News
Ministry



Sr. Helen Mary Anthony, of the Sisters of St. Anne Bangalore, will take charge as the director of the Catholic Health Association of India in May. (Courtesy of Helen Mary Anthony)



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A Catholic sister will take up the leadership of India's largest network of Catholic medical professionals, becoming the first woman to lead the Catholic Health Association of India.

Sr. Helen Mary Anthony, of the Sisters of St. Anne Bangalore, will take over as director on May 1. The 63-year-old medical doctor with specialization in gynecology has extensive experience in hospital management and medical ministry in India.

"I am happy to take up this position and continue its legacy," Anthony told Global Sisters Report.

Currently, the association — founded by an Australian missionary nun 83 years ago — has 3,572 member institutions that function under 11 regional units. Most of them are located in remote and difficult-to-reach areas.

Redemptorist Fr. Mathew Abraham, the association's outgoing director, said he saw Anthony's leadership qualities and commitment to the medical profession, and he mentored her for the position. She served as the association's deputy director for a year.

The association extends primary, preventive, promotive and curative care services to the community, serving more than 21 million people annually.

"Almost 90% of the members serving [the association] are women religious, as well as thousands of lay nurses from the Catholic community," said Anthony, who has served in rural areas most of her life and is also an active member of the Sister Doctors Forum of India.

Anthony said Australian missionary Sr. Mary Glowrey, a member of the Congregation of Jesus Mary Joseph and a medical doctor, laid the foundation for the medical ministry in India and founded the association in 1943 as the Catholic Hospital Association of India.

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"I want to take Venerable Mary of the Sacred Heart Glowrey as my role model and inspiration," Anthony said, explaining that her religious vocation and the medical mission go hand in hand.

Born in Bangalore (now Bengaluru) in southern India, Anthony joined her congregation at the age of 16 and became the provincial when she was 38.

"I had a priest and two sisters on my maternal side who were my immediate inspiration to become a nun, and Mother Teresa of Kolkata instilled in me a desire to serve the destitute," she said.

She said the Sister Doctors Forum initially focused mainly on maternal and child health, addressing critical needs in underserved communities. The mortality rates of infants in rural areas were as high as 50% when she started working.

"Now it is brought down to less than 3%, thanks to a combined mission of the Catholic nuns and the government of India," Anthony said.

Since 2025, the Catholic Health Association of India's doctors have adopted a new mission to promote mental health among various sectors, including among the nuns.

Anthony said she will continue to implement the association's goal to reach the unreached, engage in direct community health programs in the poorest areas, and in palliative care.

"Our focus will continue to be option for the poor, and we are committed to taking care of their physical and mental health needs," she said.