News
Q&As



Sr. Seby Thomas, a member of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate, edits at her studio in Sultan Bathery in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala. (GSR photo/Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)



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Sr. Seby Thomas, a member of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate, uses short films to describe challenges facing contemporary society in Kerala, a southwestern Indian state.

After earning a bachelor's degree in mass communications and journalism, the 44-year-old nun focuses on issues in the church, including sisters and priests. She has already completed 34 short films, including one on Kerala's Munambam, a coastal village where Christians were on the verge of losing their property to a Muslim welfare board.

Her college friends share her vision and sometimes fund her projects. They also act in and edit her films.

She told Global Sisters Report that she spends a lot of time in prayer, reading and reflection before undertaking a project.

***GSR*: How did you enter mass media, when your congregation mainly focuses on family?**

Thomas: My inspiration came from our founder, Fr. C.J. Varkey (1921-2009). Although our congregation's charism is to manifest Jesus' redemptive love to all, he wanted us to move with the signs of the times.

From the beginning, he encouraged us to use radio and print, available then, to proclaim the Gospel. The media field has progressed a lot since then. However, the modern world uses social media to tarnish Jesus' saving message of love. We try to use the same media to bring Jesus' love to God's people.



Sr. Seby Thomas, a member of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate, in front of her convent at Sultan Bathery in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala (GSR photo/Lissy Maruthanakuzhy)

What were your thoughts when asked to study media?

I felt empty, and was in the dark when my provincial asked me if I could study mass communications and journalism. I had not heard about such subjects. I was prepared to become a teacher. But my father's unexpected death left a great void in me and I could not proceed. It was during those days the provincial approached me. I took my superior's request as God's voice and obeyed.

Tell us about your study days.

My teachers and companions often asked me, "What is the use of a religious sister studying mass communications?" I only smiled. I was certain to do the will of the Lord, who I was certain would not leave me halfway. Such trust helped me overcome many adverse situations.

By the time I completed the course, my critics changed their views. They saw my performances in the production of short films, documentaries and interviews done for online magazines. My first interview was with the then-education minister of Kerala that amazed my teachers and colleagues. Whenever I asked people to act in my short films they obliged happily.

Why did you decide to focus on films and not print journalism?

Perhaps the Lord who taught through parables and stories may have wanted me to use this media for better reach. This is not a field I wanted to enter. But I believe it was God's plan for me. I strive to fulfill his plan for me. This is what I think every time I complete a project beyond my intelligence and capacity.

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What type of themes do you choose for your films?

When I find Jesus and his church being ridiculed through social media, I take it as my responsibility to tell the world the truth. In such moments, we think the world has forgotten the truth and degraded social media presentations.

When I see a movie trailer deal with some issues, I watch the film with a superior to see how it has gone against the church and its teachings. Only then do I decide to respond.

So, your superiors and community support you?

Yes. I prefer to be known as a religious, rather than a media person. I don't do anything that I want with the media. When my superiors ask me to do a certain project I do with great joy. Or, when I have an idea I present it to them and work on it only when they approve it. So far they have not said no.



Sr. Seby Thomas with Ann Maria, an actress, at a shooting site in Sultan Bathery, Kerala, India (Courtesy of Seby Thomas)

How many films do you produce in a year? Who writes the script and music? Who funds them?

My focus is on contemporary themes that touch lives. I keep observing films, news and issues that come up in society. I decide to respond with a short film after prayer and reflection. I also read a lot.

I believe it is Jesus who dictates the screenplay and script; I only have to write. I tell Jesus, "If you desire, I will do it."

How do you shoot the film? How do you choose locations and actors?

I observe places when I travel and choose different locations. A week before the shooting, I give the script to the prospective actors. If they are new to acting, I coach them to get the right accent and expression.

At the film set, we maintain a family atmosphere where we feel free with one another. We do not shoot in a studio.

Veteran actors reduce their rates when they learn that I am doing the film as a mission. Some say, "If it is for sisters, no charge." People are generally happy to collaborate with us. Once a classmate traveled from Hyderabad to Kerala with his camera to shoot my film and charged nothing. This is why I say it is God's work.

Do you have any message for youth who want to join the media mission?

You ought to stand for truth, embrace the values, be the voice of truth, raise your voice as a media person when you find those standing for truth are persecuted.