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Stella Maris College

Stella Maris College- Recounting the Journey of 75 Glorious Years

By Dr Dolly Thomas

Stella Maris begins its Platinum Jubilee celebrations: Stella Maris College was founded on August 15, 1947 by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and therefore 2021 marks the beginning of the semi sesquicentennial year. The year-long jubilee celebrations to commemorate this significant milestone was launched on 15 August 2021 in a grand celebration involving the college community, the FMM congregation and well wishers. The highlights of the celebration were a recorded message of blessings from Archbishop George Antonysamy of Madras-Mylapore, felicitations from Dr. Sr. Francisco Nirmala, FMM, Provincial, Chennai Province, motivational messages from the chief guests Dr. C Rangarajan, Former Governor, RBI, Justice Prabha Sridevan (Retd.), High Court Judge and alumna of the college and Brigadier Dr. G Himashree, Brigadier Medical of the Dakshin Bharat area. A presentation on the history of college and the release of the jubilee souvenir were part of the memorable celebrations.

The Humble Beginnings: The college was initially located in a one storey bungalow in the campus of St. Thomas Convent in Mylapore and classes began in 1947 with 32 students as part of the Intermediate University Course. The years 1948- 49 witnessed the Affiliation to University of Madras as a First Grade College and two year courses in Economics, History and Drawing and Painting were initiated. 1949 was an exciting year as the college relocated from St. Thomas Convent premises to a magnificent new, three storeyed building on Palace Road.

A Pioneering Institution: Stella Maris college has to its credit the distinction of being the first to introduce an M.A. programme in Indian Music in the University of Madras region, and the first women's college in Madras to offer M.A. programmes in English, Economics and Fine Arts. In 1952 BA and BSc programmes in Mathematics,



The First student arrives at Stella Maris on August 15 1947



The Western Music class in session (1950-51)



1960- The shift to our present campus on Cathedral Road



Dr S Radhakrishnan at the inaugural of our new premises

Indian Music and Drawing & painting were introduced. Within a decade of its inception significant milestones were added with full fledged degree programmes in Zoology in 1956 and History in 1957.

Stella Maris Moves to Cathedral Road: The momentous shift to our present location "The Cloisters" at 17, Cathedral Road took place in 1960. The new campus was part of the extensive property that had been bequeathed by John De Monte, a wealthy Portuguese man to the Madras Mylapore Archdiocese in 1820. In the 1950's the property on Cathedral Road was leased to the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. A tentative shift to the new campus was made in 1957 when the students of the Diploma in Social Service occupied the Bonaventure block for their classes. The new buildings on the premises were inaugurated by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, India's first Vice-President.

Brick by Brick, Department by Department: The Diploma in Social Work evolved into MA in Social Work in 1962. In keeping with the growing demand for women's education Stella Maris continued to add to its growing list of courses. MSc Mathematics and the Undergraduate Department of Chemistry were begun in 1964. The seventies continued to witness the remarkable progress of our college as more departments, activities and campus traditions took root. The undergraduate department of Sociology was introduced in 1971 and undergraduate programme in Public Relations in 1975. The last academic year of the seventies saw the establishment of the Department of Botany in 1979. We kick-started the eighties with a brand new department—BSc Physics was inaugurated in 1980. The academic year 1985-86 saw the introduction of B.com General, M.Phil FA and M.Phil Sequential Programme for English, Mathematics and Social Work. The need for more classrooms



Inaugural of the Sancta Sophia Block in 2019



Sr. Nirmala, FMM, Provincial, inaugurates the platinum jubilee of SMC on 15 Aug 2021

and increased infrastructural facilities led to several new structures coming up on campus.

The Grant of Autonomy: Till 1986, the college was affiliated with the University of Madras, as a constituent college, following the common university curriculum. In 1987, it was awarded the status of Autonomy by the UGC. The grant of autonomy marked a significant milestone in our quest for academic excellence.

The nineties ushered in newer avenues of progress that our college embraced with unstinted zeal. In 1994-95 a full-fledged Post Graduate Diploma in Computer Science with University recognition was launched. The year also witnessed the construction of the St. Clare Centre popularly called the CC block, which continues to function as the administrative block to this day. In line with the UGC norms, Stella Maris College introduced the Choice Based Credit System in 1997 to extend opportunities and possibilities in offering core and electives of interdisciplinary nature. In 1998 Bachelor's Degree in Computer Applications was launched.

NAAC Accreditation: At the turn of the century Stella Maris began yet another momentous chapter in its history when the college was awarded 5 Star status by the NAAC.

In 2001 MSc Information Technology was introduced and MA International Studies, MSc Bioinformatics and MPhil in Mathematics were started in 2002. During the academic year 2004-2005 several programmes were introduced namely M.Sc. Chemistry, M.Com., B.S.W. (Bachelors in Social Work) and M. Phil in Social Work. In 2006 MSc Biotechnology and MA Public Relations were added to the growing list of much sought after courses and enriched the academic life on campus. A new project centre named after our Foundress, Helene de Chappotin, was blessed and opened by His Grace, the Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore on March 10, 2004.

Quest for Excellence Continues: In 2006 the Entrepreneurship Development Cell was set up with the support of the National Science and Technology Entrepreneurship Board, Department of Science and Technology, Govt. of India. The same year Department of Mathematics received recognition with the "DST FIST sponsorship", a "Fund for Improvement of S&T Infrastructure in higher Educational Institutions.

2008- 2009 was a red letter year as College was reaccredited with an A Grade with a CGPA of 3.57 on a 4 point scale with effect from September 16, 2008.

In 2009 Stella Maris was selected under the Star College Scheme by the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India for strengthening of Life sciences and Biotechnology education and training at the undergraduate level.

On 15 October 2009 the Centre for Research in Science and Technology (CRIST), a multi-disciplinary science lab was inaugurated. With the demand for commerce based courses continuing to soar, the college introduced B. Com Corporate Secretaryship in 2010.

In 2013, as a recognition for the consistent striving for excellence, the college was reaccredited by NAAC with an A Grade and CGPA of 3.68. The very same year the DBT Star Department Status was conferred on all undergraduate Science Departments. With the goal towards

internationalization several MoU's with foreign universities were signed.

Stella Maris - Pride of the Catholic Church: The year 2016 gave us several reasons to celebrate as Stella Maris was recognised as "the College with Potential for Excellence" by the University Grants Commission and also conferred "Pride of the Catholic church" title. In 2016, Bvoc Food Processing & Quality Control and Sustainable Energy Management courses commenced. The year also marked the launch of B.Sc. Psychology and Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.).

The department of English added a new programme BA English and Communication in 2018. Bvoc Banking, Financial Services & Insurance and Tourism & Hospitality were added to the list of Bvoc courses in 2019. In June 2019 the Stella Centre for Effective Education and Development (SCEED) was initiated with the objective of facilitating professional training programmes for faculty and students. The academic year 2019-2020 kept us on our toes as the Sancta Sofia Block was inaugurated, the FARR centre was instituted and there were new additions to our campus namely the SMC Fitness Centre and Gender Centre.

The newest programmes introduced as recently as 2020 are MA Human Resource Management and B.Com Honours bringing up the grand total to 23 Undergraduate, 14 Postgraduate, 5 MPhil and 7 PhD programmes. From the humble figure of 32 students in 1947 the college at present has an enrolment of 5629 students. Stella Maris has become one of the most sought after institutions of higher learning for women in India.

In Gratitude: As we step into our 75th year the college remembers with gratitude the generations of visionary principals and members of management, the committed and compassionate faculty and non teaching staff and the vibrant and energetic students who have contributed to making Stella Maris a higher educational institution of great repute and standing. And the journey continues.... ●