

MONTFORTIAN MISSION IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON TAMILNADU

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Abstract

There is lot of things said about the missions of Monfortians in India; some of these statements would carry values to this: "Our Schools have reopened and life carries on. The years to come will be as fruitful as the years that have gone" Bro. Eleazar, "Many of the precious are still with us", "May they remain with us for many more years" – Bro. Eleazar, Montfortian Mission in Tamilnadu. This paper is aimed to record the Montfortian mission in India with special focus on Tamilnadu.

INTRODUCTION

"Man is a fine expression of God"- St. Montfort

This report starts with a short note on the Institute's Founder and with the beginning of the congregation in France and proceeds to tell about the beginning of the mission in India with the arrival of 3 pioneers from France on Sep. 11, 1903 at Tindivanam, Villupuram District, Tamil Nadu. We admire them for their indomitable sense of commitment. Let us see their journey, arrival and the work at St. Joseph's Industrial School, Tindivanam.

MONTFORTIAN MISSION IN INDIA

On August 19, 1903, Bros Denis, John the Baptist and Martin de Vertou left St. Laurent for Marseilles via Lourdes. On August 22nd, they arrived in Marseilles and Fr. Beate, the Procurator of the Foreign Missions in that town met them at the

railway station and handed over to them their tickets for Pondicherry.

Arrival

On September 11, 1903, the three pioneers taking a small ship, the Duplex, arrived at Pondicherry. At the Mission in Pondy our missionaries received an enthusiastic welcome from Rev. Fr. Renevier, the Vicar General and from all the other missionaries.

Petit Seminaire HS, Pondichery

On September 14th, 1903 they began to teach. Bro. Denis, the Superior, taught most of the subjects. As for Bro. John Baptist, he gave drawing lessons. Later he left for Trivandrum.

St. Joseph's Industrial School, Tindivanam

Fr. Combes, who was the parish priest at Tindivanam, gathered several orphans and started a small orphanage at Tindivanam. Tindivanam was to become the 'Mother

House' of St. Gabriel in India. Bro. Baptist constructed a simple thatched roof shed.

Little Flower High School and Industrial School, Salem

On January 18, 1932, the District Education Officer of Salem appointed Bro. Corentin as Director and Head Master of Little Flower High School. The school had 350 pupils. As it was not self-supporting, it was agreed that the Brothers would have only the management of it and receive a salary while the Mission would shoulder the whole financial aspect of it.

All Saints High School, Hyderabad

At the end of April 1933, Bro. Rosius, who had come to Yercaud for holidays, had a violent hemorrhage and he had to be taken to St. Martha Hospital, Bangalore. In March 1941, Bro. Aloysius was sent to All Saints. In June 1941, Bro. Louis retired and after spending a few months at Yercaud, he was sent to Hyderabad, where he taught till 1944. In 1946, All Saints had a strength of nearly 1000 students. Because of the discipline reigning in the school and the high standard of education imparted to the pupils, All Saints had become one of the leading institutions in the former Hyderabad Dominion.

St. Antony's High School and Elementary School, Coonoor

Called by the Bishop of Coimbatore, Brothers took charge of the St. Antony's High School, Coonoor on 1st June 1931. The Elementary School had been founded in 1865 by Rev. Fr. Gelis. The high school was started in 1930. There were 237 pupils in the High School and 130 in the Elementary school. Bro. Octavian took charge of the high school and he was assisted by Bro. Claudin. Bro. Philip, whose services were no longer required by Fr. Gavan Duffy at Tindivanam, was appointed Head Master of the Elementary school. In June 1941, Bro. John of God was appointed Director & Head Master, St. Antony's High School, Coonoor

in the place of Bro. Amance. Bro. John of God had to face some trouble from the parish priest. Hence the Brothers appealed to the Bishop to stop by 5 p.m. on Saturdays the matches that were conducted for the school boys. On Jan 30, 1945 the property was bought by the institution. In 1947, Bro. John of God was transferred to All Saints High School as its Rector and Bro. Amance replaced him at Coonoor.

Montfort High School, Alandur

This is one of the latest institutions started by the Brothers in 1983 for the benefit of the poor children of Alandur. A poor locality, there are hardly 300 started in total. This was the last institution transferred in 2003 to the Province of Trichy. Though it demands greater sacrifice and dedication on the part of brothers, it never fails to reward those who are generous to give. One day, this too, liked any other institution would stand as a lofty one for sure.

Social Action Centre – A. Poruvai

This centre which was started by Bro. Joseph John in 1982, had its high and low tide period its growth. However there was new impetus and spirit in all the activities of the centre from the time it came under the direction and animation of Bro. Edwin Joseph from 1994. True to his dynamic nature and concern for the less-privileged, he ventured to insert himself with the life of the simple village folk, ably assisted by his brothers Easudoss and Benito. They introduced various projects and movements like adult education, literary campaign, women self-help groups etc. while the unemployed and the school drop-outs were given training in mushroom cultivation, gem cutting or tailoring works which brought sustenance to them. Much energy was spent in health and hygiene education and in managing the govt aided schools for the child labourers.

Certainly the involvement of brothers in the life of the people was such that it

strengthened the ties between them. However, the services of Bros. Joseph Thottuchalil, Philip Raj and A. Augustine helped to keep alive the centre which was dormant. The appointment of Bro. Cruz in 2003 as local superior has brought new life to the centre. He, in all earnestness, strived to revive some of the inactive movements in the villages.

This center had its high and low tide period in its growth. However, there was new impetus and Spirit in all the activities of the center from the time it came under the direction and animation of brothers from 1994. It introduced various project and movements in Adult Education, Literacy Campaign, Women Self Help Groups etc., which the unemployed and the school drop outs were given training in mushroom cultivation, gem cutting or tailoring works, which brought sustenance to them. Much energy was spent in health and hygiene education and in managing the Govt. Aided schools for the Child labourers, the momentum, which picked up in the center's activities, had its gradual regress due to many reason including financial constraint to sustain the projects already helped to keep alive the center, which was dormant.

Campion School, Trichy

In June 1993, when Trichy became a region, the community of Campion consisted of Bro. Selvanathan as local superior and Bros. J Jesuraj, Johnson, Joseph Sahayam and Charles Gasper. A swimming pool and 2 concrete basketball courts were constructed in 1998 during the tenure of Bro. Selvanathan. The school has reached great heights in every sphere of its activities. In academic studies; the results of the Board exams have been encouraging. Needless to say, its star performance in the fields of sports and games and other co-curricular activities has been noted by all. Keeping the finest traditions of the past,

the Principals at various times, namely Bros. Selvanathan, Michael and now Bro. Susai Raj have contributed unique share to the growth and development of the institutions by their total commitment and devotion.

St. Joseph Group of Schools, Chengalpattu

The Archdiocese of Madras, Mylapore was bifurcated into Chennai and Chengalpattu dioceses in 2002. The parishes within Chengalpattu, Kanchipuram, St. Thomas Mount came under the territory of Chengalpattu diocese. St. Joseph's group of schools which is in the heart of Chengalpattu town is one of the leading groups catering to the educational need of various sections of the society from lower to upper middle class. Keeping pace with the changing scenario in the field of education which calls for additional facilities enriched the campus by building a new stage measuring about 80 * 21 ft. and provided new classrooms.

St. Antony's Higher Secondary School, Coonoor

Rev. Br. Michael succeeded Rev. Br. Thomas Thottiyil in the year 1993 for the third time as Head Master and Correspondent for 3 years. The second basketball court was constructed by him. Bro. Xavier Montfort succeeded Rev. Br. Michael in 1996 and his tenure extended till 2001. He was another towering personality among the brothers who served this institution. He was a recipient of the Best Teacher State Award. He had left an indelible mark in the minds and hearts of the pupils and people of this town by his hard work and rapport with the public of Coonoor.

All Saints School, Muttom

All Sanits High School, Muttom has its own interesting history from the very day the brother's tool charge of it as early as 1975. The brothers who were compelled to retreat from the administration of the school

due to the 'Class of Titans' were once again brought back to hold the reigns at the request of the local people and diocesan administration in 1984 with Bro. P J John as Head Master and Correspondent. After five years of committed service to the backward children of the village, he was transferred and Bro. Dhanraj succeeded him in 1989. The school came in the limelight in the district due to its splendid performance in the field of sports, extra-curricular activities and academics in spite of its poor economic background.

St. Louis Institute for the Deaf and the Blind, Adyar

The Arch Bishop of Madras was keen that we start a school for the deaf and the blind in Madras and he was willing to put up the needed buildings. 3 buildings were put up by the Arch diocese of Madras at Adyar to start a school for the blind and one for the deaf. 48 deaf boys and 6 blind boys were transferred from Little Flower School Teynampet to our new institution. Bros. Antony Francesco (Director), Cecilius Eric, Francis Bogia and Octavian formed the community. On Feb 6th, there was the official inauguration of St. Louis Institute for the Deaf and the Blind. Mr. Bakthavatchalam the then Honourable Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu presided over the function. He did not fail to praise the Brothers of St. Gabriel who agreed to undertake the education of the Deaf and the Blind with pedagogical talent of the highest degree coupled with much patience and much love. The request came into existence on July 1st 1967 and all the 3 regions were to be governed under the control of the Bro. Provincial and his council. Hence the Provincial administration had all the powers and its work was to coordinate the functioning of the regions, so that spiritual and apostolic growth took place.

CRI Brothers Institute of Theology, Bangalore

Though this institute did not and does not belong to the Institute of the Brothers of St. Gabriel, our Brothers have played their role and many of the Brothers have been and are trained there. It started functioning in June 1967. In 1969, the Institute bought a property for itself at Bangalore. During some years, they have provided Director or Principals or other staff members. Now the course has become a 3-year degree course.

BIRTH OF THE REGION

25th March 1993, the feast of the Annunciation saw the birth of two regions during an impressive and solemn religious ceremony held at May field, St. Louis Villa-Yercaud and officiated by Rev. Bro. Ignatius Mullooparampil the Provincial Superior. Institutionally, the Trichy Region enlisted a total of 13 communities mostly in the Trichy sector viz Social Action centre-Poruvai, Campion-Trichy, R.C. Susai HS-Kalugumalai, St. Antony's-Manjampatti, St. John's Farm-Manaparai, St. John's ITI-Manjampatti, All Saints-Muttom, Montfort Home-Palakurichy, St. James HS-Palakurichy, RSK HS-Trichy, St. Stanislass Institution – Sattur, Montfort Scholasticate-Trichy and St. Peter's –Royapuram and St. Antony's –Coonoor, Gradually following the decision of the 7th Provincial Chapter the communities in Chennai Sector would be transferred to the Trichy Region. Geographically the diocese of Kottar, Madurai, Palayamkottai, Trichirapalli and Ooty came under this region.

MONTFORT MATRICULATION SCHOOL-ARIYALUR

Ariyalur is one of the main towns of Perambalur district roughly 60 km away from Trichy Town. The new foundation was blessed by Bishop Peter Remigius on 19th March 1994. The school began with classes LKG to VI Standard with 170

students. Montfort centenary Block was constructed to house the kindergarten sections and a mini hostel was started for those students who come from far. Due credit must be given to the pioneers who toiled day and night with clear vision and dedications. The devotion and commitment to duty, sense of loyalty to the congregation was very visible in the manifold sacrifices they made and hardships endured which has placed the school in a prominent place and set the wheels of progress on the move.

MONTFORT MATRICULATION SCHOOL- MANJAMPATTY

The idea of starting another matriculation school in St. John's ITI Manjampatty campus so as to make it accessible to the middle class and lower middle class group and for bringing some income to the young region received favourable consideration by the admission. The school was inaugurated in the Boy's Town premises on 15th June 1994. The very next year the school was upgraded up to class VII and upto higher secondary level in 2001. Each brother strived to bring up the standard and quality of the institution by providing the necessary infrastructure and facilities.

MONTFORT ARUL UDAYAM- MANJAMPATTY

One of the significant developments in early nineties was that another formation house was set up in the province under the jurisdiction of the National council. The number of candidates swelled remarkably that it was necessary to start a new center. The National council decided to put in to use that building that was lying vacant in Boy's Town, Manaparai. After some modification the house was inaugurated in June 1994 with 30 candidates from all the provinces. Three batches passed through this formation house until 1997 when the house was closed and

the same formation programme was once again confirmed in Uppal, Hyderabad, A.P.

REGIONAL HOUSE-TRICHY

The new administration transferred its office from Montfort Scholasticate to a rented house in the town until a new arrangement was made. This house was in use until the region was recreated as an independent province in 1998. Of course a good some prevailed among the brothers, timely sector meetings and live-in sessions was of immense help to strengthen the bond of unity and brotherhood.

GROWING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

The numerical strength of the brothers in the province had grown rapidly in five years time from 50 (in 1993) to 103 professed brothers with 33 novices and 19 pre-novices. The gradual transfer of Madras section communities to Trichy Region as envisaged by the Extraordinary Chapter became effective and the process began from 1998. We have been noticing that there was stupendous growth in the number of both professed brothers and novices. For instance in March 2000, 25 novices of Trichy province took their vows to the amazement of all who attended the profession ceremony. It was undoubtedly the largest number ever for a single province, in the history of the congregation. The total number of brother with temporary vows was to 71, a marvel of the Lord indeed. Witnessing the rapid quantitative increase of the brothers in a very short span of time, many in and around began to be skeptical about the quality of this great strength of Brother particularly of the young brothers. The provincial Administration reorganized its formation programme so as to disprove the unfounded skepticism. Further, annual province meet, periodical seminors, live in-sessions, were opportunity to review and renew the quality and

effectiveness of the life of brothers in the province.

R.C Susai HSS, Kalugumalai

This institution which was started in 1983 in a very humble way, grew gradually during the last 20 years under the dynamic leadership of Montfort brothers. There was an added life and enthusiasms among the students. The school is constructed in a very poor economic background of the students. It provided a holistic education.

The Province of India from 1959 to 1967

Bro. John of the Cross became the Provincial Superior on August 15, 1959. Bro. Eleazar was in Yercaud to hand over charge to him. At the beginning of April 1960, Bro. Othon left for Europe on home leave. On Feb 2nd, 1961, Bro. Vicar arrived in Madras from Singapore.

The following decisions were taken by the Provincial and his Council

1. To start an orphanage and take over a higher elementary school in Manapparai in the diocese of Thiruchirapalli with Bro. Montfort of the Cross as Director
2. To take over the management of St.Vianney's school Lachragarh in the diocese of Ranchi.
3. To erect St. Louis villa, Yercaud a community for old Brothers and also as the provincial house and to appoint Bro. Baptist as its Director.
4. And to start a one-year post-novitiate course at Tindivanam with Bro. Philip as its Director.

Then the council granted some permission to appoint some Directors of communities. After visiting the communities in Tamilnadu. Bro. Vicar left for Europe on March 10, 1961. On April 30, 1961, a provincial council meeting was held.

The Division of the Province of India into 3 regions

During the first quarter of 1966, Rev. Bro. Superior General, the Assistant General

and the Provincial visited the Province. They felt the need to divide the province into 3 regions. After his return to Rome, he wrote a circular letter in which he mentioned about this division. In his letter to the Brothers in India, dated April 15 1967, the General gave the following reasons for the division of the province.

1. The vast geographical area of the province.
2. The political constitution of the Indian Federal Government and the diversity of school education rules in the various states.
3. The existence in the province of 3 distinct regions from the geographical, linguistic and ethnic angles.
4. The need for the intensification of local recruiting and for a formation better adapted to local needs.
5. A need for a closer and therefore more efficient contact with the authority.

The general further wrote, "The division of the province into 3 semi-autonomous districts, under the over-all authority of the province and council was thought more practical and more straight forward".

Later the following appointments were made:

- a. Southern Region – Bro. Antony Francisco
- b. Centre Region – Bro. Vinit de Paul
- c. Northern Region – Bro. John of the Cross

On the footsteps of ST. Montfort - In April 1992, Brothers who were selected to go on the footsteps of Montfort had a seminar on Montfort at CRI Institute, Bangalore. Then they left for France to go on a pilgrimage on Lourdes and to the places connected with St. Montfort.

The Golden Jubilee of St. Montfort's Canonizations

1. A Montfortian calendar depicting matters about Montfort.
2. St. Louis orchestra had a number of performances to collect funds for itself and for the Montfortian Congress.

3. A seminar on Montfort was conducted at the Divya Deepthi Bhavan, Kazipet, from Oct 24th to 27th, 1997 as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations connected with St. Montfort's canonizations.

4. From Dec 28 1997 to Jan 2 1998, a Montfort Indian Congress was held at NBCLC, Bangalore and it was attended by 250 members. The Congress was well conducted and it was very instructive as well as experimental. It got over by 2 p.m. on Jan 2nd 1998.

During the visit of Rev. Br. James Friant, Superior General 1993, many of the Brothers met him individually and shared their difficulties, painful experiences, their fears and hopes, their suggestions and propositions for the future.

First Regional Chapter (January 1994)

After the epoch-making event in the Annals of the province of South India, the newly created Trichy regions held its first regional chapter at Campion HSS from the 13th to 15th January 1994, to which Rev. Br. Mani Mekkunnel was a special invitee. The chapter was historically significant when Trichy Region was on the threshold of new life revitalization. The chapter members reflected together and received in depth the equality of their life and mission in all dimensions, greater attention in our initial and on-going formation, simplification of our life-style. Qualitative innovations in our education mission, shift of focus in our mission from institutional to non-institutional ministries were points reflected during the chapter which ended at midnight of 15th Jan 1994.

The Visit of the Vicar

Right from the very inception of the region, the guidance and encouragement of all Superiors through their circular letters and their presence at the Chapters and their frequent visits have contributed to the growth and development of the region in the

right direction. Bro. Mani Mekkunnel visited the region as Vicar General from 24th June to 11th July 1996.

Status of Communities from 1993 – 2003 - St. Louis Institute, Adyar

St. Louis Institute for the Deaf and the Blind is a special school for the hearing and visually impaired students. As early as 1962, the Arch Bishop Louis Mathias invited the Brothers to start an institution for the disabled children. Bro Louis Burea sowed the seeds of this great institution. From the modest beginning came the present St. Louis Institute as a result of the selfless service of the brothers and all those who followed them. The institute, which caters to the higher secondary education of the blind and the deaf children, has further started a degree college affiliated to Madras University besides offering a diploma course in printing. This institute has been recognised with many prestigious awards for its excellence by the State and Central Govt and other agencies. The community of Young Brothers was vibrant and active, that had its impact on the life of the institute. One of the greatest services that the Institute does without fail is that, it finds employment opportunities for the outgoing students in various leading companies and organizations. Surely the vision and objectives of the founders and pioneers of this great institution become realities by the service of dedicated Brothers and Collaborators.

CONCLUSION

Mission is a constituent element of religious life. The mission of the brother is exercised primarily in the education of the youth particularly of the poor. The General chapter Meeting reaffirms this mission to educate the youth and the poor around us. A media center spreads the messages of the justice and peace. Today due to explosion of information technology, the world has

become small. There is a lot of collaboration and co-operation among the nations and people. There is more understanding and this is a position development. This has brought people closer and trust in built up. So, more than ever, there is an urgent call to establish the required structures to facilitate net working for Justice, Peace and Integrity of creation.

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