News
Q&As



Sr. Delna Rose is pictured at the entrance of the Mary Matha Provincial House of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate at Paroppady, in the Kozhikode district of the southwestern Indian state of Kerala. (Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)



by Sr. Lissy Maruthanakuzhy

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Sr. Delna Rose joined the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate in 1999 at 25 after working as a nurse for five years.

She has spent 16 years of her religious life working in the "home mission," the main apostolate of her congregation, founded on Sept 8, 1962, by Msgr. C.J. Varkey at Kulathuvayal in what was then the Diocese of Thalassery, Kerala, India.

The 52-year-old nun, responsible for evangelization works in the Mary Matha province, shared with Global Sisters Report her experiences in various apostolates responding to the needs of the people she serves.

***GSR*: Why did you join the religious life?**

Sr. Delna Rose: I worked as a staff nurse at a Mumbai hospital. Those were fulfilling years for me, but I was [also] involved in the Jesus Youth charismatic movement.

[That was when] I realized I had a call to be a religious. It was an inner call after reading an article in Shalom Magazine by Monsignor Varkey that profoundly touched my heart, bringing me to tears. And there was no looking [back] since then.



Sr. Delna Rose of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate speaks with the family of Kainady Jacob George during a home mission visit at Paroppady in the Kozhikode district of the southwestern Indian state of Kerala. (Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)

Why did you choose this congregation?

Recognizing my calling to be a religious, I embarked on a prayerful search for a community that would enable me to dedicate myself to direct evangelization and preaching God's word. I was drawn to the congregation's family apostolate and proclaiming God's word. I was thrilled to find a congregation aligning [with] my aspirations, offering abundant opportunities for mission work through visits and retreats.

Today, I feel grateful to God for leading me to this congregation, where I live out my calling to spread God's love and word.

Kerala is the birthplace of many congregations. Why was this congregation needed?

Monsignor Varkey started our congregation to draw people to God. After the Second World War, many Christian families migrated from [the] Travancore kingdom [now in central Kerala] to Malabar [in the north]. The migration was caused by poverty and scarcity of land for cultivation.

As the pastor of Kulathuvayal, a migrants' parish under the Archdiocese of Thalassery, he had a close encounter with the miserable conditions of the migrating families. Poverty was rampant. The people had to find shelter [and] sell their agricultural produce. They lacked medical assistance, educational facilities and faith formation for [their] children. Another challenge was [the] lack of spiritual and moral assistance for their family problems.

He also founded the congregation so women could respond to the needs of these migrant families. He wanted to uphold human values and work for God's kingdom in collaboration with the church.

We carry forward this mission through [our] family apostolate, proclamation of the Gospel and other apostolates suited to the time.

What does your congregation do now?

Our congregation now has four provinces. We are engaged in various apostolates in 25 dioceses in India, four in Europe (Germany and Italy), and one in America. We have opened retreat centers to cater to our people's spiritual needs. The first was the Nirmala (Immaculate) Retreat Centre at Kulathuvayal, which offers people spiritual rejuvenation and liberation from [the] bondage [of] alcohol and drugs. Now,

we have five such centers where we organize weeklong and weekend retreats together with night vigils for families, youth and children. During the retreats, we also counsel those in difficult situations.

We offer "Angels Retreats" for children aged 3-8, side by side with their parents. We introduce children to the word of God from a young age using attractive methods. For example, one of our sisters started a group called "Christine" for children. We also organize counseling at schools, colleges and parishes.

The center of all this is our home mission.

Can you please elaborate?

Our home mission is spread throughout different parishes and dioceses in and out of Kerala. Two sisters visit every family in a parish as a team. The sisters live among the people and meet each family member individually before meeting them all together. We also counsel and pray with them. We can visit a maximum of six to eight families a day. Each sister, whatever her mission, has to visit at least two families every week. We leave a family only after giving them a taste of God's love.

A few years ago, we launched "Ammayodoppam" ("With Mother") in parishes to promote devotion to Mother Mary. The program centers around apparitions of the Blessed Mother and the rosary, talks and prayers.

"Blaze Sun" is a program for youth to help them understand that victory comes only through Jesus. Many young people do not wish to marry but choose a "live-in" relationship. We guide them through the sacrament of marriage.

In Mumbai, we have the "Shadows of Tomorrow' program where we train street children and put them in schools. This year, the first batch of three passed their 10th-grade exams.



Sisters stand in front of the grotto of the Blessed Mother at the Provincial House of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate at Paroppady in the Kozhikode district of the southwestern Indian state of Kerala. They are, from left, Srs. Mary Paul, Rosmy John, Soja John, Delna Rose, Asha Maria and Christy Babu. (Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)

What are the main problems of those seeking counseling from you?

Around 100 people attend our five-day weekly retreats. Their problems differ according to the place, culture and nation and include alcoholism, substance abuse addiction, and husband-wife relations. We have also come across LGBTQ [people].

In northeastern India, we have found people facing moral issues. The Archdiocese of Shillong [in Meghalaya state in northeast India] invited us to start the home mission and counseling. I served there [for] two years.

A lack of prayer is [commonly] seen among young people. They are after worldly things.

We counsel people according to their needs and are also trained in "gifted counseling" during our formation. It comes in handy during retreats.

Could you explain what "gifted counseling" is?

In gifted counseling, we seek guidance from the Holy Spirit to uncover underlying issues and bring lasting healing. A gifted counselor, attuned to the Holy Spirit's wisdom, can discern unshared problems as the Holy Spirit reveals hidden concerns, allowing the counselor to address unseen roots; identify root causes as charisms of the Holy Spirit guide the counselor to uncover the underlying sources of distress; and facilitate deep healing with the Holy Spirit's guidance, as the counselor helps clients overcome spiritual and emotional obstacles.

By embracing the Holy Spirit's guidance, gifted counseling offers a unique and powerful approach to healing and growth.

A gifted counselor can see a person's problem even [if] she or he does not share it. We believe the Holy Spirit reveals the problem to the counselor. This helps us find a lasting solution in one session.

We conduct a 12-day training in gifted counseling for anyone interested. Individual counseling is offered from 9 a.m, to 1 p.m. every second Saturday.

Do you use digital media?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we reached our people through an online program, "Christ's Army." About 700 people from around the world attended it. We formed them into groups, organized discussions on faith and gave them recorded talks.

We also collaborate with [the] Shalom TV channel, founded by the inspiration and support of our founder. The channel's headquarters [is] near our generalate. We contribute two programs for children and adults to the channel.

Do you organize outside India?

Yes. Two of our sisters concluded retreats in the Persian Gulf countries. We have now reached Australia. Many Catholics from Kerala settled or [are] working in these countries. We conduct at least four retreats in Australia.

Tell us about your family.

I feel blessed to have been born into a devout Catholic family with loving parents and two younger brothers, who are now settled with their families.