News
Ministry



The sisters who walk the Gospel journey pray with a group of auto-rickshaw drivers during the Gospel Journey Campaign in the northern part of Kerala, southern India. (Philip Mathew)



by Philip Mathew

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Kannur, India — October 31, 2019

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Meeting with two Catholic nuns who were on a journey to spread the Gospel proved a turning point in the life of Mohan Kumar, a Hindu man in Kerala, southern India.

Sisters Little Therese and Treasa Margret of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel had gone to the 45-year-old alcoholic's house as part of their Gospel Journey Campaign for spreading Jesus' message and values to people of different faiths.

A week later, the nuns received a call from Kumar's wife that her husband had stopped drinking, and was acting more loving and kind to the family.

"We thanked God for the miraculous change in Kumar's life, and told the wife that we will continue to pray for her family," Little Therese, 52, told GSR.

The Carmelite sisters have been on this journey of what they say is "radiating Gospel values on foot as Jesus did" for the last 22 months. They walk with few possessions, expecting to live among people struggling with worldly and spiritual needs, in the pattern of Christ and his disciples.

The sisters, who go only by one or two given names, now are walking in the northeastern-most Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh until May 2020. From there they will go to the western Indian state of Maharashtra and one day hope to visit Mideastern and Asian nations where people are more unaware of Jesus Christ. In January, they will be in the third year of their journey on foot.

Related: Mother of Carmel Sisters in India carry on the charism of their revolutionary founder

The two nuns launched the campaign in Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese in early 2018 and visited Kumar, his wife and their two children at their home.

Margret, 44, says they have many stories of alcoholics quitting their addictions to return to normal life, bringing joy to their families.

She recalled Kumar's wife sharing many family problems during their talks. Her main worry was her husband's heavy drinking that consumed all his earnings.

"We tried to convince Kumar about the need for quitting drinking and taking care of his family. With the permission of the family, we also prayed in their house," Margret

said.

Little Therese and Margret walked through towns and villages in the archdiocesan territory in central Kerala, to evangelize, share the Gospel and teach Scriptures among the most marginalized people of all religions. They include unorganized agricultural workers, low-wage urban laborers, the unemployed and tribal (Dalit) people in what was formerly India's lowest caste.

Advertisement



Sister Little Therese, in foreground, and Sister Ann Ligy distribute prayer cards to a group of auto-rickshaw drivers they met during the Gospel Journey Campaign in Kerala, southern India. (Philip Mathew)

Later, the two nuns moved to Idukki Diocese in the state's east-central region.

They were joined in April 2018 by Carmelite Sisters Ginsa Rose, 51, and Therese, 43**,** and in January this year by Sisters Princy Maria, 55, and Ann Ligy, 60.

"On completion of our campaign in Idukki, we moved to the Tellicherry Archdiocese in northern Kerala," Sister Little Therese said.

"We walk in pairs and talk to poor and marginalized people, headload workers [freight loaders], unemployed youth, beggars, auto-rickshaw [motorized, three-wheeler passenger taxi] drivers, daily wagers and the jobless," she explained.

They also meet people who hang around in public places, or sit in groups at coffee shops, and share with them the Gospel and Jesus' love.

Sister Little Therese says they haven't faced any major challenges or obstacles during the campaign, although Hindu radicals opposed to Christianity have become more active in Kerala these days.

"Before we started the campaign, we had decided that, if any challenges or obstacles come our way, we would accept them with joy and go forward with courage," she said as the other nuns nodded.



Six members of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel have joined the Gospel Journey Campaign that started in January 2018 in Kerala, southern India. From left

are Sisters Ginsa Rose, Princy Maria, Ann Ligy, Therese, Little Therese and Treasa Margret. (Philip Mathew)

The people the nuns visit have only good words for them.

"I felt overwhelmed when the sisters shared the messages from the Bible, and gave us a prayer card," Sanjeev Rajan, 37, an auto-rickshaw driver, told GSR.

He said the auto-rickshaw drivers are "very ordinary people" who were moved when the nuns spoke to them and prayed for them and their families.

Sister Little Therese says they follow Jesus' command to his disciples when he sent them to villages in pairs. "We carry a bag for keeping some essential things for daily use. We never carry any money or food. We survive with what people give us," she adds.

She said they take a two-day break during the week and spend the time in a nearby convent to pray and meditate and review their work.

While traveling, they stay in homes that welcome them and eat what is given to them.

Sister Little Therese says their main aim is to reach out to people who have never known Jesus Christ and his ministry. "So far we have walked through 560 parishes in the three dioceses, spoken to about 26,000 people and visited some 8,000 homes, covering roughly 7,000 kilometers [4,350 miles],” she estimated in March.



Sister Little Therese walks a country road during the Gospel Journey Campaign in Kerala, southern India. Sister Treasa Margret can be seen walking several steps ahead. (Philip Mathew)

Once they are in a new region, Sister Margret said, they never use public or private transportation to move from one place to another while on the campaign. "We go everywhere on foot, come rain or shine," she said, and added, "God has been so gracious and merciful to us. None of us has fallen ill or felt tired of walking."

Sister Ann Ligy, a former school teacher and the oldest among the six nuns, told GSR that she has a walking problem, "but that hasn't stopped me from the campaign. I always felt that God is guiding me and giving me strength."

Sister Ginsa Rose claims that she could persuade a laundryman to quit his drinking habits through her prayers. "Today, when he meets a Catholic nun on the road, he

would stop his work and ask her, 'Sister, can we pray?' "

The other Sister Therese in the group, a trained nurse and a member of the congregation's Bhopal province in central India, joined the campaign when she came to Kerala to look after a nun who was ill.

"I have always found great joy in talking about Scriptures to people not aware of them," she said. Her superiors have allowed her to stay in Kerala to continue the campaign.

Maria, a counsellor by profession, says she talks to road construction workers and those working in the streets. "After exchanging pleasantries, I talk to them about Jesus and the various miracles he did."

As they travel on foot to meet people, the nuns pray the rosary.

Margret says they spend more time with those who are tired and sick, or disabled and marginalized.

"We give the needy food, clothes and medicines that we get from other people," said Therese, who has a master's degree in nursing and had worked as a nurse in Vienna, Austria, before becoming a nun.



Sisters Princy Maria and Ginsa Rose are companions on the Gospel Journey Campaign in Kerala, southern India. (Philip Mathew)

The nuns make it a point to get the family's permission before they pray for them.

"Once we visited a Muslim house. The mother insisted that we pray for them since she believes that Allah will listen to the prayers of people with pure hearts," Sister Therese recalled.

According to their superior general, Sister Sibi, who prefers going by one name, the vision of the campaign is based on the biblical verse "to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79).

The congregation's general council and Cardinal George Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, have approved the campaign.

Alencherry has told the congregation that the campaign should be conducted under strict observation and guidance of its major superiors. He also asked the sisters to inform local parish priests about their plans to stay overnight in religious houses or with families.

"We make sure that we stay in touch with our superiors by phone and get their advice and guidance to go forward in the campaign," Little Therese said.

After the campaign completed its first year in January, Alencherry hailed the nuns for doing "amazing work." He told them that more sisters from other congregations also want to join the campaign.

Archbishop George Njaralakatt of Tellicherry says the nuns on the Gospel campaign are role models for others.

The 73-year-old prelate prayed that more sisters will follow the six original travelers to reach out to people who have never known Jesus or the Gospel.

Mary John, a Catholic laywoman the nuns met at Nellikampoyil in Tellicherry Archdiocese, finds the campaign "a unique mission to make the world a better place to live."

The 52-year-old homemaker wants more sisters from different congregations to come forward to take the campaign to many more people.



The Gospel Journey Campaign sisters pray with a group of homemakers in Kerala, southern India. (Philip Mathew)

[Philip Mathew is a journalist based in Bangalore, southern India. He edits Asia Pacific Ecumenical News and writes for Matters India, a news portal that focuses on religious and social issues.]