



## A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND STUDY OF THE SACRED HEART CATHEDRAL CHURCH AND ITS SERVICES TO THE PEOPLE OF TUTICORIN

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### **Abstract**

*Sacred Heart Cathedral is one of the biggest Catholic Churches in Tamil Nadu, India. This Church is one of the great religious and architectural wonder which gives visual treat to all look at. The other name for the Sacred Hearts Cathedral is Chinna Koil Church. This church had been dedicated for the Sacred heart of Mary and the sacred heart of Jesus, thus, this church began to be called as the Sacred Hearts Church rather than the sacred heart church. The main objective of this paper is to trace out the historical background of the sacred Heart Cathedral church and its services to the Christian community in Tuticorin District. This paper also exposes the social and educational development done by the sacred Heart Cathedral church.*

### **Introduction**

On the 8th of July 1836, Pope Gregory XVI made Madurai an Apostolic Province. Pearl fishery coast which came this new province was entrusted to the Jesuit Missionaries of Thulus Province in France. Those days Our Lady of Snows church was taken care of by the priests of Mylapore diocese which belonged to the Portuguese Mission. Thus the Jesuit Missionaries felt that they need a separate church to function from. In 1849, Rev. Fr. Kanos became the Superior of the Jesuit Region of Palayamkottai. He wanted to build a big church at Tuticorin. Thus, Rev. Fr. Cori who was ministering at Tuticorin laid the foundation stone for the new church. Rev. Fr. Cori was succeeded by Rev. Fr. Piccinelli, who continued the construction work. On 5th January 1849, the new church was dedicated to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In 1909, Rev. Fr. Martin extended the side wings of the church. In 1923, this massive beautiful church was elevated as the Cathedral of the diocese of Tuticorin. The foundation of this Church began in the 1940s when Jesuit Priests wished to build a Church here for their worship. A land measuring more than 64 acres had been gifted by Manuel Vijayagula Motha for the construction of the Church. In 1948, Bishop Tirurtius Roche, erected the sky scraping towers.

### **The Cathedral its Origin**

On 15<sup>th</sup> August 1842, Fr. Bertrand was promoted to the position of the provincial of the Madura Mission. Fr. Castainier found that church of "Our Lady of Snows" was under the control of St. Ignatius chapel and that was inadequate to accommodate all the believers who supported the French mission. He therefore, scouted for a suitable place to build a bigger church and preferred a vast area in which the present day cathedral stands magnificently to acquire from the Jathi Thalaivan. Fr. Castanier managed to purchase the surrounding area and built up a thatched church on that place the magnificent and historical cathedral in Tuticorin dedicated in 1848 as an inspiring house of prayer and striking beauty situated in northern side of thoothukudi.

Fr. James Wilmot took over this new church and realized that the thatched church was inadequate for population in that time, so he decided to construct with stone and mortar. Fr. Castamien and his assistant Fr. Gory were instructed to carry out the work. Fr. Gory fulfilled the work of completing the basement foundation work and proceeded to Verapoly to procure timber for the church. As he could not procure the required timber owing to its paucity, construction work was delayed for about a year. In the meantime, Bro. Schevalo, a noted architect came to Tuticorin. He decided that Fr. Piccinelli would be the most suited person to work with Bro. Schevalo in the projected church and therefore, Fr. Gory was transferred and in his place in 1847. At the time when Fr. Piccinelli came to Tuticorin, only Rs.4000 was with him, nevertheless with faith and confidence he started the construction work to build a big church which would accommodate the entire catholic population of Tuticorin.

### **Religious Services of Cathedral Church**

In sacred Heart Cathedral church, all community people attend the mass every day. The Priest and the catechist conduct the church services every morning and evening also on festival days. All community people are obligatory to come to the church to worship. At the church service, the people praise the lord by saying prayers and singing hymns. This church offers various religious services to the peoples not only to the peoples belong to this church but all the Christians in the Tuticorin district. This church provide a round the clock religious services to the people. Some of the services are as follows: Daily Morning and Evening Church Services, Sunday Church Service, New Year Midnight Church Service, New Year Day Morning Services, Ash Wednesday Church Service, Palm Sunday Service, Maundy Thursday, Holy Friday service, Torch Service, Easter Service, Church Dedication service, Baptism Service, Confirmation Service, Holy Matrimony Service, and Christmas Carol Service.



### **Social Welfare Measures of Cathedral Church**

There are many social welfare measure conducted by the cathedral church in Tuticorin. All these services are offered for the benefit of Christian peoples and other peoples living in the Tuticorin district. This church regularly involving in the social developmental activities. Many welfare programs are regularly conducted in different places of the Tuticorin district. The peoples have benefited by the welfare programs and social development programs of Cathedral church. Mariya Senai Woman Fellowship service, Vincent the Paul Sabha or Men fellowship service, Lady of Sorrows Council, Youth Council service, Church Campus Friends service, Children's Association service and Women service are the some of the notable welfare measures of the cathedral church. In addition with the above said services, Devotion to Sacred Heart, Evangelization, Care for Abandoned Children, care for guiding Girl Students, Medical Mission, Handicapped & Elders' care, Sacrament Preparation and many educational services are offered by the Cathedral church.

### **Socio-Educational Services of Cathedral Church**

The sacred Heart cathedral is doing three most important services namely, Religious, Educational and Health services in the different places. The Educational Institutions working under this sacred Heart cathedral church us remarkable. Educational is the primary concern of every on Socio – economic development. Educational institution brought together all the people irrespective of caste or creed. All schools administrated by cathedral church have a clear admission policy with emphasis on the educational institutions. Saint George School, Saint Xavier Primary School and Saint Teresa Primary School are the three famous schools in Tuticorin district. These schools have been established by the cathedral church of Tuticorin. People of different religion are studying in this school. This school competing with the all other school in Tuticorin district. As per the admission policy of Cathedral Church, all the people are getting admission in these schools irrespective of their religion.

### **Sacred Heart Hospital**

Sacred heart hospital, Tuticorin was started in 1960, as a small dispensary. In the year 1961, a small hospital was built to accommodate and take care of the mothers and children. As there was steady flow of patients, there was a felt need for a large hospital. Thought the continuous and tireless effort of Sr. Paula Graf, the hospital gained popularity in subsequent years and many patients started coming from distant places. The hospital was provided with all the facilities for the overall development of the Nursing Students. In 1992 a Premature Care Unit was started under the guidance of Sr. Rosalia. Premature babies and under weight babies are taken care in this unit. The Public Health Department is taking keen interest in the prevention and treatment of Tuberculosis as this is very much prevalent in Tuticorin. It also has the causality department. All the emergency cases are attended in this department at any part of the day or night. Medical officers and staff nurses are posted in turn to manage 24 hours casualty.

### **Conclusion**

Establishments of the Sacred Heart Cathedral church is an important event in the history of Christianity in Tuticorin. The cathedral gives an active co-operation in the field of evangelization of social change and education. This church also examined the role of the educational institutions and their policies and give directions or sanctions where needed. Social concerns and social works have created a new image of the catholic church in sacred Heart cathedral church being involved in action for the cause of the people in need their betterment, their empowerment, recognition of their rights and dignity.

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