

ELISWA

THE FIRST FLAME



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"A single flame kindled in silence can illumine generations."

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FOREWORD



In the hush of 19th-century Kerala, amid tides of caste, custom, and colonial change, one woman dared to listen more to the whisper of God than to the noise of her world. Blessed Mother Eliswa of the Blessed Virgin Mary rose from hidden shores to found the first religious congregation for women in Kerala. Her life, a harmony of contemplation and service, still breathes through the convents, classrooms, and hearts she touched. This book gathers the fragrance of that faith, the story of a soul that burned for Christ and bent low for humanity.

St. Shantha CIC
Superior General

The veil descended, and heaven rejoiced.

Blessed Mother Eliswa stands as the first Religious Sister and Foundress in Kerala, and the first Carmelite Sister in India. She Founded the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites for Women (TOCD) on February 13, 1866, at Koonammavu. From this humble beginning emerged two flourishing congregations: The Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites (CTC) and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC).

She was also a true pioneer in women's education and social upliftment, founding the first convent school, boarding school, and orphanage for girls in the history of the Kerala Church.

"The only subject of our desire should be the three letters: 'GOD.'"
- Blessed Mother Eliswa

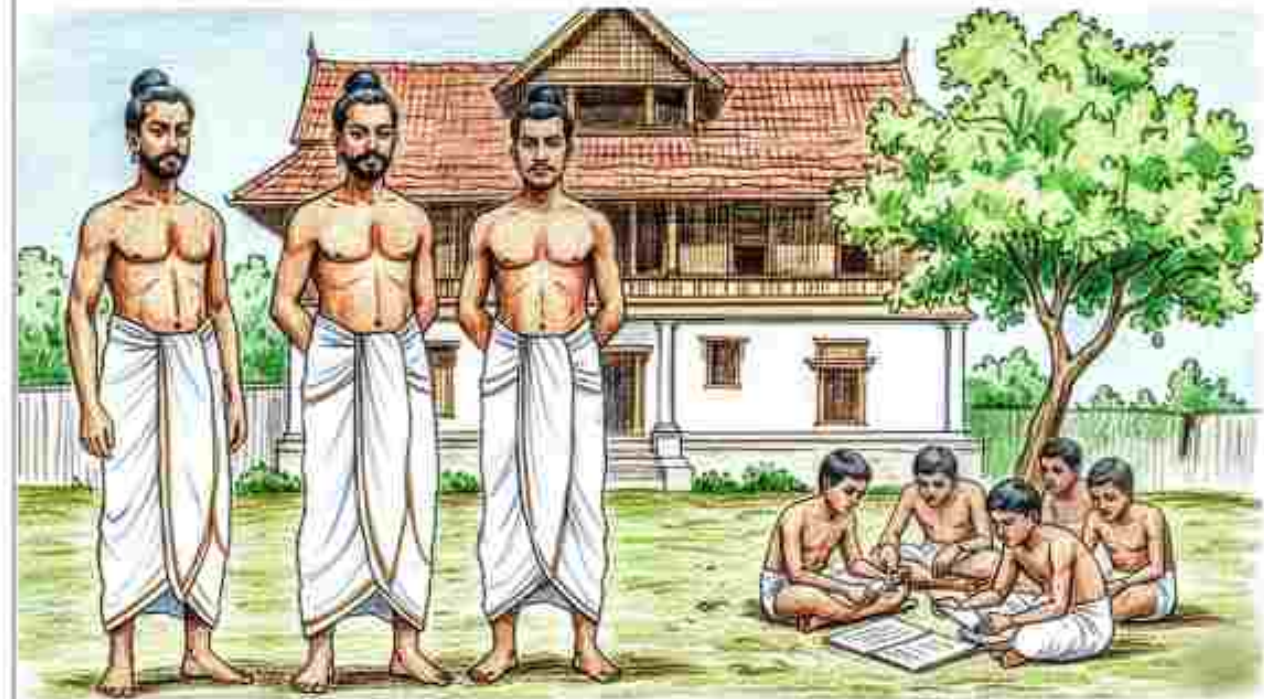


Blessed Mother Eliswa

In 19th-century Kerala, marked by oppressive caste discrimination and the most severe forms of dehumanisation and injustice, women from the lower-caste marginalised communities were deprived of their basic rights, while the women from the most privileged upper-caste were forced into their illam enclosure, totally barred from social interactions. Amid this, young Eliswa reached out to the poor, hungry and forlorn, displaying remarkable tenderness, generosity, and care.

Female education was nearly non-existent, limited to rudimentary instruction in ezhuthupalli or kaleri, while girls were largely confined to domestic chores. Boys had access to emerging schools and seminaries, however, no formal institutions existed for girls in Malabar. Exceptionally, the Vypissery girls received tutoring at home from reputed masters, who helped Eliswa gain linguistic excellence in Malayalam and develop elegant handwriting, and she could imbibe profound knowledge of Catholic doctrine, enabling her to compose a concise summary on the theology of consecrated life for her spiritual daughters.

"Place all your hope in the passion of Jesus Christ"
- Blessed Mother Eliswa



Eliswa was born on October 15, 1831, into the noble Vypissery family with large landholdings in Ochanthuruth on the Vypin Island near the Cochin harbour mouth. She was the eldest of eight children born to Thomman and Thanda. From childhood, faith was the first language in her home, prayer the daily rhythm, and Eliswa breathed humility and gentleness. The fragrance of compassion followed her, and within the simplicity of her days was already woven the golden thread of a vocation that would one day shape history. From her earliest years, Eliswa longed to love and serve Jesus in the poor and the needy. This virtuous disposition and deep spirituality were evident even in childhood. At her First Holy Communion, her fervent love for the Eucharistic Lord shone forth; she was seen kneeling in prayer before the Tabernacle for a long time, her face radiant with divine light. Her tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary was another hallmark of her life; she lovingly adorned Mary's image with fresh flowers each day, a practice she cherished until her final breath. Equally remarkable was her compassion for the poor and marginalized, especially those of the lower castes and labouring classes, whom she served with humility and love. Her younger brother Louis embraced religious life, becoming the first ordained Latin rite friar of the indigenous Carmelite Religious Congregation (TOCD), and he founded Sathyanadha Kahalam, the first Catholic newspaper in Malayalam. Her youngest sister, Thresia, would one day mirror Eliswa's contemplative spirit and share her vision as Co-Foundress of the premier religious congregation for women.

"Pray to Jesus always to grant the divine gift of love".
-Blessed Mother Eliswa



From her early years, Eliswa longed for a life of prayer, simplicity, and service to the poor, an unfamiliar path for women in Kerala. Obedient to God's will and her parents' wish, the sixteen year old Eliswa entered in marriage with Vatharu Vakayil of Koonammavu in 1847. He was a scion of the wealthy family of spice merchants and landowners, who had donated some properties to St. Philomena's Monastery Church at Koonammavu. She embraced family life with serenity, viewing it as a sacred apprenticeship in love. Their daughter Anna, baptised at Cruz Milagres Church, became both her earthly joy and future spiritual companion. In 1851, her husband's death ended her brief married life. She was 20, and baby Anna was just one and a half year old. Grief refined her faith. Within prayer, silence, and solitude, she discerned not loss but invitation, the gentle call of God toward a higher consecration.

*"Once you come to know the will of God, never say 'no' to it".
- Blessed Mother Eliswa*



When urged toward a second marriage, Eliswa chose instead to remain in her husband's home with her daughter, dedicating herself wholly to the Holy Spirit. After household duties, she withdrew for prayer and meditation, serving the poor as if tending the wounds of Christ. For ten silent years (1852-1862), she prepared interiorly, convincing her in-laws and paternal family of her novel path: a divine calling to dedicate herself to God and to serve the most needy. Her maternal uncle, Father Thomas Guyomar, supported her, helping to repurpose a kalapura (a storehouse) at the Vakayil homestead into exclusive living quarters for Eliswa and her daughter Anna. This became their first hermitage, where they lived in absolute peace, poverty, prayer, and contemplation, sowing the earliest seeds of Carmel in Indian soil. Though unfamiliar with the Carmelite mystics, Eliswa's heart already echoed their spirit. Facing the church at Koonammavu, she built a small prayer cell within the granary, where hours before the Blessed Sacrament became "Per Cellum ad Caelum" (from cell to Heaven) is a silent psalm of detachment, humility, and yearning. One evening in 1862, during fervent prayer before the Eucharist, she felt a divine stirring and was summoned to share her longing with Fr. Leopold Beccaro, the young Italian Carmelite missionary friar known as Kochumoopāchan. At the confessional, Eliswa confided her deep spiritual longing to Fr. Leopold, who fully understood and offered spiritual guidance, allowing the Church to discern God's plan taking form. For fourteen years, Eliswa walked the hidden path of interior prayer, her soul anchored by contemplation, clothed in simplicity, and guided by charity. Her life bore the fragrance of the Carmelite charism long before any formal name was given to it. Living an ascetical life, she became a radiant witness to Christian virtues, deeply imprinted with the essence of Carmelite spirituality: contemplation, humility, and interior union with God. Recognizing the divine hand upon her, Fr. Leopold affirmed her way of life as authentically Carmelite, through which the Church acknowledged her vocation a contemplative union with God expressed through communion, charity, and ecclesial service.

*"Meditation is nourishment for our soul",
-Blessed Mother Eliswa*



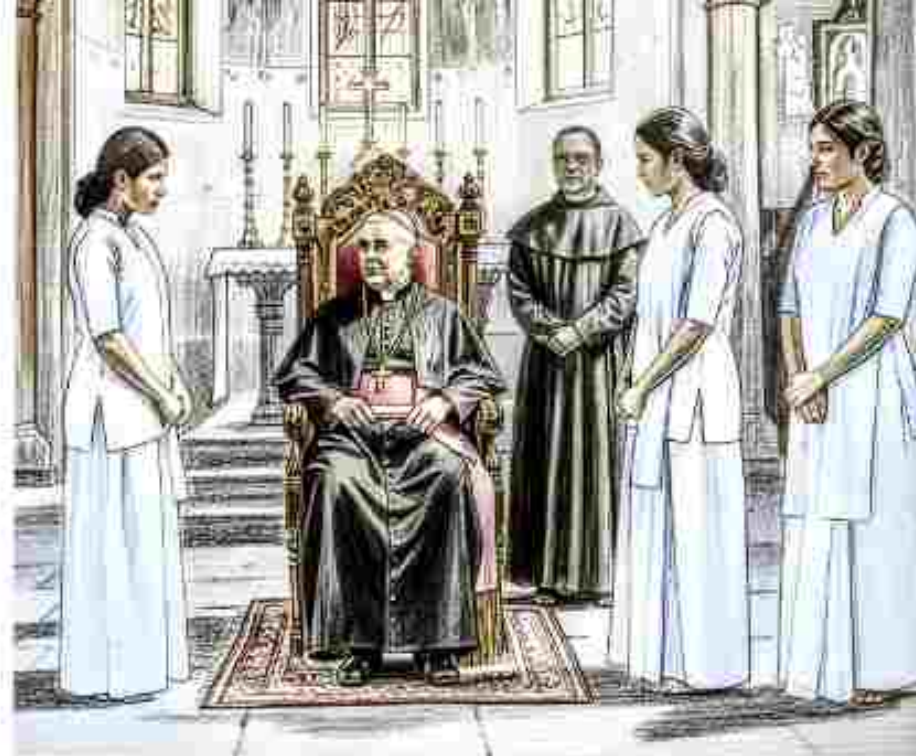
From a bamboo cell rose a house of prayer for the nations.

In the humble dwelling of kalapura, Mother Eliswa and Anna began the first consecrated community for women in Kerala. Thresia, preparing at Ochanthuruth, soon joined them. Under the spiritual guidance of Fr. Leopold, their days flowed between silence, prayer, and service.

Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli was delighted to hear from Fr. Leopold, his delegate for the Discalced Carmelite monasteries, about the quest of three pious women who were seeking to live a communal life of sacred commitment and solicitude. Baccinelli, who was also the Provincial Superior General of Carmelites in India, fetched the constitution of the Carmelite Religious Congregation for Women in Genova and handed it over to Fr. Leopold to adapt it for the local situation. He began instructing the aspirants about Carmelite rules and regulations. On February 12, 1866, Archbishop Baccinelli formally received Eliswa, Anna, and Thresia into the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites, marking the birth of the first indigenous Carmelite community for women in India, proclaiming them "the founding stones" of the new congregation. The following day, February 13, the TODC congregation was officially established at the bamboo-mat convent (Panambumadam) in Koonammavu, with 34 year old Mother Foundress Eliswa as its first prioress and 17 year old Thresia, and 15 year old Anna as Co-foundresses receiving the brown scapular from Fr. Leopold Beccaro. Their small community became the cradle of women's religious life in Kerala, a dawn for Indian Carmel.

"Rejoice in the Almighty and bountiful God always"

- Blessed Mother Eliswa

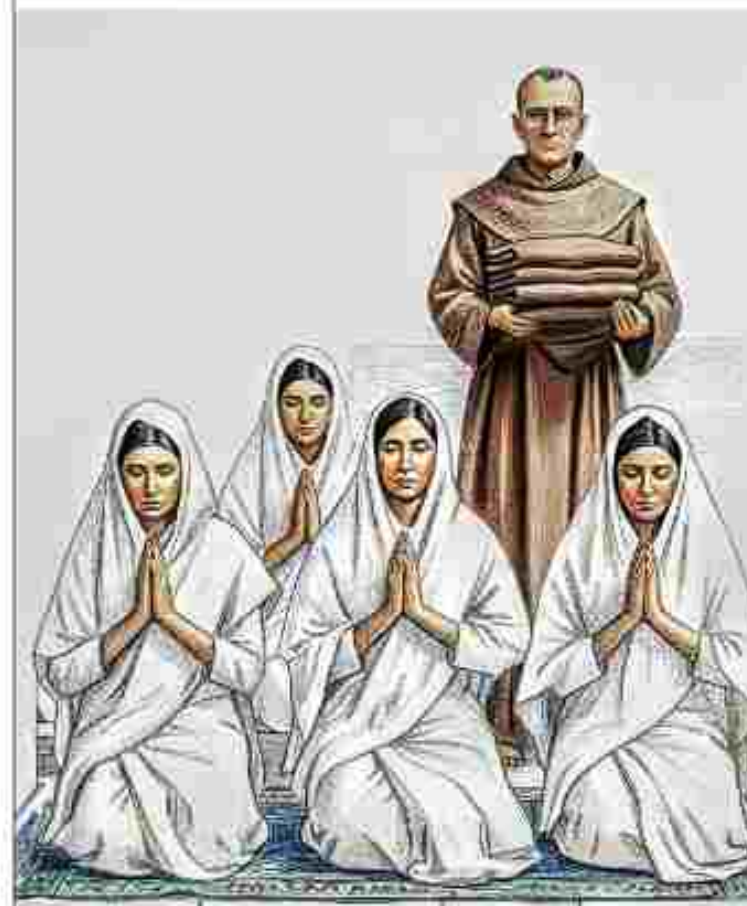


Love makes no distinction of rite or race; it gathers all beneath one cross.

On 14 February, Achamma (Eliswa, later known as Clara), a widow from the Syrian community, knelt before Mother Eliswa, pleading to join the new congregation. Mother Eliswa received her with open heart: "We are poor and beggars," she said, "yet I receive you as my own sister. Let us share whatever God provides." Thus, the community's first act was one of unity, the embrace of diversity within the single body of Christ. The small Panambu Madam soon became insufficient for the sisters' growing community. Archbishop Bernardine resolved to construct a solid convent for the newly founded congregation and entrusted the work to Fr. Leopold. The three founding members offered all their property as capital, and with their patrimony, a plot named Thalichuva Parambu near Koonammavu Church was purchased. Mother Eliswa's uncle, Fr. Guyommar, generously supported the project by donating adjacent lands named Pathiri Parambu, Vatta Parambu, and Thekinedan Parambu. The new convent, constructed on these combined plots, was blessed by Fr. Leopold on March 27, 1867, after which the sisters moved from the bamboo convent into their new home. Fr. Leopold declared that these women were the foundation stones of the TOCD Congregation and foretold that many would follow their example in the years to come. The religious profession of Mother Eliswa, Sr. Anna, Sr. Thresia, and Sr. Clara was held on July 16, 1868, with Fr. Leopold as the chief celebrant. He also signed the official record of the profession, marking the first religious profession of women religious in Kerala.

"Then dear sisters, value the state of religious life greater than all the riches of the world".

- Blessed Mother Eliswa



The long, silent preparation of Mother Eliswa reached its culmination when her contemplative life kindled an apostolic flame, leading to the formal establishment of a religious community that, by 1868, had welcomed eight young women from both the Latin and Syrian Rites, reflecting the unity of the local Church she aimed to serve. As the foundress, Eliswa's towering importance was in translating her deep spirituality into a way of life rooted firmly in the teachings of St. Teresa of Ávila, establishing poverty as the seal of the community to ensure their sole reliance on God. The spiritual core of their days was intense contemplation, teaching the sisters to show their love for God and offer Him constant praise by "doing small things with faithfulness and love," turning even mundane tasks into acts of merit performed with perfect obedience and charity. Eliswa herself was the model of humility and holiness, teaching that true holiness is found in a hidden life of self-denial; consequently, the sisters' days were a rhythmic blend of prayer and service, marked by joy and peace. She fostered a strong love of sisterly fraternity, making their mutual charity the primary witness, while obedience was practiced as a sacred means of union with God's will. Their works, serving the poor, educating girls and comforting the sick were a direct overflow of their contemplation, proving that the Teresian ideal of prayer, poverty, and fraternity could take deep root in Indian soil and kindle the apostolic flame in action.

"One who knows himself will attain perfection in holiness"
- Blessed Mother Eliswa

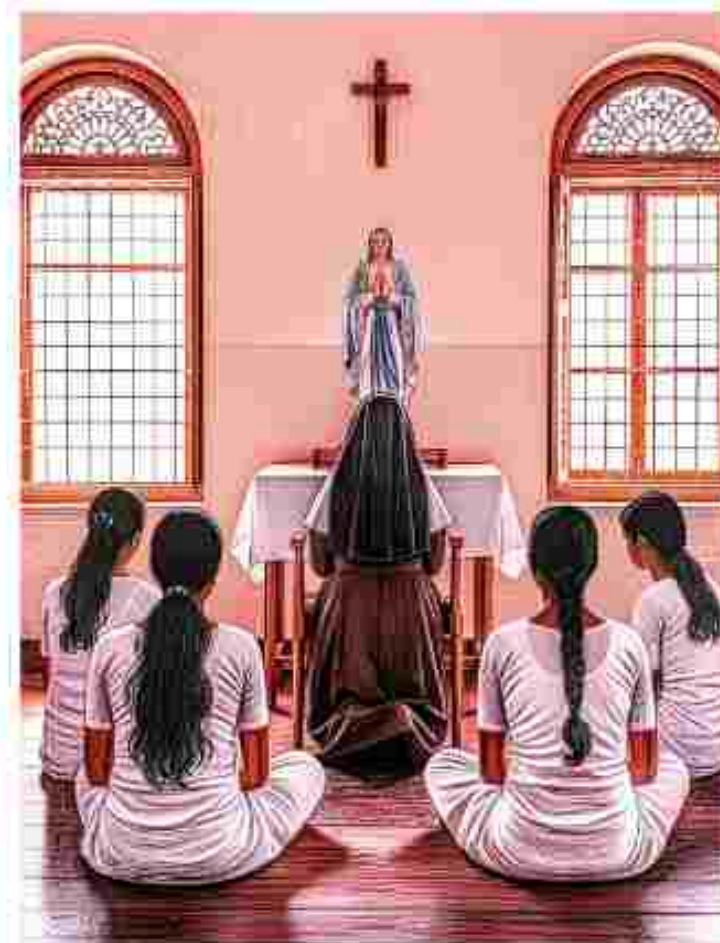


Mother Eliswa's contemplative devotion to God swiftly blossomed into a ground breaking educational apostolate that revolutionized the status of women in Kerala. This commitment found its earliest expression with the establishment of a boarding house named after St. Anna, opened on January 2, 1868. That same year, on July 20, the Vicar Apostolic formally entrusted the TOCD Sisters with the education of women. Lacking a dedicated structure, Mother Eliswa's pioneering spirit led to a room in the convent being converted into a classroom, and with Sr. Thresia appointed as the first Headmistress, this humble space marked the very beginning of convent schools in Kerala. Guided by Fr. Leopold, the school's curriculum was broad and transformative, encompassing academics, crafts, and spiritual formation alongside strict religious discipline. Mother Eliswa's educational mission, which she beautifully summarized as aiming "to facilitate at least one soul to love God," was a direct outflow of her deep faith. Her work was foundational: she established the first convent school, boarding house, and orphanage for girls in Kerala. These institutions were crucial in providing education, moral formation, and vocational training (like sewing and embroidery), which collectively enabled girls and women to attain literacy, gain economic independence, and break free from oppressive social customs. In a rigid caste society that fiercely resisted female education and economic autonomy, Mother Eliswa's apostolate was a profoundly transformative force, challenging socio-religious norms and creating new spaces for women's growth and dignity.

Her work complemented broader reform movements by catalysing women's empowerment within a faith-based framework, establishing her as one of the earliest female leaders in Kerala to materially confront entrenched social injustices through a fusion of education and spirituality. The Mission's growth was affirmed in 1879 when Archbishop Mellano used a donation from an Italian benefactress to construct a dedicated school building. Mother Eliswa's enduring vision illuminated the lives of women, elevating their social status and opportunities, and grew into a powerful movement of cultural, social, and spiritual renewal that empowered women to step beyond the confines of their homes where they had long been restricted. The humble classrooms of Koonammavu became enduring centres of light and liberation, where knowledge and virtue walked hand in hand. Mother Eliswa saw in every child the face of Christ, and in every sister the seed of a future mission.



*"Do everything with sole intention
to please Jesus Christ"*
- Blessed Mother Eliswa



Mother Eliswa's soul was wondrously moulded by the radiant forces of faith, hope, and charity, guiding her toward perfect communion with God. Anchored in an unwavering faith and profound trust in Divine Providence, she met every trial with courage, accepted renunciations with serenity, and lived entirely consumed by divine love. This steadfast faith empowered her to transcend rigid societal confines and open a new path of consecrated life for women in Kerala. Her spiritual heritage was further enriched by a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, clothing her with humility, compassion, and an ardent zeal for God's kingdom. This threefold foundation illuminated how faith becomes the root of hope and love, how detachment purifies the heart to love wholly in God, and how divine love stands as the supreme principle and ultimate goal of all spiritual life.

Despite the monumental fact that she had no opportunity to learn Carmelite spirituality through reading as the liturgy was in Latin and the Bible had not yet been translated into Malayalam (a task later achieved by her younger brother, Fr. Louis Vypissery TOCD, who co-translated the New Testament in 1905) the life Mother Eliswa lived was profoundly imbued with the essence of Carmel and harmoniously aligned with its Rule. She devoted long hours to meditation, cultivating the essential virtues of humility, detachment, and an ascetical spirit that sustained her deep life of prayer. Within the solitude of her small cell, she spent prolonged hours in contemplation, while Marian devotion was an inseparably woven, enduring thread that accompanied her from childhood to her final breath.

Inspired by St. Teresa of Avila, Mother Eliswa emphasized detachment, humility, and fraternal love as essential for holiness, urging her sisters to embrace trials, poverty, and submission as instruments of sanctification rather than seeking comfort. Her teachings, which combined practical guidance with mystical insight, warned against spiritual dangers and worldly distractions, urging constant vigilance and steadfast devotion, thus offering her community a clear and deeply felt path for a life wholly devoted to God.

"One who knows himself will attain perfection in holiness".
-Blessed Mother Eliswa





The passing of Mother Anna, the beloved daughter and first perfect fruit of Mother Eliswa's consecrated life, was a moment woven with profound spiritual beauty and heartache, revealing the boundless depth of Eliswa's motherhood and vocation. Having lost her father when she was a mere one and a half years old, Anna knew only the extraordinary love and guidance of her mother, Mother Eliswa, who shielded her from the loss and, in its place, offered her the most priceless gift: her own vocation, her Christ, and her spiritual life. Every spiritual truth, every act of devotion Anna embraced, was a direct legacy of Eliswa's heart. It was Anna who knew, witnessed, and understood the inner, hidden sanctity of Eliswa; what she truly was and was drawn into the same divine flame.

This unique spiritual bond made Anna the essential strength and constant companion to Mother Eliswa, the very reason behind Eliswa's heartfelt conviction to live this life of togetherness with her sisters. As Anna grew spiritually, Mother Eliswa watched with a mother's pride and a foundress's joy, their deep, shared spiritual conversations strengthening them both in their challenging path.

In November 1870, Anna began to suffer from fever, coughing, and swelling, which later worsened, necessitating her transfer to the sick room. Despite the terrible trial of severe pain, swelling, and bed sores, Anna bore her illness silently, a testament to the virtues Eliswa had nurtured in her. She continually urged the sisters to thank God for her sufferings, calmly stating when offered prayers for relief, "The Lord knows what is good for me, so He will take care." This peaceful surrender, this absolute trust, was the crowning glory of Eliswa's maternal ministry. On the morning of May 24, Anna received Holy Communion, and later that evening at six, she peacefully entrusted her soul to God. Fr. Leopold, her long-time confessor, could only remark at the purity of her passing: "If we all had such a death, how great it would be."

Seeing her own daughter, her first and perfect follower, her greatest fruit, ascend to heaven, Mother Eliswa knew a sorrow that only a mother can feel, yet simultaneously experienced a profound validation of her life's work. This experience, of not only being a foundress but a real mother who nurtured her daughter in her own congregation, witnessed her spiritual growth, endured her physical sufferings, and saw her heavenly entry, became the final, deep stamp on her vocation. It is through Anna's passage that Mother Eliswa gained the intimate knowledge of the spiritual, physical, and psychological difficulties faced by all her daughters. Thus, she stands today, and forever, as a woman and a mother upon whom all her sisters can entirely rely, for she sees Anna in the face of every single sister in her community.



*Meditate often on death, that your soul
may be prepared'*
- Blessed Mother Eliswa



The flame that Mother Eliswa ignited quickly spread: in June 1888, her vision birthed its first outward sign of growth, a mission led by Sr. Clara, the first Syrian Rite member of the Congregation, established a convent in Mutholi. With Archbishop Mellano's approval, this expansion was undertaken by Sr. Clara, along with Sr. Agnes and Sr. Thresia. Catherina, saw the first branch of St. Teresa's Convent was inaugurated on August 29, 1888. The sisters of Mutholi, deeply rooted in the spirit of the foundress, remembered Mother Eliswa and Mother Thresia with love, their letters testifying to Eliswa's sublime holiness by lovingly calling her "Blessed Mother." However, the flourishing community was soon subjected to a searing, a geopolitical trial happened in 1890, due to jurisdictional changes enacted by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, the convent at Koonammavu was transferred from the Archdiocese of Verapoly to the Vicariate of Thrissur. This led to a heartbreaking separation where the Latin Rite sisters, including Mother Eliswa herself, had to leave the very cradle she had established, which was then occupied by sisters of the Syro-Malabar Rite. This bifurcation of the TOCD Congregation resulted in the formation of two distinct but spiritually unified entities: the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC) and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC). Though this mandatory division deeply wounded her heart, Mother Eliswa met the rupture with heroic obedience, seeing in it not a trauma, but a spiritual refinement, the pruning that precedes greater fruitfulness, thereby extending her spiritual motherhood to embrace both communities as her children. This supreme testing time revealed the astonishing depth of Mother Eliswa's virtues and her unwavering dedication to the Kingdom of God; she manifested remarkable self-mastery and steadfastness in discerning the will of God through prayer. Renouncing all worldly possessions, including her vast properties, without uttering a single word about compensation, she embraced perfect detachment and serene surrender, actions that shone with faith, hope, charity, humility, prudence, and fortitude. So absolute was her detachment from worldly concerns that Brother Leopold OCD was moved to call her 'prapancha viraktha' one completely detached from the world. She radiated equilibrium, constancy, and serene joy in the practice of virtues, ensuring with prudent foresight that the essential elements of the Carmelite way of life were faithfully observed in the convent, giving utmost importance to the law of enclosure and remaining vigilant against every subtle attempt of the evil one to undermine it.



"I belong wholly to God, nothing is mine"
- Blessed Mother Eliswa

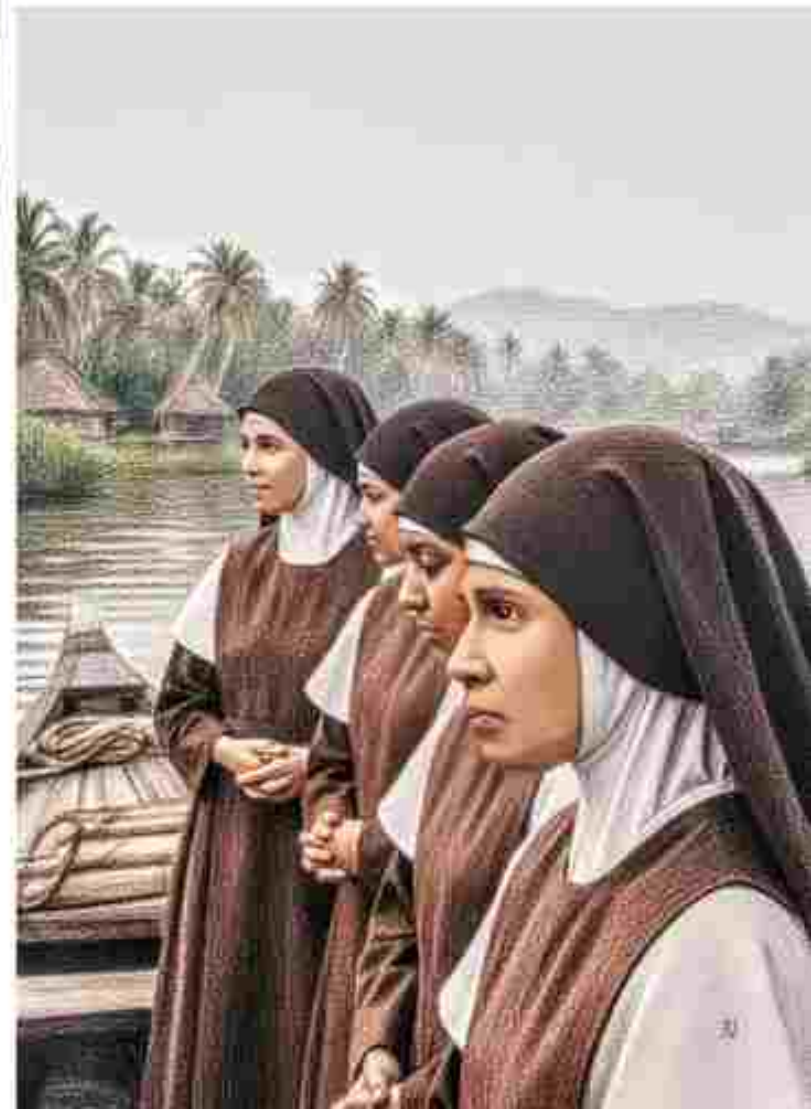


Following the profound wound of separation, the Latin branch of the TOCO, led by the invincible Mother Eliswa, found itself after a brief sojourn in Ernakulam, solemnly transferred to Varapuzha by Archbishop Leonardo Mellano on November 10, 1890. Despite the displacement and the heartache of leaving the original foundation at Koonammavu, Mother Eliswa's faith was a fortress; this new place, with the establishment of St. Joseph's Convent, became the courageous new motherhouse of the Teresian Carmelites Congregation.

On that very day, with her spiritual motherhood burning brighter than ever, Mother Eliswa's compassion instantly overflowed into action: she founded an orphanage, providing immediate refuge and hope to the children who had been forced to leave Koonammavu. This orphanage, a tender fruit of her love, soon flourished under her devoted care. She was not merely a foundress; she was a genuine mother to the destitute children and to the blossoming community, taking on every necessary duty: serving tirelessly as Prioress, Novice Directress, teacher, and Boarding Mistress. New vocations quickly blossomed, sensing the authentic Carmelite spirit, and a novitiate was promptly instituted under her guidance.

For the next 23 years, Mother Eliswa lived at the Varapuzha Convent, remaining unwavering in God's will, confident that the vine she had replanted would continue to bear fruit. Her days were a beautiful, practical testament to her teachings: filled with prayer, manual work, and tender care for the sisters around her. She bore every residual suffering with a deep serenity, her eyes ever lifted toward the Crucified Lord, from whom she drew her immense, sustaining strength. Her life at Varapuzha was a powerful lesson in perseverance, embodying her cherished virtues and demonstrating that true obedience can turn any exile into a new genesis of grace.

*"God is ready to give His helping hand and make you stand up once again".
-Blessed Mother Eliswa*







The spiritual life of Mother Eliswa was tested yet again by the illness and ultimate loss of her youngest sister and beloved Co-Foundress, Sister Thresia, a constant companion and cherished fruit of the same Vypissery home. Sister Thresia was always prudent and diligent, devotedly managing the school and tirelessly working for the Congregation, serving as an anchor of continuity beside Mother Eliswa.

In 1876, Sister Thresia began a prolonged period of suffering from arthritis, which led to paralysis, compounded by a serious injury when the heavy door of Koonammavu Church fell on her head. Despite her grievous affliction, she bore it with profound patience, a living testament to the ascetical spirit instilled by Mother Eliswa, even receiving the Last Sacrament for a second time in 1880. Yet, in a moment that offered a brief, miraculous solace to her community and to Mother Eliswa's watchful heart, the sisters carried the paralyzed Thresia to the hall, where she prayed before the newly installed statue of St. Joseph and was miraculously cured, returning to her room walking. This brief moment of relief, however, gave way to the inevitable suffering. Archbishop Mellano and numerous authorities, including Bishop Marceline OCD, attested to Sister Thresia's exceptional abilities, piety, and obedience, even comparing her to St. Teresa of Ávila, a testament to the foundational spirit infused by Mother Eliswa. Her sisters, like Sister Clara and Sister Agnes, affirmed that Thresia was a living model of humility, fraternal love, and perfect obedience to God's will, seeing in her a pure reflection of the Carmelite ideals Mother Eliswa had brought to Indian soil.

For Mother Eliswa, to witness this prolonged suffering and the final passing of her own sister, her spiritual daughter, her first collaborator, and her co-foundress, was a profound experience of maternal sorrow. Having seen her own daughter, Anna, enter heaven, and now seeing her younger sibling and intimate collaborator follow, Mother Eliswa stood as the solitary vessel of the founding grace. Each loss was a spiritual pruning that deepened her reliance on the Crucified Lord, confirming her as the true, suffering Mother of the new Carmel, who had given not only her own life but also her nearest and dearest to God's service. This continuous sacrifice solidified Mother Eliswa's role as the enduring spiritual source, carrying the collective memory and grace of the foundation forward.



"How beautiful it is to suffer hardships with peaceful conscience, with the joy of God's will and with the conviction that each sorrow would become an ornament on the crown of eternity"
- Blessed Mother Eliswa

Following Mother Theresia's passing, Mother Eliswa of the Blessed Virgin Mary humbly took on the role of Superior for two faithful years. When the burden of age and growing infirmity compelled her to step down, she requested to be relieved and another sister was elected in her place, but she did not retreat; rather, she initiated a profound and deliberate final chapter of her spiritual life, focusing solely on preparation for her holy end. Her days became a sanctuary, wholly consecrated to unwavering prayer and the rhythmic, comforting intercession of the Rosary, as she gently readied her soul for a peaceful departure.

Though illness relentlessly eroded her physical body, her spirit seemed to ignite with an extraordinary radiance. In her final, sacred days, surrounded by the sisters she had mothered, she was a living icon of unshakeable tranquility and spiritual perseverance. Her words, now few, were profoundly impactful. Her prayers, however, became ceaseless, a constant, silent offering. In a final, monumental act of grace, she released all earthly burdens, forgiving everyone with the full love of Christ. Having become entirely bed-ridden, she received the profound solace of the Last Sacraments and Holy Communion on February 11, 1913. Her sickbed was transformed into an altar: sustained by weekly confession, daily Communion, and continuous contemplation, her spiritual life reached its zenith. Her ultimate source of strength and consolation was the tender repetition of the 'Hail Mary' and the heartfelt, constant invocation of the Holy Name of Jesus, a final, luminous focusing of her entire being upon the Divine.

This was the transcendent culmination of her life's magnificent vocation: that of Mother Eliswa, the first indigenous Carmelite TOCD Sister in Kerala and the venerable Foundress of the first Third Order Carmelite Congregation for women in India. Her life, a perfect weave of childlike devotion and unwavering obedience, was a singular, uninterrupted outpouring of 'Christ like love'—a love for God that knew no measure and a service to humanity that knew no distinction, that is "Passion for Christ and Compassion for Humanity."

On the serene morning of Friday, July 18, 1913, at 9:30 a.m., at the age of 82, she arrived not as a defeat, but as a silent, glorious transition. With her soul utterly purged, fortified by the Sacraments, and clinging only to the names of Jesus and Mary, the veil thinned. The Foundress, her earthly work completed and her final prayer offered, was gently released from her frail body and peacefully called to the eternal home, her final breath dissolving into the light of God.

On her final farewell, despite the heavy monsoon rains and pervasive flooding on Saturday, July 19, 1913, numerous priests, sisters, students, and faithful gathered to honour her. Her mortal remains were laid to rest at 5:00 p.m. in the Cathedral Church of Verapoly, within the sacred space reserved for the sisters, leaving behind a flourishing congregation of approximately twenty-nine professed sisters and many candidates, all bearing the torch of her unparalleled spiritual legacy.





"Often meditate on death. When you lie on bed think that one day you will die lying on this bed!"
- Blessed Mother Elisav



Mother Eliswa's departure was not an end but a beginning. From her hidden tomb at Varapuzha, the light of her sanctity spread across Kerala and beyond. Generations of sisters rose to follow her path of contemplation and charity, carrying forward her vision of a Church enlivened by love and service. The people remembered her as Amma Eliswa, the mother who prayed for all, who loved without condition, whose hands never tired of mercy. Even in death, she became a lamp upon the altar of Carmel, guiding souls toward the divine embrace. In 1920, Mother Eliswa's mortal remains were transferred to the graveyard on the eastern side of St. Joseph's Convent at Verapoly, and on June 27, 1988, they were placed in a newly built tomb, with Holy Mass, ceremonial prayers, and a procession. Her 75th death anniversary was commemorated on July 19, 1988, with a Mass celebrated by the Archbishop of Verapoly, Cornelius Elanjikkal, and the faithful of Verapoly continue to honor her memory with devotion at her tomb. On September 10, 1997, the remains of Mother Eliswa and Mother Thresia were moved to the Smrithi Mandhir near St. Joseph's Convent.



Born: On October 15, 1831, She was born to Thomman and Thanda of Vypissery family at Ochianthuruthi.
Religious Profession: On July 16, 1868, She consecrated herself wholly to God.
Born to Eternal Life: On July 18, 1913, she completed her earthly pilgrimage and entered into the eternal embrace of the Lord.
Servant of God: On March 6, 2008, the Church recognized her holiness, declaring her a Servant of God.
Venerable: On November 8, 2023, her heroic virtues were formally acknowledged, and she was proclaimed Venerable.
Beatified: On November 8, 2025, the Church solemnly celebrated her beatification, honoring her inspiring life of faith, love, and service.

THE FIRST BRIDE'S LOVE

For Mother Eliswa, the first indigenous nun of Kerala, Christ was not a figure of distant doctrine; He was the Eternal Bridegroom, the singular, magnetic center of her entire existence. Her vocation was a dramatic, courageous act of love, an eventful and adventurous spiritual journey where she chose the King of Heaven over the noble status and security of the world, dedicating her life to an unparalleled intimacy.

The Crucible of Early Sacrifice

Eliswa's love story with Christ was forged not in comfort, but in crushing sorrow. As a young woman, she was plunged into the crucible of early widowhood. The shock of her husband's death was compounded by the anguish of facing society's pressure to remarry, a fate that threatened to sever her desire for a consecrated life. The deepest sorrow, however, was the burden of her tiny daughter, the little Anna, barely a year and a half old. It was in this abyss of human grief, responsibility, and social pressure that the Eternal Bridegroom intervened. In a moment of profound, divine revelation a grace that only the chosen can understand Eliswa's soul was seized by the realization of Christ's sovereign, perfect Love. This was a love that superseded all earthly ties, a love that offered not fleeting happiness, but the Crown of Heavenly Inheritance. With the courage that defied the customs and expectations of her noble family, she made her choice. She refused the second marriage, declaring that her heart had already been claimed by One who had "sacrificed His life to be loved."

The Courage of the First Bride

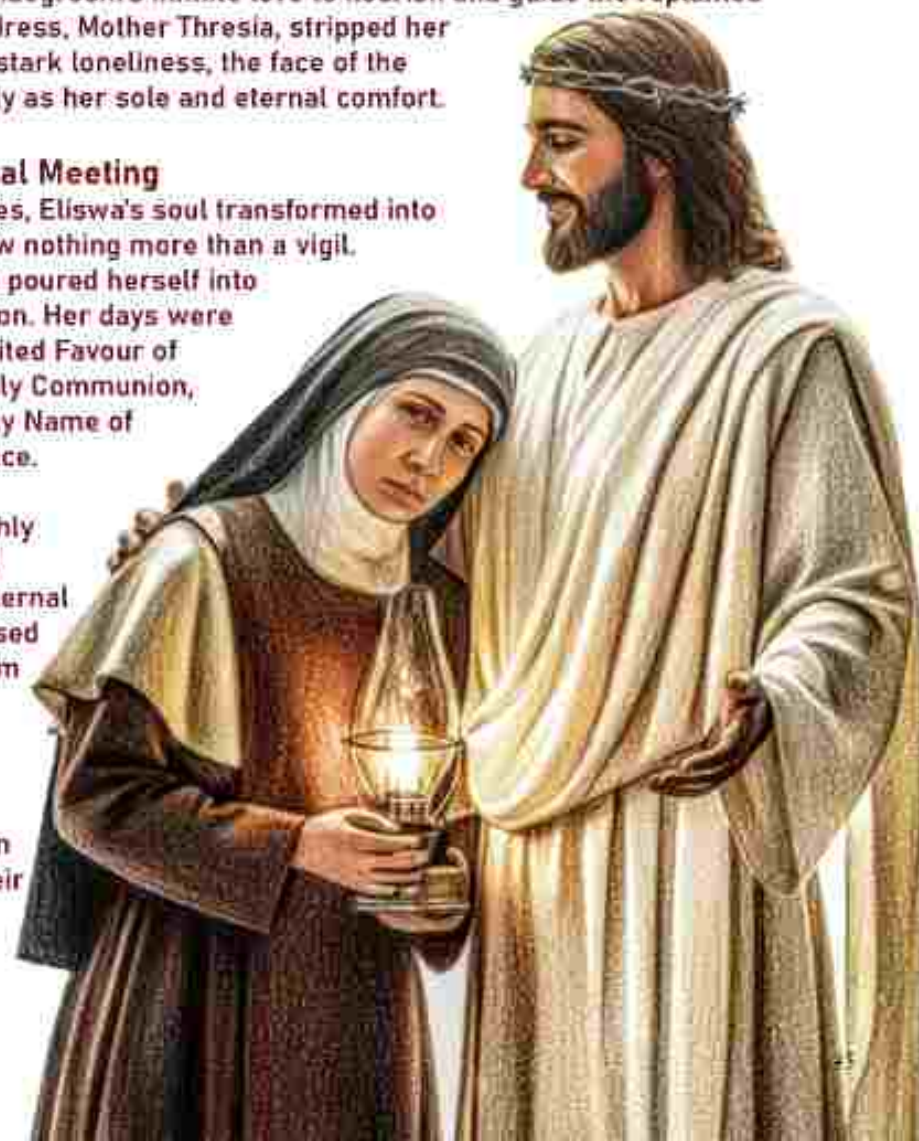
Her life became a testimony to this realization. With her love for Christ, Eliswa did what no woman of her culture and time had done: she dedicated herself fully to Christ, forging the path of the first indigenous nun in Kerala. This courageous choice drew her own family into the orbit of her divine love. Her beloved daughter, Anna, and her youngest sister, Thresia, were the first to understand the glory of the Bridegroom's call, joining her in the religious profession. Thresia and Anna became her steadfast Co-foundresses, and her first spiritual daughters. Then many joined them, together, their tiny community at Koonammavu blossomed, a direct fruit of Eliswa's fiery devotion. The life of Christ was now literally her life, driving her into the world with profound social compassion. Their cloister walls could not contain the love they shared with the Bridegroom; it poured forth in tangible ministries for the marginalized. The convent became a beacon of dignity: a haven for women through school, boarding house, and orphanage, offering vital vocational training. Eliswa demonstrated that the deepest contemplative life fuels the most dynamic social action, seeing the wounds of her Crucified Beloved in the needs of every soul she served.

The Love Tested by Fire

Yet, even in the convent, the vows were tested by fire. The deeply painful loss of her daughter, the little nun Anna, was a separation that pierced the Mother Foundress's soul. It was a searing lesson straight from the cross: her heart belonged wholly to the Divine Bridegroom, requiring the surrender of even the most precious earthly loves. In that profound void, she clung tighter to Christ's unshakeable love, transforming her grief into deeper union. Following this pain, and amidst the turbulence of division, Eliswa stood as the true matriarch, finding in Christ the "New Beginning" for her community, and drawing strength directly from her Bridegroom's infinite love to nourish and guide the replanted vine. Later, the death of her Co-Foundress, Mother Thresia, stripped her of her closest companion, but in that stark loneliness, the face of the Bridegroom shone all the more clearly as her sole and eternal comfort.

The Final Longing and the Eternal Meeting

In her final years, relieved of her duties, Eliswa's soul transformed into pure Longing. Her earthly life was now nothing more than a vigil. She knew the hour was near, and she poured herself into preparing for the perfect final reception. Her days were a relentless meditation on the Unmerited Favour of Christ's love. Every Rosary, every Daily Communion, every whispered invocation of the Holy Name of Jesus was a step closer to the embrace. On the serene morning of Friday, July 18, 1913, at the age of 82, the earthly vigil ended. With her soul purged, and clinging only to the certainty of her Eternal Bridegroom's love, Mother Eliswa closed her eyes to the world and opened them to the vision of her Beloved. Her death was not a tragedy, but the glorious, Eternal Ascent of the first bride the moment her unbroken vows were sealed forever in the Heart of Christ. The warmth of their love, born in sorrow and purified by sacrifice, remains the eternal flame, who walks the path of total devotion today.



The tiny convent at Koonammavu that Mother Eliswa founded has miraculously blossomed into a vast communion of Carmel. Today, her legacy lives on most directly through the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC), the Latin branch of the TOCD for women, a vibrant tree rooted in her initial vision. The original TOCD for Women flourished into two distinct branches: the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) and the CTC. These two congregations achieved the highest level of universal recognition, being raised to Pontifical status in 1967 and 1971, respectively. As Pontifical Congregations, the CTC enjoys the distinct honour of being directly under the supreme authority of the Pope, with its governance, religious observances, and apostolic activities guided and overseen by the Holy See.

The flame of Carmel now burns far beyond Kerala's shores. With over 1350 sisters across 11 provinces and 223 convents, the Congregation continues to spread the light of the Gospel throughout India and across the world. From Africa to Europe and the Americas, the Sisters carry the contemplative spirit of Mother Eliswa into diverse missions. Across dioceses, cultures, and languages, they have built schools, hospitals, and homes of compassion, all beating with the same Carmelite heart. Each foundation is a testimony that holiness, once born in silence, can resound across nations, and that a widow from Koonammavu could become the mother of a global mission. Wherever her daughters went, they carried the twin treasures of her spirit: Passion for Christ and compassion for humanity.

Blessed Mother Eliswa's life has become a legacy, and her legacy a living mission. Her life remains a lasting source of inspiration for consecrated persons and the faithful alike, embodying the ideals of humility, charity, and total devotion to God. Her life remains their light, her faith their foundation, and her love their lasting legacy.

PRAYER

Oh, Jesus, my God and my redeemer, I was not worthy to receive this great favour. You chose me an unworthy sinner from numerous innocent virgins to abide in your dwelling place as your bride, in order to grant me the crown of heavenly inheritance. My Lord, give me the wisdom to know the depth of your great love shown to me, so that I may love you in return and be ever grateful for your hountiful kindness and mercy. Without you I can do nothing, but sin. Since you chose me to be your bride, grant me the grace to be loyal and grateful to you forever. Oh, blessed flames of the heart of Jesus annihilate in my heart all inclinations, which do not belong to you. Enable me to live only to love my beloved who sacrificed His life to be loved. Oh, loving Mother Mary, you are not only my queen but also my Mother as I am the bride of your Son. It is your intercession that brought me to this holy abode, separating me from this world, to be the bride of your son. Be now my refuge. Never abandon me. Let my life and death be worthy of the bride of Jesus. Grant me this grace through your intercession. Amen.



- Blessed Mother Eliswa

CHARISM

*Contemplative union with God in a life of communion through
charity and Ecclesial Service.*

MOTTO

Passion for Christ and compassion for humanity.

*"From Carmel to Calvary, from Koonammavu to the world, one woman's yes transformed the very
face of faith."*

*Blessed Mother Eliawa, Widow, Mother, Foundress, and Saint -in -waiting, was a woman ahead of her
time, yet wholly attuned to God's perfect timing.*

Her story is more than history; it is prophecy fulfilled in silence, humility, and radiant devotion.

*May every reader who opens this book sense her presence, gentle, maternal, and unwavering,
whispering the same call she once received from Christ:*

"Come, follow Me, and carry My love to the least of these."