

50 Years of CJ presence in NEPAL



The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Our journey as "Congregation of Jesus" formerly known as Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary takes us back to the journey that daring English woman Mary Ward undertook in the year 1609, leaving her home country England and crossing the seas to St. Omer to start her foundation. She and her companions had to take this bold step on account of the terrible persecution of Catholics then raging in England. From St. Omer they spread to Germany. Women in great numbers joined Mary Ward. Under the auspices of Elector Maximilian of Bavaria who was determined to secure her services, the foundation at Munich was made. Mary Ward was that incomparable woman whom England gave to the Church in the bloodiest of its history. She was the one who uttered for the first time in the Elizabethan times, "Let women be governed by women; and "Women in time to come will do great things".

Mary Ward walked the Alps to reach Rome to present before the Pope her plan for the institute. The seas and mountains and the Society of Jesus seem to be very much a part of our story. In 1621 Mary Ward had an intellectual vision "Take the same of the Society" meaning the Society of Jesus... At the time of her uncertainty as to what rule to follow this was a great confirmation from the Lord to adopt the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus a dream which reached its complete fulfillment only in 2003 when we were allowed to take the full Ignatian Constitution and to have Jesus in the name of the Congregation as Mary Ward wanted.

Today we recall with gratitude all our sisters who toiled hard so that we are able to celebrate the mighty deeds the Lord has done through our sisters in the Kingdom of Nepal. At the invitation of His Majesty late Tribhuvan, St. Xavier's school was started in Kathmandu in 1951. Soon the government made urgent appeals to the Jesuit Fathers for a school for girls. Fr. Moran SJ, the founding father of education in Nepal approached the sisters of St. Joseph's convent Patna to ask if they would be interested. The Sisters felt honored and gladly accepted the offer.

As a true friend of the CJ sisters, Fr. Moran had done much of the spade work along with Sr. Benigna who made a few trips to Kathmandu. On Jan 26th 1954 Mother M. Benigna, Superior of St. Joseph's Convent, Patna, chartered a plane and with Sr. Frances together with all the school equipments landed on a patch of grazing land- Kathmandu's initial airport. Fr. Moran met the sisters and took them to Tulo Bhawan, a house close to St. Xavier's. In November 1954, Mother M. Benigna and Sr. Rita with Bishop Wildermuth SJ had visited Kathmandu and had made the choice of this house belonging to Rana family.

Soon preparations were set afoot to get the school ready and on 15th Feb. 1955, St. Mary's rang its first bell for 15 students. Two Nepali teachers, Miss Flora Rai and Miss Samling were taken on in the first year to help with the teaching.

Lack of transport facilities made the need for a hostel apparent. By 15th March, arrangements were made to accommodate 20 boarders but the number increased to 45 by the end of the year. Sister Silveria joined the community at the end of June 1955 and stayed on till 1973. The school grew and grew. Between the years 1960 to 1965, the Mary Ward wing, a three storey building, providing an auditorium, a large dormitory, classrooms and teachers' quarters was constructed. By 1965, the strength of the school had risen to 465, out of which 174 were boarders. Majority of the students hailed from Nepal itself but Kathmandu being the capital, there were children of many foreign ambassadors and staff of foreign aid agencies.

Outreach to the poor

Following the footsteps of our Foundress Mary Ward, on whose tombstone the following was found engraved-

"To love the poor

To live, die and rise with them"

Was the aim of Mary Ward, a school for the street children of the locality was started in 1986. Sr. Aloysia, the then superior of SMC Kathmandu dreamed this great dream. Inspired by the venture of the sisters, the students of Class 8 volunteered to teach these children. Later they were formally registered as part of Mary Ward School- as the number of children increased, a small house was bought in Jamshikhel. Sisters took up residence there and began classes. In 1988, a school building was constructed meant for children from KG to Class 5.

In order to give an opportunity for these to complete their schooling, an extension of Mary Ward School was started at Lubhu- besides formal education, for the empowerment of women, adult literacy classes and tailoring classes began. This small beginning has now developed into a tailoring Diploma enabling the women to be self supportive. Both these Mary Ward Schools are supported by generous benefactors from Nepal especially by ASMAN St. Mary's Ex-students' Association.

Reaching Out- The Foundation in Pokhara

In 1982, St. Mary's school Pokhara was started. The pioneers in this venture were Srs. Rufina, Scholastica and Asha. The school in Pokhara developed into a big establishment now having 800 children, many admissions being refused for the lack of space. An evening school is conducted for the children who have no opportunity of joining formal schools. Tailoring classes are part of the empowerment programme for women here too.

Gorkha

In 1991, we reached out to the people of Gorkha. On 17th November, St. Mary's school was started in a 7 room apartment, Srs. Rufina, Jyoti and Joyce being the pioneers. The foundati

Golden Messages

on stone for the new building site at Tera kilo was blessed by Msgr. Anthony Sharma. Sisters built up great rapport with the people and the children received quality education. Unfortunately, the clouds of Maoist violence loomed large on the horizon and we were forced to close school a number of times. When the school was closed for a whole year in 2001, sisters engaged themselves in literacy classes, painting and tailoring for women, thus keeping alive the spirit of their foundress.

We cannot but recall with joy the 24th March 2005, when a triple celebration was organized for Sr. Frances, our great pioneer- 50 years in St. Mary's Kathmandu, 70 years in religious life and 90 years of age. Her sister Hannie and Michael, her son were present on this happy occasion.

2nd October 2001 occupies special importance as Sr. Benigna, founder member of St. Mary's School surrendered her soul to the Lord- She was a pillar of strength to SMC, Kathmandu. Her foresight and untiring efforts brought about the existence of St. Mary's school, Kathmandu, Pokhara and Gorkha. She worked assiduously to create funds for the two Mary Ward Schools so that the poor of the place would have continuing education in the future too.

Today as we look back into history, we feel proud of so many of our sister principals, especially Sr. Eugenia who made it a point to be with us today and Sr. Margaret Mary who is leading the school in these most challenging times. We gratefully recall our staff, students and friends whose selfless sacrifices have made this golden day possible. Thanks to the Jesuits, beginning with Fr. Moran who has traveled with us in our journey to this day. We are grateful to Msgr. Sharma and to all the priests who have contributed to the spiritual welfare of our sisters here in Nepal. Our superiors General down through the centuries have been constant inspiration and have given continuous support for our growth. We are delighted that we have two of our former provincial superiors with us- Srs. Isabel and Febronia who have in their inimitable style nurtured all our sisters and their ministries. We have in our midst Sr. Rita who celebrated her 95th Birthday just four days ago, who inspired many a student, staff member and CJ sister with her devotion, hard work, wit and humour and her great musical talent. We, all the CJ sisters of both the provinces, Patna and Allahabad acknowledge our golden feelings towards Sr. Edwina and the SMC community on this day when all of us experience their great hospitality and care.

The new school building, the construction of which is a memorial to the dedication of the many CJ Members to the people of Nepal, was made possible by the generous contribution of students, parents and many benefactors. As we look ahead to the unborn tomorrows, we place Nepal at the feet of the Lord praying that the peace and prosperity promised by the Lord be totally ours.

Sister Prisca
Provincial Superior