



# Shepherding Mission in Salem

## INTRODUCTION

Good Shepherd Convent is a non-profit, non-governmental and community-based organization working among and for the empowerment of children and women from the most disadvantaged communities of Ayothiyapattinam Block for the past 25 years. We are reaching out to the marginalized, especially the needy and the poor children through Educational and Community Sponsorship Programme, Supplementary Education for the Children of Non-literate Parents, Vocational Training for the young women and dropout adolescent girls, Inclusive Community Development Services (ICDS), and Creating Safe Space for Vulnerable Children who are in need of Care, Protection and Development and also various social awareness programs for the welfare of children and women from the deprived sections of the society. We network with NGOs, Government Departments and Community Groups for the promotion of the rights of the people at the margins of our society.

### 1. VIKKASINI Vocational Training Centre

‘Adolescent Girls and Young Women’ who could not go in for higher education were supported with Tailoring and Embroidery Skills. Hundreds of young women were helped through this vocational course. The tailoring centres were established in the village settings and the local leaders provided needed space for setting up the Tailoring Centres. Sisters of the Good Shepherd thank all those who supported in establishing such centres.

### 2. PRISON MINISTRY

Since 2001, Sisters have been working for the Prisoners and their Families through means of supportive counselling. Over a period of time, Sisters have built a congenial working relationship with the Police Officials and Prison Authorities which allows them to visit the prisoners periodically and provide counselling services. The ‘Prison Ministry’ has been carried out in collaboration with the ‘Salem Social Service Society’ and also with a networking body called ‘Prison Ministry of India’. On Thursdays, Sisters visit the women prisoners and engage them through counselling and other activities. During important occasions and celebrations, the ‘Women in Prisons’ are provided with opportunities to celebrate the festivals.

### **3. CHALICE – Educational and Community Sponsorship Programme**

With the partnership of a Canada based organisation called CHALICE, since 2004, the Sisters have been providing educational sponsorship to children in need of external support. Appropriate strategies are being followed to identify the children of both sex in need of support. As of now, 239 children from 7 Panchayats of Ayothiyapattinam Block are being supported under this programme. Apart from educational support, families in need of support to build their houses and toilets are being supported depending on the field realities. Through an initiative called ‘Gift Catalogue’, women are supported to establish small business units. At this moment, on behalf of the children and families supported, we express our gratitude to the organisation CHALICE and all the families and individuals with whose support this initiative has been successful for the last 20 years.

*The sponsorship Direct Family Fund is mainly for the 4 components; namely*

- i) Supporting children to pursue Formal Education;
- ii) Attend to health needs of the Family Members;
- iii) Provide Nutrition; and
- iv) Family support.

This project is monitored and facilitated by the leaders of the Women Groups initiated in the respective villages.

### **4. Inclusive Community Development Services (ICDS) 2021**

In the year 2020, Sisters made a study about the social unrest prevailing among people of different faiths, and caste communities. The study has given some direction as to what needs to be done to rebuild better relationships among people of different caste, religion and gender differences.

The PEACE MISSION aims at creating a friendly and equitable environment where people can have space to dialogue regarding their own harmful convictions based on religion, caste and gender and able to bridge their differences and discriminative practices in a peaceful manner.

The Peace Mission has been done by Sisters and their Partners-in-Mission in 20 hamlets of the 10 most backwards villages in Ayothiyapattinam Block. The mission has been embarked among students in schools & colleges, village-level interfaith groups (children, youth, women and men), religious leaders of different faiths. Village-level Peace Committees are formed and being trained to facilitate healthy discussions on matters concerning caste, religion and gender conflicts. Appropriate teaching-learning materials are prepared and used for educating the target groups and communities on subaltern cultures and constitutional values. Efforts are now being taken to seek the partnership of Rotary Club in Salem and few more Corporate Bodies in this peace mission. Sisters and their Partners-in-Mission are expressing their gratitude to all those individuals, groups, communities, Government Officials and religious leaders who collaborate on this peace mission.

## **5. CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION & PROMOTION**

Having witnessed and studied the incidents of child abuses and child rights violations, since 2022, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in association with their Partners-in-Mission initiated a project called 'CREATING SAFE SPACE FOR THE CHILDREN'. This project has been implemented in 20 most backward villages in Ayothiyapattinam Block. The project aims at creating a 'Child Friendly Villages' where children have better access to education, health, recreation, and other opportunities for protection and development. The primary target are children who are being formed into 'Children Parliaments', 'Adolescent Groups' and are being regularly trained with the 'Life Skills Education' to understand themselves, learn to think and communicate properly, and learn to cope in their transition period. The program created a village level structure where people have the space to raise their voice against the abuses and violence against children in the villages. On account of our intervention, Good Shepherd Convent has been recognised as a best serving organization and reports on the children's state of life to the District Child Protection Unit and Good Shepherd Convent also represents the District Child Protection Unit in organizing the Village-level Child Protection Committees at the grass-roots level.

## **6. SOCIO-ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR WOMEN**

Women in our society are regarded as second-class citizens. Their rights to development, protection and participation are ignored at every level. They become the easy target for violence at all times both within and the house and at the community-levels. Having realised the violence and abuse faced by the women from the lower strata, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd initiated a project called 'Economic Justice for Women'. The project aims at creating a society where socio-economic and political status of the women from the marginalised sections is enhanced, gender sensitive communities are created, women become economically sound and contributing to the family and taking part in the decision making both in family and in the society. The programme ensures women with entitlement and to lead a dignified life. Women in SHGs in 20 villages, with membership of 254 of them, are trained to come together and are trained on savings and thriftiness. Women who are willing to pursue economic activities are being supported to take up economic activities of their choice. Continuous monitoring and counselling help them to regularly pay back the small amount given as loan which in turn help the other women to take benefit from.

## **7. NETWORKING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

On a regular basis, in order to create awareness among the public and the Government Machineries, Sisters in partnership with the local networks and NGOs organised campaign activities. National and International Days of importance (such as National and International days Girl Children, International Women's Day, International Day Against Child Labour and Human Trafficking, International Day of Peace & Harmony, and International Human Rights Day) are observed in partnership with the other like-minded organisations and educational institutions in the form of rallies, folk-art, social media campaign, publications, public meetings and workshops and seminars.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Good Shepherd Convent remains steadfast in its mission to shepherd the vulnerable and empower communities in Salem. With the grace of God, the commitment of the Sisters and Partners-in-Mission, and the support of generous individuals, networks, and institutions, we continue to build a more just, compassionate, and inclusive society for all - specially for the women and children who need it most.