

**First stage:**

The congregation was founded in Mosul city, north Iraq, in 1877. At that time, the sisters spread across the villages to achieve their aim, which was the education and development of women, since education was only for men in these villages. Apart from the lack of educational institutions for women, poverty also prevented the women from getting educated, so the sisters worked with these women, trying to help them in their domestic affairs and teaching them the basics of some professions like sewing, embroidery and weaving. At the same time, to be able to meet Christian women and give catechism classes, the sisters made use of what was called "Sunday Schools" where women used to go to Church and meet after Mass.

A few years later, mainly in the 1880s, the sisters started opening kindergartens and schools for girls in the villages and cities where the sisters had convents. This time the work was more extended to accept girls who were from different sects and religions. The sisters wanted their schools to be a place first of all for meeting, as well as for learning.

The congregation entered its **second stage** when the private schools, including ours, were nationalized by the government in 1974.

At that time the sisters decided to remain in the schools, not as their owners as they were before, but as teachers. They thus confirmed their presence in the schools, because they believed that they could achieve their mission in this important place where they could meet a special class in society, the teenagers. At that time, most of the sisters were professionally trained teachers.

**Third stage:** during the sanctions of 1991-2003

- **The sisters stayed in the schools:** Many teachers and employees left their jobs because the salary was too low (only 2-3 \$ a month). Despite that, the sisters continued in their jobs, living a simple life as many did that time, remaining with others in the most difficult situations, giving courage and hope to the teachers and students concerning their future.
- The professional formation courses that sisters already offered were extended during this time, so as to help women, especially the unemployed, to earn some income to help their families, and to live in dignity. This time the sisters opened centers where they could offer these courses for free, where the women were not only able to learn, but also where they could sell their products and earn from their production, since the sisters set up shops for that reason.
- **Opening their Convents for the Girls in need:** Because of the difficult social and economic conditions during the sanctions, the sisters opened two of their convents, in Baghdad and in Mosul, to accept the girls whose families were in need at that time, and especially to orphans. The sisters welcomed these girls and offered them the accommodation and the support they needed for their studies so that they might be educated and prepared to get jobs and have a chance to be useful members in society. The sisters are still running such projects today.
- **Opening Preschools:** Because education was only confined to the government during the period of the previous regime (the one during the sanctions), the sisters had no right to open schools, but they were successful in getting permission to open preschools, in several villages. The aim of that project was to give child some norms of peace culture from the beginning, especially after the Gulf War, when the effects of violence spread everywhere. So the sisters wanted to help mothers to find some ways to bring up their children in the more peaceful environments that the sisters offered in their institutions.

- **Concerning woman's health**: at the beginning of the sanctions, in Baghdad in 1992, the sisters got one of their convents turned into a maternity clinic, to take care of mothers with their babies. That project was set up because of the shortage in health services all over the country. The hospital got bigger to meet the needs of the many who trusted the services of the sisters and appreciated them. Today, despite the conflicts in the country among the many sects and religions, the hospital is still a meeting point for healing and reconciliation.
- Sometimes, because of political and security reasons, the congregation was limited and unable to realize its projects. An example of this would be the center that was built in Mosul, and equipped to be a cultural center for giving talks and lectures on different topics. But in the end, the sisters could not achieve that aim.

### **Today, after 5 years of war:**

The sisters continue their projects mentioned above. And they also feel responsible for creating places for meeting, healing and reconciliation. Indeed, war has destroyed not only buildings, institutions and infrastructure, but also the Iraqi person him or herself, all of whom have been deeply injured.

A Dominican Complex containing a maternity clinic and secondary school for girls, has been opened as a center where conversation among different religions can take place. Actually, the congregation got one of its schools back officially, and took the risk of opening and running it this year, despite the lack of security, as a sign of hope for the young and the families in the neighborhood. The sisters recognize that other religions, especially the Muslims, trust and appreciate their services as not being aligned with a certain side or religion. Furthermore, a building is being prepared, in collaboration with the Dominican Friars, within the same complex to become a "University of the People", where there will be good, well-trained staff working in the University. The congregation is preparing young sisters (today 20 of our sisters are studying in Europe and USA), to serve in this university and in others as well. Our sisters believe that allowing the young sisters to live with others of different cultures will help them to experience concretely how to accept and appreciate others, so that then they can convey their experience to their people when they return.

The congregation thinks of similar projects for the future, not only in Baghdad but also in different places where the sisters live and can minister.