

The Congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) is the first indigenous religious congregation in the Catholic Church of India. Fr. Thomas Palackal, Fr. Thomas Porukara and Fr. Kuriakose Chavara of the Syro-Malabar Church of apostolic origin, who felt that “a lot of good had not been done due to the absence of a Thapasu Bhavanam (House of Discipline) and a Darsana Veedu (House of Vision)”, had the challenging vision of providing spiritual leadership and fostering unity and growth in the Kerala Church. With the permission of Bishop Aurelius Stabilini, the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Kerala, India they founded a religious house at Mannanam in the District of Kottayam, Kerala State in India on 11 May 1831. Jacob Kanianthara who later became the first professed brother in the Congregation, cooperated with the founding fathers from the beginning. The name of the Congregation was ‘Servants of Mary Immaculate’. Soon, some more priests and clerics joined the founding fathers and thus a small religious community took shape. On 8 December 1855, the religious Congregation was canonically approved, and the first eleven fathers made their religious profession. Blessed Chavara, the only surviving founder, was appointed the first superior of the Congregation. Since, during the early period of the religious Congregation, the Vicars Apostolic of Verapoly were Carmelites, the congregation had come under the Carmelite influence; hence, the rules of the Carmelites with some modifications were given to them in 1855.

In 1860, the community was affiliated to the Order of Carmelites Discalced with the name, ‘Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced’ (TOCD). The Constitutions were approved ad experimentum by the Apostolic See in 1885. In 1958, the name was changed to ‘Carmelites of Mary Immaculate’ (CMI). The Congregation was granted pontifical exemption in 1967. From the

very beginning, the religious life in the congregation was rooted in the Indian, Oriental, and Carmelite spiritual traditions. Being contemplatives in action, the members engaged in such activities as the Church in Kerala needed at various times. They preached retreats, conducted seminaries for the training of the local clergy, met the challenge of educating the youth and disseminating Christian literature, laboured for the propagation of the faith and for the reunion of separated brethren, undertook works of mercy and started charitable institutions. The apostolate of the CMI Congregation gathered new dimension and momentum as mission areas were entrusted to it beyond the boundaries of Kerala. In 1962, Chanda became the first mission ordinariate of the Syro-Malabar Church and was entrusted to the Congregation. Since then, more mission dioceses and regions were erected in Central and North India. There are now four dioceses in North India and one in South India entrusted to the Congregation, viz., Chanda, Jagdalpur, Bijnor, Rajkot and Adilabad. These five dioceses are headed by CMI Bishops. This is indeed a milestone in the progress of the CMI missions and an abiding evidence of the recognition by the Apostolic See. Besides, many members are engaged in various kinds of apostolate in other parts of India and also in other countries. The Prior General, assisted by four Councillors, is at the head of the administration; the Prior General's House at Chavara Hills in Kochi is the headquarters of the Congregation. For the sake of administration, the Congregation is divided into 15 provinces, one region and 7 sub-regions. At present the Congregation has about 3000 members including 10 bishops, 1840 priests, 1 permanent deacon, 22 brothers and 1200 brothers in formation. More than half of the priests are working outside Kerala, of whom about 367 are doing pastoral services in 31 countries around the world.

SAINT KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA, THE FOUNDER OF CMI



Kuriakose (Cyriac) Chavara was born in 1805, of pious and devout Catholic parents of Syro-Malabar Church, at Kainakary, Kerala, India. After his early schooling in the native village and priestly studies under Fr. Thomas Palackal at Pallippuram, Kerala state of India, he was ordained priest in 1829.

In 1831, co-operating with Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara, he founded the first indigenous religious congregation for men, now known as the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). It was after the death of his senior companions that Fr. Kuriakose, together with the first members, made the religious profession in 1855. In religion he took the name, Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. Starting seven religious houses, including the first one at Mannanam, in different parts of Kerala, the new Congregation made great strides in the spiritual renovation of the Syro-Malabar

Church. Seminaries for the education and formation of the clergy, introduction of annual retreats for priests and people, a publishing house for the propagation of Catholic doctrine, a house for the dying and destitute, special attention to catechumens and schools for general education, were a few among the various activities of the Congregation under Fr. Kuriakose Elias' leadership. Fr. Chavara also introduced valuable improvements and reform in the Syro-Malabar liturgy. In 1866, with the co-operation of Fr. Leopold Boccardo OCD, he started the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) for women. When a schism threatened the Church in 1861, Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the then Vicar General of the Syro-Malabar Church, took a strong stand and gave effective leadership in thwarting Thomas Roccas' intrusion and saving the Church in Kerala from schism.

Fr. Chavara has also written a number of books in pros as well as in verse with unique spiritual vision. His counsel to the Christian families given in the form of the 'Testament of a Loving Father' is applicable and relevant to this day. Essentially a man of prayer and intense charity, he lived in close communion with the Lord amidst his several religious and social activities. Owing to his deep spirituality that permeated all his actions, he was accepted and referred to as a man of God, from his early years. In 1871, on January 3rd, Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, after a short but painful illness, died at Koonammavu preserving his baptismal innocence unto death. He was buried at St. Philominas Church first. Later his mortal remains were transferred from Koonammavu to Mannanam in 1889 and has been reinterred in St. Joseph's Monastery Church at Mannanam. The diocesan process for his beatification was inaugurated by the Archbishop of Changanassery on 3 January 1958 on the request of the late Fr. Maurus CMI, the then Prior General. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints, after having scrutinised the writings of the Servant of God and other relevant documents, formally introduced the cause on 15 March 1980. On 7 April 1984, Pope John Paul II

solemnly recognised the heroic virtues of the Servant of God and elevated him to the status of Venerable. On 8 February 1986, during his historic visit to Kottayam, Kerala, Pope John Paul II raised Venerable Kuriakose Elias Chavara to the honours of the altar declaring him 'Blessed'.

On 18 March 2014 Pope Francis approved the miracle by signing the Decree prepared by the Assembly of plenary of Cardinals. On 12 June 2014 Pope Francis announced the date of Canonization during the celebration of the Public Consistory at the Vatican on 23 November 2014. The canonization took place the following November. His feast day is January 3 in the Syro-Malabar Church, and February 18 in the Latin rite of the Roman Catholic Church.