

**Apostolic Carmel Sisters**

# A Century of Christian Service in Sri Lanka

**DISHAN JOSEPH**

There is a passage from the Bible which says "In His Time He makes all things beautiful". The Catholic Church of Sri Lanka has a long heritage in this island. Generations of dedicated priests and nuns have served the church through many facets of service laced with compassion, reflecting the love of Almighty God. The Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel will be celebrating 100 years of service today (February 5, 2022). You may have seen these kind nuns attired in their traditional brown habits, although some nuns wear white.

The Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel are members of a Carmelite religious institute dedicated to female education. It was founded in the latter part of the 19th Century by Mother Veronica of the Passion. As a young girl Sophie Leeves, was originally an Anglican. Sophie had been attracted to the lifestyle and love displayed by the Dominican Convent. She was awed by Holy Communion. According to oral tradition, she got baptized as a Catholic much to the dismay of her mother. During the period of Easter, she heard a still voice saying, "Peace I leave with you." Young Sophie broke off her engagement to a Navy officer which also came as a surprise to her family. She joined the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. Subsequently she heard the words, "I want you in Carmel," which encouraged her to go to the Carmelite Convent in Pau, France. Here Sophie took the name of Sister Veronica. On July 16, 1868, Sister Veronica piously established the Apostolic Carmelite Order at Bayonne, France.

**PIONEER MISSIONARIES**

After her profession, she began to train a group of young European women of varying nationalities for the task of education in India. These were the pioneer missionaries. On November 19, 1870, the first group of Sisters arrived in Mangalore, under the leadership of Mother Mary of the Angels, who was the first Superior General and novice mistress, to start the Mission. St. Anne Convent, which became the Motherhouse, was the cradle of the Apostolic Carmel. The Apostolic Carmel has spread its branches into the various parts of India, Sri Lanka, Kuwait, Pakistan, Kenya, Rome and Bahrain. The Congregation is governed under Six Provinces and centrally administered by the General Team from the General Motherhouse in Bangalore, with Sister Agatha Mary as the present Superior General (2008).

God's divine will for Apostolic Carmel sisters in Sri Lanka took shape on February 2, 1922 as the pioneer band of Apostolic Carmel Sisters. Mary Lourdes, Crescence, Clare, and Justin left the shores of India and arrived in Trincomalee on February 5, 1922. It was the vision of their Beloved Founder Mother Veronica "My God when shall I see that terrestrial Paradise again. I shall see it quite close when my pilgrimage ends. So patience".

Mother Veronica was sent by her Mother General to India with Sr. Mary Joseph, to begin a Convent at Calicut on the Malabar Coast in 1862. On her way to India, she stayed at Point de Galle, Sri Lanka for eight days. While waiting for a ship that would take her to Cannanore. She had said "At the next departure I shall get ready a little parcel of Church articles for this Church (Point de galle), I have a great desire to do this since I love Ceylon and its Missionaries". Thus her missionary zeal extended to Sri Lanka.

The history of the Apostolic Carmel in Sri Lanka originates with the appointment of Rev. Fr. L. Dupont of Trincomalee as a Visitor of the Jesuit Houses in Kanara and Malabar. When Fr. Dupont got to Mangalore he approached Mother Aloysia the Superior General of the Apostolic Carmel with a message from the Bishop of Trincomalee, Rt. Rev. Dr. Gaston Robichez, requesting her to take over the schools, English and vernacular as well as work-houses and orphanages from the Sisters of Cluny who were unable to continue their work for lack of new hands and were awaiting final orders from Europe to leave Trincomalee. Interestingly the Sisters of Cluny have come to Sri Lanka once again and set up a small mission in Velanai, Jaffna.



Founder of the Carmelite Order **Mother Veronica**



**Sister Therese - 50 years of teaching**



**Sister Fatima and Sister Hiranthi**

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The spreading out of the mission of the Lord in the trusted hands of the Apostolic Carmel Sisters began to take place when



the Most Rev. Dr. Bede Beckmeyer OSB, the second Bishop of Kandy was inspired by their commitment for a promising future for the children. He invited them to work in his diocese.

They pioneered their mission by taking over St. Ursula's Convent in Badulla and the school attached to it. The other schools founded and taken over (from other Christian missionaries) by the Apostolic Carmel sisters are- St. Mary's College Trincomalee, St. Cecilia's College Batticaloa, St. Anthony's Vidyalaya Dematagoda, Carmel Central College Chilaw, All Saints College Colombo, St. Paul's Balika Vidyalaya Kelaniya, St. Anthony's Balika Vidyalaya Colombo, St. Theresa College Atchuvvely, Holy Cross Tamil Vidyalaya Kalmunai, Sacred Heart College Muttur, Don Bosco School Jaffna, St. Benedicts Vidyalayam Jaffna and the Apostolic Carmel School Maharagama. In the Bible we see Jesus Christ always finding time for children, to minister to them.

**CARMELETTE CONGREGATION**

In Sri Lanka there are almost 250 nuns working in 37 convents. These faithful nuns are also actively engaged in Jaffna and Mannar.

They have remained steadfast and live by their motto, "God alone is sufficient." In 1981 under the guidance of Sister Carmeli-



ta, the nuns from the Sri Lankan Carmelite Province established a mission in Pakistan. These Carmelite nuns came in as young women. They go through the religious training phase of candidacy, postulancy, novitiate and final profession of vows – a period of almost 10 years of unwavering Catholic commitment before being ordained. During postulancy, the aspiring young sisters remove their gold earrings, as a symbolic act of renunciation and place it on the altar. During the Novitiate period of two years, the young novitiates spend time in seclusion with much prayer. This is the crucial stage of concentrated discernment. They must fully decide if they are willing to follow Jesus in the

Apostolic Carmelite way of life. After making their First Profession, the Junior Sisters are sent to India to widen their love and loyalty to the Carmelite Congregation.

Since 1922 their mission has faithfully touched thousands of Sri Lankans, especially young female students. The Apostolic Carmelites have spread the all-sufficing love of God through education and other ministries of mercy. They have followed the exemplary obedience, faith and courage of their founder Sister Veronica.

The Apostolic Carmelites are testament to the joy of living for God and serving others in his name, in that we definitely witness true Biblical abundance.



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