



Provincialate : 4A Chestnut Drive, Singapore 679330.

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Malaysia

The Sisters arrived in Malaya as it then was in 1852 - the first mission on foreign soil since the Founding of the Institute in 1666. The first School as well as an Orphanage was in Penang and others soon followed. Today the work of education in both formal and informal settings continues in Kuala Lumpur, Bukit Nanas, Kapar, Rawang, Port Dickson, Seremban, Cameron Highlands, Bagan Serai, Ipoh, Sitiawan, Telok Intan, Johor Bahru, Melaka, Keningau, Penampang as well as in Penang.

In 1851 the following appeal came to our sisters from Mgr Boucho, the Apostolic Vicar to Malaya: "We must have schools if we want to bring Christianity to this country. We need teachers, can you give them to us?"

Having prayed and reflected, full of pioneering spirit and trust in Divine Providence, the superior general at the time, Mother de Faudoas, and her council, considered the totally new possibility of sending sisters on mission outside France, indeed outside Europe. They made the daring decision to respond to the request and to send five sisters to Malaya.

So, on December 6, 1851, five brave women set out on La Julie for the long sea voyage into the unknown, together with two newly ordained priests of the French Foreign Mission and four De La Salle brothers. Our first missionaries to another continent were Mother Pauline Radot, Sr Pulchérie Bath, Sr Eudoxie Claerbout, Sr Euthyme Panot and Sr Rosalie Flammarion. This difficult sea journey around the Cape of Good Hope took four long months and we can imagine the conditions and the dangers they endured during those endless days and nights on this perilous voyage. We know that La Julie was nearly shipwrecked in the Channel a few days after its departure and that the sisters were seasick for a whole month afterwards. We know too that, in spite of seasickness and treacherous conditions, they concentrated on learning English and Malay.

Their trials were not limited to rough seas and harsh conditions. One of them, Sr Euthyme, had a serious accident when a pulley fell on her head. Shortly afterwards, Mother Pauline, the leader of the courageous little group of five, fell ill and died on March 13, 1852. She was buried at sea near Christmas Island. The young Sr Pulchérie decided not to continue in the Institute. Later she worked with the sisters as a lay teacher in Malaya.

So it was that only three Infant Jesus Sisters, Eudoxie, Rosalie and Euthyme, who was already ill, finally reached Singapore on March 29, 1852. Their relief must have been enormous, but it was short lived. They were to have no time to rest. This was only a port of call, not their final destination. They set sail again for Penang, Malaya, on April 12, 1852. Conditions on this eight-day journey were even more hazardous and



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trying. They travelled on a small boat named the Edward Marguard, which was very cramped and uncomfortable. There was neither bed nor blanket, and the women slept on a mattress on the deck.

No sooner had they arrived in Penang than they set about opening a school for Catholic children. They shared their first home with 20 orphans more destitute than themselves.

Thus began, with enormous courage and generosity, the first mission of our Infant Jesus Sisters on foreign soil. Euthyme knew some English and she was put in charge of the mission. However, the long sea voyage, her accident, and especially the last eight days between Singapore and Penang, took their toll. Euthyme was already worn out. She developed brain fever, from which she never fully recovered. She gave of her best for eight years in spite of her suffering and died aged only 33. Eudoxie was just 23 years old and Rosalie some years older. The sisters were inexperienced and faced enormous difficulties. The leader of their group had died, and there were many challenges in this land that was so strange to them. They had to get used to climate, and local food and customs. In spite of the tropical heat, they wore a heavy black habit. Though they were from France, they taught through the medium of English since Malaya was a British colony at this time. Moreover, Malay was the language spoken by the local people. They cared for the orphans as well as they could, despite the difficulties of their situation. They held out but obviously needed more help.

Once again, the Apostolic Vicar appealed to Mother de Faudoas and a second group of sisters was sent, this time by another route. Mother Mathilde Raclot was appointed to take charge of this group, which included Sr Damien Dejean, Sr Apollinaire Testodive and Sr Gregory Connolly, who was still a novice. They set sail on the Bentick on September 18 by a shorter route, through the Mediterranean Sea, then crossing the desert from Cairo to Suez to reach the Red Sea. They arrived in Penang on October 28, 1852. To support themselves and their mission they ran fundraising events, and often worked late into the night doing embroidery work, which was sold to rich ladies in the town. It is difficult for us today to recapture the courage and daring of these pioneers who each in her own way faced an immense challenge with faith and perseverance.

On December 2, 1853, three more sisters, Mother Gaétan Gervais, Sr Patrice Devrière and Sr Léonard Gerbal set out to reinforce the group in Malaya.

The life and work of the Institute in Malaya over the next 200 years has been recorded in other places. Here we can simply echo the recognition, often publicly expressed, of the enormous contribution of the sisters and their lay collaborators to education in the country, to the care of the less privileged, and to the spread of the Good News up and down the peninsula. Through the schools, many people came in contact with the Gospel and felt called to the Christian faith. Others learned to respect and love it, and remained attached to their former teachers over the years. From Malaya the Institute spread rapidly to other countries.

Infant Jesus Sisters, Singapore (founded in France, 1662, established in Singapore 1854)



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(Name changed to Malaysia in 1957 after Independence)

The call to new forms of presence and service came to the sisters in Malaysia, as to the Institute in other parts of the world, in the 1960s and '70s. They answered with courage and generosity, often giving up beloved schools and community homes to respond to changing conditions and new needs.

In response to the call to return to our roots, some of the sisters, who were involved in formal education in their schools, moved on to non-formal education. This marked the beginning of the little 'learning centres' for poorer children. This move began as far back as 1979 when their kindergartens were closed so as to give priority to the materially poor in our society.

Over time, the sisters gradually became involved in various new collaborative ministries such as pastoral work in parishes and with non-governmental organisations. This includes working with people who have been abused, single mothers, and deprived children and young people. Some sisters work among the indigenous people, the 'Orang Aslis', and in community-building projects among economically deprived people in rural areas. This takes the form of non-formal education with children and young people, and human development with the mothers and young women.

An important development in their ministry is their presence among the indigenous peoples in the villages in Sabah, East Malaysia. Here, conditions are still difficult and people lack modern facilities like electricity and piped water. The sisters' efforts are bearing fruit as they work with the local people in community projects. One such project involves training young women to teach their own children.

Meanwhile, the ministry continues with the orphaned women who have been with the sisters over the years and for whom independent living has not been possible. In 1960, the superior general paid a visit to the Malay Governor, at his invitation. He quoted the Koran saying: "The door of heaven is opened for mothers who take care of their children", and added: "It is also opened for sisters who give maternal care to babies, orphans and their pupils".

In a multiracial, multi-faith society the sisters are actively involved, where possible, in dialogue with other faiths. Living and mixing with different races and religions, the sisters try to identify the values they have in common, while at the same time recognising that each one has her own special gift to offer. Focusing on these positive values, they endeavour to counteract in some way the forces that seek to bring about division and fear in the lives of so many people today. In situations where this is not yet possible, the sisters continue to be patient, recognising the presence of the living God in the people to whom they are sent and in their common history.



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Updates

The Malaysian Sisters had 4 regional assemblies in 2014. They were held in Penang, Ipoh and 2 in Kuala Lumpur excluding the Echo Chapter. Besides the fellowship, it was a time of prayer and discernment as they listened to the input on the 4 main topics of the General Chapter:

- A way of living together
- Internationality
- New forms of belonging
- Alternative ways of functioning.

Looking at their strengths and our weaknesses, one very outstanding reality surfaced - fragility in personnel and age.

In their Mission field, the "New" is that they contemplate working with NGOs or lay collaborators who share our vision and mission. It is crucial that they read the signs of the times before responding to new calls. Underlying all these was an urgent call to partnership with the Laity. This may, in the process, give rise to different forms of Community Living and the roles they will play in mission, so that witnessing becomes clearer and sharing becomes mutual.

The need to decentralize, especially in decision-making at province level, was noted. The benefits of this move would be more shared responsibility, empowering each other and promoting team work, interdependence and co-responsibility.

The formation of the CIM (Companions In Mission) Commission will help in the co-ordination and formation of the lay collaborators with the help of lay advisors. This may, in time, introduce new forms of commitment for mission.

The closing of the community of Light Street Convent

On Christmas Day 2013 in the Chapel of CLS (Convent Light Street), the Prayer Service included the Word of God, taken from Ecclesiastes (3:3-8): "*There is a time for everything under the Sun...a Time for Building and a Time for Uprooting...*" followed by a reflection on the reading.

Good-byes are as much a part of life as sun and rain and the seasons of the year.

Indeed, all present were reminded that they had gathered to *celebrate and not only to mourn the Time for Uprooting of the Community of Convent Light Street, the first Community in Malaysia. For the past 161 years, it has been a Time for Building, a time when the Sisters of the Infant Jesus laid the foundation for the first school in Peninsula Malaysia in 1852, built on it, and empowered lay friends who are now continuing the good work that was begun by the Sisters.*



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With mixed feelings - sadness and joy - all gathered to say goodbye to 161 years of the Sisters' presence in CLS and to listen and embrace the invitation to whatever will come in the future as a result of this uprooting.

The Prayer Service continued with the Prayer of Intercession by the Sisters of CLS and the Convent Women. They will embrace new life...and to continue to bear Christ's light to all. The Sign of Peace was then exchanged and the celebration terminated with a sumptuous buffet lunch with melodious carols being played in the background.

Update

With the growing awareness that new members of the Institute need to be open to new forms and broader areas of ministry, the sisters find themselves moving with the signs of the times, particularly in the structure of their initial formation programme. The younger members are now involved in more challenging services, among people who are deprived or marginalised in some way.

As the journey continues, the sisters take up challenges presented by today's rapidly changing world. There are many concerns calling for a response: caring for the earth as our common homeland so that there may be air, water and soil for future generations; raising awareness of the value and dignity of the human person; and, promoting values that enable people to live together in harmony, understanding, freedom and respect.

The sisters give thanks for all those who have travelled the road before them. Learning from their faith, wisdom and energy, they want to answer the call of God with the same spirit in their own time.

So let us plant seeds wherever we happen to be. Let us reach out in faith to what is still unknown. Let us unite to keep the dream alive: - A world at peace, human beings and all creation in symphony.

Let us now work conscientiously to increase lay collaboration in our midst!

Malaysia

Presence of IJ Sisters in Keningau, Sabah

With excitement and joy, Sr Noreen (from the Central Team) and I visited the Sisters serving in Sabah from 20—23 March 2018. We thank God for the gift of Mission to the underprivileged and deprived in the villages where Sisters Oi Lin, Celestine and Betty are, as well as Marie Angele with the boys of Montfort Youth Training Centre.

Our first visit was to **Simbuan**, a village where 70 children are cared for in pre-school education and help is given to school-going children in their studies after school. The people of the whole village and three other adjacent villages came to welcome us with gong beating as we entered the hall. It was fully packed with children, youth and adults.



The Children sang, danced and acted in a scriptural drama (cure of Jairus' daughter). The teachers used puppets to depict the story of Queen Esther from the Old Testament. The youth performed the Sabah dance while the menfolk used bamboo to entertain us with their traditional musical performance. We were delighted to be so warmly welcomed.

The mothers cooked delicious local food for lunch with all present. We ended our visit by going to the grotto which was built on a hill with the Stations of the

Cross on both sides of the path flanked by tall trees with chirping and singing of the birds. Such a scenic and quiet place for prayer and meditation.

IJ Mission

Oi Lin and four other teachers see to the holistic development of the children under their care. The name of their project is 'MADIKA' (Come, let us educate the children), in the diocese of Keningau.



In the afternoon we visited the **Sook** community where Celestine and Betty work with 2 teachers and run a hostel for 8 school-going girls.

We had lunch with Bishop Cornelius the next day on a hillside where the grandeur and beauty of God's creation is enjoyed by all who come for their retreats, camps and seminars. At night, Celestine, Betty and the girls treated us to a barbecue dinner and entertained us with their traditional dances.



We left Sook early next morning for the airport in the capital City, Kota Kinabalu which is a 2-hour drive. In **Kinarut**, we dropped by the Montfort Boys Training centre where Marie Angele works, and had a short chat with Brother Gasper, the director of the Centre.

This ended our short visit to our mission areas in Sabah with much gratitude in our hearts to God for the gift of Mission in this part of Malaysia.

Sr Mary Theresa Chua IJS

News in Brief from Malaysia

1. Renovations of the House for the Elderly Sisters in Sitiawan.

After almost a year away, the newly refurbished house was ready for the Sisters to move in on 31 January 2018. This was done to cater for the needs of the Sisters who are still mobile and can offer services to enhance their Spirit of Mission both in the community house and the parish life.



2. Storm damage to the roof of Cheras Chapel

Heavy rain and storms in February 2018 caused two-thirds of the roof at the **Cheras** House to be destroyed, causing damage to the Chapel. We thank God for protecting the elderly Sisters in this community as they had just left the Chapel after their evening prayers when this happened. Only one sister suffered some bruises when one of the ceiling boards hit her.

The Sisters who were at the Council of the Institute in Malaysia had the opportunity to visit this community house and to share dinner together on 7 March 2018.

