

Bangladesh Province

Brief history, culture, life and mission



Water Lily (national flower):
sublime beauty, truth, openness,
unity and new life
rooted in God Trinity

Cross:
tree of life nurtured
by water of life

Prodeep Shikha (flame):
God's eternal light
Christ our Light



Bangladesh known as Tagore's "Golden Bangla" is a low lying riverine country situated on the northern coast of the Bay of Bengal. It is surrounded by India, with a small border with Myanmar in the southeast. The two biggest rivers – Padma and Bramaputra which originate in the Himalayas run through Bangladesh and flow into the Bay of Bengal and thus the country is vulnerable to flooding and in addition tropical monsoon and cyclones inflict frequent damage in the delta region.

The country constitutes with the major portion of the ancient and historic region of Bengal. The history of the region is closely entwined with the history of Bengal and the history of Indian sub-continent. Modern Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation after achieving independence from Pakistan in the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971.

Population: Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. It has a total population of approximately 160 million – Muslims 86.6%, Hindus 12.1%, Buddhist 0.6%, Christians 0.4% and Animists 0.3

Culture: The land, the rivers and the lives of the Bangladeshis formed a heritage with marked differences with neighbouring regions. The culture of Bangladesh is composite and assimilated influences of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity. It is manifested in various forms including music; dance and drama; art and craft; folklore and folktale; languages and literature; philosophy and religion; festivals and celebrations as well as distinct cuisine and culinary tradition.



The tribal race constitutes less than 1 percent of the total population. They live in the Chittagong Hills and in the region of Mymensingh, Sylhet, Dinajpur and Rajshahi. They differ in their social organization, marriage customs, birth and death rites, food and other social customs from the people of the rest of the country.

RNDM Presence in Bangladesh

At the invitation of Bishop Ballsieper, Vicar Apostolic of East Bengal to establish a new foundation in Chittagong, East Bengal, five pioneer Sisters Mother Mary of the Sacred Heart, Mother Mary of the Nativity, Sister Mary St. Philip, Sister Mary Stanislaus and Sister Mary St. Veronica left France on 11 February 1883 and commenced a long and most challenging journey by ship. They had a brief stop in Calcutta where they participated in the Holy Week services.



Euphrasie Barbier
Foundress



Mary of the Sacred Heart



Mary St. Veronica



Mary of the Nativity



Mary St. Philip



Mary St. Stanislaus

On 25 March 1883, Easter Sunday the valiant missionaries arrived in Chittagong. On their arrival, Euphrasie Barbier and her five companions knelt and kissed the ground, recognizing the sacredness of the land of "Golden Bengal"- the first foundation in Asia, which they wanted to fully adopt, and her people among whom they would serve.

At this time the Diocese of Chittagong had a population of 2 million, but only about 17,000 were Catholics with eight Benedictine priests and the Bishop to care for them. The RNDMs were then the only community of Religious Women. In the first month, the Sisters including Euphrasie began to learn the local languages, Hindi and Bengali. One month after their arrival, they opened two classes for poor children.

Within a short period, they opened a high school for fee paying students, a boarding school and an orphanage. Euphrasie also commenced catechism classes for young girls who were preparing for marriage. The Sisters were deeply touched and saddened by the plight of women and young girls who were forced into marriage at a very young age. To help out these women, the Sisters opened a work room for them where they worked to maintain their livelihood.

When the Congregation was founded in Bengal, Asia there was a constant movement of Sisters and many zealous and dedicated RNDM missionaries from Australia, British Isles (UK), Canada, France, Ireland and New Zealand rendered their untiring services to the province at different levels and in various fields of ministries.

It is noteworthy that when the Congregation was founded in Asia in 1883, it was known as the Indian Province which comprised of India, Burma (Myanmar) and East Bengal with the Provincial House and Novitiate being in Chittagong. Although in 1947, India and Pakistan achieved independence as two separate countries, the Congregation in Asia continued as one province, having the Provincial House and Novitiate in Chittagong.

In 1962, a war broke out between India and China – the Himalayan border being the main issue of the war. At this time some of our Indian Sisters in Chittagong were almost put in the concentration camp there but at the plea and assurance of Sister Mary Desmond O'Hara, then the Provincial Superior, the Sisters were more or less under house arrest at St. Scholastica's Convent, Chittagong.

Finally political unrest, upheaval, undue tension, and difficulty in communication contributed to the division of the province and creation of three regions – East Pakistan, India and Burma (Myanmar). Then on 16 December 1971, East Pakistan achieved Independence from Pakistan and henceforth known as Bangladesh.

Soon after the creation of the three regions in this part of Asia and more so after Vatican II, the number of Sisters coming from the Western/European provinces gradually decreased and now we have only one valiant missionary, Sister Mary Barbara Mc Loughlin from Ireland who has been with us for the past almost 50 years.





Our Various Ministries

Chittagong (1883): St. Scholastica's & Novitiate

In addition to some new ministries, Sisters at St. Scholastica's continue with the work began by Euphrasie Barbier and the pioneer Sisters.

- Ministry of Formation: We are blest with vocations and have five second year novices, four first year novices and 3 postulants.



Second year novices



First year novices



Postulants

- Education Ministry: Formal education is still an urgent need and is one of our main ministries in Bangladesh.
 - St. Scholastica's Girls High School caters for 2200 students
 - St. Scholastica's Kindergarten has 765 students.



St. Scholastica's student performing a welcome dance



St. Scholastica's KG students ready to welcome visitors

- Don Bosco Afternoon School for the under-privileged children has 260 students most of whom are children of fishermen. Visiting the families of these children is an important ministry of the Sisters here.



Eager students of Don Bosco are busy performing physical exercises

- St. Benedict's Crèche: We have here 35 unwanted, rejected and very poor babies irrespective of caste and religion.
- St. Peter's Orphanage: Those who are not taken for adoption from St. Benedict's Crèche come to St. Peter's and continue their studies either in St. Scholastica's Girls High School or in the Don Bosco Afternoon School. In addition, there are girls here who have one parent only and are also very poor. We have 48 girls here.



Sr. Catherine Purification & children of the Crèche



St. Peter's girls enjoying their free time

- Pastoral Work: Sisters are actively involved in various parish committees and activities e.g. preparation for sacraments and liturgy, taking the Holy Eucharist to the sick, family apostolate, marriage encounters, youth ministries --- Holy Childhood and Young Christian Student (YCS) movement.

Luxmi Bazar, Dhaka-1 (1912): St. Francis Xavier's

- St. Francis Xavier's Girls' High School caters for 3000 students.
- St. Francis Xavier's Kindergarten has 895 children.
- St. Francis Xavier's Evening School: There are 250 children. We have here children of cobblers (low caste Hindus) in addition to some poor children of the area irrespective of caste and religion.



SFX High School children eagerly waiting for Visitors



K.G. children welcoming Sr. Josephine Kane with flowers

- Hostel for Girls: These girls come from distant parishes of the city as well as other parts of Bangladesh for good education in SFX.
- Pastoral Work: Sisters are actively involved in different committees and pastoral activities of the parish, e.g. sacramental and liturgical preparation, bringing sacrament to the sick, family apostolate, youth ministries --- YCS and Holy Childhood.

Golla (1914): St. Thecla's

- St. Thecla's Girls' High School has 336 students.
- Don Bosco Primary School - only for Catholics and mainly for faith formation of young children has 90 students



High School girls interested in science practical work



Sr. Brinta assisting a K.G. child

- Hostel mainly for tribal girls for better education at St. Thecla's has 20 girls
- Pastoral Work: Sisters are actively involved in various parish committees and activities e.g. preparation for sacraments and liturgy, taking the Holy Eucharist to the sick, family apostolate, marriage encounters, youth ministries.

Hashnabad (1932): St. Euphrasie's

- St. Euphrasie's Girls High School cum College has 410 students
- St. Joseph's Primary School for Catholics only and has 84 students.
- Pastoral Work: visiting families, involvement in parish committees, preparation for sacraments and liturgy



St. Joseph's Primary children
enjoying their music lesson

Rangamati (1959) St. Teresa's

- St. Teresa's Primary School caters for 595 students.
- Hostel for tribal girls: provides shelter and better opportunities for about 50 tribal girls to continue their studies.
- Pastoral Work ... Visiting distant tribal villages, sacramental and marriage preparation and bring back the drop-out Catholics and assist in regularizing the illegal marriages.



St. Teresa's hostel girls with
Sr. M. Ambrose & Mary Anna



Sr. Pronoti & St. Teresa's students
busy doing their assignment

Mohammadpur, Dhaka 7 (1967): Provincialate, Proggaloy, Marialoy

Within the same compound here we have the following ministries:

- The ministry of administration and Province Leadership.
- Proggaloy (House of Wisdom): Some of our senior Sisters, who have worked for many years in various places and active ministries, now live at a specially built facility for their comfort. It is a real tower house of prayer as these Sisters support our province and the congregation with their prayer and encouragement.
- Greenherald International School - preparing students for the Cambridge Examinations at different levels. It caters for about 1500 students. 6-7 Sisters from Marialoy community are actively engaged in this apostolate.
- Afternoon school for the under-privileged- non-Bengali children who live in various refugee camps around the area attend the afternoon school. This ministry is supported and administered by Greenherald International School and has 250 students
- Hostel for the girls (ages 16-25) who attend different colleges in Dhaka. Priority is given to faith formation of these young women.
- Aspirancy: The young women who are discerning their vocation to the RNDM way of life are formed and guided by their directress.
- Bethany Ashram – a centre for prayer, reflection, guidance and spiritual counseling which is open to all who wish to come. It is also a place for Retreats.
- Ministry to the Drug Addicts: Two of our Sisters work at the Centre supported by Caritas and administered by CSC Brothers.
- Administrative work at the centre for Bangladesh Conference of Religious
- Active involvement in different committees of the Parish and family apostolate.



Provincialate cum Proggaloy (House of Wisdom) building and the Senior Sisters

**Greenherald Afternoon School
students eager to learn needle work
in addition to academic studies**



**Mary Gertrudis who will soon be
celebrating her 90th birthday
enjoys taking care of the fruit and
vegetable gardens and the farm**

**Some of our Aspirants with their
different cultural dresses**



Sreemongal (1974): St. Martha's

- St. Martha's High School mainly for tribal students of the area.
- Kindergarten for local children.
- Administering 15 Tea garden Primary Schools.
- Hostel for adibashi (tribal) girls of different tribes.
- Pastoral Work among different tribal people (Khasi, Garo, Santal, Oraon), and adult faith formation.
- Youth formation and family apostolate.
- Sacramental and Liturgical preparation.
- Faith formation of young boys and girls residing in different hostels run by lay people



**Sreemongal tribal hostel girls
dressed up for a cultural show**



**Sr. Josephine Kane visiting Diang
Holy Childhood School**

Diang (1978): Miriam Ashram

- Holy Childhood School: Sisters give good foundation to little village children from cobbler and fishermen villages and nearby other poor daily workers.
- Dispensary: Anti-natal care, treatment of children suffering from Mal-nutrition and child diseases, give advice to mothers on preventive methods
- Pastoral Ministry: Sacramental and liturgical preparation.
- Faith formation of young boys and girls.
- Visiting families in distant villages and supporting them with valuable advice and encouragement.

Bolipara (1990): Sraboninah

- Administration Teaching in Junior High School
- Health Centre: Treatment for malaria, seasonal and minor illnesses.
- Pastoral Work: family apostolate, sacramental and liturgical preparation, assists in regularizing illegal marriages.
- Hostel for Tripura girls: Christian and ethical formation in addition to assisting them with their academic studies. Teach them to grow different vegetables so that they get a balanced diet which they lack in their culture.



Tripura girls in the hostel enjoying their leisure time.

Natore (1993): Mariam Niketan

- Administration and teaching in Junior High School.
- Shelter and good education for under-privileged adibashi girls, Christian and ethical formation.
- Pastoral Work: sacramental and liturgical preparation.
- Dialogue with people of other faiths.



Adibashi hostel girls of different age groups



Sr. Teresa Tripura enjoying demonstrating needle work

Bagerhat (1995): Jyotidham

- Administration and teaching in Primary School.
- Pastoral Work: family apostolate, sacramental and liturgical preparation, assists in regularizing illegal marriages.
- Sewing Centre to upraise the status of poor women in Bagerhat



Bhadun Community: Sisters Bibiana, Maria and Shathee with Sr. Josephine Kane



Sr. M. Edward training the women in the sewing centre to earn their daily bread and thus raise their status

Bhadun (2007): Deepaloy

- Administration and teaching in Primary School.
- Pastoral Work: involvement in parish pastoral committee; sacramental and liturgical preparation; visiting families especially the sick and bringing the Holy Eucharist to them.

Jhaljolia (2007): St. Clara's

- Administration and teaching in Primary School for tribal boys and girls
- Supervision of Hostel for tribal girls: Christian and ethical formation in addition to assisting them with their academic studies. Teach them to grow different vegetables so that they get a balanced diet which they lack in their culture.
- Pastoral: Visiting involvement in parish pastoral committee, visiting families especially the sick and bringing sacrament to them, sacramental and liturgical preparation.



Jhaljolia school children who seldom see many visitors are eagerly waiting for the arrival of Sr. Josephine Kane

Bhotepara (2012): Barbier House

- Sisters supervise various projects for up raising the status of women of the area, such as goat-project, bamboo craft, etc.
- Supervise the shelter for the under-privileged adibashi children.
- Christian and ethical formation in addition to assisting them with their academic studies.
- Teach them to grow different vegetables so that they get a balanced diet which they lack in their culture.
- Teaching in the Primary School
- Pastoral work: Visit families involvement in parish pastoral committee, visiting and living with the people in sub-centers (out stations) of the parish, visiting especially the sick and bringing sacrament to them, sacramental and liturgical preparation.



Sr. Bernadette is watching with keen interest how efficiently the lady is doing the bamboo craft work



The hostel children are enjoying their leisure time with Sr. Shiuli who is telling them a story

Gournadi (2015): Sacred Heart Convent

This is our newly founded community opened on 3 January 2015. Two of our Sisters have been missioned here. We, the RNDMs will work in partnership with the Parish of Gournadi. At the moment the two Sisters are living in a temporary house which will be renovated in the near future. It is a poor parish but the people are very simple and they have unique culture. The Sisters will be involved in the following ministries.

- Administration and teaching in Parish Primary School
- Supervision of the Home (shelter) for the small boys who come from distant villages for education and Christian formation.
- Pastoral: Visiting families of Christians and non-Christians around the area and in different sub-centers (out stations) of the parish.
- Soon there will be a Home (shelter) for the girls to provide them with better education and Christian formation.



Sr. Kakon Maria directing the hostel boys who are happily preparing the soil in the vegetable garden.



Sr. Shilpi Veronica and Sr. Kakon Maria with a group of small boys from the "Home" which is under their supervision



**Our TP Sisters at their
Annual Gathering**



**Sisters (40-50) enjoying
their day of relaxation**

**Sisters of age group (30-39)
visited some historical sites with
Sisters Supriti and Marcia (PLT)**



**Sr. Josephine Kane with PLT,
some Sisters from Marialoy
and Progggaloy**

**Compiled by
Mary Teresa Gomes**