

# THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN SIHM'S LIFE AND MISSION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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## Introduction

The Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (SIHM) would like to acknowledge the invitation to contribute to the Seminar of EAO on "Implantation of the Salesian Charism in the Region: Ideals, Challenges, Answers and Results". Being a member of the Salesian Family, we too are eager to study and know more about this precious gift. This paper limits itself to the first 20 years of our foundation, i.e., from 1937 to 1957.

We can say that the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was born in a Salesian context and from the needs of the local Church in 1937, barely ten years after the opening of the Salesian mission in Thailand

When we look at our origins, we could easily realize that the Salesian Charism has permeated our life and mission right from our foundation. On the specific characteristic of our Congregation, art. 11 of our Constitutions says:

"In the service of the local Church, which is the specific role of the Society, the members will make the charism of Don Bosco appear in their religious life by their simple and moderate way of living [...]. The sisters practice family spirit in the community life, display a friendly relationship with others; they are joyful, tender, optimistic, and adapt

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themselves properly to the situation. They are ready to forgive in accordance with the teachings and examples of Jesus. They use the preventive system which is based on loving-kindness, reason and religion. An important part of the piety of the sisters is in the Holy Eucharist and Mother Mary. Aside from these, they will try to live a life 'contemplating God while fulfilling their mission of service'".<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Historical Context

The Salesians arrived in Thailand in 1925 led by the then Prefect General of the Society, Fr Pietro Ricaldone. Two years later Fr Gaetano Pasotti, who was assigned to China, was sent to Thailand. He was later elected to be the Superior of this mission in Ratchaburi.

The Holy See elevated the Mission to an Apostolic Prefecture in 1934, entrusting it to Fr Pasotti. The Center of the Mission was in Bang-Nok-Khuek. This new Mission included 15 provinces beginning from Ratchaburi down to the South. Two Salesian missionaries had been visiting the parishioners periodically from 1933.

As a zealous missionary, especially after he was ordained Bishop on 28 May 1934, Mgr Gaetano Pasotti began his mission with the pastoral visit. After being made the Prefect Apostolic of Ratchaburi in 1938 he visited the Catholics scattered in the provinces of Prachuap Khirikan, Chumphorn, NakornSriThammarat, (Hatyai) Songkhla, Pattani and (Betong) Yala, together with the missionaries.

In 1948 Bishop Pasotti sent two missionaries from Chumphorn to Narathiwat in the far South. They also visited the Catholic families scattered along the way – in NakornSriThammarat, Phuket, Ranong, Songkhla, Betong, Yala.

From these pastoral visits from Huahin to the southernmost part of Thailand, the Bishop realized that there were a lot of adults

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<sup>1</sup> *Constitutions of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Suratthani, [SIHM Publication] 1985, art. 11.

and youth – catholics and non-catholics – who were waiting for spiritual help, like sheep without shepherds. He himself wrote:

“Filled with anxiety, I have seen with my own eyes that along the peninsula from Ratchaburi down to the border in the South, *there is not a single mission center*. The people are still in darkness [...]. When will God's time come? We hope that in this XIX Century of the world's redemption Christian love will make us bring salvation to this world by building mission centers in every place where Christ has not yet arrived.”<sup>2</sup>

## **2. The Implantation of the Salesian charism in SIHM's life**

When Bishop Gaetano Pasotti received the Catholic Mission of Ratchaburi, he was confronted with the question of how to bring the Good News to the people, specially the young, and how to develop the Diocese – how to bring the Kingdom to all the people in his territory. He thought of preparing personnel for the mission. He planned to promote the diocesan clergy and also found a new congregation of sisters.

It is a gospel truth that one cannot give what one does not have. It can, therefore, be rightly said that in founding his spiritual daughters, Bishop Pasotti, himself a Salesian, could not relay any other spirit to this group except that of the Salesian charism. A reflection written by Bishop Michael Praphon Chaicharoen, the second successor to the Catholic Mission of Surat Thani, in the book celebrating “The Golden Jubilee of the Congregation”, he underlined:

“First of all, I think that the fact that the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have been related with the Salesians is part of the plan of God, who made a Salesian

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<sup>2</sup> Gaetano PASOTTI, *Splendide giornate di entusiasmo e di bene*, BS LVII (maggio 1933) 152-153.

Bishop to be their founder [...]. It is no wonder at all that the SIHM have been related with the Salesians since their birth.”<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1. *Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Founder*

When Bishop Pasotti founded the Congregation of “Sisters-Servants” he wanted one that would “*be all to all*”, both for the Christians and non-Christians. He wanted to have one that would live and do some particular tasks in the Diocese which the priests could not do. This would enable the priests to do their pastoral work more effectively. He gave the SIHM the ‘*fourteen point rule*’ as their ‘*path of life*’, and he sent this to the Propaganda Fide for approval. The Rules reflected his vision of what this new Congregation would “BE” and what they would “DO” in the local Church. The “fourteen point rule”<sup>4</sup> was:

What to “BE”:

- zealous missionaries
- Thai for the Thais
- filially obedient to the Superior of the Mission as to a most loving father
- adaptable to the culture so as to easily find an open way to souls
- all things to all... be shining examples of “gentleness of heart and humility”

What to “DO”:

- be engaged in works of charity on behalf of the female group... in religious promotion, education, etc.

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<sup>3</sup> Praphon CHAICHAROEN, *Return to the Past and Looking Forward to the Future in The Golden Jubilee of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Bangkok, Sarn Muanchon Printing Company 1987, p.155.

<sup>4</sup> Gaetano PASOTTI, *The Path of Life: First Edition of the Society of Sisters Helpers* [a series of 14 two-page documents sent to Propaganda Fide], Bang Nok Khuek 1937.

- be available to help missionaries set up the mission stations especially in house-keeping – kitchen service and laundry – and the care of the Church
- select deserving individuals from among the members and give opportunity to acquire necessary qualifications
- be available to help in any other works of charity: visiting the sick, preparing people for the sacraments, baptizing children at the point of death, preparing candidates for baptism and first communion, caring for young orphan girls and those at risk
- make every effort to spread good books and literature; zealously promote the formation and development of Catholic Action Groups
- give praise to the Lord for having been made worthy to suffer a little for the sake of His name
- open one or more houses for girls who show some evidence of religious vocation, and prepare those who have the ability to acquire teacher's certification

## 2.2. *Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Missionary*

Being the 'one who was sent' in order to build the local Church where the light of Christ has not yet reached, Bishop Pasotti wanted that his spiritual daughters be authentic missionaries to propagate the Good News and cultivate the faith of the Christian community. He wanted them to do pastoral work to help maintain the faith of the Christian communities and to keep them strong.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.3. *Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, the Salesian*

As a son of Don Bosco, Bishop Pasotti taught the Salesian method and spirit to his spiritual daughters by his words and example so that they could see this in real practice, assimilate them and live

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. P. CHAICHAROEN, *Return to the Past ...*, p.155.

them in their mission. He wanted the new Congregation he founded to be missionaries in the Diocese with the Salesian charism.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. The Role of the Salesians of Don Bosco**

In the initial stage of the Congregation, Bishop Gaetano Pasotti asked the Salesian priests to teach his spiritual daughters catechism and religious life, preach monthly recollections and annual retreats, and also be their confessors. Among the Salesians who were associated with the SIHM's life and mission were Fr Job Carnini, who came to teach catechism everyday; Fr Silvio de Munari, the first confessor; Fr Mario Barbero, Fr Peter Jellici and Fr Silvio Provera, confessors; Fr Carlo Casetta, Fr Mario Ruzeddu and Fr Joseph Forlazzini, preachers of recollections and annual retreats; Fr Egidio Bottain, teacher of religious life; Fr John Casetta, the first Salesian Provincial who visited the sisters; Fr Giorgio Bainotti, teacher of the Constitutions to the novices. All the Salesians were very patient in forming the new candidates to be good religious. They helped Bishop Gaetano Pasotti make his plan come true.<sup>7</sup>

### **4. The Role of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians**

In a letter to the Propaganda Fide, dated 29 March 1939, Bishop Gaetano Pasotti wrote, "The spirit of the Congregation follows the model of the FMA's, especially with regard to the education of young women." He wanted his new Congregation to follow the model of the FMA's because he was convinced that they were faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. With God's inspiration there was close collaboration between the Salesian Sisters and the Bishop. He always expressed his gratitude to the FMA's when he wrote to their Mother General:

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.153-164.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sompong THABPING, *The story of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary 1937-1997* in *Yon Roy PhuRapChai* [Tracing the Steps of the Servants]. Vol.II, Ratchaburi, SIHM Publication 1996, pp., 24-25, *Ibid.* Vol. III, pp.8,16, 33.

“I do not know how to describe to you my profound feelings in appreciation for the dedication of Sr Antonietta Morellato who helped in the foundation of this new Congregation of the ‘Sisters-Servants’. Please relay my gratitude also to your Councillors.”<sup>8</sup>

Since the FMA Sisters did not accept to work in the small centers of the mission as they had to work directly for the children and the young women according to their Constitutions, it was indeed providential that Bishop Gaetano Pasotti and the diocesan councillors of Ratchaburi agreed to found a new congregation to work with the priests in various parishes and centers. The Bishop, however, requested the Mother General of the FMA's to send two sisters to help in the foundation of this new congregation. The superiors of the FMAs accepted the plan wholeheartedly. The sisters selected for this purpose of assisting and forming the candidates of this new congregation were Sr Antonietta Morellato and Sr Luigina di Giorgio.

*Sr Antonietta Morellato* was appointed the first novice mistress even though she was only 26 years old and just 5 years in the country. Her Superiors wanted her to stay for only three years. However, the Bishop asked for a special consideration. In a letter to the FMA Superior General, the Bishop expressed three points:

- his gratitude for the help of the FMA congregation through the presence of Sr Antonietta Morellato
- the exemption obtained from Propaganda Fide from the age impediment of the novice mistress who was only 26 years old
- his important request, “don't leave me too quickly because this kind of work is very delicate”

Eventually, she served as novice mistress for 15 years (1937-1952). She was both the novice mistress and the superior of the

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<sup>8</sup> Sompong THABPING, *FMA: Phu wang raak tan chivit Phakhinee Phu Rap Chai* [FMA: Who helped to lay the foundation of Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary], Bangkok, Star Boom Interprint 2003, p.25.

community until 1941 since the Superiors could not find any other sister to help her. Her presence, however, brought joy to the first group of candidates.<sup>9</sup>

*Sr Luigina Di Giorgio* was the first superior. Being a nurse, she took care of the sick and looked after the health of the candidates. Being also a dress-maker she taught needlework to the candidates. She did not learn formally the Thai language since she had to plunge herself immediately into work. She stitched the cassocks of the Salesian seminarians and priests. While teaching needlework in Nariwattana School, she also took care of the sick in the small health center near the Nativity of Mary Church, Bang Nok Khuek, and helped in the activities of the Catholic groups, especially the young women and women's group.

In 1941 Bishop Pasotti asked her to be assistant of the professed sisters. Finally, in 1944, she was officially appointed the first Superior of the Congregation of the Sisters-Servants. She held this position until 1964. After 20 years she continued to live at Narivitaya School, Ratchaburi, even though she was no longer the Superior of the SIHM and took on the role of special councillor until she died on 14 September 1987. She had been with the SIHM Sisters for 46 years and dedicated her missionary life to give life to the SIHM Congregation. She was always the model of a faithful religious until her death.<sup>10</sup>

*Sr Esterina Brando* was the second novice mistress. She got involved closely with the SIHM when Sr Antonietta Morellato was made Provincial of the FMA in Thailand in February 1952. On 11 May 1953 Sr Esterina Brando began her mission as the novice mistress with one second-year novice and ten postulants. On 2 May 1956, after the first profession of the 7 novices she had formed, she was appointed novice mistress and superior of the FMA community in Banpong, Ratchaburi. She left the SIHM Sisters on 19 May 1956.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.6-13.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.16-18.

Even now the SIHM Sisters still feel very close to her and she continues to treat us as her daughters.<sup>11</sup>

## **5. Absorbing the Salesian Charism from Life Experience**

We learn more easily from our experience. Living with another person for some time would enable us to absorb some of the other's values and make them our own. Living and working together with the Salesians and the FMA Sisters presented the SIHM Sisters the opportunity to absorb the values of the Salesian Charism. From them and with them the SIHM imbibed the mission 'to be and to do' in the same spirit.

### *5.1. Cooperation in the Foundation and Formation of the SIHM*

The presence of the FMA Sisters helped the SIHM actualize the '14 point rule' envisioned for them by Bishop Gaetano Pasotti as 'the path of life'. They cooperated in the activities of the parishes – teaching catechism, housekeeping, laundry and cooking. The Salesian Sisters in-charge encouraged the candidates to take the teachers' certification exams and trained them to be certified nurses to help in the pastoral care of the parishioners. It was through these daily interactions that the FMA sisters were able to transmit what one should "BE" and what one should "DO".

Through the Salesians and the FMAs, the SIHM Sisters learned more about Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. Many important Salesian events also occurred during this period, among them the canonization of Don Bosco in 1934, the golden jubilee of his death in 1938, the beatification of Dominic Savio in 1950, and the beatification Mother Maria Mazzarello in 1951. These celebrations aroused the interest and devotion of the sisters for these holy figures and increased their desire to imitate them and put into practice their 'spirit'.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* pp.19-22.

## 5.2. *Devotion to the Eucharist and Solemn Liturgy*

Both the SIHM founder (Bishop Gaetano Pasotti) and their first formators (the FMA sisters) were truly devoted to the Holy Eucharist. Through their teachings and example they encouraged the candidates to prepare well the Sunday liturgy, especially the singing and the services. For the celebration of solemnities and feast days, the Salesian Sisters would play the organ and teach us the songs, and we helped to decorate the church.

Some of the unforgettable teachings of Bishop Pasotti along this line were:

- “Our heart has to cling to God, i.e., our heart should be inflamed everyday for love of Him as the lamp near the tabernacle”<sup>12</sup>
- “I know that you love to be with Jesus in the Eucharist. There is nothing more joyful than to be in front of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. We can express our minds when we come to see Him in the Eucharist.”<sup>13</sup>
- “Let’s be intimate with Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. If we are separated from Him, we will lack happiness and peace.”<sup>14</sup>
- “Let’s be close to Him by receiving Him often; don’t leave it without any suitable reason.”<sup>15</sup>

On the anniversary of the consecration of Bishop Gaetano Pasotti on 24 June 1942, everyone took turns to be with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to pray for his intentions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gaetano PASOTTI, *Kam Sangson* [Teaching for Sisters Servants]. *The small collection and translation in English*, Hua-Hin, SIHM Publication 2002 [excerpts from the chronicles of Bank-nok khuek], 9 October 1938.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 October 1946.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 May 1950.

<sup>15</sup> S. THABPING, *FMA: Phu wang raak ...*, p.49.

<sup>16</sup> Archives of SIHM, Hua-Hin (ASIHM), *Chronicles of the First House in Bang-nok khuek*, 24 June 1942.

### 5.3. *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Bishop Pasotti reminded us often that Jesus loves the Sisters-Servants very much because He wanted us to replace Him in this world. The Sacred Heart of Jesus looked at us and felt happy because of our good will; He blessed our Congregation. "Our love, if it does not belong totally to Jesus Christ, would become a dead love."<sup>17</sup>

### 5.4. *Filial Love to the Blessed Virgin Mary*

Bishop Gaetano Pasotti considered the Blessed Virgin Mary as the support of his vocation. He contemplated her as the Lord's disciple who answered 'Yes' to God's plan of the Incarnation. He dedicated himself to her and placed his entire mission under her protection. He taught his spiritual daughters: "Let's love the Holy Eucharist and the Blessed Mother very much."<sup>18</sup>

In another place he said, "I placed you under Mary's protection. I have done this because all the virtues and asceticism to be good and holy religious come from her. Do you understand that the future of the Congregation, the holiness of the members and all the virtues that we acquire must come from her?"<sup>19</sup>

As true daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Sr Antonietta Morellato and Sr Luigina di Giorgio showed profound devotion to the Virgin Mary, and they transmitted this to the SIHM Sisters. From January 1938 every 24<sup>th</sup> of the month the sisters would celebrate a special liturgy to pay homage and promote love and devotion to Mary Help of Christians. They also prayed the Holy Rosary together everyday. The chronicles of 1944 record an event that showed the special intervention of the Blessed Mother:

"On 24 January 1944, the monthly memorial of Mary Help of Christians, Sr Luigina di Giorgio brought the abnormal

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<sup>17</sup> G. PASOTTI, *Kam Sangson*, 5 April 1946.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, December 1939.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 August 1949.

16 year old Magdalena to attend Mass at the Church. Bishop Gaetano Pasotti blessed her after invoking the Blessed Mother. Miraculously, she recovered and was back to normal. There was no need to shackle her with chains anymore. Everybody was surprised and happy for her to obtain the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. This was an authentic miracle attested by the two Salesian Sisters who took care of her.”<sup>20</sup>

From the teachings of their founder and the devotion shown by their first formators, the SIHM Sisters slowly developed this filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

### 5.5. *Contemplation in Action*

Through the examples and teachings of Sr Antonietta Morellato and Sr Luigina di Giorgio, the SIHM Sisters were encouraged to pray even while they were sewing, gardening or doing other duties. There was a provision in the time-table to pray together every half-an-hour in the sewing room. This enabled us to establish intimate relationship with God. Bishop Gaetano Pasotti also wrote: “Try to make your work holy especially by saying often some ejaculatory prayers of petition.”

### 5.6. *Family Spirit*

One predominant characteristic of the new community was the ‘family spirit’. From the Salesians, from their formators and the FMA community the SIHM Sisters learned to live like a family. The solidarity of the FMA Sisters and the communion with Sr Antonietta and Sr Luigina touched the lives and impressed the hearts of the SIHM Sisters. When the Superiors of the Salesians or the FMAs came to visit Thailand, they also came to visit our community, which gave us the feeling of being in the same family. Many times, feasts were celebrated together and meals were shared. The annual retreat was also done together. An SIHM sister wrote: “We feel deeply grateful to the FMA Superior, Sr Maria Esterina Brando. We don’t know

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<sup>20</sup> ASIHM, *Chronicles of the First House in Bang-nok khuek*, 24 May 1944.

how to thank her enough. Love and gratitude will always be deep in our hearts because she loved and helped us a lot.”

## 6. The SIHM in the Local Church

Bishop Gaetano Pasotti wrote in the book *The Path of Life* of the Congregation of Sisters-Servants some guidelines on ‘how TO BE’ and ‘what TO DO’ in the Church:

- The institute of Sisters-Servants, helpers of the Catholic Mission of Ratchaburi, is a Congregation of Thai women by birth who profess the simple vows and live an intense missionary spirit. They are Thais to serve the Thais.<sup>21</sup>
- It is the purpose of the Institute to engage in works of charity on behalf of the female population. Within this field and within the boundaries of their mandates, the members shall engage in every aspect of the missionary apostolate – religious promotion, education, charity.<sup>22</sup>
- The sisters shall also be available to help the missionary at established mission stations with housekeeping – food service, laundry and linen care. They shall attend also to the care of the Church.<sup>23</sup>
- Clinics, minor surgeries and maternity care are important means of promoting the faith, as well as works of charity. Hence, the Institute shall take pains to select good individuals from among its members and give them the opportunity to acquire the necessary certifications for these professions.<sup>24</sup>
- The Sisters-Servants shall also be available to help in any other work of charity, whether material or spiritual, such as visiting the sick, preparing them for the sacraments, baptizing

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<sup>21</sup> G. PASOTTI, *The Path of life ...*, No.1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* No. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* No. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* No. 4.

children at the point of death, preparing candidates for Baptism and for first Communion, caring for the young orphan girls and girls at risk.<sup>25</sup>

- The sisters shall make every effort to spread good books and literature. Likewise, within the guidelines set by the Superiors, they shall zealously promote the formation and development of Catholic Action Groups.<sup>26</sup>
- With trust in the help of Divine Providence, the sisters shall open one or more houses for girls who give evidence of a religious vocation. In such houses, the course of studies shall conform to the current government programs. Furthermore, the Institute shall take pains to acquire the legal certification as teachers for those sisters who exhibit the ability.<sup>27</sup>

Studying these guidelines attentively, it could be concluded that the SIHM Sisters were called “to be all to all”. A solid formation was required to make them ready for various skills. It was on 30 June 1941 that the first group of sisters began to teach in Nareewatana School, *and they had to do everything*.

The presence of the SIHM Sisters in the local Church can be divided into three phases:

### 6.1. *Preparation for the Mission (1937-1938)*

The first group of SIHM Sisters spent one year of novitiate in Bang Nok Khuek. Sr Antonietta Morellato assisted them with loving-kindness and patience. Bishop Gaetano Pasotti also followed up their growth.

After their first profession in 1940, the two sisters were assigned to the Salesian seminary in Bang Nok Khuek. They worked with the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* No. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* No. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* No. 10.

children, the young and married catholic women. With their FMA Sisters-formators they carried out their activities in the Salesian spirit.

In order to arouse their missionary spirit Bishop Pasotti would share with them his experiences during his pastoral visits to the South of Thailand. He advised them, 'Prepare your soul to be strong and holy in order to be good examples to others'. On 20 January 1941, having returned from the pastoral visit to a new small parish, Bishop Pasotti addressed the sisters:

"In the various parishes, they are asking the Sisters to be there. However, it is necessary to be responsible to your duties first and to love one another. I asked all the formators to help you avoid bad habits. You have to be like a good painter who knows the defective part and makes corrections with it. To live and work in the parish, you must know your duties well and love one another as well."<sup>28</sup>

## 6.2. *Presence in the Local Church*

In 1941 one of the sisters began to teach at Nariwattana School and SIHM opened a new mission at Don Kra Bueang. Two sisters were assigned to work there. This was the first time that the professed sisters of this new Institute left the convent to work in a parish. They helped the parish priest with the housekeeping and assisted in activities for the catholic women.<sup>29</sup> In 1943 two other sisters were sent to the parish of Kok-mod-tanoi, in Damnoen-saduak. They did the same work as in Don Kra Bueang.<sup>30</sup> In 1944 one professed sister was made principal of Nareewatana School.<sup>31</sup>

It is significant to note that during this period Mother Maria Esterina Brando appointed Sr Luigina di Giorgio to be the Head

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<sup>28</sup> S. THABPING, *The story of the Sisters Servants ...*, II, p.44.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Sompong THABPING, *The story of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, in *The Golden Jubilee of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Bangkok, Sarn Muanchon Printing Company 1987, p. 97.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

Superior in charge of the Sisters-Servants. She could be considered their first Superior. Her role among the SIHM Sisters was also significant because she trained the first group of sisters to organize activities for the catholic women – the children, the young and the married.

### 6.3. *The First Perpetual Professions*

The year 1948 was a special one for the SIHM Congregation. The first group of sisters were preparing themselves for their final vows. This group left behind their respective assignments, returned to the mother house and dedicated themselves to the final preparation for perpetual profession, the total offering of oneself to God. The formators for this final stage were Sr Antonietta Morellato, the novice mistress, and Fr Constantine Cavalla SDB.<sup>32</sup>

3 May 1949 marked a historical day for the SIHM Congregation. On this day six sisters made their final vows. This group of sisters was always considered the ‘pillars’ of the Institute.<sup>33</sup>

Another important event during this year was the distribution of the book of the Constitutions for the first time. This was a tangible proof of the labour of love of Bishop Gaetano Pasotti, Sr Antonietta Morellato and Sr Luigina di Giorgio. Aside from this, the little book of prayers and devotions were also given to all the professed sisters. This served as instrument and guidelines to lead the SIHM Sisters to a close relationship with God.<sup>34</sup>

## 7. **The Mission after Bishop Gaetano Pasotti (1951-1957)**

The death of Bishop Gaetano Pasotti on 3 September 1950 left the SIHM Sisters without their spiritual father when they were still very young. It did not take long however, to have a new shepherd in the person of Bishop Peter Caretto. He was ordained Bishop and successor to Bishop Pasotti in 1951.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

In 1952 Sr Antonietta Morellato was appointed Provincial of the FMA in Thailand. She stayed with the SIHM Sisters for another year and in 1953 she finally left to assume fully her new post as Provincial. Sr Esterina Brando substituted her during her absence and it was not until 1956 that she was given the task of novice mistress.

In 1954 the SIHM Sisters opened a new mission in the parish of Thamuang, Kanchanaburi. In 1955 with the help of Msgr. Peter Carretto, Fr Peter Iellici and Sr Luigina di Giorgio, the SIHM constructed a new school of their own – Narivittaya School, Ratchaburi. This became the new mother house. On 22 January 1956 an oratory was opened here where the children could play and educative activities were organized for them.<sup>35</sup>

All these events presented opportunities for the SIHM Sisters to grow and mature in the Salesian spirit that they had absorbed through the years of formation under the tutelage of a Salesian Bishop, the Salesian confreres, and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

## **Conclusion**

The SIHM Sisters believe that their belonging to the Salesian Family was not by chance but was really the design of Divine Providence. Though there was a period of uncertainty and confusion, yet through the firm guidance of Bishop Pasotti and the FMA formators the SIHM Sisters were able to know, absorb and live the spirit of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. They understood and strove to be 'signs and bearers of God's love for the young' in their parish missions and pastoral tasks for the children and the young in schools. They lived according to the asceticism of the Salesian Charism which included work, temperance, loving-kindness, fraternal charity and educational expertise. The SIHM Sisters are very grateful to the Salesians and the FMA Sisters who worked hard in order to teach this 'precious gift' to them through their lives and examples. We are now faced with the challenge of sowing this charism in the hearts of

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.101-103.

the new generation of members, so that in their turn they may become 'signs and bearers of God's love for the young', and become 'all to all'. The motto proposed by Bishop Gaetano Pasotti and adopted as such continues to inspire us: "*Caritas Urget Nos!*".