

The Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions

Religieuse de Notre Dame des Missions (RNDM)

Beginning:

The Congregation of Our lady of the Missions was founded in Lyons, France, by Euphrasie Barbier on 25 December 1861. Euphrasie was born on 4 January 1829 in Caen, Normandy, and from her earliest years was inspired by the wave of missionary zeal which influenced nineteenth century France.

The title:

The name of the Congregation is profoundly significant and is the source of all RNDM life, mission and works.

To quote Euphrasie's words: *"In placing themselves under the patronage of Our Lady of the Missions, the sisters desire to honour; in a special way, the Divine Missions which were the object of the ardent desires of Mary.."*

"As for the expression 'Divine Missions', we are not thinking of our own poor missions, we who are nothing, but only that of the Incarnate Word, sent by God his Father to redeem humankind and the Divine Mission of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son to carry out the sanctification of Christ's Church; that is the reason for the existence and the special form, as much for the interior as for the exterior".

Euphrasie perceives Mary, as woman of visitation and Pentecost, as totally open and completely receptive to God's action within her. This woman of visitation is the missionary who moves beyond boundaries of geography, age, religion and cultural expectation. Mary is presented by Euphrasie as icon of the missionary woman that each RNDM may well emulate.

Chrism:

Euphrasie Barbier, a remarkable and courageous French woman, held an intuitive insight into the Mystery of God present in the world through the humanity of Jesus and through the power and passion of the Spirit. She recognized that humankind is called to share in the Divine Missions. Her expression of this Gift as Communion, Contemplation and Mission, laid a solid and profound theological and spiritual foundation for the sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.

Mission:

Euphrasie understood that all apostolic activity is a participation in the Trinitarian mission. Mission is everywhere. Euphrasie sent sisters to mission in New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific isles. Not content with sending her sisters to the ends of the earth, she set out as soon as possible to visit them, enduring long sea voyages, sickness and shipwrecks.

In 1883 Euphrasie traveled to India to establish first foundation in Chittagong, East Bengal where she opened an orphanage for young girls. From India she traveled for the second time to New Zealand. On her return journey she revisited Chittagong. Missionaries continually set out from Europe as new foundations sprang up in Bengal – now Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, Indo China (North Vietnam).

RNDM in Myanmar (1897 - 1966)

In 1886, after visiting New Zealand, Euphrasie stopped in Chittagong where she was asked to consider another foundation in the Dacca Diocese, specifically in Sittwe in south-west Myanmar. Euphrasie responded positively to this request and left for Sittwe with the Superior of Chittagong on the nineteen hour boat journey to Sittwe. Because of poor health, Euphrasie died on the 18th January 1893 in Lyons, France.

After four years of Euphrasie's death, four sisters arrived in 1897 to establish the first foundation in Sittwe (Akyab) for education of children. Later sisters were asked to teach in schools and to minister to the pastoral needs of the people in Buthidaung which was burnt down by fire in 1909, Thandwe (Sondaway), and Pyay (Prome).

RNDM Local leadership and continuation of the mission work began in Myanmar:

From 1966 onwards the indigenous priests and religious together with the laity assumed responsibility for the Church in Myanmar. When all foreign Sisters had departed, Mary Agnes Thein Mya was appointed Regional Superior of an increasingly isolated Myanmar. Such isolation did not discourage the Sisters from continuing their mission despite the many political and economic hardships they endured. The following decades were times of extraordinary growth thanks to the

commitment and faith of the thirteen Burmese Sisters left in the region. The number of Sisters has increased from that courageous thirteen to almost seventy. The Sisters now have Thirteen communities from where they live and work among the poor in the dioceses of Pyay: (Pyay, Oat-Shi-Pin, Mindon, Thayet, Shwe-Pan-Taw, Thandwe and Sittwe); Yangon (Provincialate) and Mawlamyine (Bo Taung and Kawthaung). The administrative Center is in Yangon.

Mission Focus:

The main mission focus is to become presence and part of mission to promote education and formation, empowerment of women and children, to undertake humanitarian works of boarding houses for the needy children who are at risk for their education, health care, HIV/AIDS, leper patients, pre- school, teaching English language, coaching classes for school subjects and the self supporting and income generating development of small projects: weaving, rearing animals and micro credit programmes. The pastoral ministries involve teaching catechism, preparing the reception of sacraments, giving retreats, seminars and touring to the remote villages for occasions. We continue to listen and discern how we are continually called to live and act in an ever evolving and changing world.

Conclusion:

Euphrasie's Trinitarian Theology and spirituality, her daring and breadth of vision continues to challenge and inspire RNDM women who embrace the same contemplative spirit and missionary zeal today in the twenty first century world that impelled their foundress to journey to the ends of the earth. We find ourselves as Congregation once again daring to respond to the challenge to live the reality that mission is not individual to anyone place, age, culture, religion and country. To live consciously as RNDM earth community in this third millennium challenges all of us to promote human rights, economic justice, a culture of reconciliation and peace; a respect for earth, a nurturing of human dignity along with the human and spiritual well being of all inhabitants. Now we are over one thousand Sisters working and serving in (18) countries.

Motto: For the Greater Glory of God