

Sister Emerencia Tirkey, OSF

June 2026

I was born on January 4, 1962, in Sirkekona, Chhattisgarh, India, the eldest of three daughters born to Philoman and Apolina (Ekka) Tirkey. My family belonged to a tribal community and was rooted in the Roman Catholic faith. While my father managed a tea garden in northern Assam, far from home, my mother cared for the family.

From my earliest years, my faith was nurtured by my maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather. My grandfather's prayers left a lasting impression on me, while my grandmother encouraged me to trust God. When I was five, my mother became ill and died in the hospital. During those difficult days, I watched the nurses who cared for my mother with compassion. Their kindness inspired me to be a nurse.

The Jesuit missionaries in my parish helped shape my spiritual life. Their witness, along with the example of my cousin, a Holy Cross Sister, inspired me. I attended a Catholic grade school and high school and studied mathematics, science, social studies, Hindi, and later English beginning in the sixth grade. I enjoyed sports, especially soccer, basketball, and hockey, and loved spending time outdoors. During a retreat in the eighth grade, the Sisters asked us what we wanted to do with our lives, and I answered that I wanted to be a nurse. What I didn't share is that I also sensed that God was calling me to something more.

I searched for a religious congregation of Franciscan Healthcare. I was drawn to the Franciscans because the Holy Cross Sisters taught us about St. Francis of Assisi, whose humility, service, and love for all creation impressed me. A classmate told me about the Medical Sisters of St. Francis in Pithora. (The community was founded on January 6, 1973, as a mission of the German Province of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, Muenster, Germany, when Sister M. Vulmara Hannover arrived and was joined by Sister M. Gerburg Aufderheide on January 26, 1974.) My classmate's brother, a priest, helped arrange a visit with the Sisters in Pithora, and on June 14, 1981, I traveled with him to Pithora and met Sister Hedwig and Sister Gerburg, and I found a home and community. I did not return to school, and I entered the community on July 2, 1981, together with three other candidates. At that time, I was among 13 sisters in the community, and I professed first vows on January 21, 1986.

Over the next four decades, I devoted my life to nursing and healing ministry. I found satisfaction in being a nurse, bringing not only medical knowledge but also faith, hope, and peace to those entrusted to my care. I was blessed to witness miracles of healing. I recall a

seriously ill man who eventually returned to work and a lifeless baby who, after five minutes without breathing, responded to my CPR, and the parents named the baby Emerencia. faith.

I speak several languages—Hindi, Sadri, Kudukh, Baangla, Odia, Chhattisgarhia, and English. Whether caring for patients, tending a garden, cooking, knitting, or creating crafts, I find opportunities to serve and to experience God's presence. My life has been guided by a simple but profound conviction: when we pray and trust in God, God finds a way to use us for a purpose in the world.