News
Q&As



Residents of Kanlungan ni Maria Home for the Aged in Antipolo City, Philippines, pose for a photo together with the nuns and staff. (GSR photo/Oliver Samson)



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Sr. Herminia Mamarion, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, is the administrator of Kanlungan ni Maria Home for the Aged in Antipolo, a city about 20 kilometers southeast of Manila, Philippines.

Kanlungan ni Maria had initially rented a house in Antipolo in 2002 to provide shelter and care to abandoned seniors. While renting, the nursing home solicited funds from charitable individuals, families and organizations to acquire land and build its own home, which opened in 2008.

In Filipino culture, caring for aging parents is the responsibility of the children. The government has taken measures to protect seniors with actions like the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010. For example, one provision allows senior citizens a 5% discount on groceries for a weekly maximum purchase of 1,300 pesos (US$22). Some members of the House of Representatives are proposing to increase the maximum weekly purchase to 2,500 pesos (US$42).

Indigent senior citizens also receive a monthly social pension of 1,000 pesos (US$17) from the national government through the social welfare department. But health care is one of the most expensive needs of seniors in the country.

***GSR*: What was the common cause of abandonment of the elderly before they found a home here?**

Mamarion: Each of our residents has his or her own story. Some of them were house helpers before. They came from the provinces and worked in Manila. Their employers approached social welfare to find for them a shelter when they were already old and had to retire.

One of our residents, who was a house helper, sent what she earned to her relatives by bank. But when she wanted to retire, she couldn't contact her relatives anymore.



Holy Cross Sr. Herminia Mamarion in her office at Kanlungan ni Maria Home for the Aged in Antipolo City, Philippines (GSR photo/Oliver Samson)

And some of our residents, sad to say, were abandoned by their own family.

One of our residents was abandoned at a church by his child. His child was also the one who informed the social welfare that a senior citizen was abandoned at the church. We investigated and located the child and informed them that their father was with us. The child told us that they knew that their father was in Kanlungan ni Maria, but they feared that we would return their father to them.

I told them that we would not give them back their father, but they should visit him. After a year, we tried to reconcile the father with his children, but we couldn't contact them anymore.

We also have a resident who is a former teacher. She and her husband did not have a child. They adopted one. Her husband got sick. They sold their properties for his hospitalization and medication. Unfortunately, her husband died.

Since she had nothing more left, she returned the child to the biological parents. She presented herself to social welfare. The child went back to her, but she was already in Kanlungan ni Maria.

What are the common health conditions of the residents today?

Kanlungan ni Maria has 34 elderly today; 13 are females, 11 are males.

Most of the male residents had a stroke. They suffered from stroke before they came to live here. Some residents are diabetic. They have their maintenance medications.

We have a new resident who is a hit-and-run victim and has a broken leg; the social welfare brought him here.

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How do you provide them with the health care they need?

We have a volunteer doctor who checks their condition. We also have an in-house nurse who monitors them.

The residents have complete medical examinations every six months. But in case of an emergency, we take them to the hospital. Our volunteer doctor advises us to take our resident to the hospital when needed.

When the doctor recommends our resident to stay in the hospital, we have him or her admitted. Fortunately, we are prioritized at the hospital since they know we are a home for the neglected.

What are the recreations of the residents?

We have an area for watching TV. They also paint toys and do coloring pages. Our stroke patients are doing coloring pages. One of our stroke patients has been doing coloring pages for years; his coloring has improved since he started doing it.

We also bring them to Regina RICA [a Marian tourist attraction in Tanay]. We have been going there for years now.

Since the nursing home provides free shelter, how do you sustain the needs of the residents?

The generous donors keep our residents provided. Sometimes, birthday celebrants say that they want to celebrate their birthday here. They ask us what they would bring for the elderly. We sometimes request them to bring medicine and vitamins, other times milk. We also request them to bring cleaning agents.



Young students visit the elderly residents of Kanlungan ni Maria Home for the Aged. (GSR photo/Oliver Samson)

Some bring diapers. Others hand us cash. We use the cash to pay our staff. Everything is provided by charitable people.

We ask for the support of the diocese only when needed, like now that we are being required to install a fire sprinkler system.

During the pandemic, what was the experience of the nursing home, its residents, staff and nuns? How did everyone cope?

By God's grace, our residents were kept provided during the pandemic. So, I said we are truly on the kanlungan [lap] of Mary. She did not let us starve.

During the pandemic, the residents spent their time on their recreations. Sometimes they sang at the videoke [a type of karaoke machine] together with the staff.

How do you make the residents feel that they have a home and a family here?

That is important to them. You must give them attention. Some residents do not eat when you have overlooked them. When you notice that they are sad because you have overlooked them, you must take the initiative to make them feel they are important and being taken care of. They seek attention.

Sometimes a resident will quarrel with a fellow resident when you did not notice them. They create scenes to make you notice them. They really need attention. And you must give it to them. Treat them the way a child does his parents. When they tell you a story you must listen to them.

They are happy when they feel you care about them.

What support do you need today from charitable individuals and groups, and even the church and government?

I think we need to expand the building to increase its capacity to provide a home for the neglected. A place like this is needed, especially today.