News



Sr. Jolly Joseph, an Indian member of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart-Philippines, displays rosaries the sisters make and sell to support their ministry. The sisters primarily focus on two youth ministries: pastoral care and education. (GSR photo/Oliver Samson)



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The mission of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart-Philippines includes 14 sisters from Vietnam, India, Kenya and Malta, and faces many challenges in the Southeast Asian country.

The congregation's central house is in New Manila in a residential development in Quezon City. The sisters minister in Gumaca, a municipality just over 200 kilometers (124 miles) southeast of Manila, the nation's capital. They also work in Bataan, a province about 120 kilometers northwest of Manila.

Their mission in the Philippines began in 2009.

"One of the biggest problems we have since we are all foreigners is visa expenses," said Sr. Marianne Farrugia, the delegate superior and a Maltese citizen, noting that the sisters pay about P30,000 ($537) for a two-year visa.

Returning to their home countries every two years increases travel expenses. Because of those costs, the nuns are sometimes allowed to return home every three years instead of two.

"It's difficult to get to know the people because we have no friends, no families, nobody to introduce us to [anyone]," Farrugia said. "It takes time." That makes it hard for them to sustain their mission.

"[Travel expenses and a lack of friends] drain us," she said.

The sisters took a few classes in the Tagalog language when they arrived. Farrugia said she mostly learned to speak Tagalog after she integrated with the local community, especially with children.

The children are simple and honest, she said, and they correct the sisters when they make a mistake speaking Tagalog.

"People really appreciate when we speak in their language," Farrugia said. Still, she said, recruiting Filipinos to the order is difficult.

Nearly 80% of the country's population identifies as Roman Catholic.



Sr. Marianne Farrugia and some of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart-Philippines in Bataan, Philippines. The congregation includes sisters from Malta, India, Kenya, Vietnam and the Philippines. (Courtesy of Daughters of the Sacred Heart-Philippines.)

The congregation has met with youths who expressed interest in joining them. However, their families will not allow them because most parents want them to earn money for themselves and the family.

"Then, we tried going to Vietnam, where most of our vocations are from. We hope to go to other nearby countries, like Indonesia. But also, thanks to God, we now have two Filipinos, a postulant and a novice," Farrugia said.

In addition, the sisters struggle to raise money to support their ministries in the Philippines. While the congregation helps with visa expenses, health care and living costs, much work remains.

"So far, we have been doing it by word of mouth," Farrugia said. "As we make friends, we share about our ministries and ask for support."

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To raise money, the sisters make rosaries; frames of Jesus, Mary and the saints; and bracelets and placemats, said Sr. Jolly Joseph, who is Indian. They sell their products from their New Manila house and make deliveries when possible.

The sisters also grow potted plants and offer them to their friends and supporters.

The sisters primarily focus on two youth ministries: pastoral care and education. They provide health-related assistance for babies and children up to 6, visiting families monthly. Three sisters work at St. Ignatius Parochial School in Gumaca. They serve as school principal, teacher and nurse.

The sisters believe the poor deserve no-cost education and vocational training to support themselves. Although the sisters have helped some people find jobs and helped mothers start income-generating projects, Farrugia said the sisters dream of doing more for the community.