without much difficulty. Due to a lack of students who came to training and a lack of trained instructors who managed to handle the training, this programme did not function after 1994<sup>15</sup>.

St. Joseph's Weaving Training Institute was started in 1969 to give self-confidence to people experiencing poverty by maintaining their family's economic status through self-employment. Many people have become financially prosperous due to this project. So, 82 students have been trained well. It admits poor students free of fee in every training course. Sarees, goatees and towels were produced through that hand-weaving equipment. The income generated by this small-scale industry was utilised to develop St. Antony's childcare mercy home students. Those who return home from the institution are given weaving equipment for self-employment<sup>16</sup>. So that they may manage their family without any problems and stand on their own. Eighty-two students have completed the training programme in the centre so far.

### **Sacred Heart of Jesus Home**

Misunderstandings between husband and wife lead to a break in the marriage bond, and they separate. So, their married life and their children are affected. It helps such families and makes them realise their state of being. It also makes them understand each other, accept each other, love each other, and live together as an example to others<sup>17</sup>. It united seven broken families in the year 2008 alone.

- 1) It meets alcohol addicts in their own houses and converts them by advising and bringing them to hospitals for rehabilitation from alcoholic life<sup>18</sup>.
- 2) It helps people in underdeveloped economies by assisting them in getting government loans for their self-employment.
- 3) It has helped the people who really need a house. It has helped them by giving them money from society and also helping them to get loans from government authorities<sup>19</sup>.

It teaches social awakening through some social programmes to the people of the locality, especially for the youth.

The widows who don't like to remarry and who lost their husbands at a young age come to this home seeking refuge. It gives them accommodation and directs them to lead a peaceful life through doing some self-employment<sup>20</sup>. Widows undergo social inequalities due to the bad treatment of their mothers-in-law, and women who experience ill-treatment by their husbands come to this home seeking refuge. Those who commit illegal clandestine sex before marriage carry their child and come to this home seeking refuge. They live together, work there, and save money, and when they feel independent enough to live on their own, they come out of this place<sup>21</sup>. Older people who don't find comfort in their children come to this home and find a peaceful life.

## **Conclusion**

The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus serve human beings at all levels. They never refuse to serve, considering caste, religion and region. They serve for all, irrespective of differences. Through their dedicated services to the poor, forsaken orphans, widows, mentally affected, and differently-abled, they make their lives cheerful. They develop hope and belief in life.

Sacred Heart Sisters ' kind-hearted services to the children make many children learn well and have hope in life. Their medical service for the children and aged in rural areas benefits society. Their generous service at all levels enriches the lives of low-income people in rural and urban areas. Regarding education, people in village areas come forward to learn things and increase the literacy level of our country. In short, they work to uplift the total society in our country.

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