

## E-BULLETIN #49

*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)*

item 96

### THANJAVUR ministry



Let me begin by saying that the members of our Khristsevikas community – nine professed and one formee – come from across five Indian States. We live and work, in the spirit of our consecrated secular lifestyle, in eight different Dioceses. We do that either individually or in teams.

In living our profession each of us has ample opportunity to practice the UAC charism in our lives and activities. Some are social workers and teachers, others are involved in media and empowering women. Most are working for people of different faiths / religions. Since we live where we work our days are lived out among people of different religions too. Thus forming small communities and interacting with people brings us closer to their families.



I would like now to share about two of our members living at Thanjavur, in the south eastern state of Tamil Nadu. They are **Virginia Malathi** and **Helen Mary**. They run their own schools. Virginia Malathi is Head Mistress of St Mary's Pre-Primary and Primary School, situated at Mariamman Kovil. Helen Mary is Principal of St Mary's High School, at Saraswathy Nagar. Virginia is also the correspondent of the whole school.

Before they joined our Khristsevikas community they were already running the school which was in its early development and, with the help of their families, they tried to build it up with all that was needed. It is of interest to note that Ms K Virginia Malathi comes from a Hindu background, and even today all her brothers and her sister are the same. She alone found Christ, and in that conviction had to leave her home when they literally put her out. Such is the driving force and strength out of which she is living a committed life to uplift children of poor backgrounds. Ms J Helen Mary joined her later, as a staff member, but now they both together carry this work forward.

They joined our Khristsevikas community in May 2000. Their formation was through in-service training. They made their First Commitment in the year 2004. Thereafter followed their on-going Formation while

continuing with their daily work. In May 2011 they made their Final Commitment in their place of work, and all their staff organized and celebrated it!

I proudly say that they are great witnesses in that part of the Church and society, in Thanjavur Diocese. And they continue to live a simple lifestyle.

St Mary's school is co-educational. Most students come from poorer families, while the rest are middle class. 70% are Hindus, 5% Muslims and 25% Christians/Catholics. The medium of instruction is bilingual – English and Tamil. Their school is not assisted by the government. Students are eager to study, even those from poorer families. At one stage the former Pallottine Rector General, Fr Fritz Kretz sac, helped them to raise some funds. Now and then they also get support from the Pallottine Mission Secretary, for which they are always grateful. This is their struggle as no government help is forthcoming. In the year 2011 the SSLC (10<sup>th</sup> grade) students achieved 100% success. The student placed first in their school secured 490 out of 500, and in the whole District of Thanjavur she was fourth.



They have 25 teaching staff. Most of them are Hindus. They are selfless and dedicated in their service, even though their salaries are minimal. With their co-operation both Virginia and Helen are able to provide an all-round education to the students. Special and specific emphasis is given to co-curricular activities, in addition to academic studies. They have quite a number of students who excel in various inter-school competitions.

This school has been recognised twice:

- “CSO – 2005” (Consumer Standard Organizer) award – 25<sup>th</sup> May 2005
- “Best Administrator” award – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2011

Both Virginia and Helen are also very much involved in their parish. They reach out to families of the needy, and they animate one of the small Christian communities of that parish.

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