News



The Kallidukkil sisters pose with their youngest sister, Pauline Kallidukkil, at her residence in Valillapuzha, Kerala, southwestern India. Pauline Kallidukkil is at center. On her right are Srs. Gracious Kallidukkil, Ancy Kallidukkil and Philo Kallidukkil; on her left are Srs. Jacintha Kallidukkil, Mareena Kallidukkil and Rosetom Kallidukkil. (Courtesy of Philo Kallidukkil)



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Before dawn broke over the mist-covered hills of Venappara, in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala, a family of 10 children and their parents would begin the day praying before the family altar.

This practice eventually led six of the eight daughters of the Kallidukkil family to religious life. The eldest, a son, is now 86 and the youngest, a daughter, is 62.

"We did not realize then that our home was shaping our vocation," said Sr. Philo Kallidukkil, the ninth member of the family and a member of the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

"Prayer was part of our living. It was as natural as breathing," the 65-year-old vice provincial of the congregation's Vimala Matha (Immaculate Mother) province told Global Sisters Report in April.

Three of Philo's sisters also belong to the Adoration congregation, while two are members of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation, both based in Kerala.

"Our parents never spoke directly about vocation. They simply prayed. Watching them taught us what surrender meant," recalled Sr. Gracious Kallidukkil, the third member of the family and the eldest among the nuns. She is now retired in Mananthavady, a town in Kerala's Wayanad district.

> 'Our home was a nursery for religious life.'
> —Sr. Jacintha Kallidukkil
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The 82-year-old Adoration nun said their late parents — Thomas and Thresiamma Kallidukkil — would rise before dawn and kneel in prayer before waking the children for the rosary, Scripture reading and hymns.

Philo said her parents were hesitant when she expressed her desire to join the convent. They sent her to stay with relatives so that she could reconsider.

"Instead, the distance deepened my conviction. Everywhere I went, I felt the call more strongly," she said.

Gracious joined the Adoration congregation's Mananthavady province in 1964 and took her first vows three years later.

"My vocation was a natural response to the faith lived at home," Gracious told GSR. Farming demanded hard work and faith anchored their daily life, she added.

Her family moved to Venappara in 1946 from Thodupuzha, some 145 miles south. Venappara's Holy Family Parish opened seven years later.



Sr. Ancy Kallidukkil poses with Sr. Philo Kallidukkil (right) and Sr. Rosetom Kallidukkil (left) at the Adoration Convent in Kerala's Kasaragod district, southwestern India. (Courtesy of Philo Kallidukkil)

Gracious said in 1956 their father and a few parishioners, led by their parish priest, traveled to Bharananganam, some 20 miles south of Thodupuzha, to request the Clarist congregation open a convent in their parish.

"The sisters became part of every family," recalled Sr. Mareena Kallidukkil, the fourth in the family. "They visited homes, taught catechism and guided us like elder sisters. We learned to love Jesus by watching them."

Mareena, a retired Clarist nun living in Kalpetta after decades in education and formation ministries, recalled children gathering eagerly for catechism classes where the nuns narrated stories of saints. Those stories kindled her love for religious life.

"We were formed at home long before entering the convent and our parents trained us through example," Mareena told GSR.

She said their grandparents, who lived with them, strengthened the home's prayerful atmosphere. Visits from nun relatives further encouraged their vocations.

"Our eldest sister set the example by joining the convent. We just followed her example," Mareena added.

Sr. Ancy Kallidukkil, the sixth member who made her first vows as an Adoration nun in 1971, recalled being influenced by their cousin nuns and catechism teachers.

"They spoke about St. Thérèse and St. Alphonsa. Something touched my heart," said the retired nursery teacher living in Kasaragod, Kerala's northernmost district.



Six sisters who are also nuns pose for a photo at their ancestral home in 2015. From left are Srs. Mareena Kallidukkil, Jacintha Kallidukkil, Ancy Kallidukkil, Philo Kallidukkil, Gracious Kallidukkil and Rosetom Kallidukkil. (Courtesy of Philo Kallidukkil)

Sr. Rosetom Kallidukkil, the seventh in the family, directs a girls' boarding school at Jamjodhpur in the western Indian state of Gujarat. She said stories of missionaries she heard in catechism classes influenced her decision to join the Clarists in 1971.

"We grew up hearing about places where the church was young. Going to Gujarat felt like continuing that missionary spirit."

"We learned commitment from our parents," she added.

Sr. Jacintha Kallidukkil, the eighth sibling, teaches in an Adoration school at Rajkot, another town in Gujarat. "Our home was a nursery for religious life," she said.

Pauline Baby, the youngest, also joined the convent, but later chose married life.

"I am happy now as my son is preparing for priesthood," she told GSR.

Another daughter who chose married life is Mary Laurance, the fifth in the family and a retired physical education teacher now settled in Kochi.

Mary said she had stayed in a convent for a month to discern her vocation.

"I understood that religious life requires a deeper call and dedication. I chose teaching, but my sisters remain our blessing," she told GSR.

The nuns stressed that their vocation was never imposed by anyone.

"Our parents guided us but never pressured us," Pauline said. "That freedom helped genuine vocations grow."

Mary said her nun sisters never invited younger ones to their own congregations. "They helped each person listen to God and discern for themselves. That is why my sisters went to different congregations."

Mareena agreed. "We never recruited anyone," she said. "Discernment was always personal. We accompanied one another, but the choice belonged to God."

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Every two years, the nuns return home to celebrate their vocations and memories. Jolly Michael, grandson of the eldest brother Michael, manages the ancestral home. He attends to his aunts along with his other brothers and cousins.

"They look after us with affection," Philo said. "Even after decades in religious life, we come back as daughters of the same home."

Gracious agreed. "We followed different paths in ministry, but we all learned the same lesson first — to listen to God together as a family," she said.

Michael said the family's faith-shaped daily life encouraged him to become an active member of the parish choir. "Our father never preached to us. He simply knelt before the altar every morning. That silence taught us more than words," he said.

The second son, Mathew, said their family home naturally prepared his sisters for community living.

"We grew up sharing everything — food, work, prayer and responsibility. Convent life was not something new for them. They were already living community life at home," he said.