

St. Ann's Provincialate,  
Gollapudi P.O.  
Krishna District  
Andhra Pradesh - 521 225  
0866 - 2970933/ 2975033



**18<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

***“The joy of the Lord is my strength” ( Nehemiah 8 :10 )***

Dearest Sisters,

The one who found her strength in the joy of the Lord, the one who experienced the Lord Jesus, as her song, her shield, her salvation, the one who always and everywhere radiated the joy of the Lord- our dearest Sr. Graziana Mathew is no more with us. Jesus, her beloved spouse knocked at the door of her heart while in the hospital, beckoning her home to himself, at around 7.30 a.m. on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020, leaving us no chance to bid her a final good-bye and making her the first victim of Covid 19 in our Congregation. Too quick and sudden came her end but to His holy designs in faith do we bend.

Sr. M. Graziana (Aleyamma Mathew) hailing from Vaikom in Kottayam District of Kerala State, was born on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1935 to Mr. Mathai Mathew and Mrs. Thresiamma a devout couple. Third of six children, all girls, little Aleyamma grew up together with her siblings in a loving and prayerful atmosphere that was conducive in nurturing religious vocations in three of them. Her sister, Sr. Benedict is a Carmelite Sister placed in Ernakulam, Kerala and her youngest sister, named Sr. Theresa Marie belongs to St. Joseph's Congregation and is serving the Lord and His people in France.

Sr. Graziana joined the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann at Secunderabad on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1954. After her clothing in January 1955, she made her First Profession of Vows on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1957 and Perpetual Profession on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1963. She had the joy of celebrating her Silver Jubilee in 1982, Ruby Jubilee in 1997, Golden Jubilee in 2007 and Diamond Jubilee in 2017.

She was sent, after her First Profession, for six months to St. Ann's Convent, Bolarum. In June 1957 she went to Bangalore as a student to complete her pre-degree course. In June 1958 she was placed in St. Ann's Convent, Secunderabad where she remained till October and in November moved out to Bansilalpet to form part of the Community there. As a student at St. Theresa's College, Eluru from June 1959 to May 1962 she completed her Bachelor of Arts degree and then went to Vishakhapatnam to pursue her two-year Masters Degree in Economics. On having qualified herself in 1964, she was appointed as a Lecturer in the St. Theresa's College, Eluru where she remained till May 1976 and returned again in May 1977 after a year of Exclaustration to carry on the same assignment till May 1992.

From June 1992 to May 1995 Sister in charge- St. Ann's Convent, Kazipet

From June 1995 to May 1998 Sister in charge- St. Theresa's Convent, Eluru.

From June 1998 to May 1999 St. Ann's Convent, Kanhangad

From June 1999 to May 2004 Sister in charge- St. Anthony's Convent, Vijayawada.

From June 2004 to May 2005 Sister in charge- St. Theresa's Convent, Eluru.

From June 2005 to May 2006 Sister in charge of the Boarding, Mangalpalem.

From June 2006 to May 2007 Sister in charge- Clemenza Villa, Eluru.

From June 2007 to May 2012 Sister in charge- St. Ann's Convent, Gollapudi.

From June 2012 to May 2015 St. Ann's Convent, Eluru. PG Directress

From June 2015 to May 2020 St. Ann's Convent, Eluru. In charge of the Community College

In July 2020 transferred to St. Anthony's Convent, Gollapudi

My acquaintance with dear Sr. Graziana dates back to the end of the sixties, 1968 to be precise, where as a young teenage girl I found myself her student and she my History Lecturer. To be frank not that I appreciated her much as a teacher but I admired her more as a person- always joyful, approachable, available. I remember the day when we both happened to be in the Library and much to my surprise she approached my table and began a conversation during which she asked me if I had ever thought of becoming a Sister. I remember too, I bluntly replied saying I very much wanted to, but had changed my mind because of some unpleasant happening with a Sister. She cheered me up and left. Needless to say, she was happy to see her student, twelve years later a happy Sister of St. Ann!

Rather than me highlighting the person she was, I leave the testimonies of lived experiences to speak for themselves. Here is what Sr. Theresa Cherian, the Provincial Superior of South Province has to say:

*"It is very difficult and painful to think that our Sr. Graziana is no more. Reminiscing the bygone days of our living together in Eluru, I have the following to tell of her. Sr. Graziana was my guru for two years and mentor for 23 years. I owe much to her for what I am today. She was naturally blessed with the tendency to rejoice with the joyful and weep with the sorrowing. A friend to the friendless, a neighbor to the marginalized Sr. Graziana could easily get involved in the struggles of the poor and walk the extra mile to uplift them. She had been generous in bestowing her natural endowments of motherly affection, understanding gestures and compassionate ways, encouraging smile and joyful spirit on those who come to her. She had been a blessing for everyone who lived with her. Dearest Sr Graziana, too swift was your journey to eternity. You lived your life on earth joyfully and rode away without tarrying. Your laughter has faded in to the silent valley. But the echo would continue to ring in our ears. May the angels and Saints welcome you with joyful praises to the eternal Kingdom."*

Sr. Sunila Rani who spent long years together with Sr. Graziana in the Community of St. Ann's, Eluru expresses herself thus:

*"With a heart full of sorrow I express my deep sentiments of gratitude to Sr. Graziana whom I fondly used to call Sr. Grass. Sister was my neighbour in the Chapel. She never ever missed Community prayers. She always used to say "you and I have gun throats, so let us pray the prayers loudly and praise God". She had a pleasant loving disposition with which she made us feel at home in her company. Though senior in age and religious profession, she got along well with the young and old equally. Age was not a barrier for her to take active part in the Community and College programmes. Punctuality was the hall mark of our dear Sister. A good host who enjoyed everybody's company. Sr. Graziana was not only a qualified academician but was also qualified in holiness. I used to see her daily*

*reading books on the Gospel reflections and used to prepare herself dedicatedly for the next day's liturgy.*

*A person who always upheld and appreciated others with her positive strokes, she helped build the person and kept the Community united. She was a very approachable, passionate, cheerful and jovial person. With her witty jokes, she made the Community recreations lively and joyful. One could find Sr. Graziana soon after breakfast sitting and reading the news papers of the day updating herself on the current affairs of the world around. She was an avid reader and would be the first to lay hands on any magazine that arrived. With her hearty laughter she brought in the much needed respite and joy after a hard day's work. Dear Sr. Graziana your loud laughter has ended but I am sure it reverberates in the heavens with the angels serenading around you."*

#### Echoes from Dr. D Madhu Malathi Professor in the Department of Economics

*"I was very fortunate to be appointed in the P.G. Dept. of Economics in the year 1984, where Sr. Graziana was already working. From that year onwards the saga continued till today. She was there in all my life's important occasions -- from my entry into this College to this moment. I honestly say that she was my moral and spiritual "guru". I consider her as my second mother for her support and guidance. We used to discuss about spiritual matters together and I still cherish those thoughts of hers about GOD ALMIGHTY. At this juncture Sister's words are lingering in my mind -- "If you want to help or uplift anybody raise them spiritually. That is the only way to help them and strengthen them."*

*She was very loving, kind hearted, affectionate and humane in her approach. These qualities in her made all of us feel very near and close to her. A sister -- par excellence, a genuine friend, philosopher and guide, to those who approached her. Known for her childlike innocent and hearty laugh, she made her surrounding vibrant always with her lively, loud laughter. I am sure her laughter will continue to reverberate in this campus always. The sudden demise of an elderly, prayerful sister is very painful not only to the Sisters of St. Ann but also to all of us who were very closely associated with her. But we humbly submit ourselves to GOD'S WILL. As she always said -- HIS ways are beyond our comprehension. Dear Sister we all miss you a lot. We will never forget your unconditional love, your empathy, your beautiful smile and your prayers for us. Thank you so much Sister for being in my life"*

Sr. Graziana Mathew was truly fortunate to enjoy good health all through her long life with no serious health problems like diabetes or pressure etc. The hearty person she was testified to the truth that "Laughter is the best medicine." Only in the recent one or two years she began putting on much weight which slowed down her steps and hampered her movements making it difficult for her to stand if she was sitting and vice versa. As she was becoming less and less auto-sufficient and needed personal attention, it was decided to transfer her this year to St. Anthony's Convent, Gollapudi .

Sr. Graziana was suffering with fever for a few days and since she was not getting better with medication it was decided she does the Covid test, since just three days before the first Sister in the Province, Sr. Sybil had tested positive. Our fears were confirmed when she got a positive result and by then she began having difficulty in breathing which called for immediate hospitalization on 29<sup>th</sup> August evening. In the ICU she initially began showing slight improvement. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September we were informed she was taking a turn for the worse, with breathing becoming more laboured and Oxygen levels dropping. The Doctors did their best round the clock to help her pick up a bit but when all attempts proved futile, on 5<sup>th</sup> morning they

advised us to shift her to the Government Hospital as only there the type of ventilators etc she needed were available. In this time of pandemic with all the protocol to be gone through for discharge and admission, we could transfer her to the hospital only late in the evening on 5<sup>th</sup>. Hoping against hope we prayed for her recovery but alas Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September morning brought us the sad news that our dearest Sr. Graziana was called by the Lord to her eternal reward at around 7.30 a.m.

The hospital authorities initially asked us to come over at 9.30 am to talk things over but later postponed the encounter to after 11.30 being Sunday and staff coming late. I entrusted this task to Sr. Margaret Thiruvudula, the Provincial Councillor for Medicare, Sr. Rosy Kidengeth the Superior of St. Anthony's Gollapudi and Sr. Prasanthi the Nurse who was the point of reference for the Doctors treating Sr. Graziana. We were given options to choose from. Under no circumstances would the body be given and choosing for burial would mean permitting them to bury the body as and when and where they chose. The best option we decided upon was to go in for gas cremation that would ensure we could collect her mortal remains in the form of ashes and give her a due Christian and Religious burial.

The urn with the ashes arrived at the Provincialate Community at 3.45 pm the same day and was taken to the Chapel in procession with due respect and reverence and placed on a table below the Blessed Sacrament.. We did not want to shock and upset the senior Sisters who were already disturbed by the Covid cases on the increase in the Community, so the venue for funeral Mass the next day at 7 am was the Provincialate Chapel with only Sr. Rosy K the Superior joining the Provincialate Community for Mass. Travel and funeral restrictions prevented the neighbouring Communities from joining us. With due solemnity the burial rituals were carried out after Mass. Then the mortal remains were transported to our Cemetery at Gollapudi and laid to rest next to our Sisters by Sisters Margaret, Rosy, Fathima Pavani and Jyosthna S.

Dearest Sisters, I take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences and thanks to Sr. Rosy Kidengeth and every Sister of the Hospital Community, very specially our dear nurses for their care and concern extended to dearest Sr. Graziana before her being hospitalized. I also express my sincere condolences to the Sisters of the Community of St. Ann who still feel the dear departed belonged to them and to the bereaved members of her family.

I wish to thank most sincerely dearest Mother Francesca and her Council for journeying with us, with their prayers and spiritual presence especially during these trying times. My thanks are due to my dear Councillors too, who stood by me rendering every type of help needed. While we thank God for the shining example Sr. Graziana was to so many people let us offer up our suffrages for her, and continue to intercede for our Sisters of Casa Betania both the sick and suffering and those serving with love.

I greet each of you with a warm embrace.

Yours affectionately,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sr. Ernestine Fernandes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Provincial Superior.