Voices of Sisters
Coronavirus
Spirituality



Sr. Shini Melukunnel, second from left, paints with her three student helpers who are preparing to become nuns. "It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness." (Provided photo)



by Shini Melukunnel

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## Join the Conversation

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We are amid a worldwide pandemic caused by the spread of a novel coronavirus. The fear and anxiety about the virulent spread of the COVID-19 disease have been a matter of great concern for all — indeed, an extremely shattering phenomenon.

Our lives will simply have to keep changing for a while and we may need to rebuild our lives around this new normalcy. Nevertheless, the reactions and responses may vary from person to person, place to place, and time to time. And this pandemic can teach us how to deal with other difficult situations in the future.

It is important to remember that whatever you or I may be feeling right now, it is genuine.

When we hear the word "lockdown," we may feel completely lost. There is no hope to go ahead; we are blocked from doing what can be done effectively for ourselves and others.

For instance, when I felt stuck because of the prolonged lockdown imposed by the government, I realized that I did not have much to do. I found delight in painting, which kept me stress-free. Releasing anxiety in the form of painting helped me to unwind and let go of all the pressures that plagued my mind during these trying times.

Currently, most of my time is spent preparing notes to post online for my students, since a physical meeting in a classroom is no longer feasible. So, I keep on painting the nursery classroom and making it more attractive.

The purpose was not merely to indulge my fascination with painting, but I thought the painting would contribute to the process of learning and teaching for young children.

Three 18 year-old students who are preparing to become nuns helped me to accomplish this joyful task. That brought much happiness, enjoyment and a feeling of teamwork to all of us. We were happy at the thought of bringing joy to others, and sharing our positive mind-set with those who came to see our painting as well as to the children. It delighted us to spend our time painting, hoping to promote a happy mood for ourselves and those around us.

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Meanwhile, I was happy to realize that every picture that we have painted on the classroom walls will have a great impact on the children. Pictures are great teachers, and touch every child in a very simple way. No matter how many teachers there are in the room, this silent teacher will always be welcome, appreciated and highly influential.

Painting pictures that children will be interested in made me realize that they can extend the exploration of certain concepts and the child's sense of wonder. A painting is a powerful instrument that gives spirit and life to many, especially by transmitting knowledge and serving as a venue for further exploration of new things.


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Student helpers at work painting the nursery school (Provided photo)

Paintings are all about colors. Colors can motivate people to turn thinking into doing. We use colors for many reasons: to decorate, to communicate, to enhance creativity, to foster independent thinking, and for the physical and emotional wellbeing of a person.

I also learned that the process of painting teaches patience. It helps us to learn to share, to interact with others, to be responsible — and gives us a broader area for innovation and creativity. It connects us to our senses, body and mind. It gives wings of expression to our imagination, illustrated by many painters and artists of old, such as Michelangelo,Vincent Willem van Gogh, and Leonardo da Vinci.

When something beautiful is made through painting, it stimulates the artistic mind and encourages an optimistic approach to life. It can help us feel the world. And this feeling may spring into thinking, engagement and even action. That is what happened in my case.

I don't see painting as an agent of change. I see it as a companion of change.

The coronavirus lockdown has restricted all of us inside our homes. But it has given us a good opportunity to develop our hidden talents and spend time with God, ourselves, and with those who are with us.

We are not alone in this pandemic situation. So, let us face it together as one human community with a great sense of solidarity, service and hope that we shall overcome it one day.

Moreover, we love each other from afar, pray for those who are sick and on the frontlines. We continue to do our parts for each other.

And above all, let us make use of and enjoy our hidden talents and gifts, to enhance these times with greater interest, attention and passion. I did it by painting the classrooms of my school. I hope you will find your own, in spite of the many constraints you may have.

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View of the painted classroom (Provided photo)

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Painting teaching the months of the year (Provided photo)

[Shini Melukunnel, an Indian national from Kottayam, Kerala, Southern India, is a member of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit. Besides her academic background in education and post graduate work in guidance and counseling, she took a formator's course in Chile. Currently, she is the secretary to the provincial superior in her home province, and a teacher at St Arnold's Convent School in Jharsuguda, a town in the eastern Indian state of Odisha.]