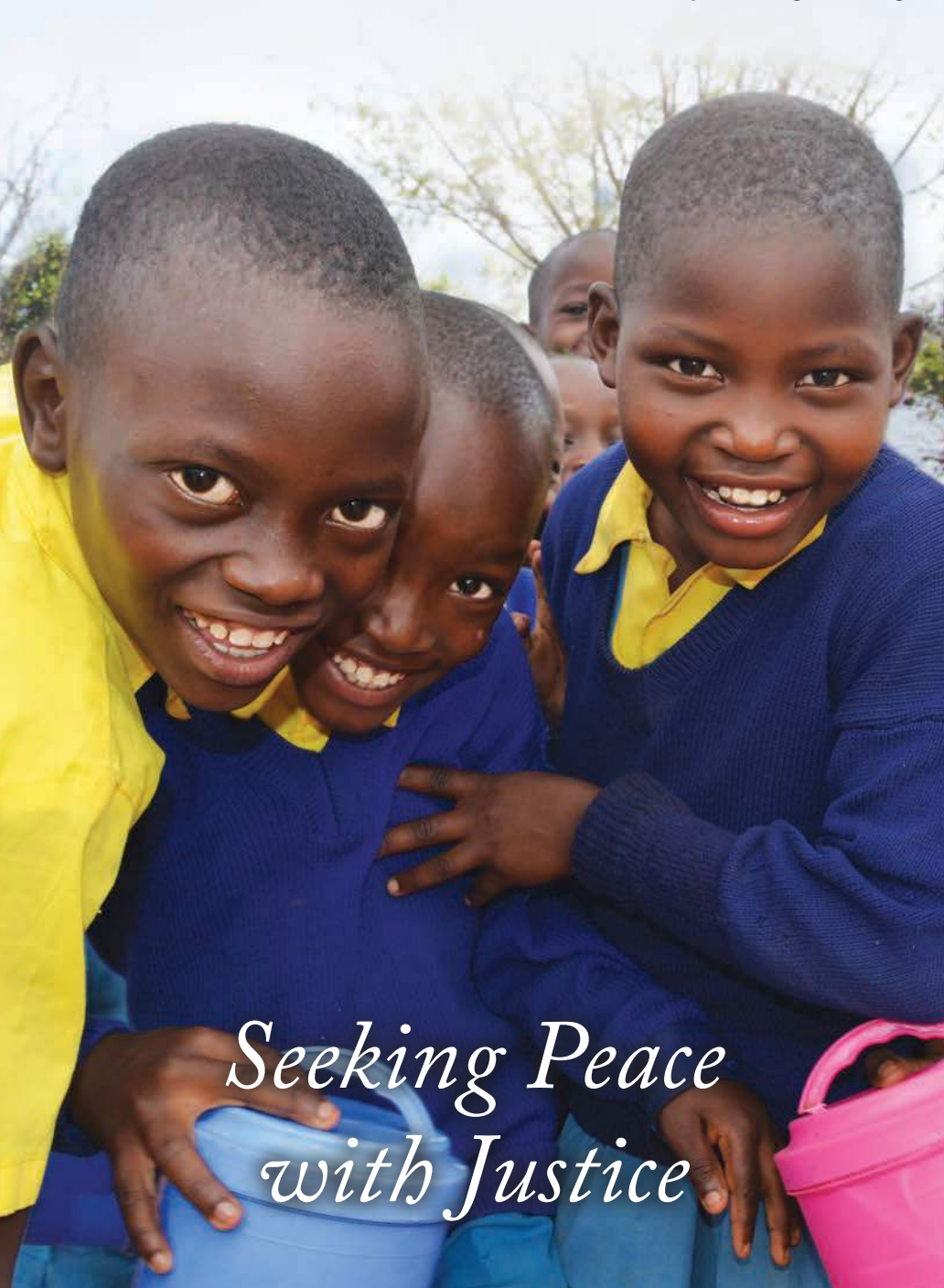




U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

Summer 2023

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*Seeking Peace
with Justice*

FROM THE EDITOR

Reviewing the lineup of this issue of *Maryknoll*, it is at once a sobering view of our unsettled world and a reflection of faith that hopes for and works for the kingdom of peace.

Three of our feature articles come from areas of current strife: Peru, Ukraine and South Sudan. Another comes from a country once synonymous with “killing fields,” Cambodia. In Ukraine, we meet Catholics responding to the needs of their compatriots displaced by the Russian invasion. From Peru, we hear a Maryknoll sister share her insight into civil unrest there, where earlier this year campesinos and Indigenous people took to the streets. From South Sudan, a Maryknoll priest recounts meeting Pope Francis, who traveled to the East African nation mired in civil war to plead for an end to bloodshed. Just as we are inspired by the Holy Father’s visit to Africa, so we are moved by the mission of Maryknollers around the world who cultivate peace while working for justice.

Justice often takes the form of opportunity, and in this issue we visit a Maryknoll lay missionary in Cambodia who helps deaf people find language, community and purpose through education. In another story, out of Kenya, we meet a young boy with HIV who was once abandoned but now thrives in school thanks to Maryknoll’s assistance.

Finally, we bring you this year’s winning essays from our Maryknoll Student Essay Contest in which young people share their own dreams for a better world.

Lynn F. Monahan
Editor-in-Chief



FEATURED STORIES

10 With Pope Francis and the IDP’s
By Michael Bassano, M.M.

18 Dreaming of Peace in Ukraine
By Gregg Brekke

24 Signing for a New Life
By Meinrad Scherer-Emunds

34 Educating Heroes
By Carolyn Trumble

40 Peru Protests: a Demand
for Respect
By Barbara Fraser

46 Maryknoll Student Essay Contest
Winners

52 Serving the Poor with Dignity
By Giovana Soria

DEPARTMENTS

2 From the Editor

4 Photo Meditation

8 Missioner Tales

16 Spirit of Mission

30 Orbis Books

56 World Watch

58 Partners in Mission

61 Readers’ Responses

FRONT COVER:
Students hold containers to fill up with a
nutritious meal at King’utheni Primary School
in Kenya’s drought-affected Kibwezi region.

COVER CREDITS:
Front: Moses Njagua Gitahi/Kenya
Back: Courtesy of Rodrigo Ulloa/U.S.

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“To those who love God, all things
work together for good ...”

Romans 8:28

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Photo Meditation on the Eucharist

On the Bumpy Road to Emmaus

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*With broken hearts, dashed hopes and bowed heads
Defeated and deflated we make our mournful way
Far from the pain of shattered dreams that is Jerusalem
Toward some supposed safety known as Emmaus.*

*Ever lengthening shadows and fast descending darkness
Magnify the mournful doom and despair in our sorrowful souls
Of once faith-filled disciples now to the four winds scattered
Like sheep without a shepherd or pilgrims without a prayer.*

*Then unexpectedly an unknown traveler
Joins our self-imposed exodus with questions
Belying a truth and wisdom not of this world and
A heavenly destination on the other side of life.*



Photo by Unsplash



*With hearts burning within us we arrive
Where we once sought to stay in peace
When the stranger, taking bread, blessed and broke it
Opening our eyes of faith to see our risen Lord.*

*Heedless now of doubt or danger, we return
To announce how in breaking bread we found him
And see him still among the sick and poor oppressed
No less than in golden tabernacles*

*In adoration falling, worshiping
God with us still.*

MISSIONER TALES



Sean Sprague/Tanzania

I occasionally helped out at the Casa del Refugiado in El Paso, Texas. A shelter of the Annunciation House hospitality network, it was one of several sites where we provide short-term accommodations to migrants and help them make travel arrangements for where they will be going in the States. Once a Turkish woman stayed at the Casa del Refugiado for several days, hoping to be reunited with family members. It was difficult for her because she did not speak English and had to communicate with the volunteers through Google Translate.

One evening, the woman came up to me and showed me her phone. Her sister-in-law had been released from

the detention center and brought to the airport – she was on her way to Casa del Refugiado. Shortly afterwards, a communication came that she had arrived. I took the woman to the entrance and when she saw her sister-in-law, she was ecstatic. Their reunion reminded me how alone and afraid migrants are, especially when separated from family members during the journey. It was wonderful to see them reunited.

Debbie Northern, MKLM

We are often taught profound truths by small, innocent children. One day, as I busily prepared to travel to the capital

city, Santiago, which was a three-hour train ride from my mission site in Chile, unexpectedly a very young neighbor stopped by to visit me. Marcella was three years old and wanted me to paint her finger nails with clear nail polish.

At the moment she asked, I was cleaning the kitchen, so she patiently waited before asking a second time. At that point I was packing my clothes, and when I finished, she asked again. I responded that I first had to get ready for the trip.

Totally oblivious of what I had promised, I approached the door to leave when Marcella patiently asked again. At that moment, I stopped, focused on my little guest and sat down to fulfill her request.

As I left for the train station, I realized how this small child had taught me something about prayer. She trusted me and made her request patiently several times, knowing that I cared for her and would be faithful to my promise.

Maureen Hanahoe, M.M.

I look upon Diana as a precious grandchild, and I am very sure that she looks upon me as a beloved grandfather. You know how grandparents delight in their grandchildren and sometimes spoil them. Diana would come frequently to see me in Shinyanga, Tanzania, to ask for help to buy shoes, clothes, school notebooks, etc. I helped her buy a bed, mattress, sheets and towels so she could board at our grade school for four months to prepare for the government entrance exam to get into high school.

We met when Diana was a bit younger and I helped her through a

prolonged illness. She spent months in Kolondoto Hospital and had to return several times for follow-up. Her mother is dirt poor, has five children of whom Diana is the oldest, and no true husband to help support them. Her mother would give me gifts of rice and corn from their crops. In return, she asked for help to buy a trolley cart for hauling harvest from their fields and barrels of water from the river. The cart cost \$75; her gifts amounted to maybe \$5, but that was an even exchange as far as I was concerned.

John Lange, M.M.

When children lose their parents, it is often a grandmother who assumes responsibility for raising them. This is hard enough when the children have no health issues or special needs. But taking care of an HIV-positive child involves supervising their daily medicine, as well as monthly doctor appointments. Tanzania has no welfare system, foster care program or food stamps to assist these grandmothers. They depend on relatives, friends and the grace of God to make ends meet.

Uzima Centre in Mwanza, Tanzania, where I serve as a lay missionary, tries to lighten the burden. We provide beans, high protein flour and soap each month. We also help with medical bills and school expenses. Little Agnes was 4 years old when her grandmother registered her with Uzima Centre. Thanks to the loving care of this grandmother, Agnes is now a happy second-grader. We assist 48 children and 32 teenagers who are HIV-positive. Our goal is to enable each of them to reach their fullest potential.

Joanne Miya, MKLM



With **POPE FRANCIS** and the **IDPs**

By Michael Bassano, M.M.

A Maryknoll priest in South Sudan accompanies those displaced by war to meet with the visiting pontiff

Words cannot adequately express what a memorable experience it was to see Pope Francis during his Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Peace.

It began on Friday morning, Feb. 3, when I went to the Juba airport to greet the 50 internally displaced people (IDPs) invited to participate in the papal visit to South Sudan.

Since I live and work in an IDP camp outside the city of Malakal, I was part of the team to welcome the delegation of 25 people from the Malakal camp and 25 people from the camp in Bentiu. We then chose four of them to participate in an interview with a staff member of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office. The four men and women, Thai and Elizabeth from the Bentiu Camp and Jokino and Teresa from the Malakal camp, spoke from the heart about the reality of living in the camps and their hopes for the future.

The next morning, there was a meeting with Pope Francis at St. Theresa's Cathedral for all bishops, priests and religious sister and brothers. Sitting near the end of my pew, I was able to catch a glimpse of the pope as he came down the main aisle in a wheelchair. His message to all of us gathered there was to be prophetic in our search for justice and peace in South Sudan. He called for an end to the senseless bloodshed of war and asked us to be prophets of peace. Referring to the Biblical figure of Moses, he said that we, too, must help people out of suffering toward a new life of hope and peace.

Pope Francis had delivered a similar message the day before, when speaking to President Salva Kiir and other governmental leaders: to stop

Pope Francis greets the crowd in Juba, South Sudan, as he arrives to celebrate Mass at the John Garang Mausoleum, Feb. 5, 2023, during his Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Peace to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. (CNS/Paul Haring)



Maryknoll Father Michael Bassano (far right) is shown with IDPs chosen to be interviewed and to greet Pope Francis: (left to right) Thai and Elizabeth from the Bentiu camp and Teresa Nyagak and Jokino from the Malakal camp, where Father Bassano serves. (Courtesy of UNHCR/South Sudan)

the senseless bloodshed and honor the peace agreement of 2018.

The IDPs from Bentiu, Malakal, Wau and Juba were invited to a special gathering Saturday afternoon to meet Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland Iain Green-shields. More than 800 people attended. After the opening prayer, the deputy special representative of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, Sara Beysolow Nyan-ti, explained the serious crisis in the country. There is renewed fighting

with the displacement of thousands of people, an increase in violence and sexual abuse against women and children and a severe food shortage crisis with over two thirds of the country — 8 million people — going hungry.

Following this came the most touching and impressive testimony of three young children named Joseph, Johnson and Rebecca, from the IDP camps in Bentiu, Malakal and Juba.

Joseph, the first to speak, said: "Pope Francis, I have lived in an IDP camp since I was 8 years old. Our

life is difficult. Why do we have to suffer in a camp for displaced persons? I am asking for your prayers that one day I may leave the camp in Bentiu and start a new life."

Johnson, who is from the Malakal camp, said: "My parents are not able to find any jobs to have food and the basic necessities we need. It is my uncle who was able to get a job and provide for us. We all need an opportunity to go to school and have a field to play football. My dream is to leave the camp one day."

When Rebecca spoke, she said:

"We love you, Pope Francis. Thank you for coming to be with us. I am asking your blessing today for all the children of South Sudan and those in my camp in Juba, that one day we can all live in peace."

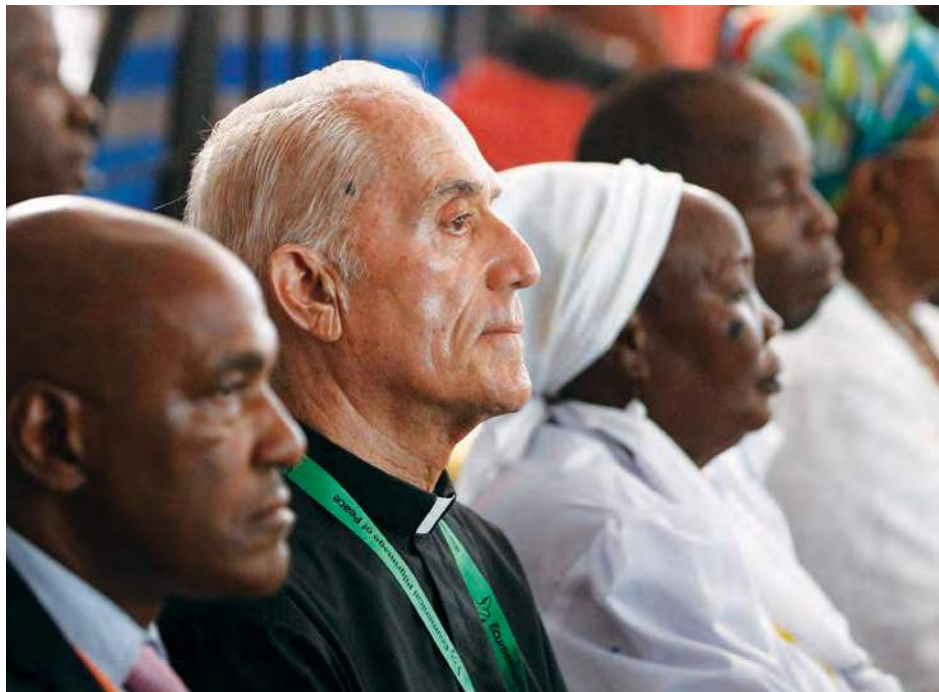
Pope Francis thanked the children and assured them of his support, prayers and blessings. "The future cannot lie in refugee camps," he told them.

He was encouraging all of us to look to the future with hope. When peace comes to South Sudan, there will be no need for IDP camps.

Immediately after the pope's address, 20 people were invited to personally greet Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland. I had the honor of accompanying one of the people from our camp, Teresa Nyagak. Upon meeting the pope, each person was given the gift of a rosary. It was an unforgettable moment to be with the people in greeting him.

The gathering came to a conclusion with singing and dancing by the IDPs and the pope blessing them. It was an incredible gathering to witness.

On Sunday, we rose at 5 a.m. to attend the celebration of the Eucharist with Pope Francis on his last day in South Sudan. It was held at



Maryknoll Father Michael Bassano, who works in Malakal, South Sudan, attends Pope Francis' meeting with internally displaced people at Freedom Hall in Juba, South Sudan, Feb. 4, 2023, as part of the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Peace. (CNS/Paul Haring)

the John Garang Mausoleum Park, where an ecumenical prayer service had taken place the previous evening. More than 100,000 people were in attendance as he came in the popemobile before beginning the Mass. At the celebration, he told the people that what Jesus said long ago is still real today: they are the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" in South Sudan.

The pope said two other words — "hope" and "peace" — are also important to remember. He went on to say that the women of South Sudan are the hope of this country because of their resilient faith despite the struggles and sufferings they have faced for so long. At this,

everyone immediately broke into applause and started singing.

"I hold you in my heart as I return to Rome," Pope Francis told the people of South Sudan before his final blessing. "You will always remain in my heart."

Even after the celebration concluded and the pope left with the bishops for the airport, the young people and others present continued to dance and sing, responding to what they had seen and heard.

What an incredible, unbelievable weekend it was! We give thanks to God for what we have been given.

Returning to Malakal, we brought 270 sacks of rice purchased with money from the Maryknoll Famline Relief Project. The newcomers

in our camp, people who were displaced within the past few months, still do not have enough food to eat. It is a coordinated effort, with the UNHCR providing a truck to deliver the sacks to our church in the camp. The diocesan office of Caritas will register the people in need and distribute the food within the next few days.

The Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Peace led by Pope Francis will remain in the hearts of the people of South Sudan as they hope and work for peace and better times to come. ✠

Maryknoll Father Michael Bassano, from Binghamton, New York, serves in South Sudan after previously working in Tanzania, Thailand and Chile.



Pope Francis greets Sara Beysolow Nyanti, the U.N. secretary-general's deputy special representative to South Sudan, during a meeting with internally displaced people at Freedom Hall in Juba, South Sudan, Feb. 4, 2023. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Spirit of Mission

Recalling Jesus

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

Dining with his Twelve Apostles on the night before he died, Jesus took bread and blessed, broke and gave it to them, saying, “Take and eat, for this is my body.” Then he took a cup of wine, blessed it, and gave it to them, saying, “Take this, and drink from it, for this is the cup of my blood. ... Do this in memory of me.”

We Catholics are so familiar with these words, we no longer truly hear them — much less appreciate their deeper meaning. They no longer shock us as they surely must have shocked the disciples. The law of Moses forbade Jews to eat a sacrificial meal and ingest blood. To ingest an animal’s blood meant its life abided within them. By sacramentally giving his flesh to eat in the form of bread, Jesus established a new, dynamic relationship between God and the disciples, who become the Body of Christ. Likewise, the consecrated wine empowers Jesus’ disciples to live new lives by drinking his Precious Blood.

Bread and wine come from wheat and grapes, and their cultivation requires land and time. God had promised Abraham and Sarah a new homeland. Bread and wine were proof that God fulfilled that promise.

To become bread, grain must first

fall to the earth, die, be buried and in time rise to new life. The wheat is then harvested, threshed, ground into flour, kneaded, baked, and finally broken and shared. Similarly, wine comes from grapes whose vines require pruning. The fruit is harvested, crushed and fermented. What better symbols of the suffering and sacrifices that lead to growth and transformation in our lives?

Bread and wine are common foods, found in most Jewish meals in the Middle East. But Jesus purposely chose as his Last Supper the Passover meal, uniting his suffering and sacrifice to the memory of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from slavery.

For Jews, Passover is not the remembrance of a singular event that took place once, centuries ago. Its celebration makes that past event present today, as if participants at the meal were personally present at the Exodus. As the Passover ritual states, each generation must ask, “What has the Lord done for us?” Not *them*. *Us*.

We too must allow ourselves to be present at that Last Supper — and at Calvary and the empty tomb. More precisely, the death and resurrection of Jesus become present to us in the Eucharist.



Maryknoll Father Edmund Cookson elevates the host while celebrating Mass in Peru, where he ministered to the Aymara people for over 50 years. (Nile Sprague/Peru)

Perhaps the key to experiencing the fullness of the mystery of the Eucharist lies in the seemingly simple command, “Do this in memory of me.” Note the first word is “do,” not “say.” The Eucharist — “this” — is a complete, dynamic set of actions, including the words of consecration: take, bless, break the bread, drink the wine, share and consume.

We’ve translated the Greek word *anamnesis* as “in memory of.” This translation risks reducing the Eucharist to a mental exercise. But what if we understand it as not simply remembering Jesus, but recalling him? That is, in a very physical sense of Jesus coming back to us. A recall means a concrete, actual return.

And now for the hard part! While

scholars and theologians debate the fine points, we make Jesus present not just by repeating the words of consecration but by doing them. Consider the Gospel of Saint John, clearly the most eucharistic of the four gospels: there are no words of consecration at the Last Supper. In their place, we have the extraordinary scene of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet — and commanding us to do the same. For Saint John, humble service makes Jesus present here and now.

Mahatma Gandhi, observing the starving throng of humanity, stated, “If God were to come to earth, God would surely come in the form of bread.” Through acts of humble service by Christians around the world, let us declare: “God has.” ✠

Dreaming of Peace in Ukraine

Text and photos by Gregg Brekke

Catholics in war-torn Ukraine feed, house, clothe and pray for those fleeing violence

In the wind-swept town of Fastiv, Ukraine, some 50 miles south of Kyiv, acts of grace happen daily. A farming hub surrounded by hundreds of miles of agricultural land, this crossroads and others nearby have become rest stops and transit points for thousands of people from the south of the country fleeing invading Russian troops. Since the beginning of the war in February 2022, the Catholic community here has provided respite and a safe haven.

Father Mikahailo Romaniv, his staff and parishioners

responded quickly when displaced people began flooding the town.

"We started providing housing and food first, with people opening their homes and our parish's open spaces," says the priest at the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. They primarily received women with children, since men are required to stay and work in the country or fight in the army. The parish continues to provide assistance to roughly 100 of the 1,500 families they have helped since the war broke out.

The center of this apartment complex in Borodyanka, Ukraine, collapsed when it was hit by a Russian missile on April 5, 2022.



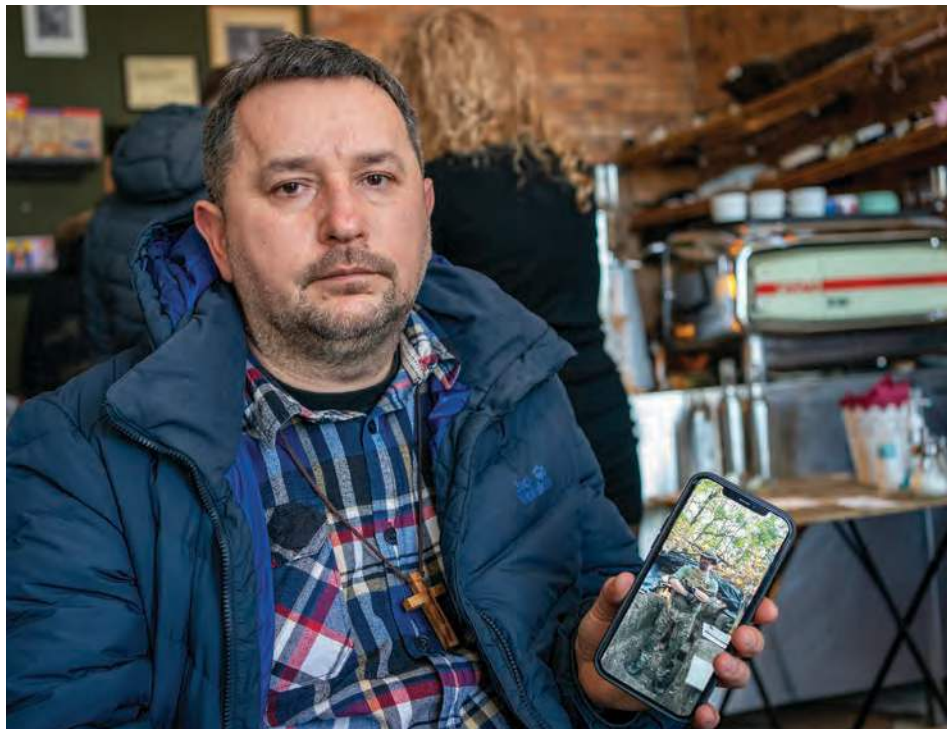
A former medical center at a nearby parish has been completely renovated since last summer to accommodate displaced families. Seven mothers and 16 children temporarily call this place home.

One resident, Dasha Habovska, fled the embattled Kherson region with her newborn son, Christian, now a curious toddler. "I worry always," the young mother says. Christian's father is in the army and, even though they are in regular contact, Habovska says she knows he is never really safe.

Kateryna Chvalova, a parish school administrator and relief outreach coordinator, estimates that thousands of displaced children have passed through her doors since last year. Most stayed for only a few days until their mothers found transportation to western Ukraine or out of the country. However, about 80 new students from displaced families have stayed in Fastiv.

"These are my little miracles," Chvalova says as two grade-school girls hug her in the school's hallway. A rambunctious group of young boys halts their play to greet Chvalova. "Each of these children has such a [difficult] story. ... Our school can provide a safe and normal place for them to grow," she says.

Beyond emergency relief for mothers and children, the parish operates a round-the-clock reception center for displaced people in the school's playground adjacent to the church. Hot meals, donated clothing, emergency supplies and prayer are offered to people seeking refuge. Wounded veterans arrive for physical and spiritual support. Some



are unable to return to battle or to their homes in the now-occupied eastern part of Ukraine.

All over the country, a sense of national unity is palpable. Resistance to the invasion is evident and a tangible solidarity binds Ukrainians together. People of faith, especially, have come to the forefront of relief efforts. But a deep concern about the lasting effects of war also motivates their work.

According to peace activist Felip Daza, social cohesion and community resilience are key outcomes of nonviolent resistance activities in the country. His report, "Ukrainian Nonviolent Civil Resistance in the Face of War," emphasizes the importance of these unified activities. He tells of people standing bravely in the way of oncoming tanks; community residents trying to dialogue with Russian soldiers; a yellow-ribbon campaign; and strengthening local governments as key to the resistance.

Unarguably, further direct efforts to end the conflict are necessary. Pax Christi International offered a statement on the first anniversary of the war calling on the international community "to immediately facilitate diplomatic initiatives to restore the international order and the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We plead with Russia and Ukraine to enter negotiations directly, on neutral ground, and with a mutually agreeable mediator."

(Above) Father Mikahailo Romaniv holds a photo of a friend in the army who was injured in fighting on the front lines.

(Below) Dominican Sister Lydia Timkova teaches a catechism class in Mukachevo.



Parish school administrator Kateryna Chvalova (far right) runs a school that provides education for many children of internally displaced families living in Fastiv, Ukraine.



Dasha Habovska and her son, Christian, are internally displaced persons living in Fastiv, Ukraine, following the Russian invasion and bombardment of their home in Kherson.

For Ukrainians, the restoration of “territorial integrity” is vital to a lasting resolution. There is a feeling among the invaded population that Russia will not be satisfied until Ukraine is under Russian control as in the Soviet era, a process that began with the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

“Of course, we pray for peace daily,” says Sister Lydia Timkova in Mukachevo, as emotions well in her eyes. “But while the war continues, we must support those who suffer, including the soldiers.” She was preparing at the time for her third trip to far eastern Ukraine, near the war’s front, to deliver warm clothing, blankets and other supplies to the embattled region.

Peace, the Slovakian-born nun continues, is not an academic or spiritual exercise in the face of evil.

Kyiv’s northern suburbs were hit especially hard in the early months of the war — including the first reports of war crimes against civilians. Scars of the assault are everywhere. Bullet riddled homes and fences, blown out storefronts, apartments with gaping holes and burned exteriors: all are enduring reminders of artillery attacks and bombing.

Hundreds of burned-out Russian tanks and personnel carriers litter roadsides, destroyed when their 20-mile-long convoy of weaponry stalled, lacking the supplies and fuel to propel their drive into the heart of Kyiv.

Sister Yanuariya Isyk remained in a conflicted area on the outskirts of Kyiv even as Russian troops occupied the streets surrounding her neighborhood. She provided food and

clothing, along with spiritual support, to those who remained and for people in the shelters during the early shelling. A bullet hole in the window of her apartment’s third-floor stairwell is a reminder of those days.

She is hopeful for a peaceful end to the war while remaining resolute that Ukraine must not cede its land to Russia. Forgiveness can happen, she says. “It’s what people of faith are called to do.” But, she adds, “real healing and restoration will take generations.”

Beyond the responses to immediate material needs, trauma care and spiritual support being provided, long-term reconciliation and social wellness are a concern for many, including Susan Gunn, director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. She herself is of Ukrainian background.

“The Russian invasion of Ukraine was a horrible, senseless, destructive act,” she says. “In moments like this we ask, what is ours to do?”

Gunn says that Maryknoll missionaries invest themselves in deep relationships with people who are suffering and afflicted around the world, and they cross boundaries to build bridges of understanding. “We hope we can build those bridges among Russians, Ukrainians and ourselves to bring about peace but also that, when the guns finally do go silent, we have laid the pathway for building strong, peaceful coexistence.” ✠

Gregg Brekke is an award-winning photojournalist and writer dedicated to telling stories of faith and justice, and a regular contributor to this magazine.



Signing for a New Life

By Meinrad Scherer-Emunds

How the Maryknoll Deaf Development Programme helps Cambodia's deaf people come into their own

In Koh Kong, Cambodia, Maryknoll Lay Missioner Julie Lawler leads a team building activity for a Deaf Development Programme youth camp. (Sopor Lay, DDP/Cambodia)

Sambath timidly hid behind his parents, not looking anyone in the eye. Slouching in his chair, he tried to make himself as small as possible while his parents met with staff of the Deaf Development Programme (DDP) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The youth, who was then 17, had very little education. He had briefly attended a government school where, as the only deaf student, he was bullied by classmates. He would come home crying and soon stopped going to school.

But his parents wanted more for Sambath. They inquired about the program at the DDP office. There, Sambath saw a staffer moving her hands to communicate in Cambodian sign language.

"When he saw us signing, he gave us his full attention by sitting up in his chair, raising his eyes and giving us direct eye contact," says Maryknoll Lay Missioner Julie Lawler, a deaf education teacher from Austin, Texas, who has worked at DDP for the past three and a half years.



Sambath (second from left) and classmates from the graduating class of 2022, with Father Charlie Dittmeier (center), proudly display their diplomas. (Sopor Lay, DDP/Cambodia)

At DDP, Sambath would not be the only deaf student, and wouldn't be picked on. His parents were hopeful, and Sambath started school at DDP the next day.

"Most of our students have never been to school a day in their life," says Father Charlie Dittmeier, the co-director of DDP. "They have no sign language, no spoken language, no written language. They have never even really talked to another human being." He explains, the most they have learned are "some very basic 'home signs' — like signs for 'cow,' 'water,' 'cooking' or 'Grandma.'"

At DDP, "we are starting at square one," Father Dittmeier says.

Father Dittmeier, who works with the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, is a priest of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky. He began working with deaf people while still a seminarian and continued that ministry during assignments in Louisville and in deaf schools and deaf communities in India, Sri Lanka and Hong Kong before coming to Cambodia in 2000 as a priest associate of the

Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.

The following year, working with Maryknoll, the Finnish Association of the Deaf and the Cambodia Disabled People's Organization (at the time, supported by Maryknoll Lay Missioner Judy Saumweber), he helped to found the Deaf Development Programme in the capital city, Phnom Penh.

Over the past 22 years, six Maryknoll lay missioners as well as others from the Maryknoll Cambodia Mission Team have been actively involved in what has become the pre-eminent deaf organization in Cambodia. The pioneering work of DDP helped to develop, standardize and promote Cambodian sign language.

At DDP, starting when they are 16 years of age, deaf individuals can take two years of basic education and social development that include learning Cambodian sign language, basic Khmer literacy, simple mathematics, life skills and relationship building through its Deaf Community Center events held each weekend.

After those two years, DDP offers



Students finishing the first term of a two-year academic program at the Deaf Development Programme sit in rows to take an end-of-the-year assessment. (Charlie Dittmeier/Cambodia)

an additional one-year course in job training. Students learn to work in barbering, beauty salons, ring molding, sewing and embroidery. By the time they leave, graduates have gained skills, language and self-awareness. They have acquired the ability to participate in society and the means to support their families.

"With access and opportunity, the lives of deaf people can be transformed," says Lawler, who is part of DDP's management team. She was able to observe Sambath's progress since his first days in the classroom.

During Sambath's first week at DDP, Lawler explains, "You could see how gradually it dawned on him that 'these are all people like me.'"

As he learned more and more sign language, and became familiar with the rules and routines of the classroom and DDP's residential house, his confidence grew. Sambath soon bonded with a group of deaf friends and found his place at DDP. He became a leader in the classroom and a support to his classmates.

While there are no official sta-

tistics on the number of deaf people in Cambodia, by extrapolating population percentages from other countries, Father Dittmeier estimates there are about 61,000 profoundly deaf people and 600,000 hard of hearing people in Cambodia.

"Here at DDP, we have found 3,000 out of the 61,000 profoundly deaf," the priest says. "The other 58,000 right now are standing out in a rice field, and they think that they are the only deaf person in the world."

"The first step is giving them a feeling of belonging," Lawler says. That, she adds, "comes from being included in a community, building relationships and breaking free from the societal stigma that deaf people are dumb and cannot learn."

Lawler has a master's degree in deaf education from Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the premier institution for learning, teaching and research to educate deaf people and promote deaf awareness. She worked as a teacher at the Texas School for the Deaf in Austin, Texas, for 11 years. But "a desire for change



Maryknoll Lay Missioner Julie Lawler, Father Charlie Dittmeier and Maryknoll Lay Missioner Kyrene Fremling (right) celebrate Deaf Week at DDP in September 2022. (Sopor Lay, DDP/ Cambodia)

and a push from God" led her to join the Maryknoll Lay Missioners in 2019.

"When somebody like her — with her academic background and years of deaf education experience — comes and brings best practices and new techniques and classroom pedagogy and games that deaf children love to play, that is so valuable," Father Dittmeier says of Lawler. "She's been a real boon for us in terms of teacher training, giving our teachers new ideas and new ways of looking at things and understanding issues in the deaf community."

In addition to sharing her expertise with DDP teachers, Lawler also provides training on hearing loss and deaf awareness to other organizations in Cambodia.

"The reality is that deaf people in Cambodia still face many struggles," Lawler says. "Our graduates still face isolation when they go home to their families since those families don't know sign language. They still face discrimination when they start looking for ways to earn a living. They can face violence from neighbors who take advantage of the vulnerable."

That's why part of DDP's work is

educating the larger Cambodian society about hearing loss and deaf awareness.

"One person at a time, change will happen," Lawler says.

For Sambath, DDP opened up the world. "You could really see the transformation," Lawler says. "He was no longer lonely, isolated and scared. It was wonderful to see the smile on his face and watch him laugh with his friends."

For the graduation ceremony in 2022, Sambath was one of three graduates chosen to share their feelings in front of the whole community about completing the two-year program. Today Sambath happily rides his bike to job training and eagerly learns how to run a barber shop.

"I love learning about barbering," Sambath says. "After a year of training at DDP, in 2023, I plan on going back home to Kandal Province and setting up a barber shop in my family's house."

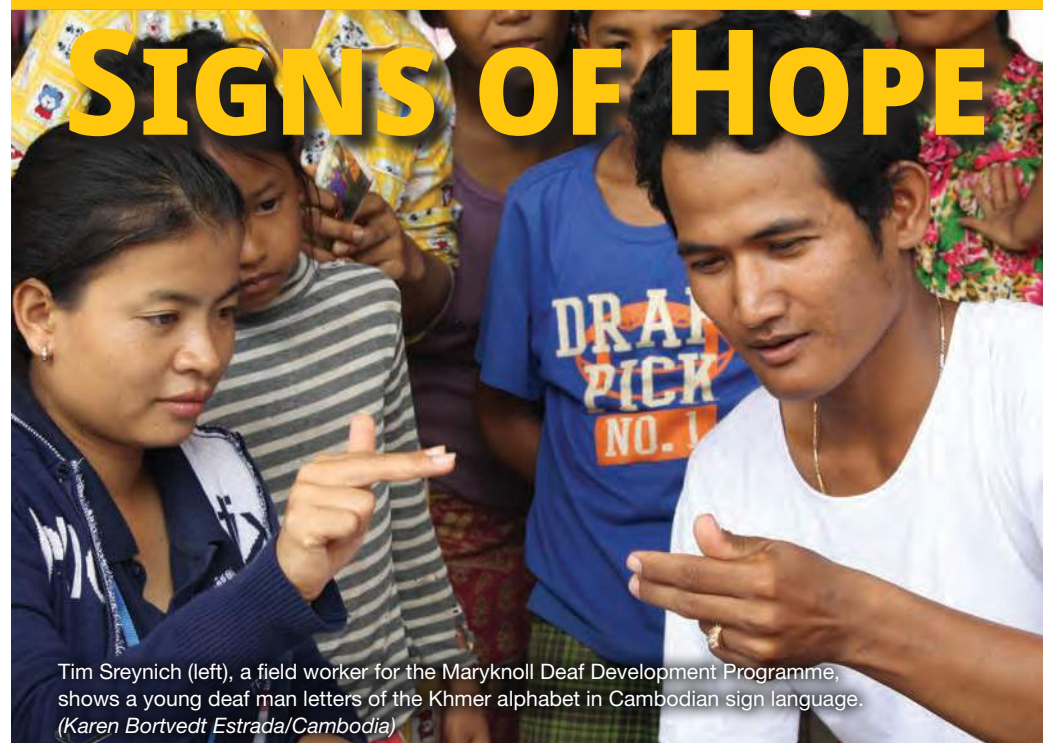
He adds, "It will be nice to be able to help support my family." ✂

Meinrad Scherer-Emunds is director of communications for the Maryknoll Lay Missioners.

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SIGNS OF HOPE



Tim Sreynich (left), a field worker for the Maryknoll Deaf Development Programme, shows a young deaf man letters of the Khmer alphabet in Cambodian sign language. (Karen Bortvedt Estrada/Cambodia)

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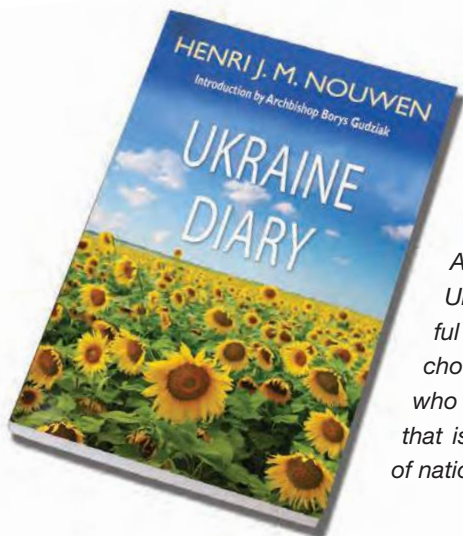


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ORBIS BOOKS

Spotlight



Preview by Robert Ellsberg

As we reflected on our experience in Ukraine, I felt a deep desire to stay faithful to the Ukrainian people and to keep choosing not just for the individual poor, who need support, but also for the country that is so clearly marginalized in the family of nations.

— Henri Nouwen

In 1993-94, Henri Nouwen, the Dutch-born priest and spiritual writer, made two trips to recently independent Ukraine. There he led retreats, observed the resurgence of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and connected with local communities working with handicapped adults. These trips were deeply significant to Nouwen, and at the time of his sudden death in 1997 he was planning further visits.

Published now, in the context of the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine, Nouwen's reflections take on a new timeliness. This is emphasized in the introduction by Nouwen's friend, Borys Gudziak, archbishop-metropolitan for the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, who was the one who invited Nouwen and accompa-

nied him on his original pilgrimages. Writing from his own journeys in the warzones of Ukraine, Archbishop Gudziak offers a poignant memory of the impact of Nouwen's friendship and solidarity with Ukraine and about the ongoing effect of those visits.

As he notes, "This modest, seemingly simple book about a visit to a distant land is in fact a subtle tale of how encounter genuinely and radically changes the lives of people." In addition, a moving afterword by Nouwen's brother Laurent describes how for 25 years after Henri's death he continued an outreach of solidarity and service to the people of Ukraine through the Henri Nouwen Foundation.

Three decades ago, I actually discouraged Henri from publishing his Ukraine diary as a book. In my own

foreword to this edition, I describe my realization that there was more to this simple book than I had originally perceived. With extraordinary prescience, Nouwen had identified in Ukraine certain spiritual and moral qualities struggling to assert themselves — exactly the qualities, almost 30 years later, that the Ukrainian people have mobilized in their struggle for freedom and independence.

Following their long history of suffering and oppression, he responded to the Ukrainian people's deep hunger for hope and healing, a need for the life-giving message that he most wanted to share: that we are all "beloved of God," and that God's love meets us where we are most hurt, weak, and vulnerable.

These were themes that Nouwen was developing in his last years, especially in his final book, *Adam: God's Beloved*, about the lessons he had learned from a deeply handicapped man in the L'Arche Daybreak community where he served as a chap-

lain. As Laurent insightfully observes, there was a connection between his response to Adam and his attraction to Ukraine — the marginalized "foster child" of a country within the family of Europe: poor, weak, vulnerable, and yet a vessel of God's love, entrusted with a message and a mission for the wider world.

No doubt, if he had lived, Nouwen would have continued to add to this "Ukraine Diary." As it is, the story of his pilgrimage from 30 years ago stands as a kind of time capsule, a window on the time when it was written, which at the same time bears a message for our own time. It is, aside from its universal themes of hope, gratitude and the power of friendship, also a message directed to all who cherish Henri's memory: that we might carry on and extend his relationship with a proud and long-suffering people he had come to love. ✠

Robert Ellsberg is the publisher of Maryknoll's Orbis Books.



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Educating Heroes

By Carolyn Trumble

Photos by Moses Njagua Gitahi

Maryknoll's work in Kenya keeps students healthy and well-fed

Maryknoll Father Lance Nadeau, who served in Kenya for 22 years, tells the story of a 15-year-old boy who lives up to his name: Gabriel, "hero of God."

Gabriel was born HIV-positive, and his father died of complications related to AIDS when the boy was just 3 years old.

"The cause of his father's death was known in the village and, consequently, Gabriel experienced stigmatization in school and in

his village," Father Nadeau says. "Neighbors once burned down the house Gabriel and his mother were living in." His mother — who is also HIV-positive — abandoned her son when he was 6.

"When I met Gabriel, he was living in northern Kenya with his elderly grandmother in abject poverty," Father Nadeau says. "He was not receiving any treatment for his HIV infection nor did he have an adequate diet." Gabriel was anemic, suffering from malnutrition, and had a high viral load.

Gabriel is one of hundreds of thousands of people who have been helped by the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program (EDARP), founded in 1993 by Maryknoll Father Edward Phillips. Through its 14 community-based clinics, the program is currently one of the largest multifaceted treatment and prevention programs in Kenya. Each year, program staff and EDARP community health workers support and care for 28,000 to 30,000 patients with HIV in Eastern Nairobi.

At an EDARP clinic, Gabriel receives medical care including antiretroviral (ARV) medications, along with the other comprehensive services that he needs.

"Before moving to Nairobi and receiving psychological counseling and support, Gabriel could not speak about his HIV status. He would break down in tears," Father Nadeau says. "But because of regular sessions with an EDARP social worker and psychologist, and support from HIV-positive peers, now

Students line up for a healthy meal at King'utheni Primary School in the drought-affected area of Kibwezi in southeast Kenya, where Maryknoll funds several relief projects.



Students share desks at Mukononi Primary School, located in the Kibwezi area severely impacted by climate change, where famine and hunger can keep children from learning.

he is able to appropriately speak about his health. And with the ARV medications he receives through EDARP, his viral load is undetectable." Under the care of EDARP, Gabriel should be able to live a normal life expectancy and have a promising future, the missionary says.

With his physical and emotional health greatly improved, Gabriel did well in his primary school studies and scored high on the national exams that qualify students to continue with their studies. However, he had no financial resources to pay for a secondary school education. With assistance from Maryknoll, he is now able to attend a good private school that welcomes and accom-

modates students with HIV.

"Gabriel is a bright and delightful young man who gets high grades in math, English, and physics," Father Nadeau says. "He works very hard in school and dreams of going to college."

Of course, students can't learn if they don't have enough to eat. Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers has committed to helping with nutritional assistance for students at nine extremely poor schools.

Elected superior general of Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in 2021, Father Nadeau was able to visit some of these schools last year. During the trip he connected with Maryknoll partners in cities such as



Maryknoll Superior General Father Lance Nadeau helps students plant trees at Malembwa Primary School in southeast Kenya, where Maryknoll assists survivors of climate change.

Nairobi, where Gabriel lives, and in rural areas of Eastern Kenya that have been hard hit in recent years.

Climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have brought devastating consequences to the food supply and the workforce.

"In the last three years a drought has caused intense hunger throughout the area," Father Nadeau says. "In Kenya right now the cost of food is very high. Many people have cut down to one to two meals daily. Many of the children come to school not having eaten breakfast," he explains. "Their parents mostly are subsistence farmers and very few of them have the means to provide a lunch for the children."

In addition to the drought, Eastern Kenya was severely affected by COVID, the missionary continues. "Many of the families have family members who work in the cities and send money back to these rural areas. Most of them work in the informal economy where over 50% of workers lost their jobs. This affected the children because they could not send money back to support the kids."

Teachers and other school staff note that thanks to the food assistance programs, more children stay in school, with minimal dropouts. The supplemental nutrition funded by Maryknoll has improved both the children's health and their academic



Maryknoll Superior General Father Lance Nadeau visits Nyamotambe Mixed Secondary School in Kehancha, Kuria, in southwest Kenya, where Maryknoll built a girls' dormitory.

performance. It also eases the burden on parents who are already carrying a heavy economic load.

During his trip, Father Nadeau visited a food assistance program at King'utheni Primary School in the Kibwezi area of southeastern Kenya, where approximately 500 children attend classes.

Each day the children line up for a meal of beans and corn. As the mixture is scooped into their cups, each child says *asante*, "thank you" in Swahili, for the meal which will give them the energy they need to study. This way, they can receive an education that empowers them to go forward into the future as heroes for themselves and their communities.

"I admire Kenyans because they

are brave, resilient, hopeful and committed to their families," Father Nadeau says.

Meanwhile, the young Gabriel studying in Nairobi remains courageous in facing HIV and stigmatization, Father Nadeau says. The boy loves his mother even though she was unable to care for him, and he tries to visit her regularly back in their home village, where she still lives.

"Gabriel lives up to his name, 'hero of God.' He is a living example of hope for poor people with HIV," Father Nadeau says. ✠

Carolyn Trumble, who served as a lay missionary in Brazil, is a Maryknoll mission education promoter.

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*Maryknoll Father Rodrigo Ulloa stands on a busy street in Hong Kong.
(Nile Sprague/Hong Kong)*

PERU PROTESTS:

a Demand for **RESPECT**

By Barbara Fraser

Protests by rural and Indigenous Peruvians reflect frustration with urban politicians, Maryknoll sister says



Demonstrators take part in an anti-government protest in Lima, Peru, on Jan. 23, 2023 in support of ousted former President Pedro Castillo. (OSV News/Angela Ponce/Reuters)

It's hard to say what made the people in Peru's southern highland region of Puno most indignant during the anti-government protests that have wracked the country since December 2022.

It might have been the sight of a police officer at a peaceful demonstration firing a tear gas canister directly at an Aymara Indigenous woman wearing traditional dress and carrying a baby on her back. It might have been the education minister's public comment that she and other women were "worse than animals" for taking their children along on a protest march to Lima, the capital.

Or it might have been the state of emergency in the Puno region, where that woman lives, which gave the military broad powers and led to the deaths of six young soldiers who drowned crossing a river while fleeing conflicts.

For Maryknoll Sister Patricia Ryan, however, the anger that has made Puno the epicenter of political turmoil stems from all of those episodes, combined with a centuries-long history of deep scars.

Sister Ryan shares the people's indignation, mixed with sadness, as she watches the police and military crack down sharply on Indigenous people of the region where she has spent most of her life defending human rights.

"It's terribly difficult when you see people you know under attack," Sister Ryan

says, adding that people in Puno “feel the government has declared war on them.”

Nearly 60 civilians died during protests in the first quarter of 2023, many after being struck by live ammunition, buckshot or tear gas canisters. One police officer and the six young soldiers have also died, and hundreds of civilians and police have been injured.

The political upheaval in Peru began on Dec. 7, 2022, when then-President Pedro Castillo, facing an impeachment vote in Congress, announced that he was shutting down Congress and ruling by decree. The military did not support him, however, and Congress impeached him. Castillo was arrested as he attempted to take refuge in the Mexican Embassy in Lima.

Castillo, a rural teacher and farmer from the highlands of northern Peru, was a political outsider with no government experience when he was elected in 2021. Yet, as a president who represented the people most marginalized from political power, he had strong backing in the rural Andes Mountains, even as his truncated term was plagued with a constant turnover of Cabinet ministers and accusations of corruption.

When Castillo’s vice president, Dina Boluarte, was sworn in as president, people who had supported Castillo saw her as a traitor, and protests erupted. Demonstrators took to the streets and blocked highways in various parts of the country, especially in the southern highlands where Sister Ryan has served for over five decades.

Most of the protests have been

peaceful, including many in Puno that have drawn thousands of people, Sister Ryan says. Some, however, have been marred by violence, with vandals burning police stations and other public buildings.

Boluarte, who had already distanced herself from Castillo’s leftist Peru Libre party which then expelled her, turned to the military and right-wing parties for an armed response when the protests erupted — which only made people angrier. Protesters demanded her resignation and new elections, and there were calls for a constituent assembly to rewrite the country’s constitution. Boluarte refused to step down, but said she would call new elections in April 2024. That requires congressional approval, however, and so far Congress has failed to act.



The implosion of Castillo’s government was also partly due to an ongoing conflict between the legislature and the executive branch, which has resulted in Peru having six presidents in the past five years, including three in eight days in November 2020.

For many rural Peruvians, especially Indigenous people in the highlands, Castillo’s election represented their hope for equal treatment and a voice in decisions affecting them.

Peru’s rural Andean and Amazonian communities are among the country’s poorest. They generally lack basic services such as safe drinking water, sanitation and access to decent health care and education. In the southern highlands, where protests have been strongest, mining companies extract gold, silver and other metals while nearby communi-

ties go without electricity. Poorly regulated mining has left rivers polluted with toxic metals, making these waters unsafe for livestock and human consumption.

Sister Ryan and her colleagues at the Puno-based organization Human Rights and Environment help communities demand their right to consultation about mining projects and a safe environment — but those cases often end up in court for years, she says, and meanwhile, the situation on the ground goes unchanged.

The protest by the Aymara women in Lima was one of a series that began in January, when caravans of people from various parts of the country converged on the capital after more than a month of protests in their home regions.

“This is a terribly complex situation,” says Maryknoll Father Joseph Fedora, who ministers in Lima to HIV-positive people and those working with them. “There are so many players and agendas involved. It’s not black and white.”

People Father Fedora knows who have participated in the protests have told him that the violence and property damage generally occur at night, after most demonstrators go home. Observers say it is not clear who is behind the violence.

“It’s not representative of the vast majority of protesters who have legitimate demands,” Father Fedora says. “There are players who are taking advantage of this situation.”

Demonstrators clash with security forces near the Juliaca airport during a Jan. 9, 2023, protest demanding early elections and the release of the former president. (OSV News/Hugo Courotto/Reuters)



Maryknoll Sister Patricia Ryan, who has served with Indigenous communities in Peru for 50 years, says that recent protests are a demand for respect for rights. (Nile Sprague/Peru)

Church leaders, including Pope Francis, have called for dialogue and a peaceful solution.

In a letter to the Peruvian president and Congress, Bishop Ciro Quispe of the Juli Prelature in Puno urged, "Let us listen to the Aymara people and let us listen to one another, as brothers and sisters."

He called on government officials to "show a visible and concrete sign to stop this wave of wounded and dead" and establish "real dialogue, with specific points" to be discussed.

Archbishop Paolo Rocco Gualtieri, the papal nuncio to Peru, told Boluarte in a meeting in January, "The protesters are mainly residents of rural [Andean], low-income urban and Amazonian regions who for years have been 'made invisible' or marginalized or left behind, with their civil rights ignored."

While violence against people and property "is never justifiable," the nuncio said, "it is important to address the causes behind it and neutralize them, always using the force of the law, never the law of force."

Sister Ryan says the Indigenous people's dissatisfaction has deep roots and they are insisting on their right to be fully respected as citizens, with a voice in decisions affecting their families and their land.

"They do not recognize this as their government," she says, because they do not believe it represents them or guarantees their rights. "At the core of the protests is their dignity, the Earth and their lives." ✠

Barbara Fraser, a former Maryknoll lay missionary from Washington, D.C., is a freelance writer based in Lima, Peru.



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2022 MARYKNOLL™ STUDENT ESSAY WINNERS

In his book, *Let Us Dream: the Path to a Better Future*, Pope Francis writes, "God dares us to create something new." How is God inviting you to create something new that would help your community and your world?

We received essays from young writers from all over the country in answer to this question. Following are the winning essays.

DIVISION I (GRADES 6-8)

FIRST PLACE WINNER: CAELYN ALCANTARA

God's Wish



Caelyn Alcantara, shown with her parents, is presented the Bishop Francis X. Ford Award by Maryknoll Father Stephen Judd in San Francisco. (Courtesy of Stephen Judd/U.S.)

Pope Francis' book *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* tells us how "God asks us to dare to create something new." It creates a question in your head when you hear that statement: how can you create something new in God's name? You first ask yourself what you want to accomplish. Do you want to help people, inspire people, maybe even want to change people for the better?

I want to be able to create something to help people through their struggles. A safe place, somewhere people can go to if they ever feel lost. I know people struggle and go through a lot these days. I want to help them. God would want a safe and comforting place for the children he loves to go to. They should know there will always be someone to help them in their times of struggle. There are a lot of problems going on in today's world. I want to create a space that can help these people, a place called "We're Here for You."

With the recent illnesses and the pandemic, a lot of people have lost their jobs. Or, they are struggling to maintain their job as demands are being raised. I want to help them get back on their feet. We can start with providing the needy with donations of basic necessities or even being available just for someone to talk to. It doesn't have to be the same person every time who would talk to these people. It could be a number of different people that can or want to help others in the community and world. I want to be one of those people.

Giving donations to help others live is one of the first priorities because people cannot function when their basic needs are not met. However, it does not and should not always stop there. Who knows if after so much struggle and trauma that person just needs someone to talk to. I want to help others overcome their mental struggles beyond just physically helping them. People in the world suffer from emotional or mental problems and with the right encouragement others can help them. We're Here for You will be a safe space that can help people through their struggles. Charity money can be raised, donations can be collected or people can volunteer to help others mentally. We're Here for You could be located locally in an area where a lot of people need help, for example, in my area it would be San Francisco.

There are so many things people can wish to create, to fix problems in the world. Whether it is globally, environmentally or sadly, any other problem in the world, it should start somewhere locally and with someone willing to lead. It starts with people who live in the community and want to be supportive of their neighbors. In the Ten Commandments, we are encouraged to love our neighbors. This love includes fostering a real community where people support each other, a community where people care about each other and the physical place they live in.

We're Here for You will create a community space to help neighbors and let this positivity spread so that more people can come together and impact our world. The Church is a peaceful and safe space to be. It is a space where positivity can grow. Similarly, We're Here for You can be a

place where suffering people can find that comforting feeling. The center will have helpers who build trust in the community so that it will encourage people to open up to them. Volunteers can help in different ways just as we can all struggle in different ways.

We're Here for You would be a comforting "home" for everyone, a community space they can turn to for help just as they would with their loved ones. Whether they're struggling physically, mentally, or for any other reason, this would be a safe haven for all those who need it. The place I will create, We're Here for You, will show people that others want to help them because they may not have been able to help themselves at the time. Those getting help, in turn, can spread this love when they are in a better place and help others who need it. In God's name, I want to help, and this is what I want to create.

DIVISION II (GRADES 9-12)

FIRST PLACE WINNER: ELLIOT COURTNEY

After Hurricane Ian



Elliot Courtney, shown with his father, is presented the Bishop Patrick Byrne Award by Maryknoll Father Leo Shea in Punta Gorda, Florida. (Courtesy of Leo Shea/U.S.)

Pope Francis posed the challenge, "God asks us to dare to create something new." I believe the pope to be a wise man and his challenge to create something new for our community reflects the tireless efforts of Christ and the Church. At no point did God forsake mankind and assume we were well enough to not need his love, guidance and support. The pope's book reiterates the message that a better future is always in need of that

continued guidance and support. We can't make it on our own as people, stoic and standing alone on an island. We need others, the community, the Church and Christ.

I had a great essay planned a few weeks ago. I volunteer with our local Habitat for Humanity and have had some great experiences serving others. I'm an Eagle Scout and through scouting have been a good servant, mentor and helper to others. I was going to pull from my leadership in sports, academic clubs, and other activities to craft an essay on how I have tried to create something new to help others.

This all changed rather rapidly after Hurricane Ian. I'm writing from Punta Gorda, Florida, where the eye directly passed, leaving my community in absolute destruction and peril. As I type this, I still have not returned to school and am unsure of the damage. We had extensive damage to our home and had to evacuate but it is reparable and we are blessed compared to others who have lost everything. As we assessed the damage, I began to reflect on what I could do to make a difference.

Pope Francis wrote, "We need to feel again that we need each other, that we have a responsibility for others." I don't think God is daring me to reinvent the wheel but instead calling on me to use my time, talents, and skills to give back. As I surveyed my street, I realized several older people needed assistance. Roofs were destroyed and debris was everywhere, and I could make a small difference. My siblings and I began to help clean, making piles of debris and moving and cutting up trees. We reached out to former teachers who are older and lived nearby. I contacted people from my wrestling team, and even though we had downed power lines and cell service, we began to help. We began to make a difference. I began to make a difference.

This essay has helped me reflect and grow. I didn't anticipate 150 mph winds rattling my home, but it makes us pause and consider things. Yes, I have always tried to give back to others and live a Christ-centered life. I know my efforts in the past have made an impact but as I helped with this hurricane recovery, I realized that while others needed me, I also needed them. My purpose was clear, and my responsibility toward others was evident, but as I gave of myself, the reward was given back to me.

This all sounds so poetic or trivial to write. It has been an emotional past few weeks. I helped my senior neighbor whose house was in horrible shape. She raised her kids in that home, lost her husband in that home, and would always bring us cookies when she made extras. As I moved large trees from her yard and cleared her driveway, I questioned whether it was she who needed help or I who needed her.

God is good because he gave us the freedom to accept love and responsibility for others. I'm not sure if I have grasped the full extent of Pope Francis' message but I do know that God is always inviting us. However, we must seize that invitation. While it's tragic to see the circumstances of Southwest Florida, it's hopeful to watch our community come together, with me knowing I was one small part of that process.

DIVISION I (GRADES 6-8)

SECOND PLACE ANABEL COONEY



Anabel's down-to-earth dream? A neighborhood composting campaign. She learned practical ways to reduce household waste while spending summers with her Nana — who makes use of a kitchen compost bucket. "As children of God, we must do our part to look after this environment," Anabel writes. "This planet is truly a gift."

THIRD PLACE OLIVIA VOLION



Imagine a middle school club devoted to spreading kindness. Olivia describes her Kindness Club's first event, "Chalk the Walk," drawing positive quotes and pictures on school walkways in her Louisiana community. Everyday acts of kindness, writes Olivia, not only make kids and adults happier; they also help everyone get along better.

DIVISION II (GRADES 9-12)

SECOND PLACE EMMA HOWELL



In "A Rose for Renewal," Emma shares a deeply personal account of unexpectedly receiving a white rose in answer to a prayer: she is considering a vocation to religious life. Emma reflects, "Far from being old and irrelevant in today's world, being created anew in Christ in religious life allows new things to come into the world."

THIRD PLACE AUTUMN STREBEL



In cofounding a St. Vincent de Paul youth conference, Autumn widens her classmates' panorama — and her own — to view Cincinnati's diverse, socioeconomically challenged population. "Equity instead of Poverty" recounts their journey toward understanding. "Living in poverty means facing invisible obstacles every day," she writes.



SERVING THE POOR WITH DIGNITY

By Giovana Soria

For a Houston biochemist, missionary discipleship is his true vocation

Mesias Pedroza has not forgotten the missionary heart of the late Maryknoll Father Gerald Kelly, a mentor who still guides him every day to serve God through others.

Pedroza has an extensive track record serving the poor of Houston, Texas, and other communities, and the seed of his concern for those less fortunate was instilled in him from childhood.

Pedroza was born in Chicago, Illi-

nois, but when he was 3 years old, his parents took him and his three siblings to Mexico to immerse them in their culture, language and faith. He recalls a childhood full of good memories, but many challenges as well. His parents sacrificed to give their children the best they could, including a Catholic education. After a few years in Mexico, his father and brother returned to the States to better provide for the family.

"We were poor and had to borrow money to be able to eat," Pedroza says, "but we were enriched by my family's instruction. From my mother, Guadalupe, I learned charity and prayer, and to share a loaf of bread with those whose needs were greater than ours. My mother used to say: 'Here, take this bean taco to Mr. Marquitos,' because even though he was homeless, he deserved to be treated with respect and dignity."

When the young Pedroza was 14, he and the rest of his family returned to the United States and reunited with his father and brother in Hous-

ton. He still had two more years of high school to finish, but it took him five years to do so.

"I felt alien to a new culture and language and to the country of my birth," he says. "I got together with other newly arrived students and fell under some bad influences that led me to rebel. I left school for three years." He continues, "Nonetheless, during those rebellious years, the presence of God surrounded me. I knew God was watching me, unhappy with my behavior. Finally, I told him, 'If you guide me, I will change.'"

In 2002, Pedroza finished high school. Before starting university, he deepened his process of introspection, asking himself, "Why did God bring me into the world?" One day, he heard the priest at Saint Charles Borromeo parish in Houston announce they were looking for someone to take charge of the food pantry. Pedroza volunteered. "It was an awakening," he says. "I felt a calling from God to help the poor."

While fulfilling his commitment to help others, Pedroza earned a bachelor's degree in biotechnology from the University of Houston and then a doctorate in biochemistry from the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston.

In 2010 Pedroza was invited to attend the Youth Mission Encounter — Encuentro Misionero Juvenil (EMJ) in Spanish — in Houston. There he met Father Kelly, who was fundamental in the creation of the EMJ, a gathering of various Spanish-speaking mission

At El Buen Samaritano in Laredo, Texas, Mesias Pedroza (black cap), his wife Christie (beside him) and volunteers deliver donations. (All photos courtesy of Mesias Pedroza/U.S.)



Christie (left), the wife of Mesias Pedroza, engages in recreational activities with a nursing home resident. The visit is part of Matthew's Family Ministries, run by the young couple.

groups that create awareness and promote missions both locally and abroad.

"What I learned from Father Kelly was the vocation to serve, to be actively receptive to God's voice," Pedroza says. He remembers the missionary's sense of joy. "His smile would be the first impression to brighten our day. He loved working with youth and migrant families. His optimism was what kept us working next to him. He was a simple man with a heart of gold."

Despite his advanced age and some health problems, Father Kelly, who passed away in 2021, served tirelessly until his last days. "Mission was his nourishment," Pedroza says. "He loved being close to God's people."

Today, Pedroza and his wife, Christie, run Matthew's Family Ministries, named after one of two unborn children they lost during pregnancy, the other being Thomas. The ministries include distributing food and clothes in the Saint Charles Borromeo parish, writing letters to inmates in prison, visiting the homebound and patients in hospitals, tutoring students and donating books, notebooks, backpacks and educational materials.

Another ministry that Pedroza, 40, does from the heart is visiting migrant shelters on the border — a mission that was important to Father Kelly. "We continue this mission in memory of Father Kelly, to make him smile in heaven," he says.



The late Maryknoll Father Gerald Kelly (left) is shown at a 2010 Encuentro Misionero Juvenil gathering with Mesias Pedroza, now 40, who leads multiple ministries in the Houston area.

Participants bring donations, pray for the families and help with local transportation. They also pray at places migrants lost their lives.

More than 50 volunteers from various parishes of the Houston Archdiocese and other religious organizations such as Maryknoll serve through Matthew's Family Ministries.

Pedroza continues his collaboration with Maryknoll through the Maryknoll Affiliates, Maryknoll mission promoters and Maryknoll Father Rafael Dávila. "His keen understanding motivates us to learn more about our faith and how our faith transforms society," says Pedroza about the missionary. Last year, following in Father Kelly's footsteps, Pedroza even organized the EMJ gathering.

In March, the prayers of Pedroza and his wife Christie were granted. They welcomed a baby boy, Santiago, into this world. "May Santiago remember his brothers through the mission of Matthew's Family Ministries," he says.

Pedroza, who is a professor of biology and biochemistry at the University of Houston and does research into how illnesses develop, says one of the most important things for him is to work for the common good in his community. "When a community works for everyone's well-being," he says, "it will become a healthy and vibrant community." ✠

Arturo and Esperanza Monterrubio contributed reporting to this article.

World Watch

Fresh Pain from Old Wounds

By Thomas Gould

The February release of 222 political prisoners from Nicaragua has been heralded by some as an olive branch and by others as another worrisome signal of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's hardening authoritarianism.

While no sanctions from the United States were lifted after the exchange, Secretary of State Antony Blinken signaled that the episode opened lines of communication with the potential to lift sanctions in the future.

Yet the manner of the release of the 222 only heightened authoritarianism within the Central American regime. In the hours after the prisoners were released and put on a plane bound for the United States, the national assembly amended the Nicaraguan constitution to revoke the citizenship of these "traitors of the nation" — an act illegal under international law. This leaves the released prisoners stateless. One week later, the judiciary applied the new conditions of citizenship, along with the 2014 laws defining "traitors to the country" and existing criminal asset forfeiture laws, to seize the property of 94 of the exiles.

Since he was returned to the presidency of Nicaragua in 2007, Ortega has consolidated his power by removing term limits, passing the "traitors"

laws and jailing political opponents before his last election. He and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, are now one year into Ortega's fourth consecutive five-year term.

Ortega was first elected president in 1984 by a supermajority in what independent observers viewed as a fair election. The Reagan Administration disagreed and began funneling arms and money to the government's violent opposition, the Contras, in the infamous Iran-Contra Affair. After Ortega's first presidency, his party fell out of power until he regained the presidency in a 2006 election by a plurality of the vote.

In April of 2018, Ortega's government reacted with deadly violence to student protests in support of pensioners and social security benefits, killing 25 people. More died in subsequent protests, and on Mother's Day that year, police killed 20 people and wounded more than 100 others who were marching in grief and protest of the previous killings. In the years since, Ortega has imprisoned politicians, journalists, public figures and Catholic clergy. Through 2022, his government expelled hundreds of religious and civil society organizations from the country, especially those based in the United States.



A demonstrator holds a crucifix during a protest against Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's government in Managua on May 15, 2018. (CNS/Oswaldo Rivas/Reuters)

The 222 exiled prisoners might have been 224 had Bishop Rolando Álvarez and one other detainee not refused to leave Nicaragua for the United States. Bishop Álvarez was then sentenced to 26 years in prison under the "traitor" laws. He, too, was stripped of his citizenship.

In a statement, the Organization of American States stressed that the release was no "liberation" and that the full restoration of rights is due. Arch-

bishop Timothy P. Broglio, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said in a statement: "I join our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his exhortation to those responsible in Nicaragua, that 'through an open and sincere dialogue, the basis for a respectful and peaceful coexistence might still be found.'" ✠

Thomas Gould is communications manager for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns in Washington, D.C.

FAITH IN ACTION:

- Join in calling on the Biden Administration to redesignate Nicaragua for the life-saving Temporary Protected Status program (TPS) that protects migrants from deportation proceedings: <https://mogc.info/TPS4Nicaragua>
- For a report on the beginnings of the violent crackdown, see this article from our 2018 Newsnotes: <https://mogc.info/Nicaragua2018>
- Read more about the circumstances around the bishop's arrest <https://mogc.info/BpAlvarez-arrest> and join Pope Francis in prayer for his release <https://mogc.info/BpAlvarez-pray>

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, based in Washington, D.C., is a resource for Maryknoll on matters of peace, social justice and integrity of creation, and brings Maryknoll's mission experience into U.S. policy discussions. Phone (202) 832-1780, visit www.maryknollogc.org or email ogc@maryknollogc.org.

Partners in Mission

Being Loved

By Deirdre Cornell

Praying for Maryknoll. This, Kim Mom says, is her current mission.

The returned lay missionary, who lives in Jersey City, New Jersey, says, “I pray for Maryknoll every day.”

While Kim’s commitment to Maryknoll remains constant, her missionary journey has evolved, taking her across borders — and back again.

Kim’s family is ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese, and she was born and raised in Cambodia. There, she was educated by the French-speaking Sisters of Providence of Portieux, who ran several large schools in the Southeast Asian country. Kim excelled in academics and received a Fulbright scholarship. She came to the United States in 1973 and earned a master of business administration degree, MBA, at Columbia University in New York.

“In the spring of 1975, just one semester before I completed my studies, a tragic event happened,” she recounts. The Khmer Rouge came to power when it overthrew the Cambodian government in a bloody civil war.

For four years, the regime decimated the country. A quarter of the population was lost to genocide and starvation. Urban and educated people, especially, were targeted: teachers, doctors, law-

yers — even people who simply wore glasses. “Members of my family were among them,” Kim says. “My grief was intense. I couldn’t eat. I couldn’t sleep.”

Remaining in the United States, Kim worked as an accountant and sought strength and solace in her growing Catholic faith. She attended daily Mass during her lunch hour. Eventually, Kim learned of Maryknoll’s work to rebuild her country of origin and became a Maryknoll lay missionary in 1998.

After an absence of 26 years, Kim returned to Cambodia. “It’s not the same society I once knew,” she said at the time of her sending. She was going, she said, “to help Cambodian people rebuild their spirit, their hope and their trust in government and each other.”

Maryknoll Sister Leonor Montiel, who served alongside the lay missionary, says, “One of Kim’s unique gifts was being fluent in the five languages used in Cambodia — Khmer, Vietnamese, French, English and Chinese.”

Since the Cambodia mission team followed a collaborative model, priests, brothers, sisters and lay missionaries worked closely together. They organized Saturday evening English Masses and held regular gatherings on Wednesdays. “We called it the three Ms,” says Maryknoll Father John Barth,



Kim Mom (far right) brings food and companionship to a Vietnamese refugee family living on a boat in the area of Phnom Penh in 1999. (Sean Sprague/Cambodia)

who also served in Phnom Penh at the time. “Meeting, Mass and meal.”

Maryknoll Sister Luise Ahrens, who served in Cambodia for 25 years, remembers well Kim’s work in a program for people with disabilities caused by polio, cerebral palsy or landmines. The Maryknoll skills training program, housed at the Wat Than Buddhist temple, taught weaving and woodworking to Cambodians with disabilities.

“It was started by the late Maryknoll Father William O’Leary to train landmine amputees to make a living, since they couldn’t work in the rice paddies anymore,” recalls Father Barth.

The project needed Kim’s help. Her managerial skill and marketing expertise were put to good use — as was her sharp eye. “She told them, ‘You have to use different colors and higher quality materials,’” Sister Ahrens recalls. “Kim found new buyers and earned the trust of clients and partners,” Sister Montiel says. “She turned Wat Than around.”

Even after Kim finished her commitment with the lay missionaries in 2003,

the project, by then known as Peace Handicrafts, continued. Kim served as a consultant, mentoring new leaders and guiding a transition for the project to become independent. “She was the driving force for them to be able to continue,” Sister Ahrens says. Wat Than Artisans continues to win awards and recognition, adds Sister Montiel, attributing its long-lived success to Kim’s firm foundation.

Back at home in Jersey City, Kim attends Mass at Saint Peter’s Church. She maintains communication with friends still serving in overseas mission, like Father Barth. She reads *Maryknoll* magazine avidly and contributes regularly. Limited mobility, aging and health challenges have not interrupted her commitment to mission. Nor have they dimmed her faith. If anything, her faith is stronger. “I have a better sense that I am loved,” she says.

“Before, I thought God would love me for what I do,” Kim explains. Now, she says, she understands God is telling her, “I love you the way you are.” ✠



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READERS' RESPONSES

CLIMATE CONTROVERSY

A reader whose letter was printed in the Spring issue — safely perched over 4,500 feet above sea level — claims that climate change should not be a prime factor when making decisions regarding land use. Yet, accelerating sea rise leads the inhabitants of coastal cities worldwide to at least question its cost. Residents of Kiribati and Tuvalu in the Pacific, the Maldives and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean and even Bermuda have been forced to leave their properties.

This same reader is perhaps unaware that the average wind speed of over 20 mph in Boulder and Fort Collins just north of Denver is optimal for wind energy generation. The facts are that once used, fossil fuels pollute and disappear, while solar, water and wind do not pollute and can be endlessly used. Even the lithium in electric vehicles can be substantially reused.

Most of the world's population lives in cities, where it is a struggle politically and socially to develop a circular economy which reduces, reuses and recycles natural resources. This is the care we owe for the gift of our earth.

Arthur Rigor da Eva
Stoughton, Massachusetts

DOING GOD'S WORK

In response to letters to the editor in the Winter 2023 issue, global warming is very much a religious issue. The good Lord gave us tools to use our resources wisely, which include increasing renewable energy and reducing dependence on coal and oil as energy

sources. Fertilizers and pesticides do improve products and intensify production — but at what expense?

Challenging our leaders in research, in all levels of government, in philanthropy and in the religious community with respect to global warming is paramount in our country and world today. Thank you, Maryknoll, for being an advocate for our environment. You certainly are doing God's work.

Jeffrey Finnegan
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

STEWARDSHIP, A DUTY

I was saddened and disturbed by the two letters in the Readers' Responses of the *Maryknoll* Winter 2023 issue that claimed "global warming is a political issue" and "environmental philosophies" are not "God's work." If caring for God's miraculous creation is not God's work, what is?

Stewardship of the earth is a duty of the faithful and a right to life issue. It is not inherently political, as destruction of nature affects all of us — first and foremost, the poor. True, renewable energy is not a panacea and it does not occur without effort and cost. But to go on the way we are, valuing money and comfort over human survival, is truly a grave sin against the Creator.

Marie Slattery
Hoosick Falls, New York

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

In response to the letter titled "Column Raises Doubt" in your Winter 2023 issue, I honestly appreciate concern for the poor who

are “burdened” by the high cost of “renewable energy.” However, I do have a related point to state: isn’t it strange that the United States can spend trillions on weapons of mass destruction while continually resisting every dollar proposed to save the Earth?

Thank you for neither being “political” nor “religious” regarding these important issues — but rather for your spiritual guidance in these crucial times.

*Michael Pelepko
Lebanon, Pennsylvania*

PAYING ATTENTION

A reader wrote a letter published in Winter 2023 about global warming being a political issue, not a religious one. I disagree. I think it is very important that we pay attention to global warming — it is a real thing. My husband was a farmer and we garden with no pesticides.

*Bonnie Sawyer
Auburn, Washington*

YOGA NOT CATHOLIC

I love the Maryknoll mission and have supported it for many years. I especially like the *Maryknoll* magazine that arrives throughout the year.

However, in the magazine’s latest issue, Spring 2023, the article “Creating a Sustaining Community” by Carolyn Trumble shows Maryknoll Lay Missioner Kathy Bond leading a chair yoga class! Yoga is not com-

patible with Catholic doctrine and it is not simply a form of stretching. It is a form of religious worship. Please advise your staff, and I would welcome any comments.

Thanks for all you do. I just wanted to make you aware that it shocked me to see this being done in mission!

*Kristin Taubel
Necedah, Wisconsin*

HELP AT HOME?

I would like to thank the Maryknoll Sisters for their work with migrants at the border, seen in Sister Genie Natividad’s “Strangers Become Guests” in the Winter 2023 issue. However, I’d wish our own homeless and very poor families were afforded the same type of reception and assistance.

Thank you for the great work around the world.

*Dave Solhtalab
Concord, California*

LAKOTA SPIRIT

Just finished another wonderful magazine from Maryknoll! I especially liked “In Search of Lakota Spirit” by Scott Giblin. Thank you for this story and for the World Watch column regarding the Philippines. We read each article and share the magazine with our son. We’ve been supporters since 1963. You are in our prayers. God bless you all.

*Marge Wierman
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

The editors invite Maryknoll readers to send us their views. Write to:

Readers’ Responses

P.O. Box 302, Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545-0302

Our e-mail address is: mklmag@maryknoll.org

“Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” — 1 John 4:21

*Maryknoll Superior General Father Lance Nadeau
serves food to schoolchildren in Kenya.
(Moses Njagua Gitahi/Kenya)*



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At Holy Family Catholic Church in Fort Worth, Texas, Maryknoll Father Rodrigo Ulloa presents the Division II second place award of Maryknoll's annual student essay contest to Emma Howell for her essay, "A Rose for Renewal," about the vocation to religious life. (See story, page 46)

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