



Story of 150 years of Shepherding Journey: Witnessing Christ, Serving with Compassion!

Good Shepherd Convent Bellary - Sesquicentennial Year 1875-2024

St. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, the Foundress of Sisters of the Good Shepherd, once exhorted her sisters with these words:

“Since we all are Shepherdesses, we must not be attached to one little corner of the earth. One town, one foundation will not satisfy our zeal. It must embrace the whole world, wherever there are sheep to be gathered into the fold, we must not fear to go and pitch our tents, even on the most distant shores.”

This inspiring vision took root here in Bellary on 18th of November 1875 at the invitation of Rev. Fr. Patrick Doyle with the approbation of Rt. Rev. Stephen Fenally, Vicar Apostolic of Madras. Since that day, God’s blessings have been manifold as many lives have been touched by the Shepherd’s love.

A journey of thousand miles begins with the first step. On 18th November 1875, a group of Good Shepherd Sisters from France, who already serving in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, arrived in Bellary, driven by the fourth vow of zeal to extend the compassion of Jesus the Good Shepherd to the most vulnerable and today we, the successors are at the threshold of the 150th Jubilee year of this noble enterprise.

Rev. Fr. Doyle, a holy and true missionary, who invited them, wanted to confide various works of charity to this Good Shepherd religious community. On their arrival they were installed by Fr. Doyle in the presbytery previously occupied by him and his assistant priests, which had been vacated by them for the purpose of accommodating the newly arrived missionaries. The Foundress and first Superior of the new mission was Mother Mary of St. Thomas Cullerton.

The community took charge of an orphanage for destitute children, and opened a Boarding and Day School for the middle classes. Poor children in the locality attended the orphanage school and catechism was taught on Sundays to all, planting the seeds of faith. Thus the most pressing want of the Community was met in accordance with the desire of Fr. Patrick Doyle.

The famine which prevailed in India during 1876-1877, witnessed to a large number of children becoming orphans, making it necessary to open an orphanage and a school for the destitute children in the year 1878. The annals of the Good Shepherd Convent recount the harrowing plight of orphans as; ‘most of these destitute children who were orphaned were wasted to mere

skeletons and their clothing in rags and their bodies ulcerated'. But the sisters nursed them with compassion and restored most of them to a new and dignified life.

As these *famine orphans* as they were called, when grew in numbers, Fr. Doyle approached the Government to put up buildings for them and they were supported by voluntary contributions. He also used his influence to get Government grant for the support of these children on a monthly basis. But after a short time they were maintained and educated at the expense of the Madras Catholic Mission. Telugu was the language taught at first in this school, but after some years it was superseded by Tamil, and finally in 1937 the transition to Kannada Medium and thus St. Mary's Higher Primary School came into existence. In 1977, this School was awarded by the Lion's Club as the best Kannada Medium School in Bellary.

In 1877 the community was shifted from Cantonment to Fort but after a few months they realized that Cantonment was more favorable to the development of our works for the poor and so on 28th August 1877 the sisters were back in their earlier residence and continued their apostolate.

19th August 1877, Rev. Fr. Patrick Doyle entered in to eternal life. It is written in the Annals of the Good Shepherd Convent about Rev Patrick Doyle, "He was a true apostle and father of the orphan and afflicted, and his death is a great loss to the Catholic community". Truly, the unexpected death of Rev. Fr. Patrick Doyle was a shock to the community of Sisters. They had lost a father, a mentor and a great benefactor in the person of Fr. Patrick Doyle.

In 1885 a new school building was completed with the help of Government grant and was blessed on 6th January 1866 by His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Colgan, the Bishop of Madras. The School was dedicated to St. Philomena. During those days there was no real Technical or Industrial Schools or classes in any part of Bellary District. Hence a Technical class was run at the High School and at the start; the pupils were almost all Europeans or Eurasians. On 6th December 1899, St. Philomena's School was qualified by the Government to teach music and drawing up to elementary grade. It is now an English Medium School with a section of Kannada Medium in the High School, affiliated with the State Board. In 2012 the School was upgraded to Pre-University College with Science and Commerce.

In 1892, our Chaplin Rev. Fr. Xavier Kroot, a very holy priest founded the Sisters of St. Francis Xavier with first 3 postulants, under the governance of Good Shepherd Sisters. In June 1896 the sisters of St. Francis Xavier were installed in their convent in Cowl Bazar. In 1900, Rev. Msgr. Kroot, a generous benefactor of our Convent, passed away in France.

In the course of the years the campus became a beehive of activities with children in the orphanage, boarders in separate buildings, the troubled teenagers in Kishori Home, and battered or forsaken wives in a special Home for them, the Franciscans of Third Order who assisted the sisters in the various departments and the students from the 3 Schools.

To give the senior girls and women some skill training and to make them financially self-supporting, a bakery and an Industrial School were started.

Post-Vatican II reforms inspired the Sisters to discern new ways of serving marginalized communities. Transitioning from semi-cloistered residential ministries, they embraced community development through outreach programs reaching out to those most vulnerable and at the margins of society especially girls, women, children and their families. Thus in 1979, the Manvi mission, 2013 the Madlur mission and 2021 the Chikkaheisarur mission came in to being. Outreach programs, CHALICE sponsorship programs, Social Action ministries geared towards empowering women and children, fighting against social evils, especially eradication of Devadasi system in Manvi, working for the rights of people etc became the new expressions of our mission.

As we stand at the threshold of the Sesquicentennial Jubilee of the Good Shepherd Convent, Bellary, we are called to reflect on this extraordinary journey of 150 years. It is a journey marked by unwavering faith, boundless compassion, and an unyielding commitment to serve the most vulnerable. From the humble beginnings of a small community responding to the pressing needs of famine-stricken orphans, to a vibrant mission extending its reach to distant shores, this has truly been a story of God's providence and grace at work.

This Jubilee is not just a commemoration of the past but a call to embrace the future with renewed zeal and purpose. The legacy of Rev. Fr. Patrick Doyle, Mother Mary of St. Thomas Cullerton, and countless others who shaped this mission inspires us to continue building a world rooted in love, justice, and dignity for all.

As we embark on this new chapter, we do so with deep gratitude for the pioneers, collaborators, benefactors, and every individual who has contributed to this mission with a special mention to Catholic Mission, the former Bishops, all the priests, the government officials, the benefactors who rejoice with us in heaven and all those who support us today in one way or another. Their sacrifices and vision challenge us to be faithful stewards of the Good Shepherd's love, carrying forward this legacy to touch the lives of future generations.

May this Jubilee Year be a time of grace and renewal for all who have been part of this journey! May we continue to be a beacon of hope, a voice for the voiceless, and a testimony of Christ's love in a world in need of healing! With hearts filled with gratitude and courage, let us go forth, ***witnessing to Christ, and serving with compassion.***

By

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