Columns
Religious Life

Sr. Lismy Parayil with her camera during a film shoot. (Courtesy of Lismy Parayil)

by Sr. Lismy Parayil

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With a heart full of gratitude, I am humbled to share a special milestone in my journey as a Carmelite religious sister and a creative artist. On March 8, 2022, I was recognized by the *India Book of Records* as the first professional cinematographer nun in India — a recognition not just for me, but for the broader church and creative ministry. This honor belongs to my Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC), my family, my community and to every person who has prayed with and for me.

My journey in cinematography began not in a studio, but in the silence of a convent. I entered religious life in 2007 intending to become a teacher. However, an encounter with a simple camera stirred something deeper in me. With the support of my superiors, I pursued academic training in media: a bachelor's and master's in journalism and mass communication, and a diploma in cinematography and editing.

What began with transforming songs into visual meditations for retreats slowly evolved into a full-fledged media ministry. I now serve as a freelance filmmaker and manage a digital recording studio producing Christian content — devotional music, documentaries, short films and inspirational reels that aim to proclaim God's love in the digital space.

Sr. Lismy Parayil interacts with children while holding her camera. (Courtesy of Lismy Parayil)

Over the years, I have directed more than 250 to 300 music videos, 35 documentaries, numerous short films and reels with messages of hope, faith and love. My first music video was born during a retreat, capturing the invocation of the Holy Spirit. That moment lit a fire in me, not just creatively but spiritually.

One project close to my heart is *Nanmayude Sugandham* (The Fragrance of Virtue), which tells the stories of individuals enduring profound suffering yet living with hope and dignity. Another work, *Pidakkozhi* (The Hen), a true story of redemption,

received the 2024 Phoenix Film Award. These stories are not just productions; they are encounters with grace.

Despite periods of physical suffering — including years in a wheelchair due to severe arthritis — I felt God calling me to continue. Those dark times refined my mission. As someone once said of me, "She holds a rosary in one hand and a camera in the other." That phrase captures the heart of my vocation: to merge deep prayer with vibrant creativity in the service of the Gospel.

I first opened the internet 17 years ago and was overwhelmed by its vastness: so much noise, distraction — and even darkness. Amid that, a desire grew in me to create something meaningful. I began by crafting simple visual reflections using scripture and song. Slowly, I recognized that God was calling me to use the internet as a platform for healing.

Sr. Lismy Parayil, CMC, speaks to the audience about her experience as a filmmaker at the Global Jubilee Conference, during the Jubilee of the World of Communications, in Rome, Jan. 24-26. (Courtesy of Lismy Parayil)

I see Jesus walking among today's digital crowds just as He once walked among the people by wells, in homes and on the mountains. If people gather online, then that is where we, too, are called to be — bringing His light to their screens, and ultimately, their hearts.

Today, my content reaches global audiences through platforms such as "Nirmala Media TSR" and "Camera Nun" YouTube channels, "Sr Lismy CMC" on Instagram and Facebook and several other collaborative YouTube channels. Together, these platforms have reached over 7.78 million views. I am not pursuing fame, but I believe they are great tools for evangelization and inspiration.

As a Carmelite sister, my identity is deeply rooted in silence, contemplation and community. My inspiration also comes from saints who understood the creative soul. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, a French Carmelite and accomplished pianist, once said, "I would like to be in the film industry since I want Jesus to be known in that field too." Her words still echo in my heart.

Sr. Lismy Parayil, CMC, was honored with the James Alberione Award by the Indian Catholic Press Association at the 30th National Convention of Christian Journalists in Pune, India on Sept. 20, 2025. (Courtesy of Br. Jeeson Thomas, CMI)

I also draw strength from Mother Angelica, a pioneer in religious media, and from Pope Francis, whose passion for inclusive and merciful communication challenges

me to broaden my perspective. Our founding father, St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who established the first private Catholic printing press in India, reminds me that embracing new media is part of our legacy. Like him, I aim to use communication as a path for formation and evangelization.

Cinematography may seem unconventional for a sister, but I believe that art, when guided by faith, becomes a ministry. Media, when used responsibly, can heal, unite, and inspire. My work focuses on real-life narratives — stories that reflect the goodness and resilience of ordinary people.

One of the greatest lessons I've learned is that content matters more than tools. I began with a small Sony camera and limited resources. Our first studio was outdoors. Later, with the help of just three carpenters and without an engineer, I built our current recording space, Nirmala Media Digital Recording Studio, which is dedicated to Mother Mary. She always guided me. Today, it serves as a powerful center for producing music and sharing faith with thousands.

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Our CMC charism emphasizes the Christian formation and empowerment of women and children. That focus flows into my media mission: creating content that uplifts the dignity of women, nurtures the faith of children, and opens doors for everyone to encounter Christ.

Sr. Lismy Parayil, CMC, and Dr. Paolo Ruffini, prefect of the Vatican’s Dicastery for Communication, at the Global Jubilee Conference, a part of the Jubilee of the World of Communications, in Rome, Jan. 24-26. (Courtesy of Lismy Parayil)

One of the most affirming moments in my journey came recently, when I received a special invitation from the Vatican Dicastery for Communication to attend a global media gathering. To walk the halls of the Vatican and meet with communicators from around the world was a moment of grace. This year, I was also honored with the James Alberione Award by the Indian Catholic Press Association, which was conferred at the 30th National Convention of Christian Journalists in Pune on Sept.

20. I am convinced that when we surrender our gifts to God, He takes them further than we could ever imagine.

Looking back, I see that the seeds of this ministry were planted long before I could name them. What once seemed like small acts — editing a video, recording a hymn, sharing a reflection — have now become part of a much larger mission.

This journey has not been without challenges. But I've learned that if God calls us, He will also equip us. He sends the right people, opens the right doors and gives us the courage to persevere.

My hope is that through every frame I capture and every story I tell, others may see not just a sister with a camera, but my heart trying to reflect the love of Christ. May we, in this digital age, never tire of proclaiming His light.