

# **MARYKNOLL**

U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

Summer 2025

[maryknollmagazine.org](http://maryknollmagazine.org)



*Legacy of Hope*

## FROM THE EDITOR

**A**s we were preparing to send this issue of *Maryknoll* magazine to the printer in April, we received the sad news of the passing of our beloved Pope Francis. As soon as he was elected in 2013, Pope Francis signaled a different approach to the papacy. As one colleague here at Maryknoll put it, “We finally have a pope who speaks our language.” By the time this issue comes out, we will probably have a new pope. For now, we dedicate this issue to the one we just lost.

In fact, this whole issue of *Maryknoll* looks back while contemplating what’s to come. Our story on the 50th anniversary of the founding of Maryknoll Lay Missioners covers its history and the groundwork the organization is laying for mission ahead. We preview the June 7th ordination of our two new Maryknoll priests, exploring the faith journeys that led them to this momentous juncture. We continue our series on the 60th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, which paved the way for new approaches to mission and which was instrumental in the formation of Pope Francis, the first pope ordained to the priesthood after Vatican II.

An important note from Maryknoll’s superior general addresses the seismic shifts in policies from Washington, D.C. and their potential impact on people on the margins whom we serve, and affirms Maryknoll’s commitment to the Church’s social teachings. As Jesus expressed succinctly in Matthew 25:40, “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

*Lynn F. Monahan*  
Editor-in-Chief



U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

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

*Romans 8:28*

**Maryknoll**, the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, Inc., was established in 1911 by the U.S. bishops to recruit, train, send and support American missionaries in areas overseas. Maryknoll is supported by offerings and bequests.

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Magazine of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers



Octavio Durán/Guatemala

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During the 12 years of his papacy,  
Pope Francis renewed the Church’s  
spirit of joy in mission.

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Front: CNS/Paul Haring/Vatican City  
Back: Rodrigo Ulloa-Chavarry/U.S.

The Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic and the Maryknoll Lay Missioners share the Maryknoll name and charism of commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ, sharing God’s love with people worldwide. While these three Catholic organizations often work together in mission, each is responsible for recruiting and supporting its own missionaries. The Maryknoll Affiliates is a movement grouped into local chapters both in the United States and abroad of lay people who seek to reflect the Maryknoll charism within the context of their own lives, careers and communities.

*Photo meditation on St. Luke's Beatitudes*

# On LEVEL GROUND

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*Not from on high, looking down on  
Some restless, nameless crowd  
But rather standing on level ground  
Where all are equal, no one higher  
Nor lower than the next,  
Jesus, neither richer nor poorer  
Than every woman and every man,  
Flings like two-edged swords his words  
To comfort the afflicted and  
Afflict the comfortable.*



*Paul Jeffrey/Bangladesh*





*Turning the world upside down or rather  
Turning an upside-down world aright  
He names the cursed poor blessed  
And the blessed rich accursed  
At once shattering the apathy  
Of the well-to-do and filling with hope  
The despondent dreams of the destitute.  
Likewise, he warns us now overfed  
That days of hunger will surely come  
And all who now yearn to eat their fill  
Will have their longing satisfied.*

*Laughter to tears, tears to joy  
Luke hammers home the Gospel truth  
That whether we have much or go without  
Our situation will always change  
By the waves of time and circumstance  
That we must rely no longer on our wealth  
Status, privilege, station or lack thereof  
But rather solely on the One who alone  
Forever remains savior to all, and  
Recognize in everyone we meet  
That there but for the grace of God go I.*

*CNS/Anushree Fadnavis/Reuters/India*

# STATEMENT from the MARYKNOLL SUPERIOR GENERAL

This is a time of tremendous change and uncertainty. For many people the ground is shifting beneath their feet. So many in our world are suddenly more vulnerable, more worried, more anxious about the time to come. The Church itself is undergoing a transition with the loss of our beloved Pope Francis.

Here in the United States, we cannot forget the tens of thousands of federal workers suddenly losing their jobs, or the untold number of Americans impacted by abrupt and severe cuts to social services without due regard for their needs. We especially remember immigrants who hope to rebuild their lives in this promised land, whether they are climate or economic migrants or refugees fleeing brutal regimes. Early in his papacy, Pope Francis said, “Migrants, rather than simply being a statistic, are first of all persons who have faces, names and individual stories.”

Then there are the millions of desperate people around the world dependent on the up-until-now legendary generosity of the American people. That source of life-saving aid included food for people experiencing famine in Sudan and emergency aid for victims of natural disasters, such as the recent earthquake in Myanmar.

Perhaps the starkest example of this new global reality is of those living with HIV/AIDS. We’ve told you in the past about the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program (EDARP) in Nairobi, Kenya. This project, founded by the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, enables more than 30,000 HIV-positive people to live relatively normal, healthy lives.

But EDARP depends on the U.S. funding known as PEPFAR for its life-saving AIDS treatment. It’s estimated that PEPFAR has saved at least 25 million lives

over the years. Currently, about 40 million people worldwide live with HIV. Although PEPFAR for AIDS relief was given a waiver from the draconian cuts in U.S. foreign aid, the long-term future of the medication funding and program in Nairobi now appear precarious.

Recently, a brother Maryknoller commented, “We are now needed more than ever to be out there, wherever God has us in mission and in life, both at this moment and going forward.”

His words go straight to the point: How should we, a mission community, share in the Lord’s passion for what is right and just in the land today? “What then should we do?” (Lk 3:10; Acts 2:37)

We must be who we are: missionaries rooted in the Church’s convictions about our love of God and neighbor. We remain rooted in the key values of Catholic social teaching:

- Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society.
- The person is not only sacred but also social.
- Authentic community is based on the security of everyone’s human rights and the fulfillment of our human obligations to one another.
- The needs of the poor and vulnerable are primary (Matthew 25:31-46).
- The economy must serve people, not the other way around.
- We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.
- We show respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation.

“What then should we do?” Promote Catholic social teaching so that its vision shapes civic awareness and conscience for what is right and just in the land.

We do that through our missions around the globe, in Asia, Africa, Latin America and here at home in the United States. We do that through the work of our Mission Formation Ministry, *Maryknoll* and *Misioneros* magazines, Orbis Books, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and our mission immersion programs that give people firsthand experience of the realities witnessed by Maryknoll missionaries.

God’s love for us draws us into an inescapable time of testing. Will our hope serve his work of doing what is right and just in the land?

As we continue this Jubilee Year of Hope inaugurated by Pope Francis, let us implore the Lord for the grace to believe that “we are now needed more than ever to be out there.” With God’s gift of hope, let us confidently participate in God’s quest for what is right and just.

*Fr. Lance P. Nadeau, M.M.*

Fr. Lance P. Nadeau, M.M.

*Paul Jeffrey/Haiti*



# MISSIONER TALES



One Sunday after Mass at the cathedral in Montego Bay, Jamaica, where I used to serve, a woman slipped a note into my hand and left quietly. The note read, “Elvis wishes to see a priest,” along with an address. When I visited Elvis at his home, he had a large white bandage around his neck. He explained that he was terminally ill and wished to be baptized.

I told him that I could baptize him right then and there in that room.

“You can?” he said.

There was no water to be found in the humble house, so Elvis sent a little boy out to fetch a pan of water.

When I read the Scriptures, Elvis allowed his tears to flow freely. He said he wanted to be received by Jesus, his Savior. I baptized him, and he was clearly at peace.

When his mother walked into the room, Elvis shouted, “Ma, I have been baptized!” He spoke like a new man, with enthusiasm and confidence. Shortly after, Elvis passed away. I am sure in the mystery of salvation that he is with God.

*Leo Shea, M.M.*

Before becoming a Maryknoll lay missionary, I worked in pastoral ministry with the elderly

and dying. Here in Bolivia, I started off in ministries to accompany impoverished seniors through the final years of their lives.

Then, Jenifer burst into my life.

I met Jenifer and her mother through Rosse Mary Miranda, a Bolivian psychologist who works with vulnerable women and children. Jenifer — a tiny 5-year-old bundle of joy — ran up to hug me without holding anything back. The unconditional love and acceptance from this precious girl took me completely by surprise. I felt an invitation from God to consider helping Rosse Mary open a center to serve these mothers and children. It’s an invitation I accepted. I am ready to embark on something new, confident that God (and Jenifer) will be with me.

*Louise Locke, MKLM*

In Tanzania, where I serve as a Maryknoll lay missionary, secondary school lasts for four years. An exam after the fourth year determines who will continue for two more years of advanced studies and then, hopefully, university. It’s not easy. Primary school is taught in Swahili, but secondary school requires that students take up to 10 classes, all taught in English. The students who make it to university are among the most determined and focused people I know.

One of them, who is very close to my heart, is Irene. Irene has lived with HIV since birth. When Irene was 4, her mother registered at Uzima Centre where I serve, which provides hope, healthcare, education and support

groups for children, adolescents and adults living with HIV.

The youngest of nine children, Irene was small for her age but very bright. Despite frequent absences from school due to illness, she was often at the top of her class. Irene is now studying at the university, following her dream to become a doctor!

*Joanne Miya, MKLM*

A couple of years ago, I came to the Sisters Center in New York from the Philippines, where I serve in mission, for routine medical care. I was scheduled for blood tests and struck up a conversation with my phlebotomist. She asked me, “What is spirituality?” I answered that spirituality is what energizes life for us. She then asked, “What energizes your life?” I answered that it is knowing that God is with me.

Upon hearing this, she began telling me about herself. Besides being a phlebotomist, she teaches classes. She advises students, she told me, to learn something that could be used to help the sick or others in need.

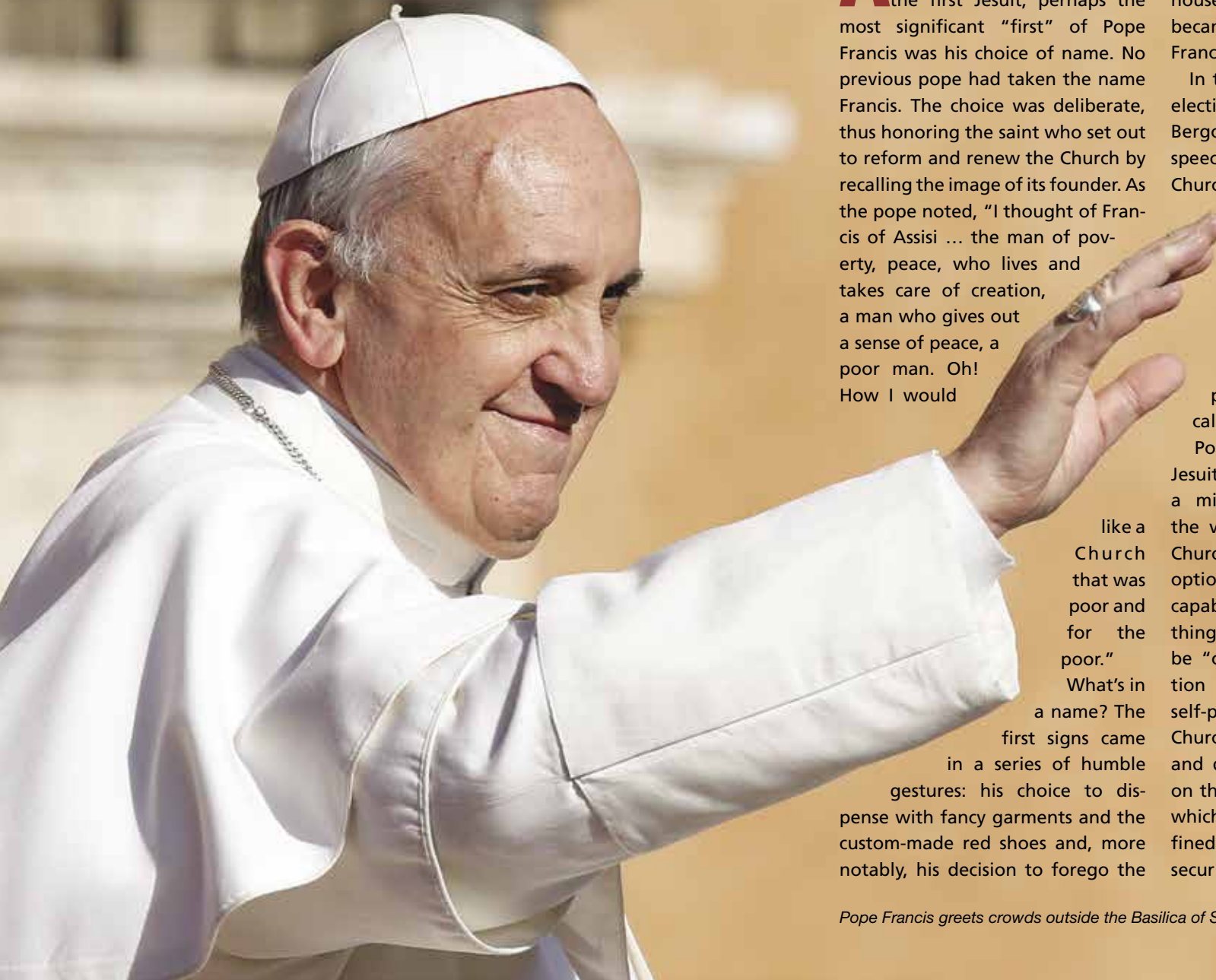
I asked about her parish. She said that she did not have one, but added that she sometimes drives to the Maryknoll campus where she can pray and see the stars in the sky, connecting with the Spirit that gives her energy for living. “Zest for life” is how the Jesuit mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin would put it. I couldn’t believe this conversation happened over the task of bloodwork, another way of giving life.

*Teresa Dagdag, M.M.*

# In the Heart of the People

By Robert Ellsberg

*Pope Francis' legacy of missionary discipleship will live on*



**A**lthough he was both the first pope from Latin America and the first Jesuit, perhaps the most significant “first” of Pope Francis was his choice of name. No previous pope had taken the name Francis. The choice was deliberate, thus honoring the saint who set out to reform and renew the Church by recalling the image of its founder. As the pope noted, “I thought of Francis of Assisi ... the man of poverty, peace, who lives and takes care of creation, a man who gives out a sense of peace, a poor man. Oh! How I would

papal palace in favor of a modest apartment in the Vatican guest-house. But beyond such gestures, it became clear that the model of St. Francis pointed to something more.

In the conclave leading up to his election in 2013, then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio had delivered a short speech outlining his vision for the Church and its mission. The greatest threat to the Church, he said, came from ecclesial introversion and “spiritual worldliness.” In contrast, he called for an evangelizing Church, that “comes out of itself” to go to the margins and peripheries — both geographical and existential.

Pope Francis, who as a young Jesuit had dreamed of becoming a missionary, defined mission as the very reason and being of the Church. “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything.” All renewal, he said, should be “channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than self-preservation.” He preferred “a Church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

like a Church that was poor and for the poor.”

What’s in a name? The first signs came in a series of humble gestures: his choice to dispense with fancy garments and the custom-made red shoes and, more notably, his decision to forego the





*Pope Francis welcomes a disabled man at his general audience. (CNS/Paul Haring/Vatican City)*

Pope Francis' first excursion out of Rome was to the island of Lampedusa, a way station for migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean, where many of them drowned at sea. In his Mass there, he said that the plight of these migrants challenged us with God's words to Cain: "Where is your brother?" They revealed to us the dangers of a "culture of indifference" that makes it impossible for us to recognize our brothers and sisters — much less the face of Christ — in the poor and those who suffer.

This concern for migrants and refugees would become a signature theme in his preaching and ministry, connected closely to his insistence on a preferential option the poor.

Without this, "proclamation of the Gospel risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words."

A second major theme, inspired by St. Francis, was his concern for the earth, our "common home." In *Laudato Si'* he set this concern squarely at the center of Catholic social teaching. "Everything is connected, everything is related," he proclaimed in a call for "ecological conversion." Ten years later he followed up on this encyclical with a second document decrying the lack of meaningful progress in responding to this challenge.

Pope Francis' overseas pilgrimages, always bearing a message of peace, took him to places far from the beaten papal track: Kazakhstan,

Iraq, Mongolia, South Sudan, Azerbaijan and Myanmar. During his one pilgrimage to the United States, he spoke before a joint session of Congress in a speech centered on the dreams of four "great Americans": Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day. Calling America a country of dreams, he said that a nation is made "great" by attending to the dreams of such figures for freedom, justice, care for immigrants and the pursuit of peace. Among other topics, he spoke against the death penalty, said that care for the common good includes care for the earth, referred to his own status as the child of immigrants, and decried the "blood-soaked arms industry."

But Pope Francis' mission was not defined by what he was against. Constantly he called the world to a new culture of encounter and "fraternity," the subject of his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. He also had a distinctive vision for the Church. One of his great projects was to set in motion a "synodal" way of being church. Synodality, he noted, means "walking together." Rather than the periodic synods of bishops in Rome, generally followed by predetermined conclusions, Pope Francis envisioned a decentralized and inclusive process of reflection and discernment, drawing on the participation and input of all the People of God. In convening an "Amazon Synod" he especially highlighted voices from the "margins and peripheries."

Some objected to Pope Francis'

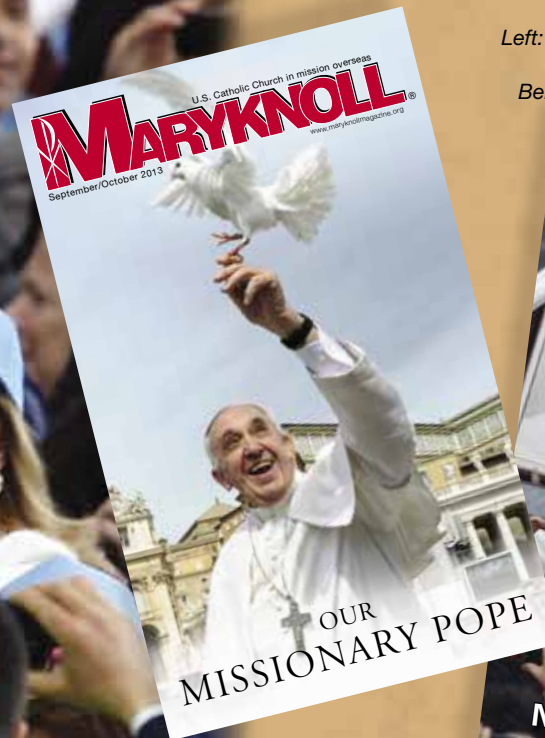


*Pope Francis embraces a child at his general audience. (CNS/Paul Haring/Vatican City)*

emphasis on mercy as the central language of the Church, in place of the enforcement of rules and traditions. Others felt he did not move quickly enough and wished he would settle longstanding controversies with clear declarations.

But that was not Francis' way. One of his maxims was "Time is more powerful than space." He believed the important thing was to plant seeds and set initiatives in process. Their fruit would only reveal itself in time. Thus, the measure of his papacy was not so much in new teachings but in a new style, a new culture, a pastoral strategy that emphasized listening and collaboration rather than authoritative edicts.





Left: Pope Francis greets cheering crowds at St. Peter's Square. (CNS/Paul Haring/Vatican City)  
Below: Pope Francis appears on our magazine covers from 2013 and 2015.



Pope Francis' teaching came as much through gestures as in written documents: his spontaneity and spirit of joy, his ability to connect with people of all sorts, and especially his compassion for the poor and all who suffer. In his first year as pope, he initiated a tradition of visiting men and women prisoners on Holy Thursday. He repeated that custom every year, even in the last week of his life, although that time his health did not permit him to wash their feet.

No doubt Pope Francis, who called for the Church to become a "community of missionary disciples," was a sign of hope and inspiration for all the Maryknoll family. For Orbis Books, where we published more than 20 volumes of his writings, he offered a standard that we tried to follow and serve. Thus, it was deeply

affirming in 2020 to receive a personal letter from him marking our 50th anniversary. Lauding our effort to publish books that offer "a true horizon of meaning," he spoke of the importance of "cultivating — especially in the younger generations — an imagination that would help them believe that another way of writing history is possible."

Of himself, he wrote in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*: "My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an 'extra' or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. *I am a mission* on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world."

He inspired us all to find and to be

our own mission on this earth, and to live that mission with equal boldness, courage and love. ✠

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

Pope Francis smiles as he recognizes Dorothy Day on a prayer card held by Robert Ellsberg. (Courtesy of Robert Ellsberg/Vatican City)



## Too Many Saviors?

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

Let's be blunt about it. We see many Christians today flooding the news and social media with interpretations of Christianity that directly contradict Jesus' teachings and proclaim other saviors of Western civilization.

The late Irish actor Richard Harris grappled with a similar situation in his poem titled "There Are Too Many Saviors on My Cross," in which he slammed the complacency of Christians in the 1970s. (Google it. It's worth the read.)

At that time, anti-war, civil rights and various liberation movements challenged people of faith to exit the sanctuaries of their churches and put their faith into action in the streets.

The so-called "prosperity gospel" that claims God wants us to be wealthy is just one distortion of the teachings of Jesus, who warns us specifically, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25).

Another Gospel quote conveniently ignored comes from the Virgin Mary, who declares, "God has filled the hungry with good things but the rich he has sent away empty" (Luke 1:53). Worse, some Christians willingly put aside the entire Sermon on

the Mount to confer messianic status on political figures whose policies violate Jesus' command to love not just our neighbor, but our enemy.

Politicians and pundits alike think nothing of vilifying immigrants, disparaging the poor or mocking other races, all the while wearing a cross or crucifix around their necks. Clearly, it is easier to wear a cross than to bear one.

Jesus warns against such hypocrisy: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Today there seems to be no shortage of would-be "Messiahs" who invoke Christ for their own advantage but do not follow him. How are Christians to respond?

This is not a new phenomenon. In the 1930s, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor, witnessed with increasing alarm the rise of Nazism, which initially described itself as a Christian movement. Worse, Christians' silence in the face of that evil was, in his view, more spiritually damaging than an open embrace of the Third Reich.

Bonhoeffer labeled such corruption of Christianity a "cheap grace"



Maryknoll Father John Spain visits a mural portraying Saint Óscar Romero and Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande, both martyred in their country's civil war. (Octavio Durán/El Salvador)

that expected forgiveness without repentance and conversion without consequences. In Bonhoeffer's way of thinking, Christianity without the Cross is meaningless. He believed the only acceptable response to systemic evil was to oppose it any way possible. For such unflinching witness, Bonhoeffer was made to pay with his life in a concentration camp.

In our time, Jesuit priest, poet and activist Daniel Berrigan cut to the chase by stating, "If you want to follow Jesus, you better look good on wood." Indeed, the invitation of Christ to his disciples is to leave behind our old way of thinking — and living — and pick up our cross, to follow him. Following where? Eventually to our own personal Calvary.

In the words of Saint Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:19-20).

Not every Christian is called to martyrdom like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the four churchwomen of El Salvador, Sister Dorothy Stang, Father Stanley Rother or the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Nevertheless, our individual Way of the Cross must lead us to the margins, to the outskirts, to the poor and oppressed: to all those whom the world deems unworthy or underserving of support.

In the end, there is but one true Savior worthy of following, whose Cross means nothing less than our total self-sacrifice in service and solidarity with the poor. ✠



# SERVING A JOYFUL COMMUNITY

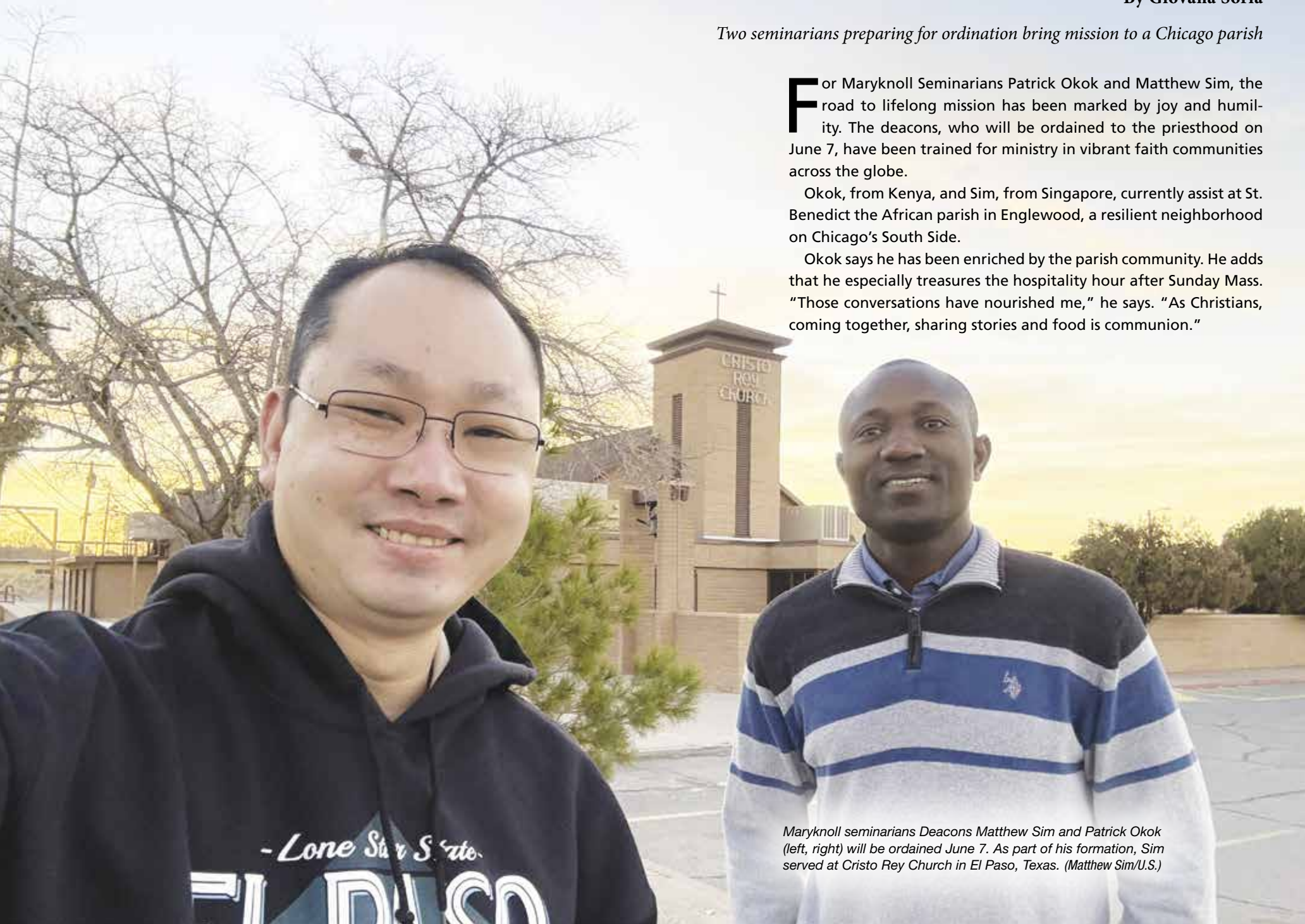
By Giovana Soria

*Two seminarians preparing for ordination bring mission to a Chicago parish*

For Maryknoll Seminarians Patrick Okok and Matthew Sim, the road to lifelong mission has been marked by joy and humility. The deacons, who will be ordained to the priesthood on June 7, have been trained for ministry in vibrant faith communities across the globe.

Okok, from Kenya, and Sim, from Singapore, currently assist at St. Benedict the African parish in Englewood, a resilient neighborhood on Chicago's South Side.

Okok says he has been enriched by the parish community. He adds that he especially treasures the hospitality hour after Sunday Mass. "Those conversations have nourished me," he says. "As Christians, coming together, sharing stories and food is communion."



*Maryknoll seminarians Deacons Matthew Sim and Patrick Okok (left, right) will be ordained June 7. As part of his formation, Sim served at Cristo Rey Church in El Paso, Texas. (Matthew Sim/U.S.)*



*Deacons Okok and Sim earned degrees at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where Maryknoll seminarians study theology, mission and pastoral ministry. (Octavio Durán/U.S.)*

"In catechism and RCIA, young people discuss issues like social media addiction and violence," Okok continues. "Despite challenges, the idea is to stay strong as a faithful community and pray with people and for safety on our streets."

Sim uses his technical skills to live-stream the parish's Sunday Mass from the church adorned with stained glass windows and wood carvings. The liturgy — with its joyful music led by a spirited choir — becomes accessible to those who cannot attend.

"My dad is 98 years old," a parishioner told Sim. "Before I come to church, I turn on Facebook for him."

The conversation was a moment of grace, Sim says. "I thought this was just a simple technical job," he explains, "but now I see it as a ministry to the homebound."

#### A HOME IN COMMUNITY

Matthew Sim, 45, was born and raised as a Buddhist and Taoist in Singapore. He grew in the Catholic faith while teaching in Hong Kong and was baptized in 2011. "The first seed of priesthood was planted in me," he says. "I felt that God was calling me to serve the Church."

Sim's first spiritual guide was Maryknoll Father Michael Sloboda, and Sim found himself drawn to the mission society. "The diversity attracted me," he says. "The mission is anchored in the needs of the people, and also the gifts that the missionaries bring."

Joining Maryknoll in 2016, Sim studied philosophy and theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He completed a spirituality year for candidates before going to Bolivia

for Maryknoll's Overseas Training Program of living and working in a foreign mission setting.

"Singapore is very communal; whatever we do, we do it for the common good," he says. "Going to Bolivia was an opportunity to experience the same belief. It felt like home."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sim and other Maryknoll missionaries served at Hogar San José, a home for the elderly in Cochabamba. Out of the 21 people they cared for, seven passed away. "God had put me there to be with them so that they could feel loved before they returned to the Father," he says.

Sim also served in an afterschool project run by Maryknoll called Apoyo Escolar. The parents of the children he tutored would leave home as early as 3 a.m. to work at La Cancha, the city's sprawling market.

"Students wake up very early to help their parents," he says. "If they have younger siblings, they take the role of parents."

Returning to the States, Sim was placed at the U.S.-Mexico border. He served at Cristo Rey Church in El Paso, Texas, where Maryknoll Father Raymond Finch is pastor. Assisting at Mass and preaching as a deacon, Sim participated in the parish's many activities and established a Bible exploration group.

Sim also volunteered at the Holy Family Refugee Center. "I tried to be a bridge between the refugee center and Cristo Rey," Sim says. The parish Bible group led the Way of the Cross in Spanish at the migrant

center. "I applied what I learned in Bolivia," he says, explaining that, in mission, it is important to use both the head and the heart.

"I hope people who dream of serving the Church join us in mission," Sim says. "Maryknoll can offer that because our charism is to be with the people and go to [other] places to change their lives."

#### HEARTS AND MINDS

Patrick Okok, 34, was born and raised in the village of Usah in the Kenyan southwestern Nyanza province. Early on Sunday mornings, his parents would prepare him and his 12 siblings for Mass, warming their bathwater and giving them coins for the collection. From an early age, Okok felt drawn to the priesthood.

At 16, he decided to pursue this calling. "I asked my catechist, 'How can I become a priest?'" Okok recalls. "He suggested joining the altar servers." Okok took this advice.

During his college years at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Okok got to know Maryknoll Father Lance Nadeau, serving there as chaplain. "Listening to his homilies, I came to admire how he was preaching," Okok says. "It made a lot of sense looking at the country, the political situation, and the student life in the university. He merged all those and connected them with the Gospel."

While studying philosophy in Kenya, he joined Maryknoll in 2017.

Okok completed his spirituality year in Chicago and, with Sim, was sent to Bolivia for overseas training.





*Pastor of St. Benedict the African Father David Jones presides while Deacon Okok assists at the altar of the historically African American church in Chicago. (Octavio Durán/U.S.)*

However, only five months later, his elder sister passed away, and Okok returned to Kenya for her funeral. He planned to go back to Bolivia — but borders closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead, Okok served for 10 months at a Maryknoll parish in Tanzania. “There were two groups of Small Christian Communities,” the seminarian says, one for parents and the other for youth. “I got engaged working with youth.” He also made Communion calls to the sick.

When the borders reopened, Okok returned to Bolivia. There he volunteered at Hogar Nuestra Casa,

a shelter for survivors of domestic violence in Cochabamba.

Okok, who has a bachelor’s degree in education with a major in mathematics and physics, tutored the girls in their studies. “There were 18 girls living at the home,” he says. “When I left Bolivia, three girls were joining the university.”

Returning to Chicago four years ago, Okok says that serving at St. Benedict the African parish has strengthened his call to mission. “I’ve learned that before I move to a new place, God is already there, among the people,” he says. “I’m joining them in this journey, putting our hearts



*In El Paso, Deacon Sim and Maryknoll Father Raymond Finch celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12 with a young parishioner. (Courtesy of Matthew Sim/U.S.)*

and minds together, seeking what is possible and listening to what God continues to call us toward.”

Okok and Sim, who earned master of divinity degrees, adapted well to the mostly African American congregation and its newer parishioners from Latin America. Father David Jones, the pastor, says the parish embraces diversity. “We are the voice that calls for unity, reconciliation and respect for humanity,” he says.

“We attend St. Benedict because it’s welcoming,” says African American parishioner Adrienne Alexander, whose husband is Mexican. “Our three daughters participated in the

Nativity play organized by Deacon Okok.” She adds that they are “excited about coming to church.”

The parish has been fortunate to have the seminarians, Alexander continues. “We are happy to play a role in their journey, and glad to know they will take a piece of our community with them around the world.”

Okok and Sim will be ordained at Maryknoll’s headquarters in Ossining, New York. As the men embark on a lifetime as missionary priests, Father Jones offers these words of encouragement: “Remain humble, always strive to follow your vocation, and trust that God is leading you.” ✠



# Charity that Strives for Dignity

By John Siyumbu, M.M.

Albentina Mhoni Mnyama, her son Emmanuel and Maryknoll Father John Siyumbu collaborated to improve Emmanuel's quality of life. (Courtesy of John Siyumbu/Tanzania)

also allow him to go outside.

I sought out Anna Johnson, then serving as a Maryknoll lay missionary in Mwanza. A registered nurse, Anna ministered to persons with disabilities, helping many children who have physical and developmental issues. She met with Emmanuel and his mother and soon afterward provided a wheelchair. Albentina remembers Anna's intervention with deep gratitude, thankful for the gift of mobility given to her son.

In the past, Emmanuel had received help from other Maryknoll lay missionaries, learning to read and practicing physiotherapy exercises for upper body strength.

With the wheelchair, Emmanuel now spends more time outdoors. Best of all, when his favorite soccer club plays, Emmanuel can access the public halls where games are screened; he even arrives with his own chair!

Through further visits, I saw how Emmanuel's enthusiasm for life was being stifled. Although at 29 he is the eldest of Albentina's children, he needs the most caregiving due to his multiple congenital challenges, including cerebral palsy. His younger siblings go to school, while he cannot. Even regular activities of daily life pose significant difficulties, for example, accessing the family's outhouse.

I am reminded of the Church declaration on human dignity last year.

Emmanuel's desire to live in dignity is rooted in a collective human desire we all share: to experience a dignity "bestowed upon us by God" (*Dignitas Infinita* 11). It is a desire that God took as his own. In the fullness of time, God missioned his son, Jesus Christ, so that the dignity of humanity — including Emmanuel — could be raised and affirmed.

It occurred to me that something needed to be done for this young soccer aficionado living in Mabatini. Emmanuel's living space needed to be renovated. This was an invitation to participate in God's mission, a mission of infinite dignity.

Albentina consulted with her in-laws and other members of her Small Christian Community. Maryknoll benefactors provided funds, and fellow parishioners procured the materials required for renovation. A modest bathroom was adjoined to Emmanuel's room, giving him some privacy and creating a sense of dignity where previously there had been none. By God's grace, and through the generosity of donors, we flew Maryknoll's flag of compassion here in East Africa.

For his part, Emmanuel offers a glimpse of the human dignity that "transcends all outward appearances" (*Dignitas Infinita* Presentation). ✠

*Maryknoll Father John Siyumbu, of Bungoma, Kenya, was ordained in 2022. He serves in Tanzania.*

**S**pend time with Emmanuel Boniface and you'll hear a lot about his favorite soccer team. Emmanuel is an ardent fan of Yanga, the Young Africans Sports Club of Tanzania. He does not let his difficulties with speech get in the way of a good conversation. Emmanuel has a way of speaking to your heart, and his eagerness draws you in.

I met Emmanuel and his mother, Albentina Mhoni Mnyama, while visiting the sick, elderly and infirm of our parish's Small Christian Communities. Here in Mabatini, a poor and undeveloped area outside the city of Mwanza, I serve at Transfig-

uration Catholic Church. In the community, people with disabilities such as Emmanuel face many challenges.

These challenges start at home. Emmanuel is unable to walk, struggles to speak, and experiences muscle spasms. He used to drag himself across the floor on his hands and knees, with his upper body doing most of the work. When I visited, I saw how Emmanuel needed help moving from his bedroom to the living room and onto the couch.

After I administered the Anointing of the Sick, Albentina explained how her son's mobility could be improved by a wheelchair. This would



# Prayer for Vocations

## Instruments of Your Love

Loving Creator God,  
you formed my being in my mother's womb  
and you know me better than I know myself.

I don't know what the future holds,  
but I trust in your divine will and goodness.

You give purpose and meaning to all that exists.  
The beauty of all creation proclaims your love!

I open my heart and soul to your loving guidance,  
trusting that you will show me how best to serve you  
with the life and gifts you have so graciously given me.

You are great and I am small, and with this knowledge  
I humbly offer myself to be an instrument of your love  
for all creation!

May I align my life and energies according to your will  
according to the witness of Jesus, the Risen One  
and with the power of the Holy Spirit.

—Dennis Moorman, M.M.

Octavio Durán/Guatemala

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# ORBIS BOOKS

## Spotlight

Preview by Robert Ellsberg

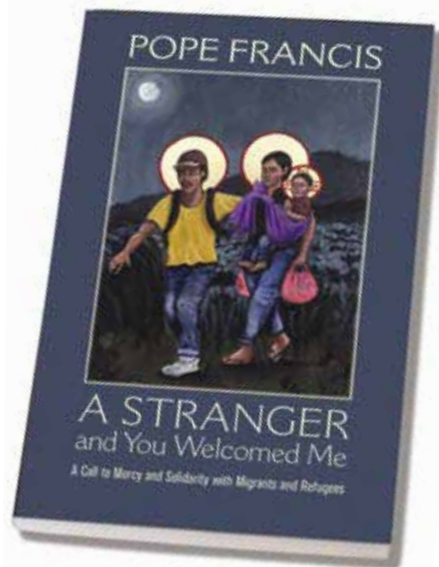
*"Lord, in this liturgy, a penitential liturgy, we beg forgiveness for our indifference to so many of our brothers and sisters."*

— Pope Francis' homily on the Island of Lampedusa, July 8, 2013

With the passing of our beloved Pope Francis, it is good to remember that care for migrants and refugees was one of the signature themes of his papacy. It is particularly timely because that was the subject of his final letter to the bishops of the United States in February 2025.

"I exhort all the faithful of the Catholic Church, and all men and women of good will, not to give in to narratives that discriminate against and cause unnecessary suffering to our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters," he wrote. "With charity and clarity, we are all called to live in solidarity and fraternity, to build bridges that bring us ever closer together, to avoid walls of ignominy and to learn to give our lives as Jesus Christ gave his for the salvation of all."

It was also the theme of his sermon on his first trip as pope outside Rome, to the Italian island of Lampedusa,



where so many refugees in the Mediterranean had drowned.

"Has anyone wept for these victims?" he asked. "The culture of comfort ... makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial. ... It leads to the globalization of indifference. ... We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business."

Pope Francis wept for them. And more: he devoted all his energies to raising up the humanity of migrants and refugees and challenging our deafness to their cries. Why? Because for him this was one of the critical

tests of the Gospel today.

Jesus said: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." He continued by saying that whatever we do "to the least of" his sisters and brothers, we do to him. (Mt 25:35, 40)

Appropriately, that verse supplies the title to this collection of his speeches and writings on "Mercy and Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees."

Pope Francis was not insensitive to the political, economic and social problems posed by the arrival of migrants and refugees at borders and coastlines. But he urged us not be guided primarily by fear and resentment of the "other." In setting public policy, he said, it makes all the difference if we begin with the acknowledgment of migrants and refugees as fellow human beings, infinitely loved by God, as opposed to criminals or "refuse cluttering a public space."

As he said in his speech to the U.S. Congress in 2015, "We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situations. ... Let us remember the Golden Rule: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'"

As we mourn Pope Francis' passing, let us honor his love for the poor and vulnerable. Again, quoting his words to Congress: "Do not be afraid to welcome them. Offer them the warmth of the love of Christ and you will unlock the mystery of their heart. I am certain that, as so often in the past, these people will enrich America and its Church."\*

Robert Ellsberg is the publisher of Maryknoll's Orbis Books and the editor of A Stranger and You Welcomed Me.

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*Hunger is a scandal, an open wound  
on the body of our humanity.*

— Pope Francis

*Spes Non Confundit*

Jubilee 2025



Paul Jeffrey/Bangladesh



# Contributing to God's Reign

By Deirdre Cornell || Photos by Octavio Durán, OFM

*A Maryknoll sister who is a physician trains health promoters in Guatemala*

Growing up, Mary Lou Daoust always knew that she would become a doctor. The Detroit native never imagined that she would serve some of Guatemala's poorest communities.

The road to mission, for Sister Daoust, started with her medical residency at the University of Miami hospitals. "I became interested in working with patients of other cultures, and in mission as a long-term commitment," she says. "And so, I found Maryknoll."

Assigned to Guatemala, she worked alongside Maryknoll Sister Jane Buellesbach, also a physician. When the sisters' team moved in 1983 to the department (state) of San Marcos, she and Sister Buellesbach were the only doctors in the town and municipality of Catarina. "We spent the first year visiting rural communities and seeing patients," Sister Daoust recounts. "At the end of the afternoon, we would meet with the community to hear their needs."

Most maladies were preventable, such as bacterial infections and ailments due to parasites and malnutrition. Having already run a successful health promoters program in another part of Guatemala, the sisters got to work.

*Maryknoll Sister Mary Lou Daoust treats patients at an outpost clinic in the village of Nicá. She has served for nearly four decades as a physician in health ministry with the Diocese of San Marcos, Guatemala.*





"We began training people from Catarina and the next town," says Sister Daoust, who works in health ministry for the Diocese of San Marcos. Word spread quickly. "It just took off."

Candidates must attend six basic courses comprised of four days of classes taught every two months. Daylong continuing education workshops are offered twice a year. For example, last September's workshop focused on metabolic syndrome, a cluster of conditions that increase the risk of chronic diseases.

Romeo Esteban and Carlos Romeo Orozco took part in the first groups of health promoters. "What the sisters came to teach us made a huge change in the communities, starting with our own families," Orozco says.

"The first course is all about basic hygiene," Sister Daoust says. "Carlos Romeo spent a year convincing his wife to boil the water. She finally said to him, 'You were right. The kids don't get sick with diarrhea anymore.'"

At that time, the promoters relate, people would go to the fields to relieve themselves, contaminating crops and groundwater. If they walked barefoot, parasite larvae entered the soles of their feet. "We ran a program to build latrines," Sister Daoust says.

Although conditions in San Marcos have improved over these four decades, the need for health care is still dire. After 60 years, almost all spent in Guatemala, in 2023 Sister Buelllesbach returned to the States,



but Sister Daoust remains, based at the Catarina clinic on the hot and humid coast. In the chilly heights of the altiplano, a second clinic is run as part of the diocesan health ministry by Doctor Mario Fuentes.

The clinic includes a dispensary which Esteban and Orozco keep open seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. A markup of 10 percent provides their salaries. Medication prices are significantly lower than in pharmacies, and the dispensary is better stocked than government facilities.

"On Mondays, we see patients in town," Sister Daoust says. "Nowadays, diabetes is the most common problem. Every week we get three or four new cases. Some patients are not even 30 years old."

Another concern, she says, is detecting and treating *Helicobacter pylori* (H. pylori) bacteria, which has been linked to gastric cancer. "Guatemala has one of the highest rates of gastric cancer in the world," the physician notes.

While Sister Daoust sees patients, on the clinic's second floor, Esteban and another promoter check and record glucose levels for diabetics already under treatment. "If it is good, we give them the same medications. If there is a change, we send them downstairs to the doctor," Esteban says.

*Above: Patients wait to be seen by Sister Daoust in Nicá. Below: Carlos Romeo Orozco, a health promoter, works at the program's dispensary in Catarina which provides medications at affordable prices.*



# Maryknoll Sisters

*Making God's love visible*

"I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for... something that energizes you... I can just encourage you to start looking and support you in the search."

**Ita Ford, M.M.**



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Sister Daoust spends the rest of the week reaching patients at sites run by the program's 100 active volunteers. "We have promoters in most of the towns in San Marcos," the missionary says. "We have 40 places on the coast and almost the same in the altiplano."

One of them is a settlement of 30 shacks on a rubber plantation. Workers there are paid 60 *quetzales* a day (less than \$8). Their housing is made of corrugated metal and planks of wood. "These people live in one room, one after another in rows," Sister Daoust says. "They were born there and they'll die there."

Like his father, Manuel Vázquez was born and raised on the plantation. The work is demanding, he says, and the shift quota is 500 trees. Starting before dawn, harvesters slash the bark of each rubber tree. Sap, called latex, drips into a bucket affixed below. "When it's a double shift, we tap 1,000 trees," Vázquez says. "We get up at 2 in the morning."

Yet after the workday ends, his volunteer duty begins. He and his uncle, Isaías, both trained by the sisters, typically provide about 500 consultations over the course of six months. "People come from all around," Vázquez says, proud to serve in this important and respected role.

Promoters with the most experience become supervisors. There are 10 supervisors on the coast and 10 in the altiplano, Sister Daoust says. Serious cases are referred to the doctors.

"We give each promoter a set of

20 essential medicines to start with," she explains. These include cold and flu remedies, acetaminophen, antacids, antiparasitic medications and creams for skin problems such as athlete's foot, which is common in this climate. Promoters replenish supplies through the dispensary.

Darío López has served as a promoter for 29 years in the village of Nicá. In a simple, two-room structure next to the church, Sister Daoust treats patients while López distributes medications and carefully records information in a notebook.

López, a subsistence farmer, has little formal education. The hardest learning curve for him was record keeping. "The program keeps strict accounting," he says. "But we learn. There are workshops and courses."

Patients, however, are not numbers. "Sister Jane used to say, 'There are people who come for medicine, but there are also people who just need to talk,'" he recalls. "She told us, 'People need to be heard. You must learn to listen to them.'"

A mother of three children, wearing a traditional Indigenous skirt, waits for a consult. "I've always come here," she says. "Here in the clinic, they treat us well."

Being a promoter, López reflects, is a calling. "I didn't understand at first," he admits. He was 19 when he signed up, and during the training he wondered why passages from the New Testament were read.

Now, he says, he understands: "Serving the people is serving God. We are contributing to God's Reign."✠



# Fifty Years of Sharing Hope

By Jennifer Tomshack



Maryknoll Lay Missioner Coralís Salvador served in Kenya for nearly two decades. She now serves at the U.S.-Mexico border. (Sean Sprague/Kenya)

*Celebrating a milestone anniversary, Maryknoll Lay Missioners honors an inspiring past, a compelling present and a strong future*

**T**his August, Maryknoll Lay Missioners will celebrate its 50th anniversary—a milestone that recognizes half a century of service and solidarity with those at the margins.

Since its founding in 1975, the lay mission organization has been committed to responding to the Gospel call to live and work with people in need across the globe.

This golden anniversary is both a time of reflection and an opportunity to look to the future of mission in an ever-changing world.

“How profound it is to contemplate where we came from and where we are going,” says Elvira Ramirez, Maryknoll Lay Missioners’ executive director. “Only the wealth of stories of the many who have served could begin to recount the history that is MKLM,” she says, using the organization’s acronym.

Lay missionaries have informally participated in Maryknoll’s mission work since 1930, when Doctor Harry Blaber served with Maryknoll priests for eight years in China. Dozens of other women and men followed in his footsteps in subsequent decades, collaborating with Maryknoll priests, brothers and sisters. One of these, John Gauker, who served with his wife and two children in Guatemala, was martyred with Maryknoll Father Bill Woods in 1976.

Several lay missionaries were already serving in Chile, Guatemala,

Hong Kong, Japan, Peru and Bolivia when the Maryknoll lay mission association was officially launched in 1975 as a joint program of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and the Maryknoll Sisters. For example, Carol Zuccarino, already serving in Bolivia, joined with her husband in 1980. Now in her 80s, she is a volunteer at shelters on the U.S.-Mexico border.

In 1994 the lay mission program was restructured as an independent organization, becoming the Maryknoll Mission Association of the Faithful, more commonly known as Maryknoll Lay Missioners. No longer a program of the other Maryknoll entities, it was incorporated the following year as a nonprofit with its own board of directors.

Since 1975, nearly 1,000 men, women and children have been sent to 35 different countries in a legacy of service and accompaniment. Frank and Josie Cuda, of the first official class in 1975, were the recipients of the 2024 Bishop McCarthy Award for dedicating their whole lives to community building.

“Our vision of our ministry was based on the belief that God was already present among the people we were to serve,” Frank Cuda says. “Our role was to reflect that love back to them by supporting their efforts to be the best they could be—and thus deepening their belief in themselves and in God.”





Building on its five core values (simple living, community, joy, inclusion and humility), in 2022, Maryknoll Lay Missioners adopted nonviolence as a guiding focus for how it approaches mission in the 21st century. The lay mission organization is committed to nonviolence through prevention, intervention, reconciliation and restoration of all creation.

Its newest member, Joshua Sisolak, says MKLM “offers a radical way of living out the Catholic faith in today’s world.” The son of a returned Maryknoll lay missionary, Sisolak has begun his mission service in Bolivia, after being sent in a ceremony in December 2024 along with longtime Maryknoll Lay Missioner Marjorie Humphrey.

Humphrey, who previously served in Kenya, returned to East Africa to work in restorative justice. “Mission is a calling that remains in our hearts,” she says. “I feel so blessed to continue this journey with Maryknoll.”

Currently, there are 40 Maryknoll lay missionaries serving in nine countries in Asia, Africa and the Americas.

While MKLM remains headquartered in Ossining, New York, the organization has continually evolved to meet the needs of the world. One significant change came in 2023 when the Mission Services Department relocated to El Paso, Texas.

This strategic move placed its orientation and formation program for new missionary candidates at the

U.S.-Mexico border — a location that facilitates firsthand experiences of migration, justice and encounter. This shift reflects MKLM’s commitment to being present where the needs are greatest, and to forming missionaries prepared to engage with changing realities.

MKLM also recently launched a new collaborative initiative in El Paso with the Maryknoll Sisters. Named for the monarch butterfly — a symbol of migration, transformation and resilience — the Maryknoll Monarch Initiative will seek to empower individuals and communities through education, advocacy and transformative experiences.

Offering immersion opportunities, community engagement and workshops, the Maryknoll Monarch Initiative will address issues such as migration, environmental justice and the role of nonviolence in local and global conflicts.

Another significant development in the lay mission organization’s journey is the expansion to include international members. Historically, MKLM membership has been limited to U.S. citizens or residents. The 2022 Mission Assembly initiated a process to remove these restrictions and welcome lay missionaries from around the world.

The assembly established a three-year timeline to implement this pilot program, and El Salvador was selected as the first country for re-

*Above, below: Maryknoll Lay Missioner Juan Gómez tutors pupils; Maryknoll Lay Missioner Rich Tarro helps AIDS orphans. (Nile Sprague/Bolivia; Courtesy of Maryknoll Lay Missioners/Kenya)*





Maryknoll Lay Missioner Louise Locke ministers to both the young and the old as she serves in Cochabamba, Bolivia. (Courtesy of Maryknoll Lay Missioners/Bolivia)

cruitment. This decision marks a shift toward a more globally diverse community of missionaries, better reflecting the universal nature of the Church and the mission it serves.

Now, in 2025, three candidates from El Salvador have successfully completed the admissions process. A sending blessing was held on March 2 at the Church of Cristo Salvador for Jackeline Gabriela Hernández de Vásquez, Wilber Ernesto Montoya Díaz and Ana Adela Morales Rodríguez. On March 14, the candidates departed for Cochabamba, Bolivia, for an orientation and formation program. Upon its completion, they will remain on mission in Bolivia.

As MKLM celebrates its 50th anniversary, it does so with deep grati-

tude for the missionaries, communities and supporters who have made this journey possible. The legacy of the past five decades serves as a foundation for new opportunities and challenges in mission.

Reflecting on MKLM's rich history and vibrant future, Ramirez quotes Mother Mary Joseph (Mollie Rogers), the founder of the Maryknoll Sisters: "As happens so often when we stop to regard God's work, there is nothing to do but wonder and thank God, realizing how little we planned, how little we achieved, and yet how much has been accomplished." ✠

*Jennifer Tomshack is communications manager for Maryknoll Lay Missioners.*



Lay missionary Peter Altman (left) serves in food programs for the most vulnerable in El Salvador. (Melissa Altman/El Salvador)



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# COMPANIONS IN MISSION

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# Vatican II at 60

## A Marvelous Mission Awakening

*Superior generals of mission institutes gather with Pope Paul VI in 1963. Maryknoll Bishop John Comber (sixth from left) served on the subcommission that wrote the Council document on mission. Also pictured (sixth from right) is Maryknoll Bishop Alonso Escalante, founder of the Missionaries of Guadalupe. (Pontificia Fotografia Felici/Maryknoll Mission Archives)*

By James H. Kroeger, M.M.

*The third of a four-part series reflecting on the significance of the Second Vatican Council*

**A**s the Church celebrates the 60th anniversary (1965-2025) of *Ad Gentes* (For all Peoples), the Vatican II document on mission, it is enlightening to recall the evolution and subsequent impact of this pivotal document; one discovers a truly interesting and dramatic story!

During the third session of the Council, the task of preparing a working document was assigned to a five-man subcommission of the full Missions Commission. Father Johannes Schütte, superior general of the Divine Word Missionaries, was named chairman. This working group selected their own *periti* (theological experts); among them were Father Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI, and Father Yves Congar, named a





In Rome, Bishop Comber talks with Bishop Maurice Michael Otunga, who would later become archbishop of Nairobi and the first Kenyan cardinal. (Maryknoll Mission Archives)

cardinal in 1994. Maryknoll Bishop John W. Comber and U.S. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen also served on this working commission.

Numerous meetings were held to prepare the full schema on the missions; they were hosted by Father Schütte in Nemi, just outside Rome. The schema came up for discussion on the Council floor on Oct. 7, 1965. Father Schütte presented an introductory overview, stressing the fact that the Missions Commission had unanimously approved each chapter. Exactly two months later, when the revised text reached the Council floor for a final vote, it received only five negative votes and was adopted by 2,394 positive votes — the highest number reached for any single Vatican II document.

The mission document of Vatican II reflects the main features of the Church's missionary reality. This is

the first time in the history of the Church that "the missions" were treated specifically by an Ecumenical Council. Commentators on *Ad Gentes* often highlight the breakthrough achieved by the Council on foundational doctrinal principles. The document asserts that the mission of the Church is modeled on the *missio Dei*, the divine missions of our Trinitarian God; thus, mission is centered on the design of the Father, the mission of the Son, and the mission of the Holy Spirit.

In the words of *Ad Gentes*: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (AG 2). Succinctly stated, mission is not just one of the many tasks or apostolates in which the Church engages; mission

is the very essence or fundamental nature of the Church. Mission is not something that the Church "does"; mission is fundamentally what the Church "is." Mission is the core identity of the Church.

While the term "mission" retains its validity, today the Church prefers to use the term "evangelization." For many Catholics this is a generally unfamiliar and relatively new term. Yet, Vatican II as well as recent popes have placed evangelization at the center of the Church's identity and mission. Today the Church sees that the "principal elements" of missionary evangelization are: presence and witness; commitment to social development and human liberation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; and proclamation and catechesis.

The one evangelizing mission of the Church is comprised of these five component elements and authentic forms. This comprehensive, holistic vision is popularly termed "integral evangelization." Viewing evangelization through its five essential dimensions results in clarity, insight, and proper integration. This is a Catholic vision of evangelization.

These five dimensions of an integral understanding of evangelization complement and reinforce each other. In speaking of the complexity of the Church's evangelizing action, Pope Paul VI, truly a missionary pope, gave a timely admonition: "Any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness,

complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it." Paul VI, now a canonized saint, continued: "It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization unless one tries to keep in view all its essential elements" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 17).

Pope Francis, who gifted the Church with *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), invited us to become enthusiastic missionary disciples (EG 119-121). In the message he prepared for World Mission Sunday 2025, Francis invited us to become "missionaries of hope among all peoples"; we are urged to "burn with holy zeal for a new evangelizing season in the Church."

Today the Church emphasizes the missionary nature of the entire Church. Every baptized member of the Church is an evangelizer, whether layperson, ordained, or religious. Catholic evangelization engages the entire Church (from top to bottom), all states of life (lay, religious, ordained, married, single), all apostolic activities and forms of witness (the five principal elements). Truly, the totality of Christian missionary evangelization embraces all these aspects. For any Christian, to live is to evangelize! ✠

Maryknoll Father James H. Kroeger recently published *Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language (Orbis Books – 2023)* and *Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights (Faith Alive Books – 2024)*.

# 2024 MARYKNOLL STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

*For the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis has invited us to become “pilgrims of hope.”*

*Students were asked to share a personal story about a time when hope played an important role in their lives, and what they learned about hope from this experience.*

*We received submissions in two divisions (grades 6-8 and grades 9-12) from students currently enrolled in a Catholic school or Catholic religious education program.*

*Following are the winning essays.*

Div. II (Grades 9-12)

**FIRST PLACE: COLE URWILLER, GRADE 12**

Seton Catholic Preparatory School - Chandler, AZ

*A Beautiful Plan*

I learned about hope at a very young age. When I was 7 years old, my family was expecting our fourth child. We were all so excited watching my mom’s belly grow and feeling the baby kick as we lay our heads on her stomach while she read to us every night before bed.

Our excitement turned to sadness, though, when my mom came home from the doctor one day in tears. She shared with us that our baby brother had gone to heaven to be with Jesus. I remember holding his little body in my arms at the hospital after she delivered him, his perfect little fingers and toes, so wonderfully made. And I remember standing by his little coffin at the cemetery singing “Jesus Loves Me” with my siblings.

Jesuit Father Michael Sparough, a retreat director, has said, “Ultimate hope is accepting what is beyond our control and believing that God will use the circumstances of our lives to help us grow in holiness.” That is just what my family did. We trusted in the Lord’s plan for us through our sadness and grief; we stayed strong in our faith and we never lost our hope.

Two years later, my parents gathered us all together for a family meeting and shared the exciting news that we were expecting another baby. Our excitement turned to shock when the ultrasound showed not one baby, but two ... we were going to have identical twin girls! The Lord answered our faithful prayers with two babies.

Things took a sudden turn, however, when our twins were diagnosed

with TTTS, twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, which happens when identical twins sharing one placenta begin to have an imbalance in nutrients. One twin was receiving nearly all the nutrients. The doctors monitored the twins closely, hoping the condition would level out and the babies would each get the nutrients they needed. Meanwhile, we prayed and stayed faithful in hope.

News of our babies spread throughout our church, our diocese and the world. They were lifted up in prayer by so many faithful prayer warriors, blessing our family with so much hope. Their TTTS, however, continued to progress, so my parents flew to Houston, Texas, to see a specialist. It was decided that surgery was needed in order to give the twins the best chance at survival.

Along with all our faithful prayer warriors, we covered the surgeon and medical team in prayer as they operated inside the amniotic sac with the twins, closing off the connecting blood vessels in the placenta so that each baby would have their own source of nutrients. We knew it was a high-risk procedure, but we trusted in the Lord and had hope.

Eight weeks later, my little twin sisters made an early arrival at 34 weeks. My parents shared with us that the delivery room was packed full of specialists, expecting to have to administer blood transfusions and other medical interventions for the babies. Much to the doctors’ surprise, my sisters came out of the womb perfectly healthy with loud, joyous cries. There was a collective pause and sense of wonder in the delivery room as everyone took in the perfectly healthy little babies with complete awe. From that day on, my twin sisters have been known as “the miracle twins” they truly are.

Through the lives of my brother in heaven and my miracle twin sisters here on earth, I have learned the importance of hope. Hope is what carried



*Cole Urwiller, winner of the Bishop Patrick J. Byrne Award for Division II, is congratulated by Principal Victor Serna. (Courtesy of Seton Catholic Preparatory School/U.S.)*



my family through our time of grief after losing my little brother. Hope is what gave us the strength to not give in to fear and despair during my twin sisters' struggle with TTTS. And hope is what makes each moment of every day worth living.

The Oxford Dictionary describes hope as "a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen, a feeling of trust." And to me, that is what hope is all about — trust. Trusting that the Lord has a beautiful plan for our lives and that everything that happens is a part of his beautiful plan. "Never, ever give up on hope. Never doubt, never tire, and never become discouraged. Be not afraid!" — *St. John Paul II* ✠

Div. I (Grades 6-8)

## FIRST PLACE: DANIEL COBIO, GRADE 8

Holy Family Catholic Church - Rockford, IL

*A Ray of Hope*

When I was a little boy, I read a story about a lighthouse. In this story, a little lighthouse emitted an intense light that shined bright in the dark night. Sailors in a ship were saved from getting lost at sea while navigating treacherous waters because they followed this light. I truly believe that hope is a light that gets us through our darkest moments in life. Although I am only 14 years old, I can recall a time of darkness and worry that consumed my existence. This occurred four years ago during COVID.

One morning, I woke up as usual and started getting ready for school. I was excited to go and see my friends since I had not seen them for a week due to spring break. My mother came into my room and told me that I wouldn't be going to school because everything was being shut down due to people getting sick. I was confused at first and soon became scared. To me, if people got sick, they would go to the doctor. We didn't close buildings and make people stay home.

Soon, only my father would go get groceries and no one else would be allowed out of the house. My mother would wipe down with bleach wipes everything that came into the house. I had never seen this before and I wondered if we, too, could get sick and die. At one point, I accidentally heard that many people were dying around the world and there was no cure. I was terrified and had nightmares every night.

Days, weeks, and months went by with no end to this chaos in sight. I would spend my days inside the house doing my homework online. Those were very stressful times. The saddest time came when I went with my mother to check

on my grandparents. We could see them only through the window, and it was devastating not to be able to hug them. I can still remember how the tears rolled down their cheeks as they waved to us from across the glass. That image will be engraved in my heart forever.

One particular afternoon, I remember feeling a deep sadness in my heart. To me, nothing would ever be the same again and things would not get better. I sat inside on the window ledge in our dining room, looking outside to the sky and asking God for a sign. I've always believed that God talks to us by sending us signs. We just need to talk to him, and he answers. Well, that afternoon, as I looked up to the grayish clouds, I asked God if things would ever get better. Would we ever return to a more normal existence?

At that moment I saw the brightest ray of sunshine pierce through the clouds. I knew that God was sending me a sign. He was saying that everything would be all right. To me, that bright light was a ray of hope.

After that day, I knew in my heart that things would be fine. The hope that I felt helped me get through the toughest days. Hope was like candlelight that shines bright in the darkest night. It fueled my soul and gave me the courage to stay strong. Little by little, things did get better, and we slowly started getting back to a more normal life.

From this experience, I have learned that hope is powerful. Hope is God. It is a force that lifts our spirits and gets us through the toughest times. It is not only important to have hope, but it is also equally essential to be a beacon of hope for others. There is so much suffering going on in the world, and people face a variety of challenges every day. One can be that light that brings hope and pulls someone out of despair. I, too, can be a lighthouse that shines a light of hope and makes a difference in the world. ✠



*Maryknoll Father Kevin Hanlon presents Daniel Cobio the Bishop Francis X. Ford Award for Division I at the Cobio family's parish. (Courtesy of Holy Family Catholic Church/U.S.)*

## Division I (Grades 6-8)

Second Place

### GWENDOLYN EISLEY



*Grade 7  
St. Luke Parish  
Jersey Shore, PA*

In "Jesus, I Hope in You!" Gwendolyn shares her story of living bravely with Crohn's Disease and juvenile arthritis. She and her family have turned to the saints, such as St. Therese of Lisieux, and to prayer, including the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. "Prayer helps us to be more hopeful," she writes.

Third Place

### OKAMURA TAGABUEL



*Grade 6  
Mt. Carmel School  
Saipan, Northern Mariana Island  
US territory*

In "The Power of Hope: How I Didn't Give Up," Okamura describes working hard on a frustrating science project. Instead of giving up, he persevered, using feedback from teachers and classmates: "Mistakes are a part of learning." He writes, in the end, "I was proud of how much I had learned."

Essays of all winners will be published on [MaryknollSociety.org/winners](https://MaryknollSociety.org/winners) and [discoveryourneighbor.org](https://discoveryourneighbor.org).

## Division II (Grades 9-12)

Second Place

### GALEN BELMAR



*Grade 10  
St. John's Catholic Preparatory School  
Buckeystown, MD*

On a service trip to Jamaica, Galen volunteered at an elementary school. In the poor but vibrant community, he learned that hope is not "distant or unreachable," nor is it "reserved for perfect solutions." Instead, "Hope is a shared journey, one that unites us in our humanity and connects us to something greater."

Third Place

### GEORGE SERCAN



*Grade 12  
St. Augustine Catholic High School  
Markham, ONT  
Canada*

Everything changed for George's family when his father fell into a prolonged coma due to COVID-19. Yet, George says, by staying close to family and community, journaling and praying, he learned about "choosing to hope." He adds, "Hope does not erase difficulty but gives us the courage to face it."

For future news of the Maryknoll Student Essay Contest, stay tuned to [MaryknollSociety.org/essay](https://MaryknollSociety.org/essay).



## Climate Action Must Continue

By Thomas Gould

**T**his year marks a significant crossroads for global climate action.

On the first day of his second term, President Trump issued an executive order withdrawing the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement. Since 2016, the agreement has sought to limit global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The withdrawal came just as 2024 was confirmed as the first year in recorded history to exceed this critical threshold.

Yet 2025 is also a year of significant anniversaries and profound spiritual renewal. It is a Jubilee Year, a time of hope and restoration. This year also marks the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*; the 800th anniversary of the "Canticle of the Creatures" by St. Francis of Assisi; and the 30th anniversary of the first meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The highly anticipated 30th U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP 30) will be held this year in Belém, Brazil, a country that is home to over half of the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest. The conference aims to push forward meaningful collective action to address climate change, building

on the progress of the last several conferences. While the United States' withdrawal is a setback, the movement toward green energy is global and unlikely to be derailed by any single country, even one as large as the United States.

Meanwhile, regional actors within the United States are stepping up despite the about-face of the national government: Local and state governments and coalitions are advancing ambitious climate goals. The U.S. Climate Alliance, a bipartisan group of 24 governors, is working to secure a net-zero future by promoting state-led, high-impact climate initiatives. Together, these states represent 54% of the nation's population and 57% of its economy.

Additionally, 17 cities including Los Angeles, Austin and Philadelphia, along with states such as Maine and California, have signed the "Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty." According to the website [fossilfuel treaty.org](https://fossilfuel treaty.org), the treaty is designed to complement the Paris Agreement by halting fossil fuel expansion, managing an equitable phaseout of coal, oil and gas, and laying the foundation for a just transition where no worker, community or country is left behind.

This call to action invites a spiritual response. As the climate crisis accel-



*Members of the group RainDrop plant trees in a forest of Ahuachapán, El Salvador, for a project supported by Catholic Relief Services. (OSV News/Oscar Leiva, Silverlight for CRS)*

erates, our Catholic tradition offers a path forward through pilgrimage — journeys that foster spiritual growth, build community and deepen our relationship with God. Inspired by this spirit, 18 Catholic groups, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, have joined in a campaign called "Pilgrimages of Hope for Creation," with prayer walks organized across the country throughout the Season of Creation, Sept. 1 to Oct. 4.

COP 30 President-Designate André Aranha Corrêa do Lago wrote: "While

we grieve human and material losses, 2025 must be the year we channel our sadness and indignation towards constructive collective action. Change is inevitable — either by choice or by catastrophe. If global warming is left unchecked, change will be imposed on us ... If we choose to organize ourselves in collective action, we have the possibility of a different future."✠

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

### FAITH IN ACTION:

- Learn more about the pilgrimages at <https://catholicpilgrimagesofhope.org/>
- Write to your state legislators to ask that your state join the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty: <https://mogc.info/FFNPT>

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).

## A Faith of Our Own

By Michael Ho

Growing up as a Korean American Catholic isn't easy. In addition to the usual challenges children face, like making friends and doing well in school, many of us born into immigrant families also struggle to learn our parents' language. For me, that meant there were things we weren't fully able to share, and one of those was our Catholic faith.

Although I attended Korean class every Saturday and my parents spoke Korean at home, I wasn't fluent enough to follow Korean Mass. Oftentimes, going to church felt like an obligation; I felt judged on how well I recited responses and prayers I had memorized phonetically, like a parrot. When my mother told me that we were going to attend a different parish in Flushing, New York, I didn't think much would change.

The first thing I heard about our new church, St. Paul Chong Ha-Sang, was that an American priest who spoke Korean served there. Maryknoll Father Joseph Veneroso — or "Father Bae" as we call him — led a weekly gathering called Friday Night Meeting. Along with free pizza, we high school students were given the chance to discuss topics relevant to living a Christian life. No question was off the table, no matter how controversial.

Having worked in Korea, first with the Peace Corps and then with Maryknoll, Father Bae understood our parents, but he understood those of us raised in the States, too. He gave thoughtful answers to our questions and quelled our doubts. He would hold forth with eclectic wisdom, drawing from Eastern and Western philosophy, literature, science, etymology and, of course, Catholicism. All of it centered on compassion, humility and making a difference in the world.

Between Friday Night Meeting and attending English Mass with Father Bae, many teenagers like me learned to make our faith our own for the first time.

My friend Daewook Kim prepared for baptism and confirmation with Father Bae at St. Paul Chong Ha-Sang. Dae went on to become a Maryknoll priest, ordained in 2013.

"Father Bae used to say, 'You're not a saint because everyone else sees your holiness. Rather you are a saint when you see the holiness of everyone around you,'" says Father Kim, who is now assistant chief financial officer for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. "He tries to see the holiness in others. It began with the people of Korea in his mission work and has continued at St. Paul working with Korean American immigrants."

Father Bae isn't just our teacher;



(From left) Maryknoll Fathers Daewook Kim and Joseph Veneroso, Michael Ho, Father Peter Kim, Deacon Sokwon Im at St. Paul Chong Ha-Sang (Courtesy of Michael Ho/U.S.)

he's also our friend. When I was 15, I had an accident that caused injuries to my pancreas and spleen, leaving me hospitalized for three weeks. Father Bae visited me regularly, cracking jokes to cheer me up and always ending with a prayer for my recovery.

After college, I discovered that Father Bae had been made the head of our Sunday school. For the next 15 years, I served alongside him as a catechist to minister to the youth of our parish. Father Bae reviewed our lesson plans and helped us lead retreats and summer camps. He was known to not only give spiritual lectures, but also to play games and throw water balloons, as situations demanded. Many times, he invited us to his home

at Maryknoll, where we were inspired by the stories of other Maryknollers and their work around the world.

This August, as we look back on 40 years of Father Bae's service to our community, it is amazing to see the profound difference one person can make. Father created a place where generations of Korean American Catholics like me could belong and could come to know God. He explained our faith to us and helped us to understand ourselves at a time when we were confused about our identity. All of us at St. Paul's are grateful that he is a part of our lives. ✠

*Michael Ho is a property manager who lives in Bayside, New York.*



*"The generous will be blessed, for they share their food with the poor." — Proverbs 22:9*



Maryknoll Father Joyalito Tajonera (left) ministers to a migrant fisher in Taichung Harbor, Taiwan. (Paul Jeffrey/Taiwan)

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## A Migrant's Trail

She's knocking on the door of light one more time,  
and one more time it opens only to darkness.  
There are shadows lying across the land,  
but she knows the desert has two faces,  
the terror of death and the treasures of life.

A migrant's trail, where a smile is a jewel,  
a meal a miracle, a safe place to sleep, heaven on earth.  
Yes, the desert has two faces, she's seen them both.  
The terror of death and the treasures of life.

She knows all too well the trail of cruelty,  
and the trail of love,  
and where moments of kindness can turn into a last instant.  
I wonder if she drowned in the irrigation canal.

Only "Jane Doe" and a row number mark the red brick of her pauper's grave.  
A privacy fence stretching hundreds of yards posts NO TRESPASSING,  
where for uncounted migrants, death hits a wall.  
Yet it is strewn with flowers, some fresh and alive,  
others wilted and dead.

It does something to you, weeping at the edge of this field.  
In sackcloth, you cross over a deep sadness, a loneliness, to a gentle presence:  
God the Great Solitaire.

And from our first moment to our last instant,  
the desert closes us down and breaks us open  
to the terror of death and the treasures of life.

—Rick Dixon

*Maryknoll Lay Missioner Rick Dixon serves at the Mexico-U.S. border.*



*OSV News/Courtesy of Luke Taylor*

# READERS' RESPONSES

## ALWAYS A MISSIONER

I remember reading *Maryknoll* magazine as a girl growing up in a big family in Oregon's logging country. As I faithfully read the magazine each month, I found myself wanting to be a Maryknoll missionary.

Alas, young life's dreams took a back seat to other paths ... college, teaching, motherhood, church musician, travel, etc. Here I am, still a missionary at heart, ministering as the Spirit leads.

When I opened the Spring 2025 issue, I was struck by the beauty of Father Joseph Veneroso's photo meditation, "Open Wide the Doors." This prayer begs to be set to music ... not a fluffy piece but a mandate commissioning us to walk in covenant with our God.

Thank you, Maryknollers, for inspiring and praying with us as we make our way in love together on this earth.

*Kathleen Valdez  
Mount Angel, Oregon*

## FAITH IN ACTION

In addition to the articles describing what life is currently like for Maryknoll missionaries across the globe, I greatly enjoyed your historical articles published in the Spring 2025 issue on Vatican II, liberation theology

and Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker. Thank you for the excellent Lenten reflections on faith in action.

*William Goodwin  
Weaverville, North Carolina*

## MISSION TRIPS

Just a note of appreciation for all the years of *Maryknoll* magazines we have received. Yours was one of a handful that we used to place in our office waiting room. We don't have our office anymore, but we still enjoy the magazine and often share it.

Last spring, my wife Mary and I took a group to Guatemala on our yearly mission trip. Our morning prayer and evening reflections used prayers and excerpts from *Maryknoll* magazine that Mary had saved over the years.

The Spring 2025 edition was enjoyable, as always. First, there was the article "Hope Triumphs in Guatemala," where we often go. Then came "A Tribute to Gustavo Gutiérrez" — a hero to many of us doing mission work in Central and South America.

There was also the "Spoons and a Spinning Top" story about Amanacer, where I first worked with Maryknoll missionaries in 1992. It's nice that a Wisconsinite works there now!

*Thomas Gelhaus  
Owen, Wisconsin*

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

Readers' Responses

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*(From left to right) Deacon Matthew Sim, Maryknoll Father Brian Barrons, Bishop Mark J. Seitz and Deacon Patrick Okok meet in El Paso, Texas. The two seminarians will be ordained by Bishop Seitz at the Maryknoll Society headquarters in Ossining, New York, on June 7. (See story, page 20.)*

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