

Servant of God Joseph Louis Ravel
1824 – 1881



Founder
Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of Mary
Coimbatore

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Introduction

Fr. Joseph Louis Ravel, founder of the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Coimbatore has received *Nihil Obstat* from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on 08.03.2019 to instruct the cause in a diocese level which will lead to his Beatification and Canonization. This event is the milestone in the history of our Congregation as he bore witness to Christ by his exemplary life. With the consent of the Bishop of Coimbatore and in his presence an opening session with a special Eucharistic concelebration was grandly hosted at the premise of the Basilica of our Lady of Holy Rosary, Karumathampatty on 14.01.2020. This event is an historical event in the chronicles of Coimbatore diocese. This happening is paving the way for the religious to grow in faith and chastity. Our servant of God invokes God on our behalf.

Birth and Early Childhood

There was a small village in the region of Alpes- de- Haute-Provence in the south – east of France known as Valernes. Agriculture thrived in this region in spite of the slow progress of industrial revolution in France. In such a background, Fr. Ravel was born to a rich land lord, Mr. Pierre Joseph Ravel and Mrs. Francoise Armand on 24 August 1824. He had two sisters. His elder sister Mary Elizabeth Ravel was born on 19 April 1828 and died on 12 August 1847. Henritta Francoise Ravel was born on 29 April 1835 as the youngest in the family. These children were brought up in piety and good manners by their parents. They were exemplary in taking care of the children, praying together, guiding and sharing their works etc. This little Ravel grew up happily in the Christian family atmosphere. He enjoyed simplicity, joy, humbleness, obedience towards elders among his sisters, who appreciated him dearly. The children lived up to the words of their parents in whatever they had done.

School Education

He started his early education in his native place Valernes and continued his higher education in a nearby town Sisteron which was 12 kilometers from Valernes. It was there that he felt his divine call and decided to offer himself to God. When he revealed his wish to his parents, they accepted God's will whole heartedly and gave him permission.

Priestly Formation

He joined the diocesan seminary at Digne in the year 1844 and continued his priestly formation until he received the tonsure. There he had come to know about the Society of the Foreign Missionaries of Paris (MEP) and the priests of that society who died for the sake of Catholic Faith in countries like Korea, Vietnam etc. The MEP was established in 1658-63. Since its foundation, the institution has sent more than 4,200 missionary priests to Asia and North America, with the mission of adapting to local customs, establishing the native clergy and keeping the close contacts with Rome. This knowledge made a strong impact on him and he joined there on 11 July 1846 and continued his priestly studies. He was ordained a priest on 17 June 1848. After the farewell ceremony, he left for India on 6 July 1848 and landed at Pondicherry in Tamil Nadu on 28 December 1848.

Missionary Zeal

As a man of vision, he heard the signs of the times and worked to meet challenges present and future in the Church and society. He started his mission in the diocese of Coimbatore and learnt the local language easily and began his services. At that time, there were a very few priests in the diocese; hence each priest had to take care and guide three to four thousand Catholics. In spite of these entire heavy schedules, he had a great thirst for saving souls. Through his love, prudence and his charitable works conquered the hearts of the simple people. From the beginning people were attracted by his wisdom, love and his docility.

Missionary Works

Missionary activity started in **Coimbatore** after the sixteenth century. Missionaries from Pondicherry, Goa and Madurai came to Coimbatore with much zeal and effort to serve the people. There was a severe famine took place in Coimbatore. People were very much affected by cholera, diarrhoea and fever. Due to hunger and famine they began to eat the flesh of the dead. Later people began to live together on the basis of their occupation. Thus, the caste system also began to grow among them. This casteism was a hindrance to the growth of the Church and to the missionary work. However, he continued his mission with much enthusiasm. From 1849 -1852 he served as a Parish Priest of St. Sebastian's Church, **Palakkad**. He interiorized the culture, customs and helped the people physically, spiritually and even materially for those in needs. There were 1800 Catholics lived in 18 villages belonging to Palakkad parish where the Goan priests who were already working created divisions among the people. It would not be an exaggeration if we say that Fr. Ravel by his faith, witness and exemplary life won the hearts of the people who were divided by the Goan priests. When the high caste people neglected the marginalized, he brought fraternity and equality among all castes. He started both Tamil and English Medium schools for the children and entrusted them under the care of Presentation sisters – the Congregation which he himself started.

In 1852 Fr. Ravel became Parish Priest of **Karumathanpatty**. The existence of casteism, ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and the inequality of women made him to contribute more for the people. In 1850 when education was denied to women in India, there was only one school for the whole of Pondicherry, Mysore and Coimbatore missions. Hence there was a need to establish schools for girl children and Congregations for indigenous women to run those schools. When his Bishop Mgr. Bresillac noticed this, he entrusted the work of founding a new religious congregation for women to educate the girls. Thus, on 21 November 1853 the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (FSPM) was founded.

He worked for the development of the Congregation as well as in several places of the diocese and faced many challenges. Since the missionaries were a very few in numbers, every priest had to look after 3000 to 4000 Christ's faithful. When an epidemic broke out in 1857, Fr. Ravel was also affected by it. However he continued to work with courage and never fading smile from his face even in his fragile health. He started an orphanage for girls in Coimbatore and an orphanage for boys in Karumatanpatty in 1859. A part of shelters for pilgrims was built by Rev. Fr. Ravel in 1860. He also built a Church in Pallapalayam along with Fr. Arulnather in 1862. A girls' school at Pallapalayam was established in 1874 and entrusted to Presentation sisters. He served in **Wellington** from 1863 – 1865. Until 1859 military troops used to come there for rest and convalescence. It was only in 1859 that it became a full-fledged military station. To cater the spiritual needs of Catholic military soldiers and the faithful of that area he constructed the first Church and presbytery in 1864. Again he became the parish priest of Palakkad from 1865-1872. Then he was appointed as the Rector of the seminary and a parish priest of St. Michael's Cathedral at Coimbatore from

1872-1875. The services in Coonoor from 1875-1880 were remarkable as he baptized 252 adults and children, blessed 47 marriages and did the rectification of marriages too. Through his preaching, house visits, witnessing life he brought many people into Catholic Church.

Service to the Poor

From 1876 to 1878 there was a severe famine in South India. Innumerable people including some missionaries died of starvation, cholera, dysentery and fever; civil authorities and missionaries united their efforts and resources for the relief of the afflicted population. Shelters and free meals(Kanji thotties) were supplied to the starving in many places such as Coimbatore, Athicode, Palakkad, Mettur and Nayamabadi. The children who survived this famine became orphans and a few orphanages were opened and entrusted to the sisters. The deep faith in the providence of God, love, wisdom and his approachability gained him the affection and love of the people. He showed a special interest towards the marginalized and had a compatible relationship with them. When he saw the troubles of the girls in the society, he realized the importance of education of girl children. He was also constantly in touch with the illiterate girls in the villages and identified education as the principle means of empowering them.

Eradication of Casteism

Fr. Ravel, who grew up in a pious and religious background, had deep faith in God and was prudent. He obeyed the will of God in carrying out his works and he mostly travelled on a horse – back to reach the people who were living in remote areas. In Somanur Fr. De Gelis appointed a low caste man to look after his horse and to accompany him during his journeys. When people came to know about this appointment got annoyed and immediately wanted to remove him. Fr. De Gelis would not heed to the people's demand. Hence the people of Somanur stopped participating in the Church activities and threatened him that they would get priests from Goa to work in their parishes. Then Fr. Ravel approached the people in a gentle manner and solved the problem feasibly; moreover he convinced the people to make reparation for their misdeed and paid a fine for it. Therefore with his strong convictions he tried to bring peace among the people as his inner self was filled with Grace.

New Ventures

The diary of Mgr. Bresillsac explains that, Fr. Ravel who encouraged the people to bring the dead bodies in to the Church. In those days people used to throw the dead body into a river or in the deep forest. Seeing this Fr. Ravel, thought on Resurrection and brought the dead into the Church for mass, recited all prayers prescribed in the liturgical books. This new effort of Fr. Ravel was unthinkable in the culture of those days and paved way for more social changes in the society.

Messenger of Peace

The main aims of the MEP are 1) to form the Missionaries for the Church 2) to strengthen the faith of the people 3) to make social changes by educating the people. In giving importance to the above mentioned works, Fr. Ravel excelled in his philanthropic activities. He also watched carefully the social background and life situations of the people; thus he found various ways and means to continue his work in a better way. Fr. Ravel taught every one irrespective of caste or creed, the fear of God, basic teachings of the Church, civilization, education and how to treat each other with respect and dignity.

The docile and soft spoken nature of Fr. Ravel brought an enormous change in the mind and heart of people. It was for this reason, wherever there was a problem that could not be solved in the diocese, our saintly priest was sent to make peace. The approach and manner in which he solved the problems

identified him as the Messenger of Peace. He strived hard to create an equal and peaceful society by finding solution to the problems of the people through his deep thought, counsel and his kind words and by pinpointing the unequal situation prevailing among them.

Founder of the Congregation of the Presentation Sisters

The origin of the Congregation of the Presentation Sisters had a humble beginning. Bishop Mgr. Marion de Bresillac wanted to do something against the system of caste in India. He was of the view that women could do better in this fight against caste system and it was absolutely important, therefore, to get the women of India to be educated. On seeing Fr. Ravel's zeal and his ability with which he had learnt the local language and culture, the bishop gave him the difficult task of founding an Indigenous Congregation for the women to educate the young girls. A young girl from Marianallur, Saveriammal by name wished to consecrate her life to the service of God in the religious state though she had never seen a religious sister or a convent. Fr. Ravel to whom she had expressed her desire, seeing her good dispositions found that she had the signs of true vocation to religious life and he understood that God was giving him an opportunity to start a Congregation.

After having deeply considered the matter, taken advice and prayed, he decided to admit her as a postulant on 21 November 1853 on the Feast Day of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The growth of the Congregation was difficult and slow because of the ignorance and illiteracy of the people.

Growth of the Congregation

Fr. Ravel bought a small house at karumathanpatty near the Church for Rupees Seven which became the first house of the Congregation. Though Saveriammal was a pious and wise lady, she did not know to read and write. During her postulancy and novitiate she was deep rooted in faith and secular matters. Under the guidance of Fr. Ravel she received her spiritual training and learnt about the religious life. After her two years of training, she was allowed to take the vow of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience and she was given a simple white and blue saree as her dress. This new Congregation was placed under the protection of Our Lady of Presentation.

In 1854 following the example of Saveriammal three other girls joined the Congregation as postulants. Then after overcoming all the hurdles, the Headquarters of the Congregation was shifted from Karumathanpatty to Coimbatore (the present Generalate) in 1859. At that time there were five professed sisters, twelve novices, postulants and two lay sisters extended their hands. Thus, the Congregation grew slowly and steadily. In 1865 Sr. Santhaiammal was appointed as the First Superior General of the Congregation by the Bishop of Coimbatore. Later she was re-elected by the sisters on 24 November 1872. Fr. Ravel taught his daughters to be the living teachings of the Great law of Charity. In his letter to Mgr. Clement Bonnard he had said, "I would like that the doors of this establishment should be always open to true vocations to religious life. We can employ its members to all the diversified works of Christian Charity adapted to these nuns; for example, spiritual and physical care of the children, of the old, of all ages, sex and conditions, as much as the circumstances and prudence will permit, nothing will be excluded; for all these services will be practiced in such a way as to make this modest community to the eyes of all, like living teaching of the Great law of Charity, the true foundation and the beautiful summary of our Holy Religion."

Last Days

Then he became sick because of his long and strenuous journeys and the epidemic affected his health very badly. In spite of his ill health he continued his missionary work in Coonoor with zeal. In 1880 before the

days of Christmas he worked hard and amidst works he went to administer the last sacraments to two dying sick people. After his retuning to the presbytery he himself had become very sick, his vision deteriorated. He could not even pray his breviary, but he managed to prepare himself for the Christmas Mass and celebrated solemnly and that was the last Mass he had offered. The Bishop of Coimbatore Mgr. Joseph Bardou brought Fr. Ravel to Coimbatore in order to take great care of him. Fr. Maury had praised Fr. Ravel as, “This good Father was a holy missionary; in Heaven he will be a protector of the mission and of its works.” From these words we can understand that he was a great and zealous missionary.

Journey towards Heaven

Fr. Ravel totally dedicated his life to the will of the Lord. Right from the beginning of his last sickness, he was fully convinced that it was his last moment and started to prepare himself to meet God, saying that he was going to meet God in Heaven soon. He wanted to receive all the sacraments in full conscience. Whenever his Bishop Mgr. Bardou or his brother priests visited him he asked them to pray for his heavenward journey. In spite of his fragile health and extreme weakness, he knelt down with the help of other priests, recited the profession of faith and with ardent love he received the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever it was possible he received the Holy Communion and gained strength to bear the pain of long illness. He often used to say, “Yes, bring me my Lord Jesus and pray to Him to take me soon”. The last ten days before his death was an agony. He pleaded to God for the peaceful death.

How sweet is the death to the man who lives well! Like a flower that gives out its last perfume, so the good father gave out his last breath on 31 January 1881 at 00.45 a.m. He was buried at the cemetery at Sungam, Coimbatore. Later the grave was excavated and his mortal remains were transferred from Sungam to the Generalate of Presentation Sisters on 1 June 2009 with the permission of the Bishop of Coimbatore Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Aquinas during the tenure of Mother General Celine Nirmala.

6. Testimony of the Bishops of Coimbatore and his Confreres

From the writings of the Bishops of Coimbatore and his confreres during his time we come to know about Fr. Ravel

1. Most Rev. Mgr. Marion de Bresillac (1849 – 1853)

It was Fr. Ravel's Fear of God, clear thinking and prudence that saved him from the troubles of casteism. When there was a problem at Palakkad, he pacified the people and brought peace among them. In Karumathanpatty he made the people to realize their wrong doing and did the reparations. “I sent Fr. Ravel to Coimbatore along with Fr. De Gelis; so I saw him for only a few days here. He made an excellent impression on me”.

2. Bishop Mgr. Joseph Bardou: (1873 – 1881)

Fr. Ravel came to Coimbatore as a missionary where he learnt the language Tamil and started working to save souls with zeal. He won the hearts of the people by his tact, kindness and charity. He remained perfectly resigned and he was happy to meet the Lord. When he was sick, he asked the fathers who were with him to say the ejaculatory prayers and the prayers for the dying as prescribed by the Holy Church.

3. Rev. Fr. Berouille (1872)

It is difficult to start a religious congregation in a land where people do not know about religious life. However, Fr. Ravel started a beautiful congregation for women with its Generalate in Coimbatore. Even

in the midst of difficult works he shared his joy with his confreres with a smile. We too loved and respected him.

Conclusion

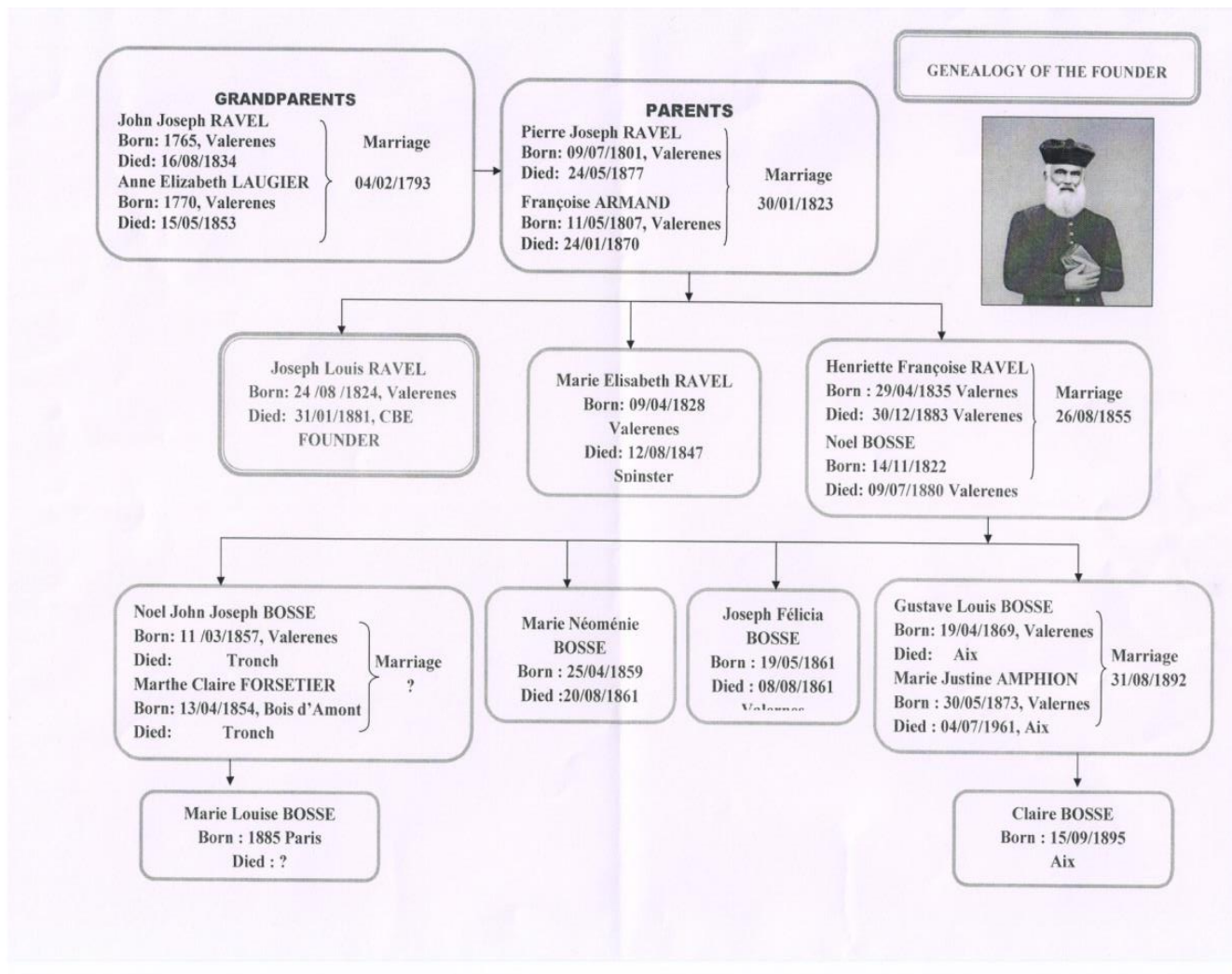
According to the word of God “So I will again do amazing things with these people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden” (Is. 29: 14), Fr. Ravel’s spirituality, apostolic life, selfless service and his Holy life still shine in our midst and proclaim that he is a messenger of God and a living saint and people believe that there is no doubt in it. In following his footsteps and continuing his mission On 16 December 1926, the Congregation was erected as the Diocesan Right and on 15 December 2000 it was raised to the status of Pontifical Right. In 1953 the Congregation celebrated its centenary and in 2003 its sesquicentennial year. Today our Congregation has spread in many countries of the world i.e. Zambia in Africa, France, Italy of Europe Mission and in India: Delhi, Jammu-Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu in India. The Congregation has spread out in the field of education, serving through the different educational institutions for the children and for the upliftment of underprivileged sections of the society. The main apostolate is the education and empowerment of women. It also has entered into other fields of social work, Medical and evangelization. May our founder’s spirit be our guide and model always.

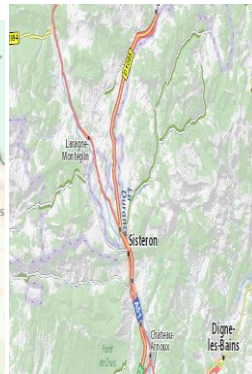
PROFILE

24.08.1824	–	Bloomed on Earth
1844	-	Initiation towards Priesthood
1846	-	Foreign Missionary Society Training at Paris
17.06.1848	–	Priestly Ordination
06.07.1848	-	Commences Journey from Paris to India (Pondicherry)
28.12.1848	-	Footing in Indian soil (Pondicherry)
Jan 1849	–	Anchorage at Coimbatore
1850 -1852	-	Groundwork in Palakkad
1851	-	Established “Thinnai Pallikoodam” at Palakkad
1852 - 1861	-	Parish Priest in Karumathampatti

- 1853 - Foundation of the Congregation of the Presentation Sisters
- 1856 - Inception of Seminary at Karumathampatti
- 1859 – Establishment of Orphanage in Karumathampatti for boys
- 1859 – Establishment of Orphanage in Coimbatore for girls
- 1859 - Shifting of Presentation Generalate to Coimbatore from Karumathampatti
- 1861 -1863 – Mission continues at Palakkad
- 1862 - Ministry in Mount Carmel Church in Pallapalayam
- 1863 -1865 – Parish Priest in Wellington
- 1864 – Built St.Joseph’s Church - Wellington
- 1865 -1872 – Establishment of the Church and School at Palakkad
- 1872 – 1875 – Rector of Seminary in Coimbatore
- 1874 – Founded Presentation Convent and School in Coimbatore and a Convent and School in Pallapalayam.
- 1874 – 1875 – Parish Priest in St. Michael’s Cathedral Coimbatore
- 1875 - 1880 - Parish Priest of St. Antony’s Church, Coonoor, Established Convent and school in Coonoor
- 31.01.1881 – Bloomed in heaven
- 01.06.2009 – Transfer of mortal remains of Fr. Ravel, from Sungam Cemetery to Generalate of Presentation Sisters, Coimbatore
- 08.03.2019 - *NihilObstat* from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints for the Diocesan Process
- 14. 01. 2020 – Opening Session for the Cause of Beatification / Canonization of
Servant of God Joseph Louis Ravel.

Genealogy of the Founder





France - Valernes



Christined Church

Primary School Building

School children



Foreign Missionaries - Seminary First Mass Celebration by Fr. Ravel Fr. Ravel photo in his native Parish



Sisteron Church



Fr. Ravel's Sisters House



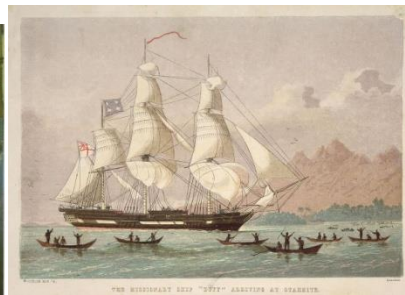
MEP Logo



MEP Generalate



Rev.Fathers from MEP



Martyrs of MEP Fathers



Departure Ceremony

France to India

Fr.Ravel with Bishops

Pastoral Mission in India



“ThinnaiPallikoodam” at Palakkad

Palghat School

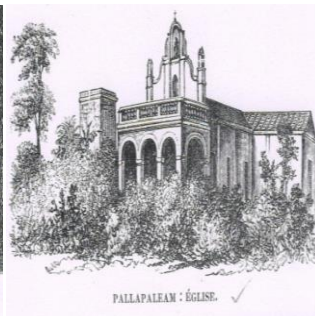
Palghat Church



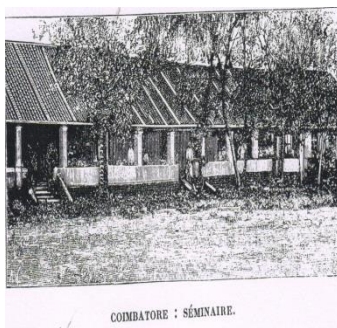
Karumathampatti Church



Karumathampatty Seminary



Pallapalayam Church



Coimbatore- Seminary



Generalate – Coimbatore

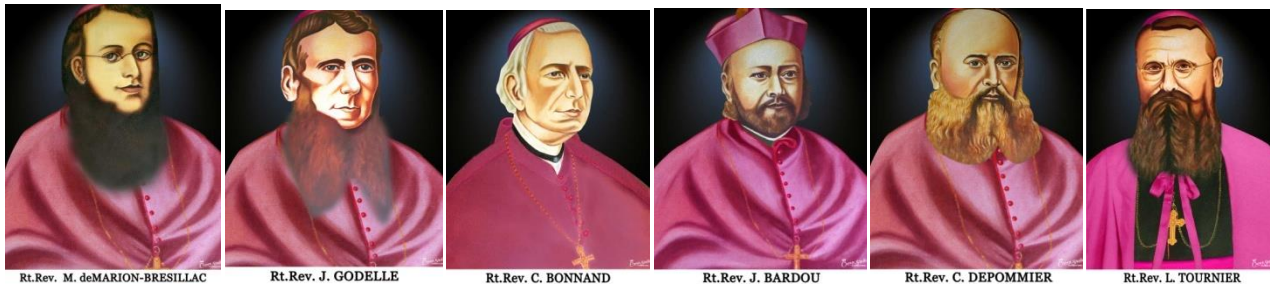


Dispensary – Coimbatore



St.Antony's Church - Coonoor

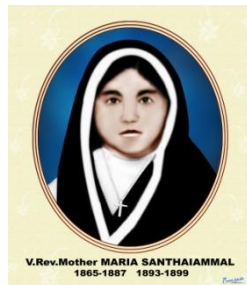
Shepherds of the Coimbatore Diocese



Beacon Lights of our Congregation



Rev.Sr.Savariammal
First Seed



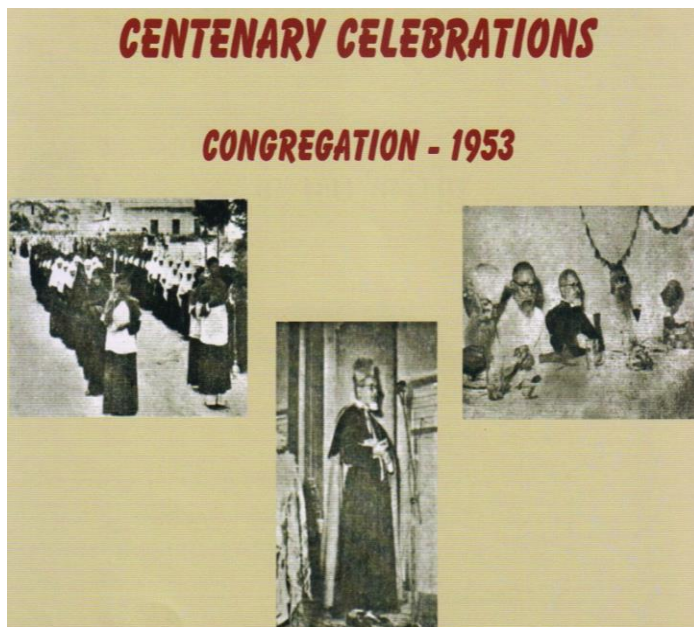
First Mother General



First House of the
Presentation Convent



Centenary Celebrations – Congregation



Pontifical Elevation 2000



பாப்பரசர் சபையாக உயர்த்தப்பட்ட அங்கீகார பத்திரத்தை கோவை ஆயர் மேதகு. அம்புஜேஸ் அவர்கள் சபையின் தலைமை அன்னை டாரியா அவர்களிடம் கொடுக்கின்றார்.



தந்தை ரவீஸ் அடிகளாரின் வரலாற்று நூலை தந்தை லெப்ரேவர் (MEP) அவர்கள் வெவீயிட அன்னை டாரியா பெற்றுக் கொள்கிறார்.

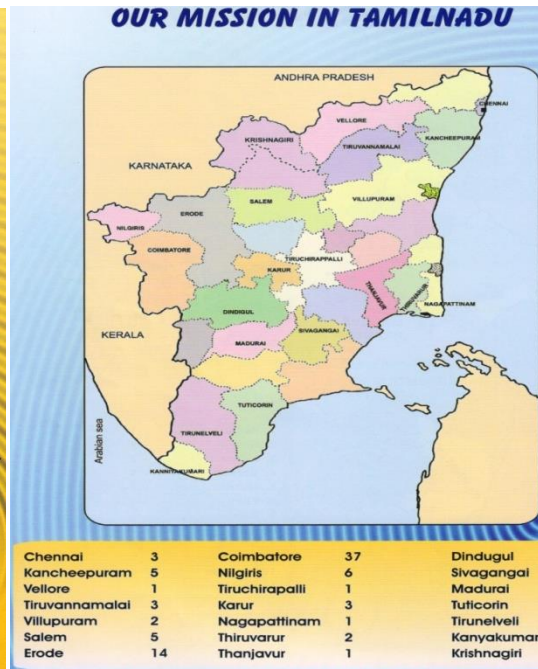


பாப்பரசர் சபையாக உயர்த்தப்பட்ட நூலில் அனைத்து கன்வியர்களும் அரங்கேறிய காட்சி

Mission Abroad



Mission in India and Tamil Nadu



Sesquicentenary celebration



Transfer of Mortal Remains of Fr. Ravel, from Sungam Cemetery to Presentation Generalate, Coimbatore



NihilObstatfrom the Congregation for Causes of Saints



Prot. N. 3433-3/19

Romae, die 8 Martii A.D. 2019

Excellentissime Domine,

Litteris, die 22 mensis Decembris anni 2018 editis, Excellentia Tua ab hac Congregatione de Causis Sanctorum quaerit utrum ex parte Sanctae Sedis aliquid obsit Causae Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Iosephi Aloisii Ravel, Sacerdotis professi Societatis Parisiensis Missionum ad Exteras Gentes et Fundatoris Congregationis Sororum Franciscanum a Praesentatione Beatae Mariae Virginis, qui vita anno Domini 1881 functus est.

Re explorata, placet mihi Excellentiam Tuam certiore reddere ex parte Sanctae Sedis nihil obstare quominus Causa Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Iosephi Aloisii Ravel peragi possit, servatis "Normis servandis in Inquisitionibus ab Episcopis faciendis in Causis Sanctorum", die 7 mensis Februarii anno 1983 ab eadem Congregatione editis.

Excellentiae Tuae addictissimus
in Domino

Dr. Marcello Bartolucci
+Marcellus Bartolucci
Archiepiscopus tit. Mevanien.
a Secretis

P. Boguslaus Turek, C.S.M.A.
Boguslaus Turek, C.S.M.A.
Subsecretarius

Exc.mo ac Rev.mo Domino
D. Thomae Aquinati Lephonse
Episcopo Coimbaturensi
Bishop's House
Post Bag No. 6
Coimbatore - 641 001
Tamilnadu, South India

Congregation
for the Cause of Saints
Prot.N.3433-3/19

Rome, 8 March A.D. 2019

Your Excellency,

In the year 2018 by the letters written on the 22nd day on the Month of December, your Excellency have enquired of the Congregation for Cause of Saints, if there is any objection on the part of the Holy See for the Cause of Beatification and Canonisation of the Servant of God Joseph Louis Ravel, a professed priest of the Society of Paris Foreign Missionaries, who died in the year 1881.

The matter having been examined, it pleases me to inform Your Excellency with certitude that on the part of the Holy See there is no objection that Cause of the Servant of God may be taken up, provided that the Norms to be observed in the enquiries conducted by the Bishops, issued by the same Congregation on the 7th day on the Month of February in the year 1983.

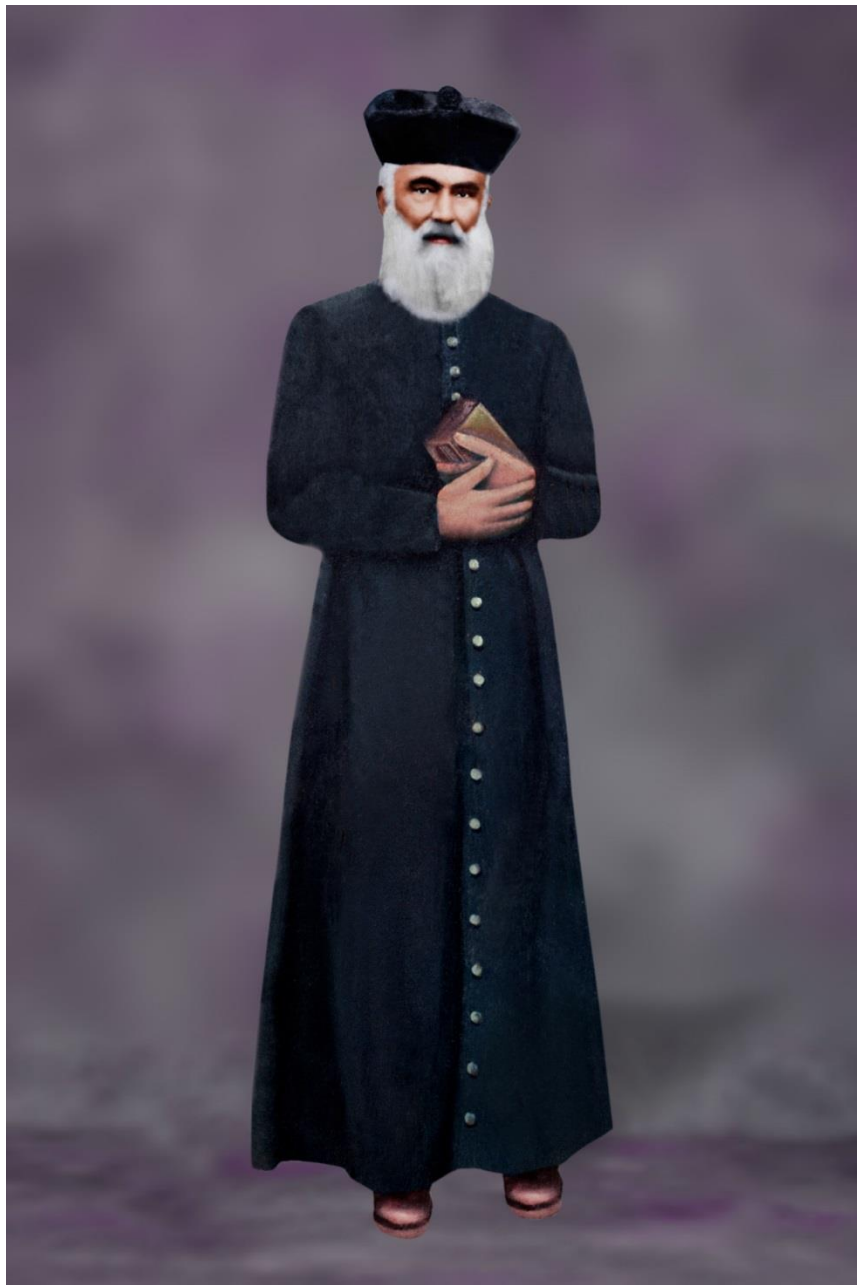
We remain united to your excellency in the Lord.

Marcellus Bartolucci
Archiepiscopus tit. Mevanien s Secretis

Boguslaus Turek C.S.M.A.
Subsecretarius

His Lordship Most Rev.
Dr. Thomae Aquinati
Lephonse
Bishop of Coimbatore
Bishop House
Post Bag No. 6
Coimbatore - 641 001
Tamilnadu, South India.

Opening Session for the Cause of Beatification / Canonization of Servant of God Joseph Louis







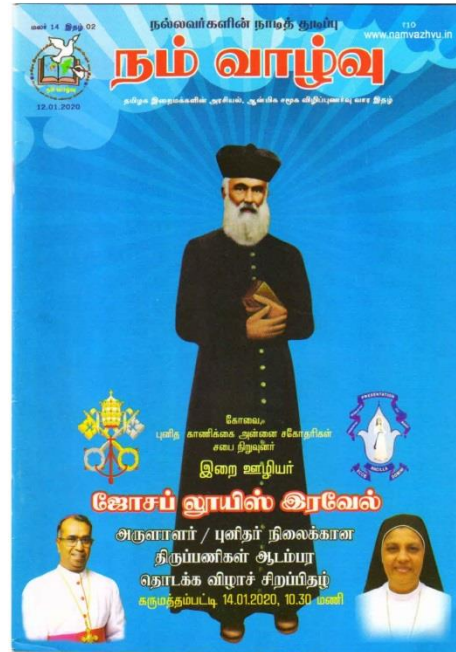
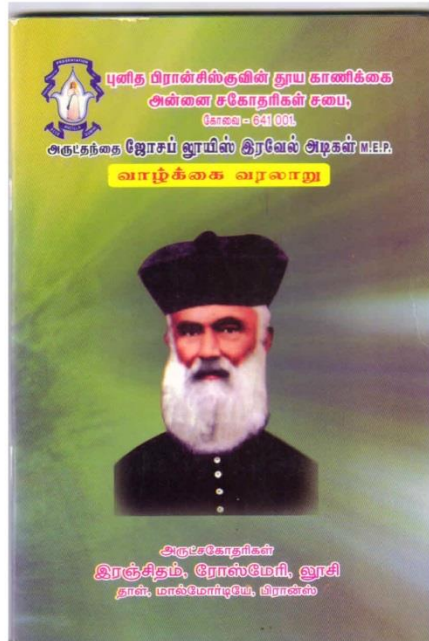
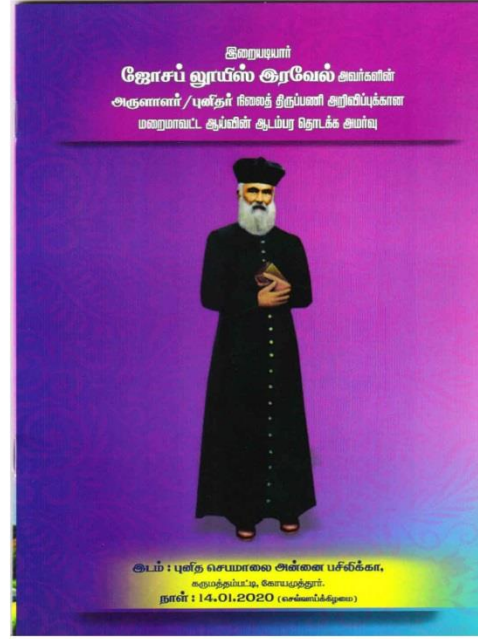
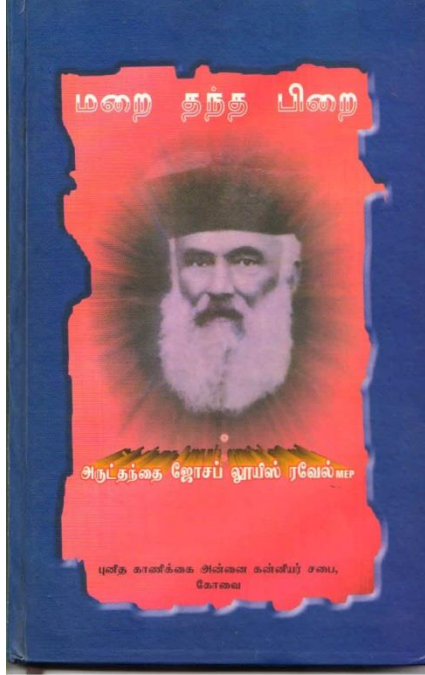


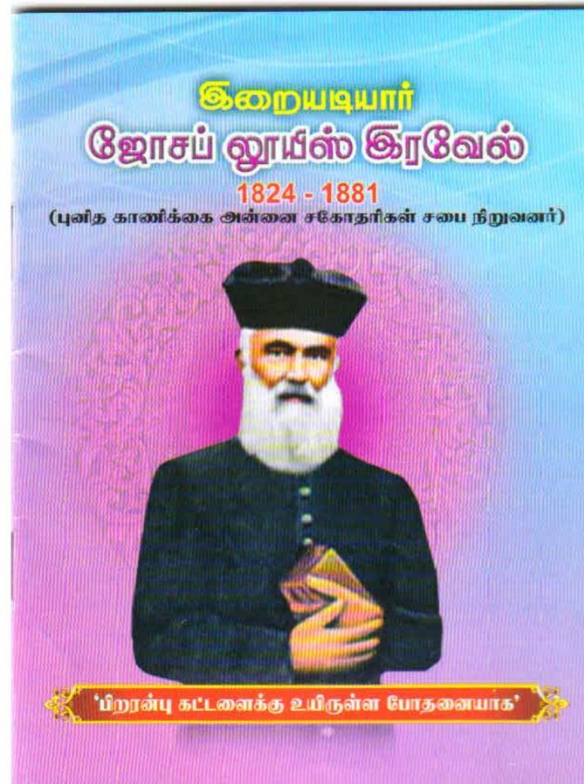
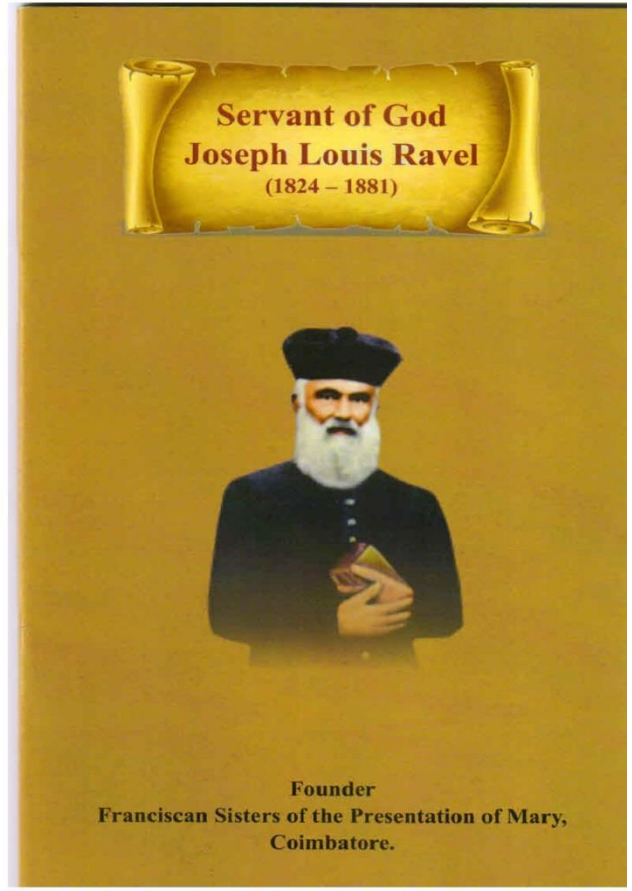
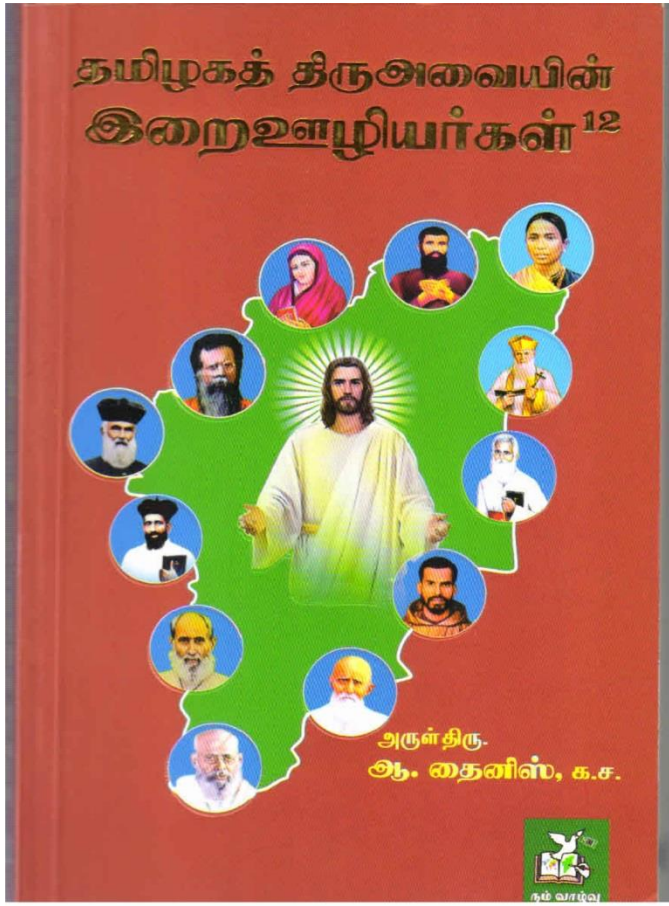






Books about our Founder





Prayer for the Beatification of Servant of God Joseph Louis Ravel

The Founder of the Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of Mary Prayer for the Beatification of Servant of God Joseph Louis Ravel

God our loving Father, we thank you for having graced the Holy Church with Servant of God Joseph Louis Ravel, who had an ardent love for you and for Mary our Mother. He brought us a living image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, by his radiant living of the Gospel in his life and made us to live a life of witness like him. Following his foot steps, help us to cultivate the minds of the people with a pure heart, with a wide range of love and tranquility, in order to make the work of women's literacy and missionary life on earth. His insight that bestowed upon the poor with the simplicity of St. Francis of Assisi, inspires us to grow in virtue and live according to your will. We urge you to listen to our prayers and uplift your servant to **the Grace of being declared Blessed** and through his intercession, grant this special favour we now implore (mention your intentions here). We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

IMPRIMATUR

+ Thomas Aquinas

Bishop of Coimbatore

09.08.2019

N.B. Those who receive any favour through the intercession of servant of God Joseph Louis Ravel, are kindly requested to contact.

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