



Delphine Hart
Founder of The Loreto
[I.B.V.M] India

Early Life

Mary Hart was born in Dublin and baptized in St. Catherine's Church, Meath Street, on December 7th, 1817. She was the eldest child of Thomas Hart and Isabella Callaghan.

Two brothers, Patrick Joseph, born in 1819 and Henry, born in 1823 were to follow, while Isabella came last.

Mary Hart became a Loreto nun taking the religious name of Delphine Hart.

She, with another ten valiant women: seven sisters and four postulants sailed on a ship named The Scotia.

They left Dublin at the end of August, 1841 and reached Calcutta, India at the end of December 1841.

Her Character

Delphine had great belief in fidelity to the rule, but she also had sound common sense and put human needs before the 'letter of the law'.

Delphine was practical enough to adjust. It was her earnest desire to ensure that the spirit of the Institute should not diminish in difficult situations where it was even more necessary for the survival and growth of the mission and for the happiness of the sisters.

Delphine was an indefatigable worker, a fact that was recognized and appreciated by the civic authorities as well as by the Church.

The quality of the education offered under her supervision and personal teaching and management brought more pupils than could be accommodated.

Mother Delphine was a bright, warm person, shrewd, kind, and capable of discerning the unspoken dreams, desires, fears and qualms of young children.

This quality of attentiveness to the individual was something she passed on to the young sisters in those early days in Calcutta.

Like all good educationists she was an avid life-long learner and it was this quality and the harvest she reaped along the way that enabled her to make the schools she founded real founts of learning.

Mother Delphine's missionary spirit is evident in the way she opened new houses all over India in quick succession.

In the times of the uprising Delphine said that she was never afraid because she had placed all in her charge under the care of the Blessed Mother of God.

Her Mission

She was a tireless ambassador for Institute unity.

This vivacious woman with her twinkling eyes and puckish expression visited the houses of the Institute in Italy, Munich, Nymphenburg and Burghausen, charming all with her warm friendliness, all the while the desire for unification of the scattered houses of the Institute growing stronger and deeper in her heart.

Though the phrase 'option for the poor' was not in circulation in Mother Delphine's time, it was a strong characteristic of her life and work.

There are numerous references in Delphine's letters to the plight of orphans, widows and the sufferings of the poor.

She had the deepest concern and care for the orphan children at Entally and even earlier for the children who attended Bow Bazar.

A large heart and a readiness to respond to need and suffering were part of the kindly nature with which God endowed her.

Throughout her long years as Chief Superior, Mother Delphine showed remarkable cheerfulness and optimism, born of her trust in God who is always faithful.

Woman of faith and obedience that she was, she just commended all failures, pains and contradictions to the loving all-knowing God who remained her constant source of strength.

The reunion of the Loreto Convents in India with Rathfarnham in 1880-1881 marked the high point of Mother Delphine's life.

She had prayed for, worked for, struggled for and travelled for this from her earliest years in Calcutta.

When Mary Delphine Hart was laid to rest in the convent grounds of Loreto Priory, Hazaribag on July 24, 1889 she had been 48 years, 6 months and 24 days on the Loreto Indian mission.

The young woman of 23 whom Mother Teresa Ball had chosen to lead the pioneering eleven into India was in her 72nd year.

Worn out with much toil, she had ended her days in the then quiet heartland of India, in her favourite convent for which she had herself selected the site and design and where she had retired in 1885.