



# MARYKNOLL®

U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

Winter 2024

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*The Purpose Is Love*

## FROM THE EDITOR

**T**o start, let me wish every one of our readers a most joyous Advent. As we enter into this period of anticipation of Christmas, preparing for the celebration of Jesus' birth, we tend to focus on happiness and cheerfulness, family and friendships, gift giving and generosity, and look to decorate our surroundings with the symbols of the season. With this, our Winter issue of *Maryknoll*, we seek to reflect that spirit of the holiday in our pages, and I think this issue certainly does that.

If we look for the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love, so emphasized by St. Paul in the New Testament, we find them in abundance in this edition. Faith is eloquently expressed in Father Joseph Veneroso's photo meditation and spirituality column and in Father Daniel Kim's reflection on Christmas. Of course, faith underlies the motivation of all the missionaries featured in this issue. Hope comes through, not only in the title of our story from the U.S./Mexico border, but underpinning, like faith, the amazing works and ministries we've highlighted in these articles. Maryknoll missionaries bring hope to others all year long. As for love, Father Robert McCahill says it best in our cover story: "The purpose of life is love."

The three virtues go together: faith expressed through love and enduring hope in Jesus. As we prepare for the coming of the Christ Child, we wish you all a blessed and merry Christmas.

*Lynn F. Monahan  
Editor-in-Chief*



*Paul Jeffrey/Bangladesh*

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**FRONT COVER:**  
Maryknoll Father Robert McCahill has served the poor in Bangladesh for five decades, living as a Christian missionary among Muslims and helping children with health challenges.

**COVER CREDITS:**  
Front: Paul Jeffrey/Bangladesh  
Back: Giovana Soria/Portugal

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### Editorial Staff:

Lance P. Nadeau, M.M., Publisher  
Lynn F. Monahan, Editor-in-Chief  
Deirdre Cornell, Managing Editor  
Giovana Soria, Associate Editor  
Andrea Moreno-Díaz, Associate Editor  
Mary Ellen Manz, M.M., Maryknoll Sister Liaison  
Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M., Contributing Writer  
Diane Mastrogiulio, Art Director  
Michael Calvente, Graphic Designer  
Regina Gelfer, Graphic Designer

### Direct all correspondence to:

Lance P. Nadeau, M.M., Publisher  
P.O. Box 302, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0302  
914.941.7590

**"To those who love God, all things  
work together for good ..."**

*Romans 8:28*

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# Light in the Darkest Hour

*By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.*

*On the darkest hour of the darkest day  
When lust for power corrupted the best  
And people willingly traded their souls  
For the right to rule and ride roughshod  
Over the foreigner, the poor, the Other,  
It is then, always then, that holy Wisdom  
Explodes silently upon an unsuspecting world.*

*The Great Divider, undeterred, sets rich  
Against poor, well-fed against hungry,  
Neighbor against neighbor,  
And one's enemy is within one's home.  
The Great Deceiver upends the world  
Declaring evil good and good bad  
Calling truth lies and lies worthy of belief  
Displacing, wherever possible, even God.*





*Somewhere in a distant land subdued  
And oppressed by those who kill and  
Plunder in the name of God,  
a Child is born in the fullness of time.  
No number of ornaments  
Can disguise injustice, no amount of light  
Can dispel despair. Instead,  
Weapons and wars are reduced  
To silence at the sound of a  
Newborn Babe nursing at the Mother's breast.*

*Good Christian, take heart! On this night  
Peace is born, mercy flows, love abounds!  
As surely as they did so long ago  
For though latter-day Herods continue  
To threaten and destroy innocence,  
God Almighty and Most Merciful comes  
Not when we are ready but when  
We need God the most.*





# MISSIONER TALES



Michael Jones/Guatemala

**T**he 25 or so prisoners gathered in a cell at the men's detention center in São Paulo, Brazil, where I served as a Maryknoll lay missionary, watched me patiently, with puzzled faces. I placed four construction paper "candles" on the table and held up a yellow construction paper "flame," asking for a volunteer. One of the men raised his hand, becoming the one who would "light" the first candle and begin the Advent season for us.

Starting four Sundays before Christmas, we prepare for Christ's birth during a period called Advent. It's a time of waiting and hope, and we

asked the men what were their hopes. Their answers included liberty, health, their families' health, love, peace and "an end to this situation." When one of the men added, "Patience," they all agreed. Then an inmate named Fabiano gave a memorable answer: he hoped to keep God's light always before him, and never vary from following it.

*Marilyn Kott, MKLM*

**I**n Guatemala, where I serve as a missionary, I lived for a time in a rural town far from the amenities of the capital city. The long dirt road was a truly rocky road in the dry season and

a rutty, muddy one when the annual rains came. One rainy day our vehicle slipped into a rut that even our four-wheel drive couldn't help us out of. I got out in the drizzle to see what we could do. As I stared at the tire — stuck in mud up to the axle — a small boy, only about 8 years old, came up and offered to help. If we couldn't do anything, I thought, he certainly couldn't.

The boy left and soon returned with an armload of firewood. He got down in the mud and shoved the pieces around the tires. "Try it now," he said. I obediently got into the car, put it into first gear and roared out of the mud. As if that weren't enough, the boy said, "My mother said to come in and get dry. She has some food for you." At their small adobe house up the hill, we were met with the finest hospitality: We dried our clothes by the fire, enjoyed a hot meal and made new friends.

Never underestimate an 8-year-old boy.

*Bernice Kita, M.M.*

**H**er name is Hadia, and she is a 10-year-old girl of the Nuer ethnic group who lives in a U.N. camp in Malakal, South Sudan, where I served in mission for 10 years. In this camp of over 30,000 people displaced by civil war, most families have very few possessions. They keep their clothes in shopping bags.

One day when I was visiting Hadia and her family, she told me that rats had chewed up her only pair of socks. I asked if she wanted to go to the market to buy another pair. She excitedly said yes and danced for joy. Upon arriving at the market, Hadia found what she wanted. She was happy just to have a new pair of socks. Despite the

difficult life of people in the camp, especially children, Hadia taught me the value of living simply and enjoying the simple things in life.

*Michael Bassano, M.M.*

**I**n our ministry in Bolivia, we strive to achieve a measure of justice and dignity for Doña Benita and her son Jhon. At 13, Jhon is the size of a 6-year-old, with extremely thin arms and legs. Born with severe physical and intellectual disabilities, he cannot talk and needs constant supervision. No school exists in the area for his special needs.

Doña Benita is a single mother who works in her neighbors' fields to earn her family's daily bread. Since she does not have a car or motorcycle and cannot afford to hire a caregiver for Jhon, she carries him on her back, often for a mile or more. Doña Benita had been told by the local doctor that her son would never walk. Even a wheelchair would not help, as the dirt roads and trails are not passable for a wheelchair. She wondered if God was punishing her.

We had Jhon examined by our doctors and learned that there was no physical reason he could not walk.

So, with our physical therapist and the rest of our team, we started intensive treatment, including teaching the exercises to Jhon's mother in order to double up on his therapy. We prayed that it was just the lack of muscle development that prevented him from walking. After six months, Jhon is now able to stand and walk 20 feet on his own. Jhon smiles when he walks, and his mother has regained her faith that a better tomorrow can be achieved.

*Joseph Loney and Filo Siles, MKLM*





# *Borders of Hope*

By Andrea Moreno-Díaz

*Maryknoll immersion program takes participants to the U.S./Mexico border*

**W**hen Border Patrol agents dropped off Miguel Soto and his family at a shelter in El Paso, Texas, the family had already spent all their money on their monthlong journey to the U.S. border. They had a contact in Utah, but no means to get there.

El Paso means “the pass-through” in Spanish — a name that defines the nature of the city for migrants on their way somewhere else.

“People are always coming and going,” says Deborah Northern, a Maryknoll lay missionary who volunteers at local shelters for asylum seekers. “That’s a real need. How do I help them wherever they go?”

Maryknoll has a long history of serving at the U.S./Mexico border. Currently, five lay missionaries, three priests and two sisters work there in various ministries.

Northern also works with The Encuentro Project, coordinating immersion trips like the one organized by the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in July. The Encuentro program offers participants a comprehensive understanding of the reality of migration and the chance to interact with migrants such as Miguel.

Miguel says his family was forced to flee their home in Venezuela for having taken part in anti-government protests. After selling everything they owned, Miguel, his wife, their three children — ages 3, 8 and 13 — and his brother Jorge (not their real names) set out for the border between Colombia

*A father and son traverse the perilous Darién Gap jungle. According to the U.N., a record number of migrants have crossed there in 2023. (OSV News photo/ Manuel Rueda/Global Sisters Report)*





*Miguel's 13-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son belong to one of the many Venezuelan families who came to the U.S. border to request asylum. (Courtesy of Andrea Moreno-Diaz/U.S.)*



*At Sacred Heart Church in El Paso, Texas, a shelter run by an ex-Border Patrol agent assists thousands of migrants. (OSV News Photo/Courtesy of Pax Christi Little Rock/U.S.)*

and Panama. The family joined the hundreds of thousands of migrants who in recent years have undertaken the treacherous trek through the jungle known as the Darién Gap.

Miguel had seen videos posted by other migrants on social media detailing the specifics of the journey, such as the cheapest routes and how to prepare. In some videos, people urged others not to start the journey at all.

En route to the Darién, in ports and encampments controlled by traffickers and cartels, migrants had to pay for passage with American dollars rather than local currency. There, Miguel says, he saw migrants from Haiti, Ecuador, Cuba and places

as remote as China — all hoping to make it to the U.S. border.

Along with about 40 other migrants, the Sotos paid a per person fee for a guide to take them a portion of the way. Then the group was left on its own, trudging muddy paths and traversing steep cliffs and swollen rivers — all the while, at risk of getting lost in the jungle or being found by criminal gangs.

Whenever they could, the adults covered the children's eyes from disturbing sights. "You see many bodies on the way ... bodies being eaten by animals," Miguel recalls. Although they did their best to react quickly, he says, once they were too late to shield their younger daughter from

seeing the body of a woman already badly decomposed.

After three and a half days, Miguel says, the group came to a clearing in Panama. Then, the family traveled through Central America and Mexico, where they boarded the freight trains headed north known as *La Bestia* (The Beast). The dangerous trip, atop different trains, lasted two and a half days.

At the end of the train tracks was Ciudad Juárez and the United States border.

By the time the Soto family reached Juárez on July 18, 2023, a newly installed barrier of concertina razor wire glinted along the banks of the Rio Grande. But the Sotos had

no intention of entering the States illegally. Like many other migrants escaping persecution, they planned to come into the United States through an official port of entry. The family was seeking asylum.

Beginning in March 2020, asylum was restricted under Title 42, which allowed for the expulsion of asylum seekers to prevent the spread of COVID-19. When the measure ended in May 2023, a new policy was instituted. Migrants have to apply for asylum in other countries before doing so in the United States. (The Sotos requested asylum in Colombia but received only a temporary authorization.) Migrants also have to schedule an appointment through a phone





Maryknoll Lay Missioner Deborah Northern (far right) and a group of high school students talk to a Border Patrol agent during an immersion trip. (Courtesy of Deborah Northern/U.S.)



Deacon Bill Toller, Jeannine Clark and Guadalupe Jimenez (left to right) prepare a meal while visiting a migrant shelter during an immersion trip to El Paso, Texas. (Andrea Moreno-Díaz/U.S.)

app called CBP One. While they wait for the appointment — sometimes for weeks or months — migrants risk kidnapping, murder and rape in dangerous border towns.

"If you're fleeing, you can't hunger down for three months until the government says 'come,'" says Heidi Cerneka, a Maryknoll lay missionary and immigration attorney serving migrants in El Paso. "The shelters in Mexico are overwhelmed because we blocked people at the gate."

On the streets of Juárez, a stranger approached the Soto family while they rested on a sidewalk. This older man sat close to their 13-year-old daughter. "He didn't care that we were there," Miguel says. The openly predatory attitude put the adults on high alert. "After that, another man passed by, speaking on his cellphone, watching us. He followed us for three blocks." A third man then came and persisted in getting close to the children, offering to buy them soda and milk.

Other migrants at the border warned the family that these behaviors indicated they had been "marked."

Miguel's brother insisted that the couple and their children try to turn themselves in immediately at a port of entry, instead of waiting for an appointment. Fearing he could be subjected to expedited removal as a single adult, Jorge stayed behind to wait for an appointment through the app. The family members said a tearful goodbye.

"I just wish people would see these migrants not as a problem, but as human beings who are suffering," Northern says. Having served in El Salvador for eight years, she's aware of the myriad reasons people

migrate. A mother she knew, Northern recalls, explained why she had her daughter leave. "I have to send her to the United States," the mother said. "The gangs are starting to look at her."

Fatigued migrants find respite in their journeys thanks to the indispensable work of volunteers and missionaries who serve at shelters in El Paso.

"It's a labor of love," says Coralís Salvador, who like Northern, has been a Maryknoll lay missionary for nearly 25 years. Since coming to El Paso in 2019, Salvador has worked at various shelters for migrants. "It gives me so much joy," she says. "They're like my family. I cook breakfast and lunch for them."

"It's menial work," Salvador continues. However, she adds, so was Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet.

The faith-based approach of the immersion trips sponsored on an ongoing basis by Maryknoll's Mission Formation Program inspires participants to help those in need and to "share the gift of mission." Participants on the most recent trip visited a Franciscan-run shelter for migrants in El Paso. There, they prepared dinner and heard the Sotos' story. A good Samaritan in the Maryknoll group offered to pay for the family's bus tickets.

Upon hearing the good news, Miguel broke down in bittersweet tears. "My brother is still on the other side," he said between sobs.

Hours later, the family arrived safely at Salt Lake City. As if to mark the occasion, their youngest child turned 4 years old that same day.

The family has yet to be approved for asylum. ✠



# Spirit of Mission

## Mistletoe at the Manger?

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

**M**y fondest memory of celebrating Christmas as a boy is midnight Mass. The church smelled of fresh pine, melted wax and incense. The highlight began when the priest intoned *Gloria in excelsis Deo* — then stopped! That was the signal for the altar servers, candles lit, to line up before the altar. Under a purificator, a statue of the Baby Jesus rested, waiting to be born.

Instead of responding with the rest of the *Gloria*, the choir broke out in the Italian Christmas carol, *Tu Scendi dalle Stelle* or “You Came Down from the Stars.” The celebrant uncovered and carried the infant in procession down the main aisle to the crèche waiting in the back of the church.

Granted, this was a liturgical no-no, but it gave my Italian American parish a chance to express our love of Jesus in our native tongue. As Baby Jesus passed by, row after row of parishioners genuflected. Once the priest placed the Infant in the manger, the choir continued the rest of the *Gloria*.

Each culture, each generation and even each individual likes to express the joy of Christ’s birth in ways that are meaningful to them. Some years ago, Monsignor Robert Ritchie, then rector of New York City’s famous St. Patrick’s

Cathedral, placed a life-size replica of his beloved Labrador retriever in the nativity scene right next to the Virgin Mary. The news drew larger crowds than usual, especially of children who appreciated seeing “man’s best friend” loyally watching over humankind’s savior.

This got me to thinking about how not just the crèche but our observance of Christmas itself has changed over the centuries. Neither mistletoe nor poinsettias were present at the first Christmas, yet both have become associated with the season.

The day and month of Jesus’ birth are not mentioned in the Bible. In the fourth century, Pope Julius I declared December 25 the date to celebrate the Lord’s birth. Close to the winter solstice, it marked the darkest time of year in the Northern Hemisphere — and the return of sunlight.

Thanks to the Roman Catholic celebration of “Christ’s Mass,” Christmas spread around the world, picking up local customs along the way.

After nativity scenes, nothing says Christmas more than a decorated Christmas tree. According to legend, Germans took up cultivating evergreens after St. Boniface chopped down a “sacred” oak tree and replaced it with a fir tree. Martin Luther is said



For nine days leading up to Christmas, during *Las Posadas*, figures of Mary and Joseph seeking hospitality are taken in procession to homes. (Diego Lozano via Unsplash/Mexico)

to have been the first to decorate an evergreen with candles. This practice evolved into the stringing of lights on Christmas trees.

In Mexico and other parts of the Spanish-speaking world, people celebrate *Las Posadas*, a novena of going house to house for music, prayer, food and piñatas for the nine days before Christmas. This tradition symbolizes Mary and Joseph’s search for room, seeking hospitality.

Gift giving originated with Eastern Orthodox Christians, who exchange presents to commemorate the visit of the Magi. On Epiphany, these traveling astrologers presented the Christ Child with gold, frankincense and myrrh. We modern Magi now give gifts to one another.

Of course, not all people can afford the luxury of gifts. In the *Orbis* book *The Gospel in Solentiname* by Ernes-

to Cardenal, the poor children of the Solentiname Islands in Nicaragua describe Christmas as the time “when rich people give each other gifts.”

These days we see secular society focusing on the commercial side of Christmas; even in non-Christian countries, department stores are decorated with stars, trees and wreaths. Some well-meaning Christians add a kneeling Santa before the Christ Child.

Recently I learned of Korean teenagers in New York City who have found a meaningful way to observe the spirit of the season: they buy gifts for babies (blankets, pacifiers, toys) and then present them to random mothers with infants on the street.

What about you? What customs or traditions, new or old, do you follow? How does your family or community celebrate the miracle of God coming to Earth as a baby? ✚





# TINY HOUSES MAKE HUGE IMPACT

By Paul Bork

*A parish in Ontario, Canada, finds creative ways to care for people experiencing hunger and homelessness*

**S**t. Mary Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows parish in Kitchener, Ontario, is an example of what Pope Francis surely had in mind when he spoke about the Church as a field hospital.

Conducting a Maryknoll mission appeal recently at St. Mary's, I was struck by its vibrantly diverse congregation and beautifully maintained church, located in the heart of downtown. I was even more impressed by how the parish takes to heart the words of dismissal at Mass: "Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord."

Five nights a week, the parish opens its Tiny Home Takeout program. From an 8-by-10-foot shed — a "tiny house" — a team of staff and volunteers serve 300 restaurant quality takeout meals. Calzones, pizzas or sandwiches, along with a "daily bite" (usually a salad in the summer or a hot casserole or soup in the winter), are packaged to go.

Those who can afford to do so are invited to make a donation, but the meals are especially intended for people experiencing homelessness. "Whether you're living on the street, squeezing your grocery budget to pay the bills, or living a middle-class life, Tiny Home Takeout is happy to feed you and your family," reads its program description.

The genesis of this creative and compassionate outreach effort was an unexpected early November snowstorm in 2019. Most of the city's unhoused people, as well as the city's service organizations, were unprepared for the early extreme weather.

*A resident of A Better Tent City in Ontario, Canada, stands outside a tiny house. The project offers shelter, privacy and community to people experiencing chronic homelessness. (Courtesy of Toby Collins/Canada)*





Staff and board members, including Resurrectionist Father Toby Collins (far right) serve at A Better Tent City in Kitchener, Ontario. The project is supported by its community partners such as St. Mary Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. (Courtesy of Toby Collins/Canada)

Area churches were asked if they might provide temporary shelter. A group of dedicated parishioners and St. Mary's pastor, Resurrectionist Father Toby Collins, said yes. They opened the parish hall and welcomed unhoused people into the warmth of the parish.

Father Collins and the parishioners soon realized that their guests could benefit from nutritious food and the fellowship that can accompany it. They invested in a full commercial kitchen and hired Chef Amy Cyr. The tiny house was set up next to the church for distributing the meals.

A woman who received help expressed her appreciation with these words: "This means love, it means being family together. This is where Jesus would come, to

people like us."

Around that time, tiny houses were being introduced in the Kitchener area in another way to help people experiencing homelessness.

Many of the area's unhoused people were staying in tents on vacant corner lots, Father Collins explains. They faced precariousness and danger in these random, informal encampments.

Along with many other community partners, St. Mary's joined A Better Tent City (ABTC). This project replaces tents and other makeshift shelters with well-built tiny houses in a safe, supportive setting.

The 42 tiny houses, which are wired with electricity for heat and light, are grouped around larger structures with facilities for showering, washing laundry and cooking.

Approximately 50 residents live in ABTC. The neighborhood-like model provides safety and the opportunity for community among residents — and at the same time, respect for their privacy and individuality.

"It provides them a lot of dignity. It gives them their own homes where they can put in shelves, and customize, and paint," says Father Collins, who serves as secretary for ABTC's board of directors.

"It's also a tool that brings other volunteers in," he continues. "People say, 'I want to do something about homelessness.' This gives them points [of contact]."

Food Bank of Waterloo Region makes weekly deliveries and the Sanguen Health Center mobile unit visits regularly. Drug management and treatment services are provided on-site. Costs are covered through donations, the support of businesses and community partners, and collaboration with local and state departments and agencies. "Everybody helps," Father Collins says.

"We still face challenges," states the A Better Tent City website. "Living in an 8'x10' cabin is not the solution to the homelessness crisis." Residents have complicated needs: unemployment, substance abuse, physical and mental health issues. And as successful as the project may be, it is not a substitute for permanent housing.

"We cannot cure homelessness," the website adds. "But we can make a difference in the lives of 50 people."

The value of this powerful witness of service at the Tiny Home Takeout and A Better Tent City is strong. It is

present among the volunteers who help out and the recipients who benefit. It is present in each takeout meal served and in each tiny house inhabited. These buildings are small, but their impact is huge because of the enormous love being shared.

The joy of the Gospel can clearly be seen through the ministries of St. Mary Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows parish. Pope Francis would be pleased. ✠

*Deacon Paul Bork, of the Diocese of Buffalo, New York, has worked for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers since 2000. He is currently the Church Appeals Program manager.*



The Tiny Home Takeout of St. Mary Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows parish in Kitchener, Ontario, is open five days a week and serves meals to go. (Penny Laurette/Canada)



# *A Rich Poverty in Bangladesh*

Text and photos by Paul Jeffrey

*A Maryknoll priest lives a life of happiness and purpose  
serving the poor like Jesus*

Maryknoll Father Robert McCahill  
visits Jamila, a 9-year-old girl with  
disabilities, and her family in Baligao,  
a village near Srinagar, Bangladesh.





Maryknoll Father Robert McCahill's room holds few possessions. There's one cup, one plate, two spoons, a knife, a vegetable peeler, one pot and a small kerosene stove. He owns three shirts and one pair of pants. There's a baseball cap and a small bag with what he needs to celebrate Mass. A rough wooden shelf holds a missal and a tattered breviary, along with a notebook and scraps of paper with scribbled information about children who need help. His bicycle leans against a wall.

The missionary's simple room is tucked away in the back of a small school in Srinagar, a village in the middle of Bangladesh. When the owner of the property met the Catholic priest and learned about his mission, he told Father McCahill he could live there, rent free. The school's owner, like everyone else in the village, is Muslim.

A native of Goshen, Indiana, Father McCahill wakes up every morning at 2:30 and makes a cup of coffee. He then prays for an hour, usually sitting on his cot under a mosquito net. After 10 minutes of exercise, he says Mass, reads his breviary, then shaves. Finally, he makes breakfast, usually a boiled egg and a banana, before setting off on his bicycle for a day among the poor of Bangladesh.

It's a routine he's been repeating for almost five decades.

Following 11 years as a priest in the Philippines, Father McCahill arrived in Bangladesh in 1975 after the archbishop of Dhaka invited Maryknoll to the newly independent nation, still reeling from its war of independence from Pakistan. Up-



on completing a year of language studies, Father McCahill and four other priests asked the archbishop for permission to live and work among Muslims in the countryside, rather than do traditional parish work. Despite warnings from his advisors that Muslims might not accept priests and might even respond with violence, the archbishop agreed.

In the 47 years since, Father McCahill has lived in 14 different rural villages throughout the country. His goal is simply to be like Jesus.

"I'm a Christian so I want to help people. That's what Jesus did," says Father McCahill, who is known to many Bengalis as *Bob Bhai* — Brother Bob. "Jesus went around doing good and healing. So I go around on

my bicycle and do some good. What Jesus did, I try to do."

Since early in his ministry, Father McCahill has focused on helping children living with disabilities or other health challenges. That may be as simple as obtaining medicine or an appropriate wheelchair, but more often involves connecting them to health care providers for everything from physical therapy to surgery. The missionary will make appointments at clinics and then accompany the child and parents to assure that all goes well.

Helping is seldom easy, however.

"The poor are afraid," Father McCahill explains. "Sometimes hospitals have a reputation in Bangladesh as a place you go to get ripped off or to die."

Nazmul Khan Suzon, a journalist in Srinagar who befriended Father McCahill and introduced him to health care workers in the region, says the missionary is famous throughout Bangladesh. "All the doctors know him. That he's a Christian priest doesn't bother people," Suzon says. "People are afraid that if they go to the hospital, it will cost them a lot of money. *Bob Bhai* gives them better options, a better life."

Yet Father McCahill stays only three years in each place.

"Every time I go into a new town, there's a year of suspicion. People suspect I'm there to convert them. But I keep at it, and by the second year, some trust has developed," he

*Father McCahill visits the family of Monna, a 12-year-old in need of support for health care services, in the village of Nopara.*



says. "People stop me on the street or approach me in the tea stalls to tell me about a child who needs help. By the third year, they've begun to develop some affection for me. At the end of that year it's time to move on and start anew."

As a Catholic priest living in villages where almost everyone is Muslim, except for a small number of Hindus, Father McCahill is frequently asked why he's there. That conversation often takes place in tea stalls where he stops during the day to drink hot tea or eat a simple meal. At times a crowd gathers to listen — or at least to stare.

"When people ask me why I'm here, I always bring Jesus into it. He's a prophet for Muslims, they appreciate him, so when I start talking about Jesus, whom they call *Isa*, no one suspects me of conversion," he says. "Some people think the touchstone between Christians and Muslims is Mary, because she's often mentioned in the Quran. But I think the touchstone is Jesus. We share Jesus. They don't think he's God, obviously, but they certainly understand when I tell them that Jesus is my model in life."

Father McCahill says he has never experienced the violent rejection that worried the archbishop's advisors. He admits that one time someone did knock off his hat. And once in the market a man hit him with a cane. "But he was a nut. And the other people there did not approve of what he did," he says.

Instead of rejection, Father McCahill says he has received amazing hospitality — especially when people learn how he helps children in their villages.

"The people around me are learn-



ing that Christians are their friends, that we love them and want to be with them and do things together," he says. "When they see what I'm doing, they are favorably impressed, and that changes their mentality towards Christians."

Father McCahill is clear about what he is doing.

"This isn't interfaith dialogue. It's mission," he says. "It's what we should be doing, living among people of other faiths and doing something with them."

Just as Father McCahill represents the Christian faith to Muslims who don't personally know other Christians, so he helps Christians in the United States understand far-away Muslims.

Ever since arriving in Bangladesh, Father McCahill has written regularly to family and friends back home before Christmas, relating his adventures in mission. In 1984, he sent his letter to the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR), and since then the newspaper has published his Christmas letter every year.

"One of the reasons for my yearly letter is to give examples of normal people living their lives," says Father McCahill, who still patiently bangs out the letter on a manual typewriter that friends keep for him in the capital. "The Catholic bishops of Asia have stated that rather than focusing on conversion of people of other faiths, we should strive to live in harmony with them."

(Above) Father McCahill visits 8-year-old Jair and his grandmother, Rohima, in the village of Batabhog. (Below) The missionary travels mostly by bicycle, even in the rain.





Father McCahill visits Sabbir, a 14-year-old with disabilities in the village of Atigao. The priest has spent nearly 50 years helping children with medical challenges.

Tom Fox, who was *NCR*'s publisher when it started carrying the priest's annual letter, calls Father McCahill's missives the most interesting missionary letters to pass through the paper's newsroom.

"They'd come on old airmail stationery and were shocking in their unique witness to the faith," Fox says. "Each letter was personal and would tell simple, understandable stories about his life and encounters among his friends. Father Bob's love and life and witness was always gloriously displayed in simplicity. He seemed to live in rich poverty."

Tom Roberts, *NCR*'s editor for several years, compares Father McCahill's letters to those of communities in the early Church.

"His missives told of a solitary soul, a wanderer through cultures so very far from the conceits of first-world Catholicism. This simple man proclaiming the Word without words," Roberts says. "It was, I often thought, the most authentically Christian thing we printed all year."

When he's done making his rounds each day, Father McCahill pedals home and fires up his kerosene stove. He cooks rice and lentils along with potatoes or string beans or okra. He stirs in a packet of spices that cost him five *takas*, about five cents.

"I cook that in one pot for 12 minutes. It's the same meal every day, and I never tire of it," he says.

Father McCahill, now 86, can't see himself retiring from his mission.

"Last time I went back to the States they sent me to a doctor, and I spent almost a month doing excessive tests. Finally, they said I was in terrific health and could leave," he says.

"And if I die here, so what? The purpose of life isn't longevity. The purpose of life is love. I have found a way to love, and I constantly thank God for the astonishing invitation to a life of happiness and purpose." ✠

*Paul Jeffrey is an international photojournalist and founder of Life on Earth Pictures. He lives in Oregon.*

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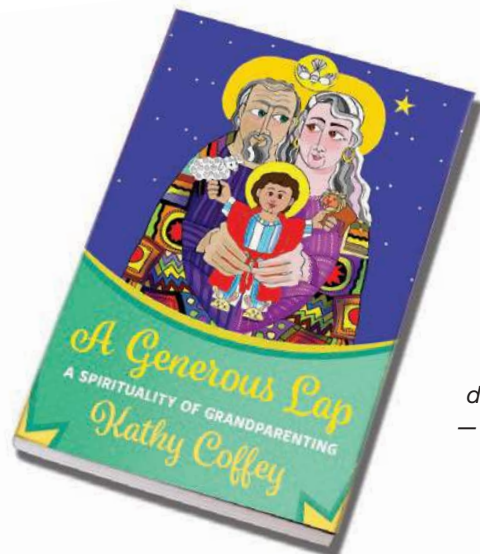
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Maryknoll Father Daniel Kim, from Southern California, was ordained in 2017 and now ministers at St. Mary's Church in Hunghom, Kowloon, Hong Kong. (Nile Sprague/Hong Kong)



# ORBIS BOOKS

## Spotlight



Preview by Robert Ellsberg

*This book will speak to your desires to love more generously — and to be open to such love in return. — Mary Stommes*

**D**o you have grandchildren? Are you a grandchild? If so, Kathy Coffey's new book *A Generous Lap: A Spirituality of Grandparenting* is for you or for someone you love. In her charming and inspiring reflections, Coffey reflects on how this station in life may expand our hearts, enlarge our humanity, put us in touch with fundamental aspects of our selves and allow opportunities for a more generous and fruitful life.

Coffey is the author of 16 books, including her Orbis bestseller, *Hidden Women of the Gospels*. But in this book she draws on her particular experience as the grandmother of six. As she notes: "God uses this period in human life to transform us. The most cantankerous introverts pull out the photos, cute sayings and stories.

Those who thought their physical ailments were paralyzing spring after the toddler heading for the street or hoist aging bodies up the jungle gym when a grandchild quails at the terrifying steepness of the slide. As 'the child grows in wisdom, age, and grace,' we get to marvel, and gradually grow into God's loving self."

The tone of the book is well set by the cover art by Brother Mickey McGrath, "Jesus Has a Sleepover with his Grandparents: Sts. Ann and Joachim." In one chapter Coffey draws on biblical stories and lives of the saints, but also includes wisdom from figures such as Pope Francis recalling the influence of his Nonna Rosa, or stories of Dorothy Day, Black Elk, or the testimonies of "seasoned experts" about what they have learned from their own

experience as grandparents.

While the book is filled with practical suggestions and questions for reflection, the heart of the book is the spirituality of grandparenting, especially in Coffey's chapter "Who They Are for Us." "Of course the intangibles are impossible to chart," she notes, "but the grandchildren really do teach me to be kind and more compassionate, as I've wanted for years to become. ... We can learn from them to be less thinking, analytical, judgmental, and how to simply rejoice in the moment that's given right now." The lessons continue, enlivened by innumerable stories: "When Jesus calls us God's gift to God, maybe he saw us as we do our grandchildren. We're not important to God because of what we've achieved, but simply for who we are, the focus of unrelenting love. ... Just as monasteries were the 'school of love' for many, especially during the Middle Ages, so too grandparenting is a school of love. ... As people age, it may be tempting to dwell in the dear,

familiar past. But gently, with jammy hands, grandchildren turn our faces toward the future."

Part of the equation is also "Who We Are for Them:" "Something is so natural about grandparenting that it's primal. What we give children that's more important than anything verbal is the always welcoming, 'ginormous' hug, the delight in seeing them even if they're head-to-toe covered in mud, sand, or jelly; the affirmation that no matter how small you are (or how annoyingly adolescent) you matter to me, you are important, you are dear as life's blood."

As a recent grandfather myself, I can add my personal endorsement! But as writer Mary Stommes notes, "Whether or not you have ever held a grandchild in your lap, this book will speak to your desires to love more generously — and to be open to such love in return." ✂

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

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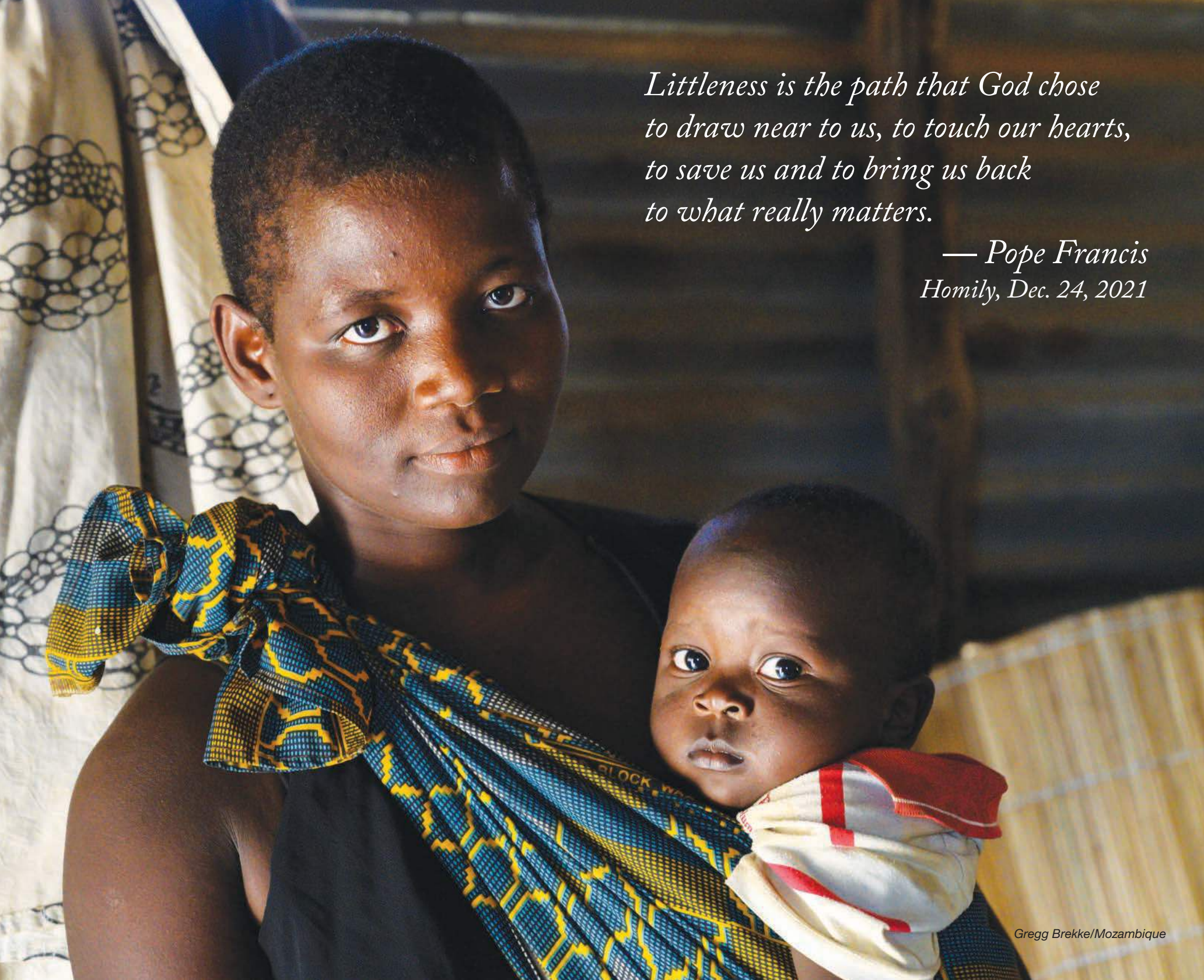
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A photograph of a young woman with short dark hair, looking directly at the camera with a calm expression. She is wearing a black sleeveless top. A baby is strapped to her chest in a blue and yellow patterned sling. The baby is looking off to the side. The background is slightly out of focus, showing a white cloth with a black lace pattern on the left and a wooden wall on the right.

*Littleness is the path that God chose  
to draw near to us, to touch our hearts,  
to save us and to bring us back  
to what really matters.*

*— Pope Francis  
Homily, Dec. 24, 2021*



# THEY CALL HER *'Foreign Grandmother'*



By Mary Ellen Manz, M.M.

*A Maryknoll sister reaches people with disabilities in East Timor's remote communities*

*Maryknoll Sister Hyunjung Kim (holding newborn baby) is shown with the first guests of Uma Esperansa, House of Hope, a home to support safe births in East Timor, a country with high maternal and infant mortality rates. (All photos courtesy of Hyunjung Kim/East Timor)*

At 51, Maryknoll Sister Hyunjung Kim is both youthful-looking and committed to religious life.

Yet, in East Timor — a small nation on the island of Timor, north of Australia — people address Sister Hyunjung as a grandparent. "They call me *Avo Malae*," she says. "Foreign Grandmother!"

A social worker by profession, Sister Hyunjung has served in community health in the mountainous region of Aileu since 2014. The Maryknoll Sisters were invited there by Bishop Carlos Belo of Dili in 1991, during the nation's struggle for independence from Indonesia.

Finding few services in the poor, rugged countryside, Maryknoll Sisters





*The Community-Based Rehabilitation motivators pose with Sister Hyunjung Kim (bottom row, third from left) outside the Uma Ita Nian (Our Home) clinic.*

Susan Gubbins and Dorothy McGowan sized up the challenge and set up a health clinic. “We envisioned the far-flung villages and knew that we needed a community-based approach,” Sister Gubbins wrote later. They trained local people as health promoters, known as “motivators,” in addition to building a center clinic.

“I benefit from the fruits of their work and mission,” Sister Hyunjung says. “I’m working in that clinic, which bears the name *Uma Ita Nian*, Our Home.”

The Uma Ita Nian clinic enlists a staff of 28 workers, including three government employees: a doctor, a midwife and a pharmacist.

Sister Hyunjung serves in various ministries through the clinic, which provides a wide range of services.

She works particularly closely with its Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) team. CBR, which originated with the World Health Organization, is “a strategy that aims to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families, and ensure their inclusion and participation in the community.”

“Home visits are part of the CBR program,” explains Sister Hyunjung. “Two times a week, we visit people with disabilities in remote villages and offer them physical therapy, referrals, medical treatments, supplementary food, equipment, home adaptation aids, hygienic materials and counseling.

“They live in isolated mountain areas with insufficient food, water or clothing and little or no access to

medical care, education or employment opportunities,” the missionary continues.

An essential part of the program is ongoing formation for the local people who work as motivators.

“Once a month, the CBR motivators come to the clinic for training. We have 18 motivators,” Sister Hyunjung says. “They help to identify potential CBR clients, facilitate services and communication between the clinic and the clients, and implement their training in the village where they are placed.”

Over the long, bumpy rides to remote villages, the clinic staff get to know one another better, exchanging food and stories. “I feel part of their lives,” the missionary says.

Sister Hyunjung’s mission of ser-

vice to others started in her country of origin, South Korea. “[It] began ... when I saw people’s hunger for hope, meaningful spirituality and a sense of human dignity,” she recalls. “I felt called to walk with them.”

She earned a degree in agricultural economics, but afterward began helping survivors of human trafficking and sexual abuse at Magdalena House, located in a red light district of Seoul. The home was a safe place for sex workers and other exploited women.

This experience, Sister Hyunjung says, motivated her to study a profession that would support people in need. She went back to school and graduated from Soongsil University with a bachelor’s degree in social work, then earned a master’s degree in social welfare from the Catholic University of Korea.

She returned to Magdalena House to work with its founder, Maryknoll Sister Jean Maloney. “I was inspired by her humble and joyful life-sharing with women who are survivors of violence such as sex abuse, domestic violence and human trafficking,” Sister Hyunjung says.

As Hyunjung met more Maryknoll sisters, she became interested in religious life — and curious about overseas mission. “As a Maryknoll sister, I can share my life and gifts to help create hope with people, and search together for meaning,” she says.

After completing the orientation program (novitiate) at the Sisters Center in New York, Sister Hyunjung



professed first vows in 2011. She professed final vows in 2016, while already in her assignment to East Timor.

According to Oxfam, three quarters of East Timor's people live in rural areas where they rely on subsistence farming. The small nation with 1.3 million inhabitants, also known as Timor-Leste, is one of the world's poorest countries. Half of its children are undernourished and display stunted growth, states the United Nations Development Programme.

As young Hyunjung had done in South Korea — furthering her studies in order to better serve people in need — the missionary earned an assistant nursing license in 2020 to use in East Timor.



"I went back with better knowledge of health care," she says, "knowledge that I can apply daily at work. That same year, our center clinic served over 7,000 people from 12 villages and our mobile clinic served over 6,000 from nine remote villages."

True to her designation in the Tetum language as an honorary grandmother, Sister Hyunjung supports efforts to build a sense of family and community.

Visiting people in their homes, she says, fosters closeness. This can be challenging: "Although I like visiting and listening to their stories, often I felt heavy with worry and concern about where to find hope for them," she says.

One day, she visited a boy with cerebral palsy and his family. "I sat with my silent worries and concerns, watching him receive physical therapy which was so painful for this little boy and his tiny body," she recalls.

"Suddenly his little sister jumped on his bed with a funny monkey toy and played with him. She was comforting him, gently pressing her cheek to his and softly touching his hair, and making funny gestures to make him laugh. The boy's cries transformed into a bright smile. We all laughed with joy and thankfulness."

In her heart, Sister Hyunjung says, she knew God was there, present with those children and everyone in the room. "For these people," she says, "family and home are a safe and nurturing place." ✕

*Sister Hyunjung Kim takes Rosalina home after a weekly program held at the clinic. The 11-year-old with a beautiful smile suffers from muscular dystrophy.*

"Love one another,  
as I have loved you." — John 15:12



*Courtesy of Hyunjung Kim/East Timor*

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# In Step with a Higher Power

By Megan Hamilton

*Lay missionary's ministry in Kenya helps people get and stay sober*

A long, pot-holed road in Mombasa, Kenya, leads to the Port Reitz Mental Health and Substance Addiction Unit. It's the gritty, harsh conclusion of many an addiction and mental illness journey — quite literally, the end of the line.


On Wednesdays, I take an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting there for a dozen or so patients. (All AA members in this article gave permission for their stories to be shared, and pseudonyms are being used.)

A few months ago, as we were about to get rolling, a young man walked in. His pressed white shirt glowed in the room's grayish light. His shoes were new, his pants clean. He walked up to me with a small but joyous smile.

"Do you remember me, Megan?" he asked. As we shook hands, he said, "I'm Vincent, and I got sober here." He told me he planned to come to Port Reitz every week to share the message that helped him get — and stay — sober. The minute he started sharing in Swahili, the patients attending the meeting sat up and leaned forward; their dark, sometimes desperate eyes locked in.

It was the first time anyone had come back to sit in one of these cracked plastic chairs after getting sober in one.

Vincent is true to his word. He comes back every week, sharing his experience, strength and hope — the message



Maryknoll Lay Missioner Megan Hamilton (left) meets with Sister Emily Jebiwott, who coordinates the Archdiocese of Mombasa's Community-Based Health Care program. (All photos courtesy of Megan Hamilton/Kenya)





Psychologist Titus Ngugi, who invited Maryknoll Lay Missioner Megan Hamilton to Port Reitz, helps patients create signs from AA readings to hang on the walls of the facility.

of AA — with those who sleep on the same cold cement he used to sleep on. Vincent carries the message with grace and simplicity.

Others in recovery join our meetings. Esther didn't get sober at Port Reitz, but came to adeptly help run the meetings.

Arthur now hosts the Port Reitz meetings. Once a large-scale drug dealer, he was caught in the morass of gang life. People from his past still try to pull him back in. But he is committed to his recovery, and goes around town giving out information and explaining the AA program.

Like my hometown of Baltimore, Maryland, Mombasa is a port city: a bit scruffy, rakish with a rambunctious history. Like many port cities, it is rife with drugs, and there is always addiction.

When I first arrived two years ago,

this city of 1.4 million had only one face-to-face AA meeting (others had gone online since the COVID-19 pandemic). We are now up to five in-person meetings. For comparison, when I got sober 31 years ago, Baltimore had 600 AA meetings a week.

Alcoholics Anonymous Kenya was established in 1971. At the East African AA Convention, which I helped Mombasa to host in November of 2022, a history of AA in Kenya was shared.

In Kenya, being an alcoholic or an addict is seen as the result of making poor lifestyle choices, being possessed by an evil spirit or the devil, or showing moral weakness. It is considered very shameful, and it brings shame on the whole family.

Awareness is needed about addiction, substance abuse disorder and recovery. People don't know what it

takes to get and stay sober. And even when patients leave rehab and go home, sometimes their family members say, "Great, now you're cured. Celebrate with a beer!"

The shame makes it difficult for recovering alcoholics to advocate for what they need. People are too ashamed to tell anyone that they're an alcoholic/addict and need to make time to attend meetings. Their families don't understand the disease of addiction and how critical it is to maintain total abstinence from drugs and alcohol.

My ministry with AA began through my work with the Community-Based Health Care program of the Archdiocese of Mombasa, which was started in 1996 by the late Maryknoll Brother John Mullen. I had done some AA promotion in my previous

international placements, in Albania with the Peace Corps and in Jamaica with Franciscan Mission. However, at first I wasn't sure about making that the main focus of my mission here.

I felt sort of guilty about it. Was it service for my own selfcare?

My spiritual director, Maryknoll Father Larry Lewis, encouraged me. In his view, some of the best mission ministries combine what is most personally meaningful to us with doing good for others.

Although AA is nonsectarian and not restricted to any particular religious group, our connection to the Catholic Church in Mombasa has been a great asset. Sister Emily Jebiwott of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes, coordinator of the Community-Based Health Care program and its three centers, has been an expert advisor.



Volunteers speak about alcohol and substance abuse to Port Reitz patients and to inmates transported there from Shimo La Tewa Prison to attend the session.



# RECOVERING GRACE

Help **Maryknoll Lay Missioners**  
support life-changing ministries like Megan's  
**addiction recovery** work in Kenya.

Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde offers support, giving me a platform to share my work with AA. On the first Mondays of each month, I give an update to the archdiocesan staff. Priests and religious sisters I meet there often refer people.

Whether or not the people who come to AA are religious, they can expect to find a miracle in recovery. My miracle brought me here, from a barstool on the Baltimore waterfront to mission in Mombasa.

To close our AA meetings, we always form a circle. We say the Serenity Prayer and then slap our hands up and down as we chant, "Keep coming back! It works if you work it! So work it, you're worth it — stay sober!"

One day during the meeting at Port Reitz, a patient painted a bleak picture of his unmanageable life. As the meeting ended, after our chant, he still seemed sad. I looked him straight in the eye and said, "You know what they told me when I first came in? They said, 'Don't quit before the miracle happens.'"

His eyes lit up. He fist-bumped my knuckles and repeated joyously, "Don't quit before the miracle happens!" ✠

*Before joining the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, Megan Hamilton, of Fayetteville, West Virginia, worked for almost 40 years with the African diaspora in Baltimore.*



A public information session about addiction is held at a school in Ukunda, Kenya, with a presentation for 22 teachers followed by an assembly for the school's 500 students.



Maryknoll Lay Missioner Megan Hamilton works in addiction recovery with a local team in Mombasa, Kenya

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# Rising Up at World Youth Day

By Giovana Soria

*Maryknoll sends a priest chaplain and young adults to the global gathering*

**F**or Juan Alvarez, a pilgrim from Texas who attended World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal, it was a blessing to receive the Eucharist every day with Maryknoll Father Rodrigo Ulloa-Chavarry. "He was our shepherd, leader and our guide in everything we did," Alvarez said.

Father Ulloa-Chavarry accompanied Alvarez, 34, and more than 100 other pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston as chaplain. This delegation — as well as a Maryknoll young adult group — joined a multitude of about 1.5 million Catholics from all over the world.

*Maryknoll Father Rodrigo Ulloa-Chavarry (bottom row, second from right) joins young pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston as a chaplain for World Youth Day. (Courtesy of Stephen Harden/Portugal)*





The theme “Mary arose and went with haste” (Luke 1:39) was chosen by Pope Francis as the motto of World Youth Day 2023. “The Church wants young adults to rise, stand up,” Father Ulloa-Chavarry said.

Father Ulloa-Chavarry, vocation director for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, celebrated an opening Mass for hundreds of pilgrims from the United States on July 30 at the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene.

Finding meaning in the saint for whom the church is named, Father Ulloa-Chavarry said, “Mary Magdalene was the first to recognize the risen Jesus. We all receive the Holy Spirit.”

In his homily, Father Ulloa-Chavarry asked pilgrims to discern their own unique calling. “What if God asked you, young man, to reflect on being a priest or a brother? Young lady, can you ponder on being a nun? And if we are afraid of saying ‘yes,’ this is the time to lose the fear,” the missionary said. “I haven’t mentioned marriage, because many of you will marry, but very few will become religious — and we need you. The Church needs your voice.”

Sarahi Unzueta, 28, a Maryknoll mission education promoter, joined the Sisters of Bon Secours to lead a delegation of more than 20 young adults from different states. “Our goal was to empower them, helping their leadership skills and spiritual growth,” she said.

Events at the weeklong World Youth Day gathering included a visit to the Sanctuary of Fatima, a welcome ceremony for Pope Francis, Stations of the Cross, a vigil and the concluding Mass. Pilgrims were also

invited to attend morning catechesis sessions called “Rise Up.”

There were ongoing occasions to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation, as well as concerts and opportunities to meet other young Catholics from different cultures.

When the Holy Father arrived at the Welcome Ceremony at Eduardo VII Park in Lisbon on Aug. 3, he was greeted by a sea of young people waving their countries’ flags and chanting in Spanish, “*Esta es la juventud del papa*,” “this is the pope’s youth.”

“I am pleased to see all of you, and also to hear the delightful noise you are making!” the pope told them. “In God’s eyes, we are precious children, and he calls us each day in order to embrace and encourage us, to make of us a unique and original masterpiece.”

“To see so many young Catholics is a good sign,” said Stephen Harden, 28, a Maryknoll seminarian who joined the Galveston-Houston delegation.

“I’m happy to see the energy that’s part of the Church,” he said. “Christ is in so many different countries, so the missionary vocation is alive and it’s very much needed.”

The following day, pilgrims gathered for the Stations of the Cross. Holding crosses, they prayed, and many embraced each other during the emotive service. Pope Francis encouraged them to share with Jesus what causes us to cry in our lives.

“Jesus dries our hidden tears with his tenderness. Jesus wishes to relieve our loneliness with his closeness. Jesus wishes to calm our fears, your fears, my fears; he wants to calm those deep fears with his con-



About 1.5 million young Catholics welcome Pope Francis as he arrives at Tejo Park in Lisbon, Portugal, for the closing Mass of World Youth Day on Aug. 6, 2023. (CNS/Lola Gomez/Portugal)

solation,” the pope said. “He also desires to encourage us to embrace the risk of loving. Today we are going to journey with Jesus along the path of his suffering.”

On Aug. 5, the pilgrims set out for Tejo Park for the vigil and Mass. The arduous walk along the Tejo River — under the fierce summer sun during a heat wave — lasted about eight hours. People were assisted if, overcome by the exertion and intense heat, they fainted.

During the walk, pilgrims prayed the rosary.

“Praying the rosary helped me focus, because the pilgrimage was rough,” said Unzueta, who led the Maryknoll group. “I was meditating on how powerful and gracious Mary is. She walked alongside Jesus and

had troubles too, yet she empowers us to focus on our goals, commitment and faith.”

Father Ulloa-Chavarry recalled Pope Francis’ words at the vigil: “Mary does something that was not asked of her ... Mary goes because she loved, and whoever loves flies, runs and rejoices.”

However, the pope cautioned, Christians’ attitudes must be merciful. The only time to look down on others, he said, is when helping them up.

During the vigil at Tejo Park, pilgrims prayed together in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. “What impressed me the most was the magnitude of everyone kneeling before our Lord in the Sacrament,” said Jason Appelgate, a Maryknoll pilgrim





Maryknoll Seminarian Stephen Harden and Father Ulloa-Chavarry attend the vigil at Tejo Park along with a multitude of other exuberant pilgrims. (Rodrigo Ulloa-Chavarry/Portugal)

from Seattle. They slept under the stars and in the morning attended Mass celebrated by Pope Francis, wrapping up World Youth Day and his visit to Portugal.

"This event allowed the youth to value and esteem their faith through a grassroots approach, walking the pilgrim journey in a land where Our Lady of Fatima chose to appear," Father Ulloa-Chavarry said. "She continues to gather people around her loving presence."

Pope Francis announced that the next World Youth Day will take place in Seoul, South Korea.

Carlos Villagomez, 26, a member of the Maryknoll Young Adult Empowerment Community in Seattle,

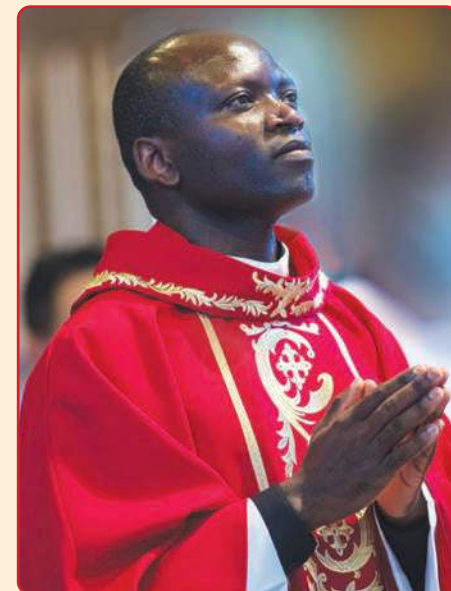
says that on his return he will share the message of Pope Francis. "Jesus loves all of us," he says.

Villagomez noted that many people — even in his own family — struggle with their faith. "I want to bring them back to Mass and encourage them to serve others."

Juan Alvarez said this experience will remain with him for a lifetime. "We walked, shared, talked and prayed together with Father Rodrigo," he said. "World Youth Day doesn't end here. We all have to continue, like Pope Francis encourages us to do. We have to keep learning and love one another. The Church is very young. We have to spread the Gospel." ✠

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may your example of faith  
and humility and joyful  
acceptance of God's will inspire  
all those called to religious life.  
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with God's love in their hearts,  
and with your blessing.



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Maryknoll Father Daniel Kim gives First Communion to young parishioners at St. Mary's Church in Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong. (Nile Sprague/Hong Kong)

## Finding the Christ Child in the Lowly and Vulnerable

By Daniel Kim, M.M.

*A Maryknoll missionary in Hong Kong gives witness to the Spirit and the power of presence to those who suffer*

On every Christmas Day, during Mass we hear the prologue of St. John's Gospel proclaiming the Word of God made flesh, the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity who became human and dwelt among us. With such a divine and grace-filled event in human history it is only natural to expect an extravagant, out of this world reception of the Son of God upon his birth. But as we all know, that was not the case — nothing of the sort!

Not even at an inn was the Holy Family able to prepare for the birth of Jesus. Rather, he was born unassumingly in a stable in lowly obscurity.

This humble and demure reception of our Lord and Savior at the time of his arrival seems very contrary to the festivities usually present during every Christmas holiday. However, amid the merriment and exuberance associated with this season, there are those who, like the Holy Family, are undergoing their own set of challenges and trials in obscurity.

A clear example of this is the growing number of displaced people across the globe due to war, poverty and natural disasters. Even in such a prosperous and sophisticated city such as Hong Kong, where I currently serve as a missionary, homelessness has more than doubled during the past 10 years. Perhaps other examples might be present closer to home, such as a friend, neighbor or relative tackling poor health alone or someone mourning the loss of a loved one in solitude.

Although conflicts stemming from geopolitical issues, homelessness, illness and grief cannot be cured overnight, what can have an immediate effect is being in solidarity with those who suffer in obscurity. Even the seemingly simple gesture of acknowledging and being present to one who is suffering can alleviate some of their pain and anguish. The ultimate tragedy is not suffering in and of itself, but suffering alone.

I am deeply touched by the efforts

and willingness of the local faithful here in Hong Kong to heed the teachings of the Gospel. They strive to see the face of Christ — especially in those who live on the margins of society — not just during the Christmas season, but throughout the year. Various small faith groups are an established part of many parish communities here in the Diocese of Hong Kong. Their Corporal Works of Mercy include regular food drives, volunteer work at shelters, visitation of the mentally ill and infirm and much, much more.

My personal experience of mission, whether abroad or at home, can be defined simply as giving witness to the Holy Spirit present in every place, situation and person; especially to those who feel alone, abandoned or marginalized. Because through this witness, I can sense a subtle yet enduring feeling of solidarity with the Holy Family and their plight on the very first Christmas Day.

Nothing was easy for Mary and Joseph from the very beginning, yet being there — at the moment the Son of God, the Savior, came into this world — must have been an experience of grace that transcended any hardship at hand.

Through our very own witness to those who may be in a similar plight as the Holy Family, may we, too, encounter the joy and transcendence of the Spirit, ready to make God's presence known through our goodwill and solidarity with people suffering in obscurity. ✠



You can subscribe to  
Maryknoll Father Daniel Kim's daily reflections at  
<https://maryknollsociety.org/podcast/daily-reflections/>





# Care for Our Collapsing Home

By Gina Christian

*Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation 'Laudate Deum' warns the earth is at a breaking point*

Pope Francis warned the clock is ticking on the dangers of climate change — and both a paradigm shift and practical action are critically needed to avert looming disasters in nature and human society.

The pope released his new apostolic exhortation "Laudate Deum" ("Praise God") Oct. 4 as a follow-up to his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. The exhortation's publication coincided with the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, patron of ecology, whose famous canticle inspired the title of *Laudato Si'*.

Though only about one-fifth the length of *Laudato Si'* (which it references extensively), the exhortation's message is even more urgent. "The world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point," Pope Francis wrote. "Climate change is one of the principal challenges facing society and the global community."

"Laudate Deum" reiterates key messages that have resonated throughout Pope Francis' papacy — among them, concern for the marginalized, care for creation, human ecology and a "synodal" approach to

resolving global problems.

With the effects of climate change "borne by the most vulnerable people," the issue is "intimately related to the dignity of human life," he said.

Addressed to "all people of good will," the exhortation declares that "it is no longer possible to doubt the human ... origin of climate change," citing data from sources such as the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"The overwhelming majority of scientists specializing in the climate" support the correlation between global climate phenomena and spikes in greenhouse gas emissions, he said.

While noting that "not every concrete catastrophe" is due to global climate change, humans bear responsibility for specific changes that have led to "extreme phenomena" — such as storms, heat waves and flooding — that are "increasingly frequent and intense," the pope said.

He pointed to rapid, human-driven increases in greenhouse gas emissions, which trap radiation from the sun in the earth's atmosphere and warm the planet. The global average temperature — a metric that tracks changes in the earth's surface temperature against long-term averages for a given location and date — has risen over the past 50 years at a rate that could approach the recommended ceiling of 1.5 degrees Celsius in just 10 years, the pope said.

That acceleration has a profound impact, causing dangerous shifts in climate and weather with effects ultimately felt "in the areas of health-care, sources of employment, access

to resources, housing (and) forced migrations," Pope Francis said.

International climate conferences held over the past several decades have had mixed results, said Pope Francis.

He said COP28, set to take place Nov. 30-Dec. 12 in Dubai, will either prove to be a turning point for decisive action or "a great disappointment" that imperils any progress made so far.

Pope Francis said the planet itself has become a mirror of a deeply flawed view of human life and activity. Such a "technocratic paradigm" exalts technological and economic power as sources of reality, goodness and truth, promising unlimited potential if methodically developed.

In recent years, that paradigm has advanced still further, with a goal of "(increasing) human power beyond anything imaginable, before which nonhuman reality is a mere resource at its disposal," he said.

The poor pay the highest price while inflicting the least damage on the planet, Pope Francis said, citing the United Nations Environment Programme's 2022 Emissions Gap Report, which found that per capita greenhouse gas emissions of richer countries far exceed those of poorer ones.

The question of human power itself must be reexamined, and "human beings must be recognized as a part of nature," the pope said, stressing that "everything is connected" and "no one is saved alone."✠

*Gina Christian is a national reporter for OSV News.*

*Birds fly at sunset near the mountains of Assisi, Italy, the birthplace of St. Francis, patron of ecology. (CNS photo/Paul Haring/Italy)*



# World Watch

## Climate Action: Loss and Damage

By Thomas Gould

**T**he year 2023 has shown us that climate change can be very costly, and often leaves irreversible damage — especially affecting those who contribute the least to causing it.

Around the world, consequences border on the incomprehensible. In Libya, more than 15,000 people died or were missing after a single flood that scientists estimate was made 50 times more likely and 50% more intense by climate change. Across the rest of Africa, from the Central African Republic to Somalia and Sudan, fragile nations suffer more from storms, floods, droughts and other climate-related shocks than other countries. Disasters there displace proportionately more than twice the percentage of the population displaced in other countries.

In the Asian nations of Myanmar and Bangladesh, Cyclone Mocha in May of 2023 set new records for heavy rainfall, storm surge and strong winds, causing damage across five states and leaving 1.6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. Throughout South Asia, rising temperatures and longer monsoon seasons are also increasing cases of mosquito-borne dengue fever.

Economic impacts aside, the ir-

reversible costs in human lives can never be recovered, nor the lives of the species that will go extinct.

In 2015, the landmark Paris Agreement established a plan to keep the rise of global temperature below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Hidden in the details of the agreement was an idea, called the Loss and Damage Fund, to provide financial assistance to poorer nations as they deal with the negative consequences of climate change. At the U.N. Conference on Climate Change last year, an “11th hour” vote finally made official the Loss and Damage Fund.

However, there remain steep obstacles to putting the plan into operation. President Joe Biden has pledged to secure \$11 billion annually for international climate funding by 2024, but a recalcitrant Congress is unlikely to allow it. Details on how the fund will be financed remain undecided.

Ahead of the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Dubai this December, faith leaders are calling for the Loss and Damage Fund to obtain what it needs to address the inherent inequity and injustice of the climate crisis. In a letter signed by many Catholics, including cardinals and bishops, the faith community spoke to the U.N. Climate Change Conference:



*Children sit in front of a home near a flooding sea wall in Serua Village, Fiji, where the 80 villagers face a painful decision whether to move away. (CNS photo/Loren Elliott/Reuters)*

“The route to justice is not always obvious. But on this issue, it is crystal clear. There is a deep disharmony at the heart of the climate crisis which is hurting our poorest brothers and sisters the most. Many poor nations who contribute the least to this crisis and already struggle to secure basic needs for their people are now paying the price of other nations’ actions. The Loss and Damage Fund must correct this injustice.”

That, the letter said, would mean a

Loss and Damage Fund that is able to get money to the people who need it the most; is based on the polluter-pays principle that whoever causes pollution should bear the costs of mitigating its damage to human health or the environment; and also addresses “non-economic losses and damages.” ✕

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

### FAITH IN ACTION:

- Learn more about the Loss and Damage Fund <https://mogc.info/COP27-LD>
- Read “Laudate Deum,” the recently released second part of Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical on the environment *Laudato Si’* <https://mogc.info/LaudateDeum>
- Pray for the people of countries being affected by climate disasters, especially the poor and climate refugees who are displaced from their homes

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](http://www.maryknollogc.org) or email [ogc@maryknollogc.org](mailto:ogc@maryknollogc.org).



# Partners in Mission

## Christian Charity in Action

By Charles Niece

It was the spring of 2019, and I was about to finish my undergraduate studies in philosophy and theology at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. I could recite lines from papal encyclicals and regurgitate Greek words for different forms of love. In short, I knew Christian charity from a chalkboard in a seminary classroom.

All that changed when the director of the Maryknoll short-term volunteer program introduced me to Maryknoll Father Joyalito Tajonera, who offered me a gap year with his migrant ministry in Taiwan. During our phone calls to discern whether this would be a good placement, Father Joy, as he is affectionately known, remarked that the Filipino migrant community in Taiwan is a perfect opportunity to truly live out Christian charity. And with that comment, I was convinced.

Sure enough, when I arrived at Father Joy's migrant shelter in Taichung, Taiwan, I wasn't attending lectures, but rather learning the Tagalog language of the Philippines and listening to a multitude of concerns from migrant workers in distress. I found myself gripping the calloused palms of automobile factory workers who labor without proper safety gear. I could smell the alkaline clean-

ing chemicals that linger on the clothes of electronics factory workers — some of them, victims of wage theft. I heard the subtle quiver in the voice of a migrant worker in an apparel factory who hadn't had a day off in over a month.

Rather than “knowing about” Christian love from a chalkboard, I began to really “know” the sacrificial love borne by migrant workers to support their families.

I also began to recognize the limitations of the Taiwanese government in addressing certain labor malpractices. One day — thinking out loud — I said to Father Joy, “I wonder, do the American brands for whom these workers are making products know what's going on?” From there we began to connect migrant workers to the international companies they ultimately work for.

Surprisingly, these corporations responded swiftly and with interest to understand what was happening in their supply chains and to assist in remedying the situations. We shared photos of overcrowded dormitories, calculations of debt repayments by workers who had taken out loans to secure jobs and messages of pregnant workers whose employment had been terminated. I like to think that these



Charles Niece (third from left), 26, has served for four years as a Maryknoll volunteer in Taiwan helping migrant workers exercise their rights. (Courtesy of Charles Niece/Taiwan)

corporations also began to “know” and not just “know about” the experience of migrant workers.

As I was getting ready to return home to New Jersey, more and more workers were seeking help. During Chinese New Year, Father Joy remarked to me with classic Maryknoll wisdom, “You shouldn't go where you want, but where you're needed.” A potent statement! I renewed my commitment as a Maryknoll volunteer. What was supposed to be a short-term gap period of six months has extended to over four years in Taiwan supporting the migrant community.

Over the past few years, we've helped initiate dozens of investigations and audits into forced and bonded labor of migrant workers in the global supply chain. We've involved corporate brands in a wide array of industries including electronics, medical devices, tooling, textile, automotive, apparel

and food processing.

We estimate — with quite a bit of astonishment — that we have helped in the return of more than \$4 million to approximately a thousand migrant workers. We oversaw the restoration of nearly 2,000 passports and other documents to migrant workers, whose employers often confiscate these documents to prevent them from leaving. We've helped dozens of workers gain the freedom to change employers.

The most rewarding part of this ministry is that once a few workers know their rights and have the confidence to stand up, they motivate other migrant workers to use their voices together. Five workers quickly grow to 300 organized workers, and one organized factory expands into five. It takes on a ripple effect, and I'm proud to say that it started with Father Joy and Maryknoll.

As for me, I found what I was promised: love in action. ✝





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## READERS' RESPONSES

### NAÏVE APPROACH

This letter is in response to the World Watch column in your Fall 2023 issue, "What's Next for Asylum?" These people are illegal aliens entering this country to do criminal acts — sex trafficking, drug trafficking, etc. These aliens are not "fleeing persecution." Quite the contrary. Yes, innocent children are involved and the best protection for them is to remain in their own countries. Our citizens have become victims of crime on a large scale. Catholic organizations are too often not working with innocent asylum seekers, but criminals. To think otherwise is to take a naïve approach. The law is fair, so let us observe it to the fullest.

*Richard Clark  
San Jose, California*

### LONG DISTANCE MISSION

I just recently visited Maryknoll headquarters in Ossining, New York, and saw my classmates (Class of 1967). For over six decades they have worked for social justice and human rights. Father Bill McIntire was in Peru and Bangladesh; Father Jerry Burr was in the Philippines; Father Jack Moynihan was in Bolivia, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Another of our classmates who lives at the Maryknoll center, Father Emile Dumas, was in Japan and served as superior for senior Maryknollers.

They are all still active in mission. From Maryknoll, they use social media and other platforms — e.g., Zoom, email, etc. — to communicate with their former parishioners and many organizations in their countries of mission.

The quiet environment of Maryknoll allows prayers, meditation and the sacraments to be signs of grace. Long distance missionary work continues, regardless of age, health, or political and social conditions in the various countries of service.

*Tom Samway  
Oakland, California*

### UPLIFTING PRAYER

The last issue's photo meditation "In the Spirit of St. Francis" by Father Joseph R. Veneroso is wondrously cogent for our times. It is beautifully crafted and emotionally uplifting.

*William G. Davies Jr.  
Elliottsburg, Pennsylvania*

### YOGA FOR ELDERLY

In the Summer 2023 magazine, a writer from Wisconsin writes that yoga is not compatible with Catholic doctrine. Yoga is the one exercise I have been able to do with these old bones, and now that I have aged even more, I do chair yoga. In my class there is a retired sister. I am sure if Sister Pat thought yoga was not compatible with her Catholic life, she would not be there in her chair, stretching and moving.

Never has religion surfaced in my yoga classes. My instructor is a practicing Catholic!

*Arlene Veal  
Oceanport, New Jersey*

### YOGA WORTH A TRY

How I love your magazine. In a world where news is 99% discouraging, it is a tremendous lift to read of the good work



of your missionaries. That said, I must respond to the opinion expressed by one of your readers that yoga is not Catholic. I am both a devout Roman Catholic and a practitioner of Hatha Yoga since my 20s. At age 66, I am pain free, have full mobility and still train for triathlons.

My daughter is a certified yoga instructor who specializes in adaptive yoga, including chair yoga. She helps people with disabilities, or who have had surgery, improve and recover mobility. The breathing and relaxation portion of her classes helps them attain peace of mind. Surely, this is the work of God. I know she considers it part of her service in the name of Christ. I have never noticed that yoga interferes with love and devotion to Our Lord, Jesus.

To your reader I say, try it! You might find it improves your life and your faith.

*Christiann Howard  
Coos Bay, Oregon*

#### HISTORY OF YOGA

I am writing in response to a letter expressing concern about chair yoga being taught in a Maryknoll mission. That reader stated that yoga is not a form of stretching but a form of worship, and contrary to Catholic doctrine.

I must disagree. Although when the practice of yoga was founded in India about 5,000 years ago, it was associated with Hinduism, modern yoga is not religion specific.

Western style yoga was introduced in the 1800s in America. Hatha Yoga, the most popular form, is based on tradi-

tional practices of breathing, awareness and meditation. If the breathing and body positions are simply done for exercise and health, we are not honoring any religious belief by doing so.

I recently heard a priest state that we as Catholics should devote the “3 Ts” to God: time, treasure and talent. He then suggested we could add a 4th T: our body is a temple, and we should take care of it, in order to give glory to God.

*Lolita Hagio  
Saint George, Utah*

#### BEAUTIFUL KINDNESS

I read about the Maryknoll Student Essay Contest winners in the Summer 2023 issue. The one that stood out for me was the third place winner in Division 1 who wrote about the Kindness Club in her middle school.

Could you please let Olivia Volion know that she is on the right path — and to keep up the good work!

My mother used to tell me that my grandmother always said, “Kindness is the most beautiful word in the English language.” Olivia, I hope you continue your good work and maybe you can change the world. I think you are off to a great start!

*Julianne Shea  
Haverford, Pennsylvania*

*Correction: The article “A Crazy Idea” in the Fall 2023 issue mistakenly attributed three photos to Sean Sprague. Those photos should be credited to Maryknoll Mission Archives.*

“...all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” — John 13:35



*Paul Jeffrey/Bangladesh*

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Readers' Responses

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*Members of the Maryknoll and Bon Secours joint delegation visit the Sanctuary of Fatima as part of World Youth Day, held Aug. 1-6, 2023, in Lisbon, Portugal. Mission Education Promoter Sarahi Unzueta (green shirt) led Maryknoll's young adult participants. (See story, page 46.)*

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