**Congregation History**

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ (PHJC) was founded in a village called Dernbach in the diocese of Limburg, Germany on August 15, 1851 by St. Katharina Kasper. Katharina was born in a peasant family whose parents were Henry Kasper and Katharina Fasal from Dernbach, Westerwald, Germany. They had eight children and Katharina was the 7th child. Though she was a peasant girl with only primary education she was endowed with a clear insight and strong determination and whose characteristic feature is expressed in her motto taken from the book “Imitation of Christ”: “Love to be unknown and esteemed as nothing.”

Jesus continually calls people to participate in a unique way in his redemptive mission. This is how Mary Katharina Kasper even as a child understood herself to be called to imitate Christ who was humble obedient to fulfil the will of God.

In prayer and faithfully following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Katharina experienced her vocation to such handmaid service. Her example inspired the vocation of other young women of her village. In 1842 they founded a Pious Association for propagation of virtue through example, instructions and prayer. Following the example of Mary, the first handmaid of the Lord, Katharina chose her community to be called as Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. Urged by the “inner voice” she wanted to build a “little house”. Despite the political tensions and meagre earning of a few pennies, her thought of the “little house” urged by her trust in God and self-determination to accomplish what God had designed for her. Thus, her dream was materialized and she nursed the sick of her village and in which she provided a home for a widow and eight orphans.

On August 15, 1851, Katharina received the necessary approval of the Bishop of Limburg, Peter Joseph Blum, to form the ‘Pious Society’ into a religious Congregation. On the 15th of August of the same year, Katharina and four like-minded women pronounced their vows at St. Boniface parish Church in Wirges, before the Bishop thus founding the Congregation, the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. This was the first religious Congregation to be established in the young diocese of Limburg, in Germany. Soon many “little houses” spread as she responded to the needs of her time. Mother Mary Katharina led her community for 37 years, personally encouraging the 2000 sisters who joined her charitable group during her lifetime.

Today the Congregation continues its ministry and mission in the spirit of Blessed Mary Katharina in Germany, England, the Netherlands, USA, India, Brazil, Mexico, Kenya and Nigeria.

**History of our presence in India**

It was a time of renewal and change in the Church. The second Vatican Council was about to Start. Mother Herluka Bierbaum was elected as mother General of the Congregation of the PHJC in the 16th General Chapter in Germany in the year 1960. As a person of vision and insight, she led the Congregation through rough and difficult times of the post Vatican period.

During her time of her Leadership, Mother Herluka had a Providential meeting with Msgr. Kurian Vanchipurackal, of the Diocese of Palai, who was touring through Germany and Holland. In their meeting, they talked about the scarcity of vocations in Europe and the abundance of them in Kerala. Mother Herluka, who was already dreaming of a mission in other continent, thought it as a ‘Sign from God’ to materialize her dream. So, she expressed her willingness and desire to admit Candidates from Kerala to the Congregation.

She got in touch with Rt. Rev. Bishop Sabastian Vayalil, Bishop of Palai. She had heard that Palai was overflowing with religious vocations. Bishop Sabastian Vayalil enthusiastically supported this idea and assured mother of all possible help. As agreed, upon, by Bishop Vayalil, a company of seven girls were selected to send to Dernbach. Their training in India was being supervised by Fr. Kurian Vanchipurackal and Rev. Fr. Mathew Madathikunnel.

It was way back in 1963, that the first courageous young women arrived in Dernbach, Germany, desirous to be Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. They were Sr. James Mary Aerimathathil PHJC, Sr. Theresilla Kakkanattu PHJC, Sr. Lellis Kunnathutharappel PHJC, Sr. Deepa Thayilkalariammakal PHJC and Sr. Gemma Kappiankal PHJC.

In 1969 Mother Herluka Bierbaum and Sr. Fabiola Winand came to India to find a suitable place for the Indian Sister to serve their people. The first place they found for this purpose was Dhani, in the Diocese of Indore, Madhya Pradesh Circumstances and acquaintances were valuable market in their search for a suitable beginning. At this time, Bishop Franz Simons, SVD a native of the Netherlands, was Bishop of the Indore Diocese. Also Sr. Fabiola’s closeness to her aunt, Sr. Anna Huberta, contributed to the knowledge that the small mission in Dhani was in search of a Congregation to replace the Swiss sisters who currently ministered there.

Dhani was an Adivasi tribal area, and the people were very poor and uneducated. In this mission station there was already a small hospital and boarding school for the children, which were in change of the Swiss Sisters to continue their ministry, they were waiting to handover the mission to some other Congregation. Seeing the place, Mother Herluka at once felt that it was the “treasure she had been searching for” and that God had destined for us. She gave her consent, readily, to Bishop Simon of Indore. Mother Herluka visited India more times as she had a very special love for India. She often used to say “Our future is India”.

**History of St. Joseph’s Province –**

One of the 2008, Provincial Chapter proposals, was to initiate the process of Bifurcation of St. Province, Indian by 2012. Keeping this in mind, Provincial Leadership formed a committee to Proceed with the necessary preparation. To facilitate the proceeding the Leadership contacted Sr. David Delany, CSJ to guide this process and she happily agreed.

The committee also met and discussed this issue and felt the need of involving all the sisters in this process. I the Superiors’ meeting, the idea was discussed, and it evoked a very good contribution from all the superiors.

The importance of bifurcation was felt for the need of apostolic effectiveness, growth into a deeper life. missionary Spirit and in all aspects of religious especially in the field of leadership, expansion of ministries, growth in membership, reduction of distances for travel within Provinces and broader representation of members to participate in the General Chapter and GPR meetings etc.

Provincial Leadership established the core Committee on the 4th March,2010.

St. Joseph’s Province consisting of 12 houses in 4 states: Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh & Jharkhand.

1. Maria Bhavan – Dhani – MP

Catholic Hospital – Dhani, MP

2. Shanti Nilaya – Dhamnod, MP

3. Katherine Bhavan – Indore, MP

4. Jyothi Sadan – Dhar, MP

5. Maria Nivas – Barwani, MP

6. Karuna Sadan – Ranapur, MP

7. San Jose convent – Babai Town,MP

8. Khristu Jyothi Convent – Khandwa, MP

9. Seva Nilaya – Ranchi, Jharkhand

10. Jeevan Jyothi Convent – Khunti, Jharkhand

11. Maria Sadan – Daha Farm, Uttarakhand

12. Katherine Nilaya- Dohna, UP

The 3rd Provincial Chapter, of the St. Mary’s Province of the PHJC decided to Bifurcation and create the St. Joseph’s Province of the PHJC with immediate effect with the approval of General leadership.

St. Joseph’s Province - Provincial house – Dhar, MP (1st Leadership Team)

Sr. Grace Manjakunnel - Provincial Superior

Sr. Suma Manjakunnel - Vicaress

Sr. Jyothi Jettan - Provincial Councilor

Sr. Mychelin Irudayam - Provincial Councilor

**Erection of St. Joseph’s Province, Dhar**

**1st September, 2012**

The historical event took place on September 1st as Sr. Jolise May, General superior, officially established St. Joseph’s Province. Sisters experienced the PHJC spirit hovering over the podium as indeed it was a memorable day. St. Joseph’s Province is a great blessing from God. The many well wishes who supported prayed and congratulated the congregation for the great event witnessed the blessing.

With the Bifurcation of the Province a new era AND HISTORY BEGINS FOR THE PHJCs in India.