

[News](#)

[Ministry](#)

[Q&As](#)



Sr. Flavia Aranha, left, and Sr. Scholastica Panthaladikel, members of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master, are engaged in holistic healing in Mapusa, Goa, in western India. (Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)



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The [Pious Disciples of the Divine Master](#) began holistic health ministry in India some 20 years ago as another branch of their charism, liturgical apostolate.

The mission was introduced by Sr. Scholastica Panthaladikel, a former Indian provincial who now manages a health center in Mapusa, Goa, in western India. According to the 74-year-old nun, the holistic health program promotes the spirituality of Jesus the master, the way, the truth and the life — the principal devotion in their congregation.

In holistic health programs, the doctor or healer deals with the body, mind and will of the patient. The nuns counsel and offer psychological help to patients in addition to attending to their physical ailments.

For physical healing, the nuns use acupuncture, classical acupuncture and [Sujok](#), or advanced acupuncture, a Korean treatment.

Those seeking this treatment at the nuns' Holistic Health Centre include priests, nuns, laypeople and children on the autism spectrum.

The nuns say the treatment is person-oriented. They consider every person as sacred.

Panthaladikel spoke with Global Sisters Report about why she launched the program and about her experience over the past 20 years.

GSR: What is holistic health?

Panthaladikel: Holistic health implies the health of a person as a whole; that is, body, mind, emotions and spirit. It focuses on everything that may interact in the cause and course of a disease. Our behavior, feelings, stressful relationships, conflicts and beliefs contribute to overall susceptibility to disease.

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Disease may not be just physical, it could involve psychological, spiritual and social dimensions. Therefore, it becomes clear that the appearance of any physical

ailments, especially a serious or chronic one, ought to evoke a deep enquiry into our lifestyle.

How did your congregation enter this program? Your main mission is liturgical apostolate combined with media, communication.

In 1994, when our general chapter deliberations favored integral formation of all, we arranged for a course on basic holistic health. I had already participated in one program and found it very helpful for me. We provided everyone in the India province an opportunity to participate in the course. After the course, a few members, on discovering the worth of the holistic program in their lives, expressed the desire to pursue holistic practitioners' training, and the provincial council favored it.



Sr. Flavia Aranha of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master gives a massage to a patient as a part of holistic treatment at their center in Mapusa, Goa, in western India. (Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)

What was the response of your sisters when you introduced this program in the province?

Surprisingly, the members who had completed their courses began practicing it wherever they were. They expressed satisfaction in their mission. Some said they loved it.

Sr. Flavia [Aranha], who is with me, has been in holistic health practice for the past 15 years. Some have completed the specialization, and others are on their way.

We established holistic health centers later. Now, we have six sisters who have completed the three-year diploma in holistic health and practice in various states. Four of them are fully trained also in counseling, classical acupuncture and Sujok. Although the training was in India, the professors came from Korea and China for the course of four to eight days. What is important is that we practice the method we learn to gain expertise.

When and where did your province begin the first center? What are the ailments you treat generally?

We established the first residential center at Bhannarghatta, Bangalore [now Bengaluru, capital of Karnataka state in southern India], in 1998. We can accommodate only six patients at a time, as each patient requires full attention with treatments like counseling, acupuncture, Sujok and massage. People come with physical and emotional problems. Stress-related ailments are common.

When admitted, we make a contract with the patients that whatever they share with us in the course of the treatment will stay with us. Chronic illnesses have a root cause that generally unfolds during the treatment. The root cause in most cases is the lifestyle: food habits, addictions and sleeping patterns. Changing lifestyle is the first step toward cure.

The patient has to be open to oneself and to the doctor. No healing will take place unless one is open. The treatment usually lasts 10 days. We follow it up after three months.

We also prepare herbal tablets for various ailments. One tablet is for boosting immunity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

How many centers do you have?

Three. We started a center in Mangalore [a port town in Karnataka state in southern India] in 2015. We started the Goa center in 2013, but here, we take only outpatients.



Sr. Scholastica Panthaladikel of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master stands in an herb garden at their holistic healing center in Mapusa, Goa, in western India. (Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)

How do you relate it to your original charism of liturgical apostolate?

The center of our discipleship is Jesus, our divine master. The totality of Jesus and of his paschal mystery grips our life to its very core. Jesus engages our minds, wills, hearts and energies. He is our way, our truth and our life, perennially present in the holy Eucharist. Jesus reached out to the whole person. This is what we try to do

through holistic healing.

We glorify God serving humanity primarily by our constant prayer before the Lord in the Eucharist. We are committed to providing nursing care to the sick. We educate and develop the skills of school dropouts.

We also promote sacred music and liturgical dance to create piety and beauty in the liturgical celebrations of the church. We also provide vestments for liturgical celebrations and church furnishings to facilitate a prayerful and spiritual ambiance in places of worship.

Do you have similar programs in other provinces?

In Mexico, our sisters work jointly with the archdiocese at a center for alcoholics. The center has experts in psychiatry and counseling who work together to help people.

Please tell us about your journey to holistic healing.

I was inspired by our first mother general, Venerable Scholastica [Rivata, 1897-1987]. She was a courageous woman. She did not take difficulties as suffering, but as a part of life. I wanted to do something good for the people.

I have not heard anything negative about this holistic healing that we have adapted into our apostolate. I find all our sisters happy with it because it is very helpful for a healthy life. I feel we do not have to die of sickness. When it is time, we die because God calls, and not necessarily because of sickness.

Knowledge is 50% of the cure. According Flavia, my companion here, we can help ourselves, even if we cannot help others. We are quick to run to doctors without looking for alternatives.



Sr. Scholastica Panthaladikel of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master, right, discusses acupuncture spots in a human body with Sr. Flavia Aranha in the office of their holistic healing center in Goa, western India. (Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)

Could you briefly tell us about your background?

I am from Kerala [a southwestern Indian state]. I have three sisters and two brothers. Two of my sisters are also religious. I joined the congregation after my 10th grade. The name of the congregation attracted me: the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master. I wanted to be a disciple of Jesus, the divine master who is the way, the truth and the life.

During my initial formation, I was fascinated by the writings of our founder, James Alberione. The formation emphasized the integral vision of the person — body, mind and spirit — and that drew me closer to the ideals of the congregation. The impact of the formation lasts throughout life, as it involves the whole person. The vastness

and the whole-embracing teaching of Jesus indeed has been breathtaking.