

Sr. Germaine Marie – Suzanne Vannay

(1916 – 1994)

Early Life and Family

Born as Suzanne Vannay in Monthey, Switzerland, in 1916, Sr. Germaine Marie grew up in a large family of twelve children. Her family had strong missionary roots — one of her uncles, Fr. Vannay, was a Redemptorist missionary, and one of her brothers followed the same vocation.

The boarding school of the Sisters of St. Joseph, located just steps away from her home, played a key role in shaping her aspirations. From a young age, Suzanne longed for a life beyond the limits of her hometown — a life of adventure, service, and discovery. She felt drawn to the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy as the path that would allow her to fulfill this vision.

Religious Vocation and Education

At the age of 18, Suzanne entered the Novitiate with the dream of becoming a missionary. Two years later, at 20 years old, she travelled to England to prepare for her future mission. World War II extended her stay there until 1945, but she made good use of this time — completing her university studies in English and forming a lifelong attachment to the country.

Her lively intelligence, boundless energy, and fearless character prepared her for a missionary life in India, which would match her adventurous spirit.

Mission in India and Founding Principalship

In 1958, Sr. Germaine Marie became the first Principal of St. Joseph's College for Women, Waltair, a milestone that marked one of the most significant and rewarding chapters of her life. Under her leadership:

- The college opened with 28 Pre-University students and 6 faculty members.
- B.A. and B.Sc. programmes were introduced in subjects such as History, Economics, Politics, Special English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Home Science, and Household Art — the first college in Andhra Pradesh to offer this combination.
- The college obtained permanent affiliation to Andhra University.
- A Non-Resident Student Centre was built with UGC aid.
- A two-storeyed hostel was constructed to accommodate 100 students.

Her tenure, which lasted until 1964, was characterised by academic excellence, cultural vibrancy, and joyful campus life. She encouraged theatre, music, and singing, often writing and acting in plays herself.

Missionary Spirit

Beyond her administrative role, Sr. Germaine Marie devoted her holidays to working with the poor in rural areas — what she fondly called “the Bush.” This was where she felt most at home, serving those in need with warmth, care, and affection.

After decades of dedicated service, Sr. Germaine Marie passed away on November 1, 1994, in Vevey, Switzerland, at the age of 78, after 54 years of Religious Profession.

Her legacy lives on in the strong foundations she laid for St. Joseph’s College for Women and in the countless lives she touched. Those who knew her remember her as a woman of vision, energy, and compassion — one whose adventurous spirit was matched by her deep love for God and His people.

“Life in heaven... a life full of warmth, caring, and affection, welcomed into eternity by her loving Mother.”