News
Q&As



Left: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament Sr. Sabina Joseph begins her winning race in the hurdles event during the State Masters Athletics Championship held Oct. 24, 2025, at Maravayal Stadium in Wayanad, Kerala (GSR screenshot/Courtesy of Sabina Joseph). Right: Joseph in the refectory of the Mary Matha Provincial House, Mananthavady, Wayanad, Kerala, southwestern India (George Kommattam).



by George Kommattam

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Eyebrows went up when Sr. Sabina Joseph lined up for a hurdles race in the 55-plus women's category in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala.

Running barefoot and wearing her religious dress, the member of the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament sprinted gracefully, clearing hurdles and finishing first in the State Masters Athletics Championship.

The crowd at Maravayal Stadium in Wayanad erupted in cheers. Videos of the race went viral in India, drawing praise from Kerala's education minister and thousands of online viewers.

Joseph was a national-level hurdler in her school days. After joining the convent in 1993, she became a physical education teacher, a rare profession for a Catholic nun in India. She later took her first vows in 1997 and perpetual vows in 2000.

Over three decades, she has trained hundreds of students in athletics, boxing, tae kwon do and badminton, helping many young people from rural families find confidence and opportunities they never would have dreamed of.

Joseph recently spoke to Global Sisters Report at the Mary Matha Provincial House, Dwaraka, Mananthavady, adjacent to the school where she teaches physical education.

***GSR*: You were once a national-level hurdler. What made you choose religious life?**

Joseph: I started sports when I was in the fourth grade at Ennappara School in Kasaragod [Kerala's northernmost district]. My family was not interested in sports, but my sports teacher encouraged me. Later, I joined GV Raja Sports School in Kannur, run by the Kerala government, where I specialized in hurdles.

While in the ninth grade, I finished first in the state meet and represented Kerala at the 1983 national games. I also competed in heptathlon events. After finishing school, I joined Mercy College in Palakkad. Later, I completed a certificate course in physical education with first rank from the Government College of Physical Education in Kozhikode.

Mercy College was managed by the Congregation of Mother of Carmel, and I was deeply touched by their prayer life and drawn to their spirituality. They sowed the seed of my vocation. My parents had taught me the importance of prayer. So, faith was already in my heart.

Why did you join the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament?

It was on my father's advice. Several of our relatives were already in this congregation, and I have always loved eucharistic adoration, even when I was in school.

This congregation allows me to have deep prayer while giving me the freedom to serve others through teaching and sports. Looking back, I feel it was God's plan.



Sr. Sabina Joseph (right) with Shoji Joseph (center), former headmaster of Dwaraka Upper Primary School, and Gralia George (left), physical education teacher, along with the school football team, in Wayanad, Kerala, southwestern India (Courtesy of Sabina Joseph)

What inspired you to return to the track and run the hurdles after so many years?

I am completing my service as a physical education teacher next March. So, I felt this was my last opportunity.

In the past years, whenever I saw hurdles, something stirred inside me. This time, I sensed a voice saying, "Do it." My students and my community encouraged me. I trained quietly for a few days to test my health and endurance before registering for the event.

It was a God-given chance to perform once more — and to thank him for all he has done for me.

Your victory video went viral, drawing the education minister's praise. How did that feel?

I was shocked. I never expected it. I ran barefoot and in habit because that is our official dress in public. Some thought it would be difficult, but it never hindered me. I felt God's presence in every step.

After completing the race, I fainted from exhaustion and was briefly hospitalized. But I was overjoyed. The minister called my victory "a proud moment for the education department."

Since then, I have received many phone calls from relatives, friends and even old schoolmates, congratulating me. Everyone says my race has inspired them.



Adoration Sr. Sabina Joseph, in white habit, is honored by Carmelite of Mary Immaculate Sr. Siji M, headmistress of Dwaraka Upper Primary School, Mananthavady, for winning a gold medal in the State Masters Athletics Championship hurdles competition held on Oct 24, 2025, in a function at the school where Joseph teaches. (Courtesy of Sabina Joseph)

Few nuns in India work in sports or physical education. Why did you choose this unusual ministry?

Sports were my passion before I joined the convent. After joining, obedience made me continue with it. My superiors asked me to teach physical education, and I accepted.

It is a demanding job for a nun — early morning practices, evening coaching and travel for competitions. But I always felt that God wanted me there. Through sports, I could reach children who might never meet a nun otherwise.

Many sisters avoid this field because it doesn't fit typical convent schedules, but I believe God calls us to serve in different ways. I've seen how sports transform lives, especially for poor students.

What challenges did you face as a sports instructor?

The first challenge came from my family. After joining the convent, I was ranked first in the Kerala Public Service Commission list and was eligible for a government job. My brother came to the convent asking me to come home, but I told him, "I have chosen Jesus."

It was hard to balance prayer, community life and my duties as a physical education teacher. I often had to leave early for practice or come home late after competitions. The work required traveling by bus and rearranging prayer times, but I did it joyfully.

The support of my community, colleagues and students helped me persevere. God gave me the strength to face every difficulty.

Do you bring faith and spirituality into your training and teaching?

Prayer is at the heart of everything. Before each coaching session, we pray together. Before every competition, I tell students, "Put your trust in God."



Adoration Sr. Sabina Joseph (right) and Carmelite Sr. Siji Joseph (left) congratulate the school's tug-of-war team for winning second prize in the district-level competition in 2025. (Courtesy of Sabina Joseph)

In 2009, during a school sports meet, my students prayed the rosary for their friends who were competing. Later, many of them told me they still keep that habit. Even non-Christian students joined in our prayers. Faith gives strength, whether on the track or in life.

Sports teach discipline, and prayer gives purpose.

You help poor and rural children discover their potential through sports. Why?

Because they have fewer chances. Rich families can afford coaching and travel, but the poor usually drop their sports careers. So, I stood with many talented and

promising students.

I try to help such students by supporting their expenses or connecting them with others who can. I refer really talented students to sports schools or academies that have good coaches.

Sports is a bridge. It unites people, heals hurts and gives children dignity. My many students have secured jobs in the police, electricity board and other services through sports. As a nun, I can be close to them and help them grow both in skill and in faith.

Please share some success stories.

Many of my students have found success through sports. More than 25 have secured government jobs in the police, military and railways.

My proudest story is about P.S. Jeena, who came from a poor Christian family in Wayanad. I trained her in athletics for a few years and then sent her to the Kannur Sports Division, where coach Tomy Cherian discovered her talent in basketball.

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She became the captain of the national women's basketball team. She also played for Australian club Ringwood Lady Hawks, becoming the first Indian woman basketballer to play professionally overseas.

She has told me that she does everything after a prayer I had taught the students in the school grounds.

Another student, Jaganathan, was a hurdler who is now an officer in the Indian Army. Some students have represented Kerala and India in athletics and team sports. Seeing their success fills my heart with gratitude.

Looking back, what are your thoughts?

At the closing stage of my career, God has reminded me that a nun's life has no limits when guided by obedience and grace. Through obedience, I found my freedom and became a witness of God's love.

God has led me from athletics to the convent, then the classroom, and finally back to the track.

If I had given up my passion completely, I might never have reached the poor children who needed me. Even my victory at the masters' meet was a sign that God wanted to use me as his witness.

To young people: Begin everything with prayer. God has a plan for you. Sports can cure many ills of our time: drug addiction, loneliness and aimlessness. It teaches teamwork, discipline and faith.

To women religious: There is no work we cannot do if God is with us. When he gives you a task, he will also give you the strength to complete it. Trust in his timing.