

SISTER MARY AIDAN OF THE SACRED HEART

INST. NO. 1168



*“I thank you, O Master of Life, you have made me for yourself,
And my heart can have no repose till it rests in you.” (Tagore)*

It was in the year 1930 on the 23rd June the birth of a baby girl brought immense joy to the young couple Wattalage Simon Fernando and Martha Maria Fernando. Blest as a firstborn child, her presence was a welcome sight to her dear parents and relatives as well. At Baptism she was named as Annie Ethelreda Fernando.

Little Annie grew up to be a gentle kind hearted girl. Her country home at Rakwana had an Eco-friendly atmosphere and displayed awe inspiring scenic views for it was surrounded by the hills and waterfalls of the Southern part of the island. Her beloved parents gave Annie an education a girl required according to the time and the place. Seven years later her little brother who was named Hubert Aquinas Fernando joined the family making her a proud elder sister and adding so much of joy to the little family with the presence of the daughter and the son. They brought up their two children in a very religious atmosphere, helping them to grow in God consciousness, and to depend on His providence always.

As Annie grew up to be a young maiden, she experienced deep within her, an irresistible attraction drawing her singularly to consecrate her life to God. He gently plucked this flower from the Southern hills and placed her in the garden of Carmel to experience His All Sufficing love and to spread the fragrance of His mercy and goodness to others through her life of simplicity and prayer. In response to God’s call, Annie Ethelreda, joined the Apostolic Carmel sisters in 1957 at the age of seventeen. At her Vestition Annie was given the name Sister Mary

Aidan of the Sacred Heart. During her novitiate years she looked forward to the day of her First Profession, to serve the Lord joyfully and whole heartedly in the apostolate. She made her first commitment on the 18th of April 1959 in Mangalore. After the initial formation, she returned to the island to offer her committed life in loving service to the Lord and others.

In the 1960's in its most difficult years of hardship an Industrial school was being opened at our convent premise at Carmel Seth Pahana, Moratuwa in collaboration with the Church. Nearly 60-100 girls were being taught, needlework, knitting, crochet, flower making and various types of handicrafts. This enabled them to get employment in the nearby factories. The convent charged no board for them as it was subsidized by the Archbishop. Different sisters were taught different skills to guide the girls. Sister Aidan who was there was sent to follow a course in cookery. She was also adept at pillow lace and in handloom weaving. She taught the girls to master such skills too. She would patiently and unobtrusively spend her free time in knitting, lace- making and flower making. Besides, she possessed a creative and an innovative mind. With her rare talents she taught the girls and boarders who were under her care to make use of their free time in learning such creative and productive activities. Sales were held at the convent displaying the beautiful works of needlework, handicrafts and art. This enabled the sisters to bring income to the community. The girls too were able to earn some money. Sister Aidan was also gifted with a green thumb. She would spend quiet hours in the garden tending to rare plants. In whichever convent she was, the flowers would flutter and dance in the breeze and rare orchids would sway proudly displaying their unique beauty of fascinating multi-hued colours. She also enjoyed gifting clipping of the plants and tender rare plants to the guest sisters and past students and friends who visit the convent. Her gentle nature, humility and fidelity have won the hearts of many people and she always had a soft corner for the poor and the needy. She was responsible in all her undertakings and helped several Apostolic Carmel schools in running the Tuck Shop regularly and in handling accounts conscientiously.

Out of her fifty-nine years of service, the longest service on record is rendered to Carmel Seth Pahana, Moratuwa, as well as at Lisieux Convent Gampaha. She spent her last 34 years at Lisieux Convent and had done a remarkable service to Holy Cross College by managing the tuck shop, and school bus accounts. More than her financial service, wherever she went, she served the people with genuine love and concern. In the community she was the infirmarian and she was attentive to the sick and the needy. She readily accompanied not only the sisters, but also the boarders and the novices to receive medical treatment whenever they were sick. Sister Aidan knew many of the doctors and some among them who were past students of Holy Cross College Gampaha. She was also friendly with the nurses and the attendants and therefore would get their attention to help some neglected patients in the hospital. Though her stature was small, her heart was large. Sister rendered her service, without grumbling and was always humble and gentle in her dealings.

As inevitable the twilight life of her years weakened her frail body. She began to get treatments for high blood pressure, and arthritis. On the 28th December 2000, Sister Aidan got her first

heart attack and ever since suffered from a weak heart. By and by, she became weak and feeble and had to be hospitalized several times. However, she continued her mission of prayer till the last moment. She was very concerned about the sisters in the community, about the boarders and showed her love deeply to all who came to see her. Strengthened by prayer she began to offer all her sufferings, pains and aches to her Lord and Saviour in a spirit of surrender. As days passed by, deteriorating health prevented her from hard labour. Yet she never wasted her time in idleness. Instead she engaged herself with creative work, knitting crotchet and lace. Sister used to make beautiful swans out of waste paper and found joy in gifting them to whoever visited her. This she did till the last week of her life. Though she was suffering from partial blindness she was quite confident that her inward eye and her intuitive power enabled her to seek the Lord in contemplation. For she often spent quiet moments during the day encountering the Eucharistic Lord.

However, Sr. Aidan's weak health condition grew worse in the last week of her life. Since Dr. Yashodha who comes to visit the elderly sisters in the community, regularly, was absent and since her condition was becoming worse, the sisters being concerned took her in an ambulance to Sethma Hospital on 28th March evening. Medical treatment was given and she was sent back to the convent.

On the 1st of April, after Easter Sunday Mass, the Chaplain of Lisieux Convent, Rev. Fr. Chryshantha Fernando OMI anointed her with the Sacrament of the sick. That morning her beloved brother Hubert came to see her and to wish her for Easter. Since her brother was her sole sibling they were very much attached to each other. (He held an important post at the Education Department and his son was a doctor). Sister Aidan's tired face lit up as she recognized her brother. He fed her some grapes and it was touching to see the heart throbbing encounter between the brother and the sister. She spent the next two days on bed with little intake of food and was becoming frail and weak. The sisters of the community and boarders too gathered round her on and oft singing hymns and offering prayers to assist her in her final hours as she was experiencing shortness of breath. On the 3rd April she was conscious and was able to recognize those who came to see her but was too weak to respond. After enduring much pain our dear sister Aidan winged her flight to heaven gently at 10.45 am.

Her mortal remains were brought to the convent chapel by night. Her quiet life was reflected in her placid countenance. Many sisters and people who were known to Sr. Aidan kept coming in, to pay their last respect. Her grieving brother and his family was also present from the following day morning till the body was taken for the burial.

At 2.30 p.m. on the 4th April the sisters in the community conducted an inspiring and a touching prayer service expressing their sisterly appreciation, of the loving kindness and hidden sacrificial service rendered to them by Sister Aidan who was their long standing community member. She was loved for her simplicity and amiability. The Requiem Mass was concelebrated at 3 pm by Rev. Fr. Jude Sharman, the administrator of St. Jude's Shrine, Indigolla and the Dean of

Gampaha and the chaplain of Lisieux Convent, Fr. Chryshantha Fernando OMI in our convent chapel.

After the celebration of the Eucharist and the obsequies, the large crowd moved to her final resting place. Amidst a large gathering of sisters, relatives, students, teachers, and all who were inspired by our dear sister, she was laid to rest at Kasagahawatta Kanatte, Gampaha.

We lift our hearts in tender praise and give thanks for the presence of our dear Sister Aidan gifted to our AC community and for all that she has been to us in such a loving and amiable manner.

***In the twilight of life, God will not judge us
On our earthly possessions and human success,
But rather on how much we have loved. –John of the Cross***

BIO DATA

Name in Religion	:	Sister Mary Aidan of the Sacred Heart
Maiden Name	:	Wattalage Annie Ethelreda Fernando
Institute No	:	1168
Date of Birth	:	23.06.1930
Date of Entrance into Postulancy	:	13.04.1957
Date of First Profession	:	18.04.1959
Date of Final Profession	:	25.05.1964
Date of Decease	:	03.04.2018
Date of Burial	:	04.04.2018
Place of Burial	:	Kasagahawatte Cemetery, Gampaha