

## FOREWORD

This book, *Reaching Out With Open Arms* -----the story of the Good Shepherd Sisters' apostolic service in the Sri Lanka/ Pakistan Province (1869-2019)---- begins with biblically pregnant words: "Our story is history, and history is mystery in the gradual unfolding and unfurling of God's inconceivable plan". Yes, as St Paul reminds us, it was the Mystery eternally hidden in God that was revealed in History at the arrival of Jesus, the much awaited Good Shepherd and Prophet, and continues in the history of his followers, wherever and whenever the rejected ones are re-integrated, dejected souls are uplifted, broken hearts are healed, ignorant minds are instructed, stray sheep are rescued and the poor are evangelized. It is this unique pastoral service that is recorded in these pages; and in accordance with the biblical reckoning of a jubilee as the year 50 that completes 7 times 7 sabbatical years, the past 150 years are a *thrice holy event*.

This book, however, is not a self-pampering exercise intended to receive kudos from the rest of the church. Rather it is an exercise in which two key characteristics of authentic prayer that Jesus introduced during his farewell meal seem to dominate: **Remembering** (*anamnesis*) and **Thanksgiving** (*eucharistia*). Here the wondrous deeds that God had wrought through the Good Shepherd Congregation are *remembered* in a spirit of humble *thanksgiving* before the Lord of History. The readers are invited to a '**commemoration** of humans' oozing with '**gratitude** to God'.

This story begins with the arrival of four Good Shepherd Sisters from Angers on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1869 to begin their mission in the Kotahena Convent, a residence which had been specially built for them by Bishop Hilarian Sillani OSB. The mandate they had received from Sister Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, the Mother Foundress of the Congregation, was that they become Good Shepherds to all humanity by re-affirming the dignity of each person, specially women and young girls.

One of the crucial turning points in this sacred history was that the locally founded congregation known as the *Sisters of St Francis Xavier* (known for their prolific pastoral service spread throughout the Island and teeming with local vocations) was amalgamated with the Good Shepherd Congregation. The merit goes to Mother Solange Duschene, the Superior General of the Francis Xavier Sisters who had their Head Quarters in Bolawalana. Her consent was a Providential intervention that brought about a great harvest in the Sri Lanka/Pakistan Province of the Good Shepherds.

Among the names that outshine in the list of nuns that the authors include in their "eucharistic anamnesis" is Mother Good Counsel Mills, who was endowed with a prophetic vision for the future of the congregation plus an inexhaustible energy and a capacity for long-term planning. It was she who introduced the project of training youth in agriculture and animal husbandry. Reading the signs of the times, which is what "discernment" implies, she introduced this venture at a time when it was seen as a revolutionary step. Along with this, she also established the Needle Work and Weaving Centre as a place of employment for poor girls.

This way of highlighting a few names does not take away the uniqueness of the contribution of so many others who guided the Congregation beginning with Mother Mary of St Proper Walsh down to Sr Mary Francine Muthugala, the present Provincial who is greatly loved and admired for the simplicity and humanness which adorns her role of leadership. Having two of my own siblings as Good Shepherd Sisters as well as my acquaintance with many others whom I met during the programmes which I conduct here at Tulana made me feel privileged when invited to write the Foreword to the Good Shepherd Saga, which is truly an *anamnesis* and a *eucharistia* celebrated amidst the People of God both in our country and in Pakistan.[]

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