

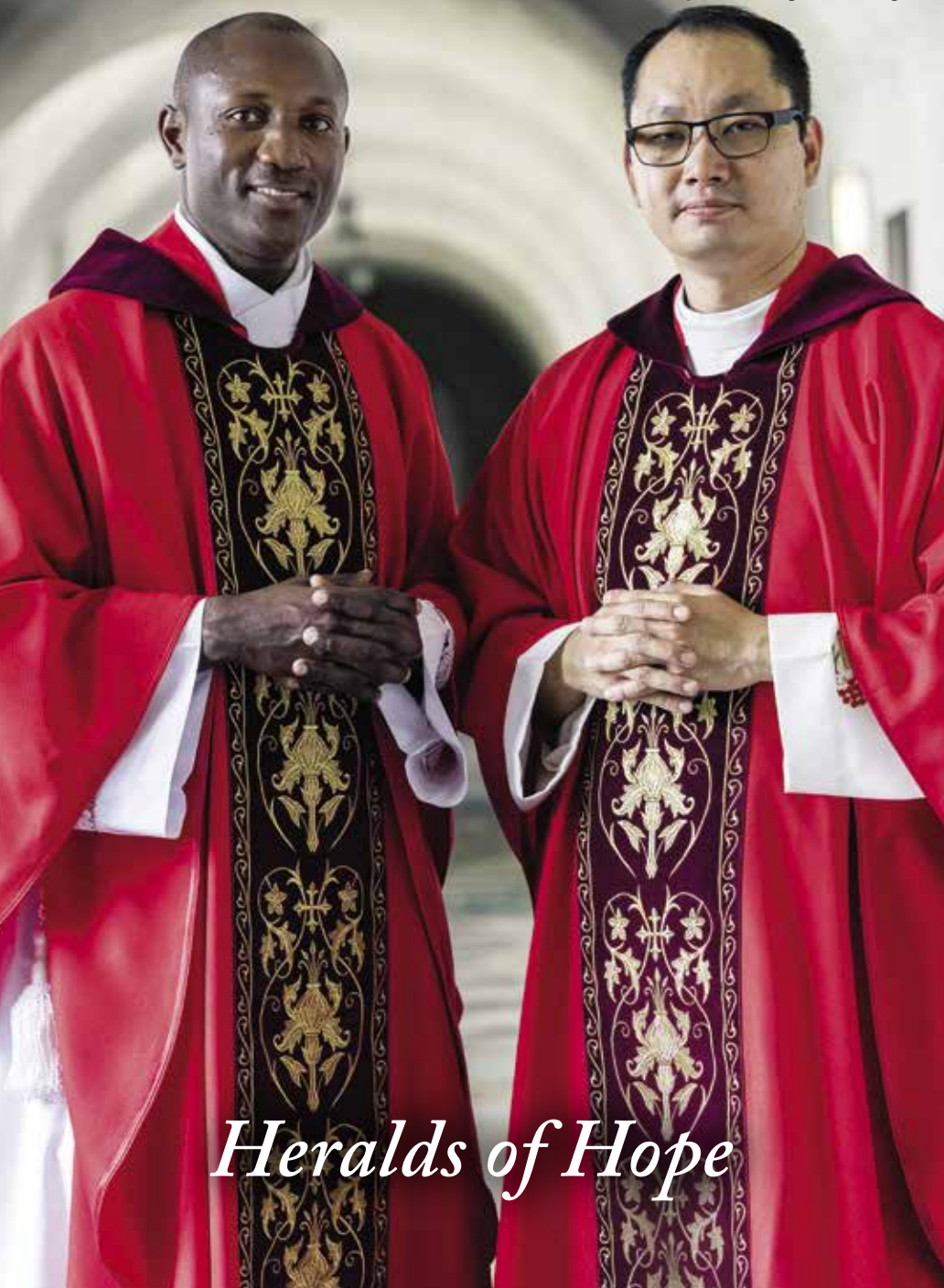


U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

MARYKNOLL

Fall 2025

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Heralds of Hope

FROM THE EDITOR

Our cover features the two new priests ordained in June to the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. Father Matthew Sim and Father Patrick Okok were both assigned to mission in Taiwan. The ordaining prelate, Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, recounted during the ordination Mass how his own vocation to the priesthood was inspired in part by a Maryknoll missionary.

Bishop Seitz heads the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration, and in an interview after the ordination he called out the current administration for its mistreatment of immigrants. Never in his "worst nightmare," he said, could he imagine how immigrants here could be rounded up and treated like criminals, when the vast majority are just hard-working people seeking the stability and opportunity of the American Dream.

Welcoming the stranger is a Gospel mandate, and this magazine regularly features the work of Maryknoll missionaries serving vulnerable migrants, both in our country and abroad. Besides an interview with Bishop Seitz, this issue includes an article on a Maryknoll Affiliates couple assisting newcomers in Chicago.

For well over 100 years Maryknoll missionaries have served the downtrodden, emphasizing the inherent dignity possessed by each person — made in the image of God. Our nation was founded upon the idea that everyone has "unalienable rights" that come not from the government but from our Creator, specifically rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." As a nation we are better than this, and there are better ways to address immigration.

*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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Courtesy of Sofia Cruz/Vatican City

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FRONT COVER:
Ordained June 7 at the Maryknoll Society
headquarters, Maryknoll Fathers Patrick
Okok and Matthew Sim (left, right)
celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.

COVER CREDITS:
Front: Octavio Durán/U.S.
Back: Paul Jeffrey/Philippines

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.



MISSION HAS A CHURCH

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*Our going forth in mission is not
To form, much less build, a church.
Rather, our coming together in faith
Is to inspire, enable and encourage
One another to go back out into the world,
Stepping through the door of each chapel,
Shrine, cathedral or basilica to
Reflect the light of love enkindled therein*

*To share the flame of truth so that people
Weary of the cold indifference of a society
Hostile to the plight of the poor, and wary
Of our best intentions, might recognize
In offers of forgiveness, mercy and peace
A joy beyond the reach of human labor
And feel inexplicably drawn to come warm
Themselves in prayer and community*

*Come, wash in the waters of God's grace
And do not let your past or even present
Prevent you from gently dying to old ways
And habits no longer wanted, needed or
Ignored but rather transformed in Christ
May all your wounds become for others
Overflowing fonts of spiritual healing and
The source and summit of our communion.*

*For Christ did not come to earth to be
Confined in tabernacles of gold but
To make his eternal dwelling place
Among us, that he might ever walk with us
Along life's Way, turning our exile
Into a prayerful pilgrimage of hope
Reconsecrating our reborn world
From broken shrine into heaven's sanctuary.*

Faith, Love and Missionary Zeal

Dear Friend in Mission,

With hearts full of hope, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers joyfully welcomes the election of our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV. In this historic moment for the universal Church, we give thanks to God for the gift of a new pope — chosen to succeed Pope Francis and guide us forward in faith, love and missionary zeal.

Pope Leo XIV brings with him a deep commitment to dialogue, peace, and global solidarity — values that echo the very heart of our missionary vocation. A seasoned pastoral leader and thoughtful theologian, he is known for his compassionate outreach and dedication to the spiritual and social needs of the Church, particularly in regions experiencing hardship and need.

His years of missionary service in Peru, working among underserved communities, reflect a profound dedication to the Church's mission of presence, accompaniment and evangelization. His firsthand experience on the peripheries of society has shaped his vision for a Church that listens, serves, and uplifts — all grounded in Christ's love.

As missionaries, we have been deeply inspired by Pope Francis' call to go to the peripheries, to serve the poor, and to be instruments of God's mercy and peace. We now look with prayerful anticipation to Pope Leo XIV, confident that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead the Church through his words and witness.

We invite you to join us in praying for our new pope, asking the Lord to bless him with wisdom, courage and compassion as he begins his ministry as the Vicar of Christ and visible sign of unity for the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

Thank you for walking with us on this missionary journey. Together, in communion with the successor of St. Peter, we remain committed to proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing to Christ's love around the world.

In gratitude and peace,

Fr. Lance P. Nadeau, M.M.

Father Lance P. Nadeau, M.M.

Superior General



Sent To Do 'Many Wonderful Things'

By Giovana Soria and Andrea Moreno-Díaz

Two newly ordained Maryknoll priests are assigned to serve in mission in Taiwan

On the vespers of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit brought forth two new Maryknoll priests. Matthew Sim, from Singapore, and Patrick Okok, from Kenya, were ordained on June 7 at Our Lady Queen of Apostles Chapel in Ossining, New York.

In his homily, ordaining prelate Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, remembered the late Maryknoll Father John E. Bergwall, whom he met as a child and who became an inspiration for him to seek the priesthood.

Father Bergwall — a medical doctor before entering Maryknoll — could have had a career in medicine, Bishop Seitz said. Yet he felt called to do more: “to make God known, to make God present in a way that only a priest could.”

While they may accomplish “many wonderful things, there is nothing more important than to celebrate the sacraments and the Mass,” Bishop Seitz said to the ordinands. “From there, you and the Church that you serve will find the strength and the vision that it needs in order to serve the people of God.”

The message resonated deeply with Father Sim. “Through the constant nourishment of ourselves and our communities in the Eucharist, we encourage ourselves to become more and more like Christ,” he said.

Left to right: Maryknoll Father Matthew Sim, Bishop Mark J. Seitz, Maryknoll Father Patrick Okok, Maryknoll Superior General Father Lance P. Nadeau (Octavio Durán/U.S.)



For Father Sim, 45, the highlight of the ordination rite was when Bishop Seitz asked if the ordinands were worthy: "To hear my rector proclaim that, through the inquiry of the parishes, the communities that we have served, our fellow brothers and sisters and other Maryknoll missionaries who have crossed our lives, we are worthy."

During the laying on of hands, Father Okok, 34, felt deeply moved. "I got very emotional," he said. "It meant a lot for brother priests to welcome me to the brotherhood of priesthood and what that means to continue God's work of salvation."

To represent his parents, Father Okok chose Florence and Jospeter Mugambi, a Kenyan married couple who met Okok through their Small Christian Community in Chicago while he was a seminarian there.

"When his parents were not able to get visas, Patrick asked me and my husband to step in," Florence said. The couple had spoken to Okok's parents about their wishes for their son's ordination ceremony.

"They expressed that this is a fulfillment of a desire in the family," Jospeter said. "One of Patrick's uncles wished to become a priest, but he died early. The parents are very happy and excited that this is an incarnation, if you will. A fulfillment of that desire."

Father Sim's father, Sang Hee Sim, traveled from Singapore with his wife and daughter to witness his son's remarkable milestone. "I am very proud of who he is as a priest,"



Above: Bishop Seitz presents a chalice and paten to Father Okok. Below: Sim and Okok lie prostrate for the Litany of Supplication. The Mass was held at Our Lady Queen of Apostles Chapel. (Octavio Durán/U.S.)

said the older Sim. "I'm happy that my son is going to different places to preach the Word and to share about Maryknoll."

Lai Har Choy, Father Sim's mother, added, "I want to give my blessings to him for achieving his dream of becoming a priest."

During the conclusion of the Mass, Maryknoll Superior General Father Lance Nadeau addressed the guests in attendance as well as those watching via livestream in Kenya, Tanzania, Taiwan and Bolivia.

Speaking in Swahili, the superior general sent a message to viewers in Kenya, especially Father Okok's parents. "Your contribution is immense," he said. "For raising these children to walk in God's way, spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Bishop Seitz concluded the Mass of Holy Orders with a rousing message: "Tomorrow is Pentecost. I think the Spirit came early." Just as Father Bergwall had been "a wonderful model" for him, he added, he hoped the new priests would inspire young people "to seek the Lord, to know him, and to follow him with all their hearts."

The joyful celebrations of the ordination weekend were the culmination of years of formation — most





The ordaining prelate, Bishop Seitz, lays hands on Matthew Sim, ordained a priest along with Patrick Okok on June 7, 2025. (Octavio Durán/U.S.)

witnessed from the beginning.”

Victor Mutobera, a Maryknoll seminarian, recalled Father Okok’s leadership at Kenyatta University, where they both studied. “He was very active and in charge. We appointed him to oversee liturgy in the parish. He has a servant leadership presence that is very calming,” he said.

Maryknoll Brother Ryan Thibert, who traveled to the States for the occasion, served alongside both ordinands during their Overseas Training Program in Bolivia. There he witnessed the budding missionaries blossom into priests in formation.

Brother Thibert said that Father Sim “has a genuine love for the people. I say to Matthew, ‘God will work wonders in your life.’”

To Father Okok, Brother Thibert said, “God has a way of teaching you where you need to be. Listen to the people. God will work through you, and it will change hearts and minds.”

As seminarians, the two missionaries also served in the States.

Endita Kiarie, founder of the Kenyan Women Support Group in Chicago, recalled Father Okok’s ministry there. “Patrick would console families and share a good word,” she said. “I’ll never forget the time a lady was expecting a baby. Patrick showed up to support with baby clothes.”

spent in mission.

Martin Ng, a longtime friend of Father Sim, says that as a teacher in Singapore, Sim already possessed the qualities of service that would define his calling. “I believe it was God guiding him along the way,” he said. “It’s been an amazing journey that I have



On the Our Lady of Maryknoll quadrangle, Father Sim shares a joyous moment with his parents and sister, who came from Singapore to attend the occasion. (Octavio Durán/U.S.)

Gilberto Salazar, a parishioner from Cristo Rey Church in El Paso, Texas, remembers fondly the time Sim spent at the parish. “He inspired my son Emilio. Seeing Matthew work at Cristo Rey showed my son that he can serve even in his teen years.”

Despite the rainy weather, the atmosphere remained festive as the new priests gave their first blessings in the Our Lady of Maryknoll quadrangle. Then, joined by Maryknoll sisters and members of the Catholic Women Association from Kenya, they led a singing procession back to the chapel for their mission sending ceremony.

During the ceremony, Maryknoll Father Raymond Finch reminded the new priests that mission is about going “beyond ourselves and our bor-

ders, beyond our own interests and needs.” He added, “It’s at the heart of what it means to follow Christ. It’s the lifeblood of what it means to be Church.”

Bishop Seitz presented the priests with their mission crosses, and Father Nadeau announced that Fathers Sim and Okok will be sent to Taiwan in mission.

The superior of the Asia region, Maryknoll Father Joyalito Tajonera, welcomed the two priests. He advised them to keep in mind three things: to connect with nonbelievers, to stay in the peripheries and, most importantly, “no matter how difficult our mission work of going to a foreign country is, you fall in love over and over again with the place that we are assigned to.”



Patrick Okok, of Kenya, asked Florence and Jospeter Mugambi to represent his parents, who were not given visas to attend the ordination in Ossining, New York. (Adam Mitchell/U.S.)

For Father Tajonera, the ordination held “a real Pentecost message,” he said, adding that Taiwan offers many mission possibilities. “Patrick wants to work in youth ministry and the environment, while Matthew likes to work in migrant and parish ministry.”

Father Sim said this assignment to Asia is significant for more than geographical reasons. “I will have to study the Taiwanese language, which is similar to Hokkien, the language that my father speaks. It’s a grace for me to be able to communicate in my father’s language with the people I serve, heart-to-heart,” he said.

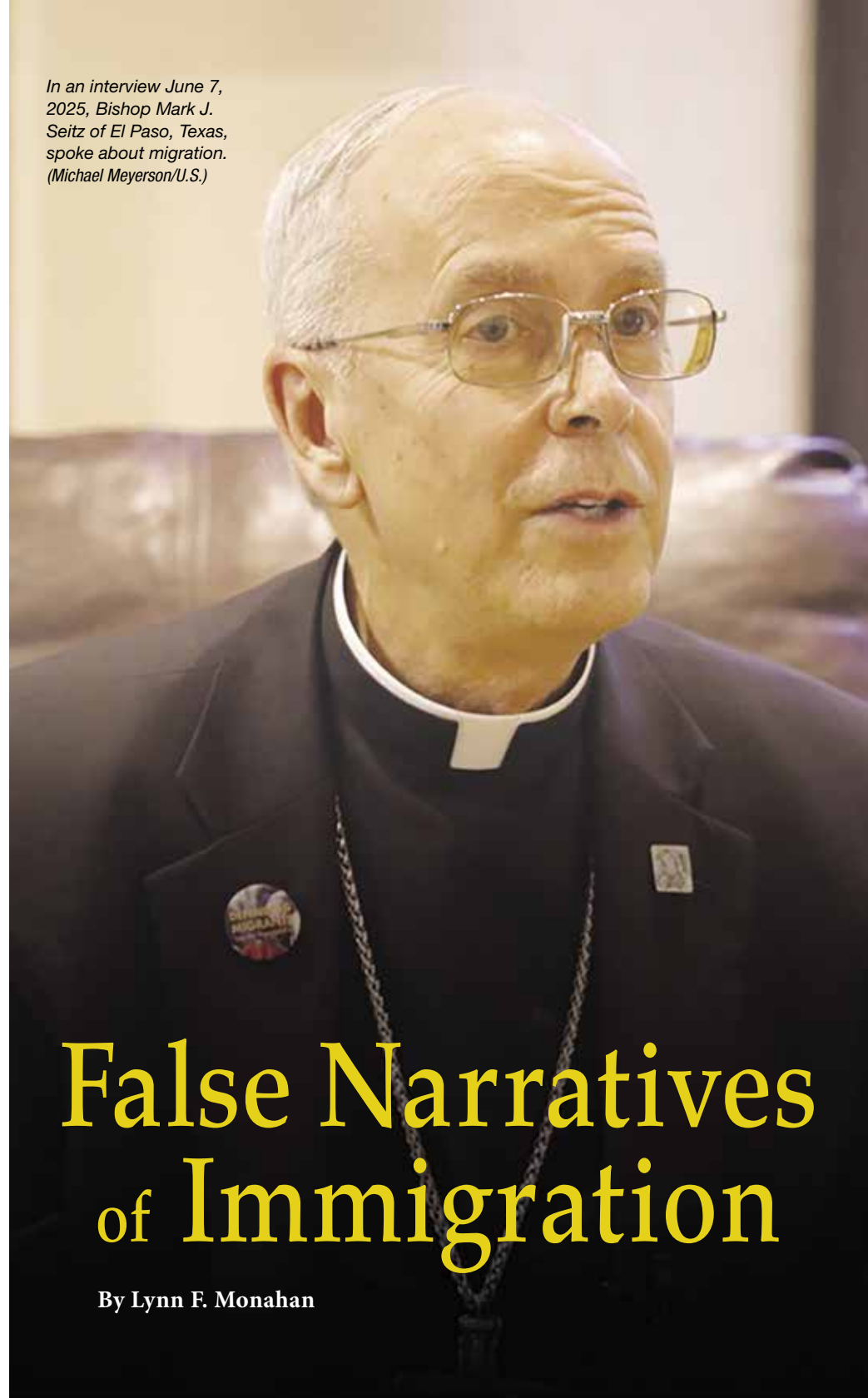
“In this wounded world, we have to start in the Church,” Father Sim

said, “and together become a Eucharistic witness to the world of God’s love and invite all into this space of love.”

Father Okok said he prays to serve faithfully in his assignment to Asia. “I pray to God to give me the grace to be a priest who listens and has a vision — a people’s vision. I pray that wherever I’m sent, God helps me identify how I am to be one of the people,” he said.

“Irrespective of the social context, we are called to meet people in their faith,” Father Okok said. “That can be in a refugee camp, in a slum, in the richest part of the country. It can be in warring countries. Wherever there are people, a priest needs to be there to accompany them.”✠

In an interview June 7, 2025, Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, spoke about migration. (Michael Meyerson/U.S.)



False Narratives of Immigration

By Lynn F. Monahan

Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, credits a Maryknoll priest from his hometown in Wisconsin as one of the inspirations for his priestly vocation, along with the *Maryknoll* magazine at his grandparents' home that he would look at before he could even read.

Bishop Seitz ordained two new priests for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in June. In an interview afterward, he denounced the Trump administration's indiscriminate roundup of immigrants in the United States — including not only the undocumented but also visa holders, vetted asylum seekers and permanent residents — and the suffering it is causing them and their families.

"I never thought our country could show such a hardened heart to people who were simply seeking a place of refuge," said Bishop Seitz, who is chairman of the Committee on Migration for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "And that somehow even though we would consider ourselves Christian, we could watch the suffering that we're causing without remorse."

The bishop said that immigrants to the States "have always had a tough road" despite our history as a country of immigrants. He recalled the words of the poem at the base of the Statue of Liberty welcoming the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free" and called immigra-

tion a source of national pride.

Sadly, he said, our country has at times failed to rise to that aspiration. Each successive wave of immigrants has faced prejudice and rejection.

"But I really didn't believe we would regress to the point in which immigrants would be seen as not worthy of human dignity, not worthy of our concern or our love," he said.

"In my worst nightmare I wouldn't have thought that we would find ourselves in a place we are right now," he said, when "a whole group that simply had the bad fortune of being born in a place where they could no longer live, would be treated as though they were criminals."

He said the country has adopted a "false narrative" casting all immigrants as criminals, when numerous studies have shown that immigrant communities are safer and have lower crime rates than do native-born communities.

As a young man considering the priesthood, Bishop Seitz said, he felt drawn to joining a missionary order. But as a student at the University of Dallas, where he earned a bachelor's and two master's degrees, he fell in love with the Latino culture of Texas, then receiving a large influx of migrants from Mexico in the early to mid-1970s.

"I never lost the love of mission," he said. Ordained to the Diocese of

Dallas in 1980, he was asked by his bishop to initiate the first Spanish Mass at Good Shepherd parish in Garland, Texas. This prompted him to learn Spanish. Later, as a pastor at various churches, he went on to develop sister parishes in Mexico and Honduras.

"That really had a tremendous impact on my outlook and my joy of the missions that I've done," he said.

"Ninety nine percent of immigrants are good, deeply faithful people who simply want to provide a safe place for their children and a place where they could provide for their basic needs and to make the country that they've adopted a better country," he said.

"I've met them, so I'm not speaking from ignorance," he said, noting the thousands of people he has served firsthand. "I've worked with them."

The city of El Paso, where he has served since 2013, has also been "smeared with the false narratives," he said, calling the border city "a dynamic place of encounter," where many people live on one side of the border and work on the other.

"There's a dynamism there that makes it a very creative and fruitful kind of environment with a great joy in welcoming people," Bishop Seitz said. "We don't fear immigrants. We look at them as brothers or sisters."

In recent years, however, gov-

"In my worst nightmare I wouldn't have thought that we would find ourselves in a place we are right now."

ernment policies and the militarization of the border have made cross-border collaboration more difficult, he said.

"If you want to call the level of immigration a crisis, then call it a humanitarian crisis," he said. "Because there's a crisis that is forcing people out of their homes."

The Catholic Church does not propose removing vetting of those who wish to cross, but rather reforming immigration policies and practices. "We believe that there should be an orderly process, both for crossing for economic reasons, and in search of asylum," he said.

He noted that the United States birth rate is not sufficient to reproduce the population to sustain a healthy economy, and the country needs immigrants to fill entry-level jobs.

"Don't see immigrants as the crisis, and don't see them as though they are somehow a threat," he said. "Because in fact, they are the best hope of our nation and always have been."✠

MISSIONER TALES



My ministry there is to teach guitar.

The problem is that every couple of weeks, I have to start all over again with the basics. Upendo Daima's aim is to reunite the children with relatives, so when a child is ready to return to their family, they go home.

You might wonder, why spend time teaching these children to play a musical instrument if they are there only a short time? However, teaching guitar is not the main issue. The children are seeking love and attention. When I arrive, 12 to 15 eager students quickly bring out the guitars and chairs. They argue a bit to see who is going to be first, or next, to learn. When I have finished the lesson, each student comes to me with a big smile and a high five.

When I pray, I remember that God's love is revealed to me through these children.

Loren Beaudry, M.M.

In Macau, where I used to serve, I started a workshop for disabled people to learn skills that would enable them to find work. A-Mui came to our center as a shy, physically disabled young lady with a low self-image. Like most of our students, she had been considered "useless" by the outside world.

A-Mui gave herself fully to the program, and in time became a skilled seamstress. With us, she learned about Jesus and experienced his love for her just as she was. As she grew in her faith, she discovered that God, who transformed water into wine, had transformed her into a lovely

self-confident woman, a dedicated worker and someone who radiates a joy she never thought possible.

When she decided to be baptized, she chose "Fatima" as her baptismal name. Like Jesuit Father Greg Boyle says, A-Mui chose "to be the tender glance of God's Love in the world."

Arlene Trant, M.M.

I met the Venerable Thích Tịnh Nguyệt, a Buddhist monastic, at an interfaith gathering in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where I serve as a Maryknoll lay missionary.

As a young novice about 20 years ago, Nguyệt took on the responsibility of fostering a newborn baby girl. Although the child was raised at the pagoda in the Buddhist tradition, she was attracted to the nearby Catholic church, where she was allowed to attend Mass. Today, the nun told me, her foster child is a third-year university student and a newly baptized Catholic.

"How understanding of you! How did you cope with all that?" I asked.

"I loved my foster daughter since her infancy," Nguyệt responded. "Raising her helped me to cultivate compassion for others, rather than being occupied by my own problems. I had to grow up with her. Prohibiting her to join the Catholic faith would have only caused suffering."

Both foster parent and child were courageous in navigating on the raft of faith. Is there a better example than this of Buddhists and Christians working together for peace?

Hang Tran, MKLM

What an enjoyable morning I've spent! Unsure of the path to take to reach the home of a disabled boy — whose address I had lost both on paper and in memory — I lucked out at just the right time, encountering folks along the way to guide me for almost seven miles. A friendly villager led me the last steps to the family's tin shed.

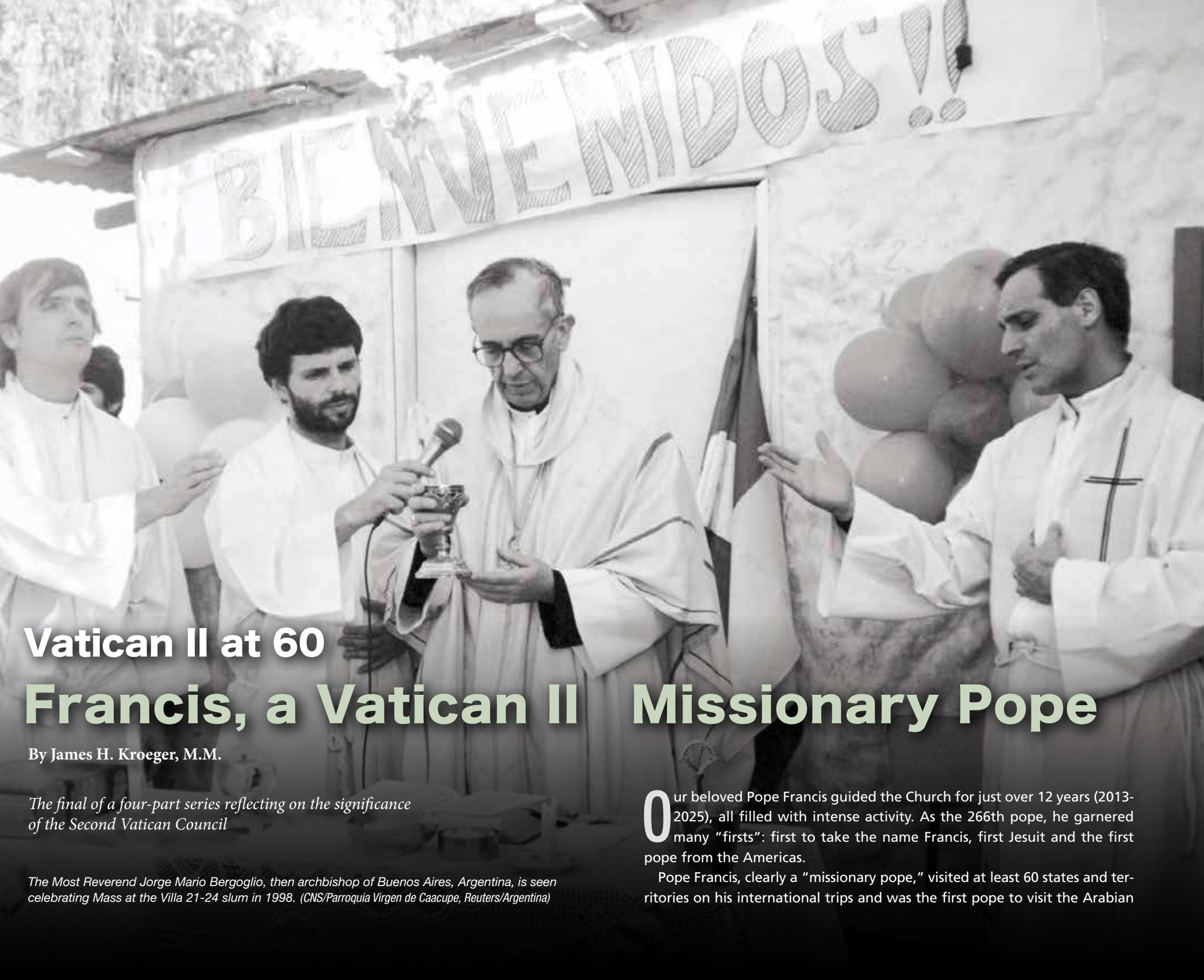
Alameen, now a big 11-year-old invalid, was sitting in a beat-up wheelchair. I recalled how his mother used to struggle to lift him and carry him from place to place.

His father was home; we had our first ever conversation. I pledged to

seek a new wheelchair for Alameen. I snapped a number of photos, and Alameen was glad to be made much of. As I biked home, I remembered the kindness of the folks who guided me well.

Robert McCahill, M.M.

Here in Mwanza, Tanzania, where I serve as a Maryknoll brother, every Monday afternoon I go to a rescue center for children who were living on the streets. Called Upendo Daima (in Swahili, Love Always), it offers free room and board, clothing, medication, counseling, loving care and basic education.



Vatican II at 60

Francis, a Vatican II Missionary Pope

By James H. Kroeger, M.M.

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

The Most Reverend Jorge Mario Bergoglio, then archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, is seen celebrating Mass at the Villa 21-24 slum in 1998. (CNS/Parroquia Virgen de Caacupe, Reuters/Argentina)

Our beloved Pope Francis guided the Church for just over 12 years (2013-2025), all filled with intense activity. As the 266th pope, he garnered many “firsts”: first to take the name Francis, first Jesuit and the first pope from the Americas.

Pope Francis, clearly a “missionary pope,” visited at least 60 states and territories on his international trips and was the first pope to visit the Arabian

Peninsula, birthplace of Islam. He canonized over 900 saints, including Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the martyred Archbishop Óscar Romero, as well as three popes: John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II. It is significant that all these three “pope-saints” were active participants in Vatican II. Thus, one could validly assert that Pope Francis has not simply canonized three “Vatican II popes,” he has also canonized the legacy of the Second Vatican Council.

Remarkably, Pope Francis is the first pope in six decades who did not personally participate in Vatican II. He had his formation during the Council, entering the Jesuits in 1958 — the same year that Pope John XXIII, the “Father of Vatican II,” was elected by the conclave. Pope Francis was ordained in 1969, soon after the Council concluded, and he assimilated the ethos and vision of this marvelous, Spirit-inspired event.

Following the Francis papacy, the Council is almost as alive today as it was when it concluded in 1965, 60 years ago. Pope Francis’ successor, Pope Leo XIV, immediately signaled his support for continuity, affirming “our complete commitment to the path that the universal Church has now followed for decades in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.”

One can identify several core Council themes clearly reflected in the life and teaching of Pope Francis, and most recently in Pope Leo XIV.

First, Vatican II gave attention to collegiality, the principle that all bishops, together with the pope,

have responsibility for the Church. This guideline intends to promote a participatory Church, an involved People of God. Pope Francis further expanded this vision with his emphasis on synodality, which is a readiness to enter into dynamic, respectful and prayerful speaking, listening and dialogue, following the Holy Spirit’s lead. He successfully concluded two international gatherings on synodality, involving all members of the Church, in 2023 and 2024.

A second Council emphasis focuses on the local church. This vision was highlighted in the Council document on missionary activity, *Ad Gentes* (For all Peoples). In short, the “center of action” is the local church; this principle extends to liturgy, evangelization, episcopal conferences and leadership, as well as numerous other areas of Christian life. Full, active, conscious participation in missionary Church life is both a right and duty of all the baptized; Pope Francis sought to concretize this vision in all local churches around the world.

Vatican II emphasized the importance of dialogue. This word was introduced into the Council by Paul VI, another Vatican II “saint pope,” in his 1964 encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (His Church). This broad principle emphasizes that the Church is to be a community of dialogue, not monologue, a truly listening Church, hearing voices from within the Church, from other Christians, from people of other faiths, and from the world at large.



Pope Francis greets then-Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, now Pope Leo XIV, in St. Peter's Square during a consistory at the Vatican Sept. 30, 2023. (CNS/Vatican Media/Vatican City)

Pope Francis proved in his papacy to be a superb example of open-hearted listening!

A fourth principle is captured by the popular expression “servant leadership.” Again, this vision is applicable to all Christians who seek to aid others in their diverse needs. Even if the actual assistance may be rather small, it is the attitude of sensitive compassion that touches the other person’s heart. Truly, Pope Francis embodied the episcopal motto of Cardinal Newman: *cor ad cor loquitur*, heart speaks to heart. Pope Leo is following the same path.

Our new Holy Father said, “Let us build a Church founded on God’s

love, a sign of unity, a missionary Church that opens its arms to the world, allows itself to be made ‘restless’ by history, and becomes a leaven of harmony for humanity.”

Clearly, in pivotal ways Pope Francis, and now Pope Leo, are truly Vatican II popes. We all rejoice in heartfelt gratitude for the marvelous gifts of *Franciscus* and *Leo*! ✠

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).

PLANTING CLIMATE JUSTICE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Text and Photos by Paul Jeffrey

A Maryknoll sister leads reforestation and long-term solutions to climate change

Near the summit of the Sierra Madre mountains that shield the heavily populated island of Luzon, Maryknoll Sister Marvelous “Marvie” Misolas continues the Maryknoll Sisters’ century of mission in the Philippines. She is helping rejuvenate a forest that will protect both the natural environment and the Indigenous peoples who make their home there.

“We’ve planted a lot of trees,” Sister Misolas says. Yet, she adds, the work goes further. “We’re helping the inhabitants of the forest find new ways to not just survive on their land, but to thrive.”

Sister Misolas directs the Environmental Studies Institute at Miriam College in Manila. Originally founded by the Maryknoll Sisters in 1926 as a teacher training institute, the school expanded in size and mission over the decades, in 1953 becoming Maryknoll College. In 1977, after the Second Vatican Council, lay leaders assumed the management of the school, and in 1989 it was renamed Miriam College.

The school has long integrated care for creation into its curriculum, as shown by a two-hectare park on the school’s main campus in Quezon City. A sanctuary for various species of birds and trees, it became a venue for lessons on biodiversity, recycling and water quality, as well as a place for quiet reflection.

Sister Misolas, who was born in the Philippines and served in Taiwan, Costa Rica and the United States before being assigned back home, has sought to guide the university into an even deeper commitment to environmental stewardship.

“We already had a very strong program of advocacy in the classroom. Miriam College is known for that,” explains Melinda Medina Lamorena, associate director of the Environmental Studies Institute. “Sister Marvie wanted to push us into deeper involvement with local communities and networks, to work for sustainable change beyond the school campus and not wait for governments to solve problems.”



Maryknoll Sister Marvelous “Marvie” Misolas serves in the Philippines.



Sister Misolas, who is herself from the Philippines, connects students and faculty from Miriam College with local communities to seek long-lasting solutions to climate change.



In the isolated Indigenous communities that partner with Miriam College, Sister Misolas promotes reforestation within wider strategies to prevent environmental degradation.

Given its location and topography, the Philippines is widely considered a canary in the coal mine of a changing climate.

"Melting polar ice means the seas are rising, and we live on islands. Big sections of Manila will be under water within a few decades," Sister Misolas says. "Where are we going to go?"

The climate crisis is exacerbated in the Philippines by a legacy of injustice, she adds.

"To say we need to relocate people is obvious, and it sounds simple, but we're dealing with decades of unjust social structures that pushed people into the marginal, easily flooded areas where they live now," the missionary says. "Handing out

food packets, what the government does after communities are flooded, is simply not enough."

Rather than waiting for official responses, Miriam College is taking action. In recent years it has helped residents of the Kaliwa River Forest Reserve find alternatives to the indiscriminate logging and slash and burn agricultural techniques that have devastated huge swaths of forest in the Sierra Madre mountains.

In the mountain community of Laiban, in 2004 the college joined with the Forest Foundation of the Philippines and the governmental Department of Environment and Natural Resources to reforest 180 hectares of denuded forest. Cebu Pacific, the country's largest airline,

became a corporate sponsor. The project, named Empowered Community for the Forest, trained local residents to plant and monitor thousands of new native trees.

However, without widespread community support, the missionary explains, the trees alone won't produce lasting change. "Without a livelihood, people often turn to illegal deforestation to survive," Sister Misolas says. "Even though it's officially a protected area, the people will cut down the trees to make charcoal or to sell the lumber." She has enlisted other partners from Miriam College to join the work.

When she started a reforestation project in the Indigenous village of Mamuyao — the college's fourth such

partnership — Sister Misolas brought students from the business school to conduct research about local products that could be profitably marketed. Students from the college's tourism department visited the area to research opportunities for ecotourism. In both cases, students returned to share their findings with local residents, who ultimately make the decisions about livelihood projects.

Reynaldo Jorda, a senior professor of tourism management at Miriam College, says tourism amounts for almost 13 percent of the country's economy. Even isolated communities such as these can be integrated into this sector. Because the land is considered their ancestral domain, Indigenous communities can block any



Sister Misolas, who worked in previous assignments with homeless women, says that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are the same.

economic projects they see as potentially harmful. For example, residents of both Laiban and Mamuyao have opposed a government proposal to construct a giant dam in their valley, a project that would force them to move elsewhere.

Jorda says everyone benefits from the connections forged by Sister Misolas.

"There are a lot of possibilities to be found in collaboration between these communities and the private sector, but we in the academic community can't make that happen. We don't have the connections or the network to link everyone up," he says. "We need somebody who can connect every-

one together. That's where Sister Marvie comes into the picture."

Lamorena says that the results are palpable.

"The people in Laiban say it was much hotter before they planted all the new trees. There was more erosion and flooding. But now those trees are taller than the people, and biodiversity has improved," she says. "There has been no fire in the forest. It's a testament to what growing a forest can do."

Loreta Castro, a former president of Miriam College, says that Sister Misolas' push for environmental activism fits well with the 100-year legacy of the school's founders.

"We are proud of our heritage,

and we've tried to carry on the mission that the Maryknoll Sisters started. We feel the spirit of those sisters come alive in the school today," says Castro, who today directs the Miriam College Center for Peace Education. "Our emphasis on promoting peace, justice, and the integrity of creation, we got all that from them. We have built on what they started."

Sister Misolas attributes that emphasis to Mary Joseph Rogers, the founder of the Maryknoll Sisters.

"Mother Mary Joseph studied zoology. She knew about the natural sciences," Sister Misolas says. "If she were present today, I'm confident she would want us to address the environmental crisis that is harming

so many of God's children."

Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, strengthened the missionary's resolve to defend the forests and people of the Philippines. "The cry of the poor and the cry of the earth are the same," she says, quoting the encyclical.

She compares caring for the earth to a previous mission assignment when she worked with homeless women.

"Nature is our common home, and as our home planet is slowly dying, we are all becoming homeless — not just people, but all created beings, all species," Sister Misolas says. "Just as those women were able to turn around their lives, I believe we can turn this environmental crisis around. There's hope precisely because God gives us the strength we need to save our common home." ✠

Paul Jeffrey is a photojournalist who works around the world with church-sponsored relief agencies. Founder of Life on Earth Pictures, he lives in Oregon.



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In Memoriam

Please pray for our Maryknoll missionaries who died during the past year.

Sister Bernadette Braun

Father Jeremiah R. Burr

Sister Helen Carpenter

Sister Mary T. Connell

Father Emile E. Dumas

Sister Elizabeth Ann Erbland

Sister Catherine Erisman

Sister Jean Fallon

Father Michael Gould

Sister Marilyn Jean Graf

Sister Maureen Gunning

Sister Anna Maria Hartman

Sister Margaret Hennessey

Sister Kathleen Higgins

Father Joseph P. La Mar

Sister Cecilia LeBlanc

Father Lawrence J. Lewis

Sister Nancy Lyons

Sister Jean Marie Maloney

Brother Andrew E. Marsolek

Brother David E. McKenna

Brother Albert F. Patrick

Father Thomas A. Peyton

Sister Dolores Poelzer

Sister Patricia Redmond

Father Richard S. Rolewicz

Brother Venard F. Ruane

Sister Nuncia St. Pierre

Sister Helen Werner

Is AI Good News?

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

The white smoke had barely stopped billowing from the roof of the Sistine Chapel on May 8 when posts began to blitz the internet. One “meme” video showed Pope Leo XIV in papal finery. His Holiness declared that “woke” meant waking up to the others’ suffering and that Christians should speak out in the face of injustice.

These beautiful sentiments and lovely words certainly sounded like things the new pope would say. Trouble is, he didn’t say or write any of it. But such is the speed of the internet that the meme was reposted more than a million times before it was established as fake by the official Vatican news website.

Providentially, the technologically savvy Cardinal Robert Prevost came prepared for his new role. Pope Leo XIV has announced that he will approach the challenge of artificial intelligence, or AI as it is commonly called, not by ignoring or condemning it, but by first understanding it. His strategy is to learn how to use it for evangelization — spreading the good news of Jesus around the world.

Our new pope’s namesake, Pope Leo XIII, critiqued both communism and unbridled capitalism following the Industrial Revolution. His 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, set the stage

for what is now referred to as Catholic social teaching. It defined, upheld and defended the dignity and worth of people over property and workers’ right to form unions and to receive a living wage in a safe environment.

Now — following what we could call the Communications Revolution — Pope Leo XIV is setting out to address both the dangers and opportunities of the internet. As Pope Francis called for a missionary Church, Pope Leo XIV — himself a missionary in Peru — calls on Catholics and all Christians to proclaim the good news in every facet of their lives, including via computer.

One of the first saints to be canonized by Pope Leo will be Carlo Acutis. The first millennial saint, Carlo died of cancer in 2006 at the age of 15. Like many teenagers, Carlo loved playing video games, for which he has been described as the first “gamer saint.” But in his short life, he undertook the mission of an evangelizer in our internet era.

Blessed Carlo Acutis created a website to document the more than 130 Eucharistic miracles from around the world that the Vatican has approved for veneration, thus fostering devotion to the Eucharistic presence of Jesus. The website has flourished, and a traveling exhibit based on his



A man holds an image of Blessed Carlo Acutis, who used the internet to evangelize, at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz/U.S.)

work invites all to a renewed devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

As we use computers to spread the good news, we fulfill Jesus’ words that his coming would be “as lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other” (Luke 17:24). Just as the image of white smoke and the news *Habemus papam* flashed around the world in seconds, every electronic message today goes out instantly to everyone everywhere.

Over the centuries, all revolutionary inventions, such as movable type, electricity, the telescope, radio, telephone, television and now the computer, have been misused or exploited for less than honorable purposes. However, that is the fault of the users,

not the means of communication.

Artificial intelligence can play a positive role. It is extremely useful for directions or definitions, translating into foreign languages and referencing information. But there is always the possibility of falsehoods.

We must approach internet content by being “shrewd as serpents and simple as doves” (Matthew 10:16). A healthy skepticism is essential. When it comes to Catholicism, we should seek reputable online sources. For information about the pope, the Vatican News website should be our first go-to site for verification.

As an early meme deception touted wryly, “Don’t believe everything you read online.” — Abraham Lincoln ✠

Holy Ground

By Jennifer Tomshack

A Maryknoll lay missionary follows her calling to Kenya

Cornfields surround St. John Bosco Rehabilitation Centre, located on the outskirts of Kitale, a small city in western Kenya. This modest campus is home during the week to 59 children between the ages of 8 and 12. Some had never been to school before. Some had never even held a pencil.

Maryknoll Lay Missioner Theresa Glaser, a veteran teacher who joined the staff in 2023, describes the humble center lovingly: "It is holy ground."

A project of the Diocese of Kitale, St. John Bosco has long partnered with Maryknoll Lay Missioners. Its goal is to rescue and rehabilitate children who were living on the streets or at risk of ending up there due to family problems. Social workers determine which children need the most help through interviews and home visits.

The center provides remedial education so students can enter the Kenyan school sys-

tem and offers a structured, stable environment where the children can thrive.

One of Glaser's many roles is to reinforce the learning of English — a crucial subject since in Kenya, English is the language of instruction starting in fourth grade. Most of her students, she notes, arrive without knowing a word.

The missionary invites children to her classroom to draw, read books or play board games. Coming across a weathered games table no longer in use at the center, Glaser spent some 60 hours obtaining special paint and varnish and then refurbishing it. Today, the table is back in action, and students line up to play snakes and ladders or checkers.

"Seeing them navigate a die, take turns, follow number sequences and think strategically made me realize how these simple games help children develop useful skills," she says. "Who knew learning could be this fun?"

Maryknoll Lay Missioner Theresa Glaser says in mission she has found "the greatest reward." (All photos courtesy of Theresa Glaser and Maryknoll Lay Missioners/Kenya)





A typical day for Glaser may include preparing art materials, grading papers alongside fellow teachers, or filling jugs with water to teach students about volume and capacity. "I love the creativity of teaching," she says, adding that she enjoys "designing lab-based, hands-on lessons."

Glaser holds a doctorate in biological sciences from the University of Cincinnati. Prior to teaching, she worked for 14 years as a research scientist in the United States, Australia and Switzerland. She

then spent decades teaching science in inner-city high schools in Ohio and South Carolina.

Glaser admits to being drawn to "challenging situations," referring to her ministries. "That's where the need is greatest."

Arriving in Kitale, Glaser encountered a new level of need. "I've been a teacher for 36 years," she says. "When I first saw a child holding a pencil sharpened at both ends, worn to a nub, I was stunned."

She tells another story from St. John Bosco. To avoid the disruption

caused by children sharing the classroom's single eraser, she procured individual erasers. As she handed them out, children responded, "God bless you." This simplest of school supplies, she says, is a valuable gift for vulnerable children experiencing scarcity and loss.

One of them is an 8-year-old boy whose family survives on just one meal a day. Before arriving at St. John Bosco, Noah spent his days

begging on the streets and scavenging at a garbage dump for plastic or metal to sell. Noah's brother, only a few years older than him, was killed in a clash with police.

While situations such as these are sobering, Glaser finds daily inspiration in the resilience of the students and staff. Four team members are themselves graduates of the center.

"Rescued from situations of extreme poverty, they were reha-

Glaser teaches at St. John Bosco Rehabilitation Centre in Kitale, Kenya, which provides remedial education and a caring environment for children at risk of living on the streets.

bilitated and supported through secondary and higher education," Glaser says. "Today they are teachers, social workers and mentors. They embody what's possible."

Glaser's own path to mission began during childhood. She recalls that at her family's home in Lima, Ohio, she once pointed to a map of Africa and declared to one of her four sisters, "When I grow up, I'm going to be a missionary there."

Glaser says she "forgot that moment for 40 years," but later, while teaching at a Franciscan high school, she felt a quiet pull toward Africa again.

In 2008, she joined a Catholic Relief Services HIV/AIDS care team in The Gambia. The team brought food and medicine to remote villages, supported orphaned children and ran mobile clinics in the West African country. "It was the best year of my life," Glaser says.

With CRS she was a volunteer, Glaser says. "But my diocese, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, heard I was going to Africa and offered me a small amount of financial support as a 'missionary.' So I called my sister and said, 'Do you remember what I said about going to Africa as a missionary?'"

When she retired from teaching in 2021, Glaser felt the call to mission again. "I realized I had a few good years of health and energy left — and I wanted to spend them in direct service to the world's poorest." She had known Maryknoll her whole life, thanks to the steady ar-

rival of *Maryknoll* magazine at her family home.

Glaser, now 73, sees mission as a mutual exchange. "On a spiritual level, what I hope to accomplish is to be changed, stretched and challenged by the lives of the people with whom I interact. You don't come away from the experience without being given as much as you may be giving."

She often reflects on Saint Paul's words in chapter 13 of the First Letter to the Corinthians. He wrote that in the end, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love. In people who are experiencing poverty, she says, she sees those virtues lived out.

"I am not saying 'it is good to be poor because the poor are happy,'" Glaser says. "But maybe my relative comfort and wealth has resulted in a diminished practice of love. I'm learning from them."

Her spiritual life is sustained by daily Mass (she rises at 4:30 a.m. to walk 30 minutes to the Immaculate Conception Cathedral) and by small, intentional acts.

On hard days, looking ahead keeps her going: "I imagine what these scruffy little kids will become in 10 or 12 years." Glaser watches them play on the games table she lovingly restored — and she gains an understanding of her own past that led to this moment.

"By Kenyan rules, kings can move anywhere across the board," Glaser says of the game of checkers. "I see how these children have gone from life on the streets to schooling that



In the classroom, students benefit from Glaser's creative teaching techniques such as activities to develop basic math skills and games to reinforce English language learning.

opens doors to brighter futures."

The missionary reflects, "I also think of my path from research scientist, to teaching in inner-city schools, to now serving in Kenya.

"In this least glamorous role, I've found the greatest reward: supporting children so that they, too, might be 'kinged' in the game of life." ✠

Jennifer Tomshack is Maryknoll Lay Missioners' communications manager.



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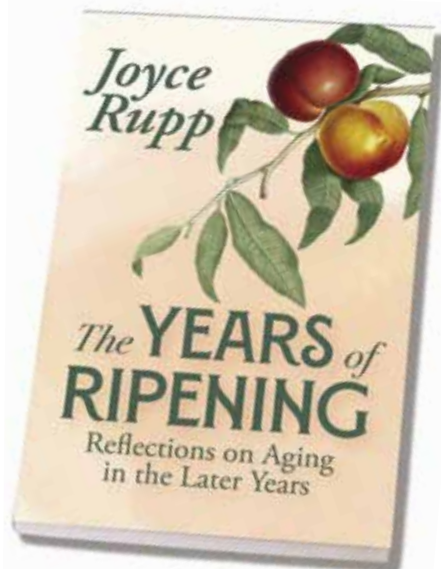
ORBIS BOOKS

Spotlight

Preview by Robert Ellsberg

Joyce Rupp is one of my all-time favorite spiritual guides: she's a wonderful mix of wise, calm, and challenging. And her insights on aging have been of enormous help in my own life. ... Let her new book help you to do it with grace, courage, humor — and joy!

— James Martin, S.J.



Last year Sister Joyce Rupp published *Vessels of Love: Prayers and Poems for the Later Years of Life*. She has followed with a companion volume, *The Years of Ripening: Reflections on Aging in the Later Years*. These reflections focus on personal transformation, the wonder and goodness of our hidden self, how the qualities of our personhood have been expressed, and in what ways we can claim ever more of the truest reality of our inner being.

As old age takes place, Rupp writes, “our physical being naturally weakens and wrinkles. At the same time, our non-physical being smooths out with a peaceful satisfaction. The tight ridges of past failures recede and dark illusions fade as we increasingly trust our life to be a harmonious song rooted in love. This encourages us to shed our self-willed, false control until

we become freed from what binds our spirit. We let go of who we imagined ourself to be and grow in a transparency that reveals our seasoned-with-love self.”

The evocative chapter titles give some suggestion of the contents: A Time to Ripen; Anxiety and Uncertainty; The Gifts of Elderhood; Loss; Grief and Healing; Gratitude; Physical Decline; Death; Hope and Purpose; Identity; A Spiritual Transformation; and Serenity, which concludes with the reflection, Love is What Counts.

Rupp doesn't shrink from the adversities and diminishment that come with aging. But she is especially sensi-

tive to opportunities. “Throughout our past, we seeded and grew our positive qualities. Now, in old age, we complete what still needs maturation, while rejoicing over the sweet taste of what has already been gathered into the harvest. We have the graced time and spacious presence to reflect, integrate, and bring to wholeness the significant features of our individual transformation that were previously set aside or not given enough attention ...

“Best of all, the older we become, the more opportunities we have to develop the full potential of our goodness. Because of our less hurried life, the roots of selfless love have the space to grow stronger and the fruits of that love can ripen into the fullest, juiciest flavors. Like other aged persons, I desire to strengthen this part of my being, to allow my inherent virtues to develop further. I do not want to miss a single piece of this precious life while trusting

I can positively affect others by being a compassionate presence.”

And, as she notes, “All is not ended with our final departure. We leave behind the beauty and bounty that resided within our aged selves. Like a ripened melon on the vine, so the matured fruit of our loving heart and weathered wisdom leaves a beneficial legacy to nurture a future generation.”

These are reflections that will guide people of any age to ponder the deep meaning and blessedness of life. Sister Kathleen Deignan writes, “In the full maturing of her own gift of soul-care for so many, Joyce Rupp now accompanies and supports us with her ‘weathered wisdom’ to brave our fields ready for harvest, to taste at last the fruit of a spirit ripened by transformation and readied for transition.” ✧

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

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God Waited for Me

By Andrea Moreno-Díaz

A Maryknoll priest brings his manifold God-given gifts to mission

In school, asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, young Joe Everson drew a picture of a priest. In college, he envisioned a teaching career — and ended up becoming an attorney instead. These turns along the road were not errant delays, but part and parcel of his formation as a missionary.

The youngest of 10 siblings in San Francisco, Maryknoll Father Joseph Everson III, 63, remembers thumbing through the pages of *Maryknoll* magazine as a child, fascinated by the lives of missionaries in far-away lands. “That was the type of life I wanted,” he recalls thinking.

During adolescence, the call to priesthood lingered in his mind. However, attending the University of California, Berkeley, he majored in history with the intention of becoming a teacher. During his last year there, Everson discovered another aptitude: law.

He graduated from Berkeley in 1984 and went on to earn a juris doctor from University of Texas at Austin. Afterward, he began working as a corporate lawyer at a well-established firm in New York City.

“It was while I was working as a corporate attorney that I once again found God patiently waiting for me,” Father Everson reflected later. He

reached out to Maryknoll to join the missionary society.

A few years later he found himself on the shores of Lake Titicaca in the Peruvian altiplano at an altitude of more than 12,000 feet in the cold, semi-arid region of Puno. He was in his Overseas Training Program, learning how to be a missionary from Maryknoll Father Edmund Cookson, who by then had worked for 30 years with the Indigenous Aymara people.

As a seminarian, Father Everson says, he felt welcomed by the local

community in the Isthmus of Yunguyo. He led pastoral ministries for children and youth and became involved in parish activities for adults. He says “the Aymara people’s way of seeing faith as an intrinsic part of their everyday life” impressed him.

“I do once or twice remember thinking, ‘Why did I choose to do this?’ I had a comfortable life in New York City,” he says. “Those doubts were good because they required me to reflect, to be more intentional, and to seek strength in the values



Maryknoll Father Joseph M. Everson, III celebrates Mass at St. Margaret's Catholic Church, where he is assistant parish priest. (Paul Jeffrey/Hong Kong)



During his overseas training, seminarian Everson took part in local customs such as this festive shower of confetti at a First Holy Communion celebration. (Robert Milazzo/Peru)



Serving poor and marginalized communities in Ciudad Juárez, Father Everson greets parishioners before Sunday Mass outside Jesus Médico chapel. (Sean Sprague/Mexico)

that had set me on this path."

After two years in Peru, seminarian Everson returned to the States. He earned a master of divinity degree from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and was ordained as a Maryknoll priest in 1999.

The New York Times, reporting on Father Everson's ordination, noted that "for him, the drastic change from corporate lawyer to missionary priest could not have felt more natural."

Reassigned to Peru, the missionary was stationed in Tacna where he began a prison ministry in two correctional facilities in the city. He soon discovered that the inmates "were very needy in every sense of the word, spiritually needy, and grateful for the services."

He also ministered in the prison of Challapalca, a maximum-security facility located more than 15,000 feet above sea level between Pu-

no and Tacna. The administration allowed him to visit the prisoners, many of whom had not received a visit in years because of the prison's remote location.

"I have found few things as life-giving as prison ministry," Father Everson wrote at the time. There is "a very real conversion that goes on in the lives of many. For the first time many of the men and women are reflecting on their lives, on their character, and on God."

In 2001, Father Everson was assigned to Cochabamba, Bolivia, where he was chaplain of San Antonio Prison. He also served at a Fe y Alegría school, part of a Jesuit network that offers integral education to impoverished and vulnerable children. Achieving his dream of teaching, he imparted religion classes to students and worked with their families.

"Some of them had been street

kids," he says. "The idea was to bring them into a special school to get them up to standards so they could then go into a regular school."

Father Everson later served for three years at a parish in Ciudad Juárez, on the Mexico-U.S. border, before returning to the States for further studies. In 2010, he earned a licentiate in canon law from the Catholic University of America. He returned to Bolivia, this time to La Paz, to teach canon law at the diocesan seminary and to serve on the diocesan tribunal.

Canon law, the attorney says, has a spiritual element to it. "It's based on the Church's teaching and practice," he says. "I see it as very pastoral — it's there to help people in whatever situation."

Elected in 2014 to the Maryknoll Society's General Council as vicar general, Father Everson applied his expertise to the Society's legal

and administrative matters. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread, the General Council sought ways to protect and sustain its retired priests residing on the New York campus.

"We are a community," Father Everson says. "You have to balance that with a sense of home and other spiritual needs that people have beyond their health."

Maryknoll Father Raymond Finch, who was superior general at the time, says he is grateful for Father Everson's support during those trying years. "He is always ready to respond to the needs of Maryknoll and the needs of evangelization," Father Finch says. "He gives 100% to the people he is serving."

In 2022, Father Everson was assigned to Hong Kong, where he now serves as assistant parish priest at St. Margaret's Church and as canon lawyer for the judicial vicar of the Hong Kong diocese. Maryknoll



Father Everson brings Communion to Linda and Pedro Ching at their home. Pedro, who has Parkinson's disease, finds it difficult to attend Mass at church. (Paul Jeffrey/Hong Kong)

Father Joyalito Tajonera, superior of the Asia region, says that Father Everson's leadership "is a gift to mission, to the local church and to Maryknoll. We all seek his advice as a civil and canon lawyer."

Father Everson also teaches two classes for adult faith formation and initiation into the Catholic Church, known as OCIA (formerly called RCIA), the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.

"The way Father Joe structured our learning is that he encourages us to share our doubts and questions," says a student. "The purpose is to let us understand the core value of being Catholics. It's an ongoing spiritual journey."

"I am absolutely impressed by how many adults have become

Catholics here in Hong Kong. We baptized about 150 at our 2024 Easter Vigil," the missionary says.

Encouraged by Father Everson, students share on their first day of classes their motivations for seeking the faith. Some want to cope with loss and illness, while others want to share a closer connection to their Catholic relatives. Some are seeking truth and peace in tumultuous times and discovering the power of prayer. "Individual lives are touched," Father Everson says.

Father Everson's own journey to the priesthood mirrors his vision of how all-encompassing and enriching missionary work is. For him, it is about inclusivity. "Mission is about learning from the people, being willing to listen and learn," he says. "It isn't about leaving people behind but about creating a wider circle to include others." ✠

Prayer for Vocations

'Feed My Sheep'

Good Shepherd, you saw mankind as sheep without a shepherd, often going astray, vulnerable to danger, living in a world of wolves.

So, you have called us to the work of caring for your flock, and have called some of us to a lifelong commitment of sharing more closely in the life and work of the Good Shepherd.

I thank you for letting me hear your voice as I seek to answer your call. You know all too well my faults, my inadequacies, and my weaknesses. Yet I am humbled to know that you still use me as an instrument for your designs.

I thank you, because through the years of my missionary journey, you have always been for me like a heavenly GPS (Good Providential Shepherd) who has shown me the way, forgiven my wrong turns, and corrected and recalibrated my course when needed, in order to arrive safely at my eternal destination.

Even at times when I find myself with no idea of where I'm going, I know that — having answered your call — you will continue to lead me in right paths and be ever at my side, all the days of my life.

— John Cuff, M.M.



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WELCOMING MIGRANT 'HEROES'

By Giovana Soria || Photos by Octavio Durán, OFM

Migrant ministry run by Maryknoll affiliates in Illinois assists newcomers

Yahelis and José Flores' hearts filled with joy when their children were selected as Students of the Month. Alfonso, 7, and Sarita, 5, were honored in April at their public school in Chicago.

The family had arrived two years ago after a harrowing journey from their native Venezuela that took them through the jungle of the Darién Gap and across mountains, deserts and rivers on their way to the Mexico-U.S. border.

During the journey, smugglers told the parents they had to pay for each child to cross the Guatemala-Mexico border. Yahelis, 24, and her husband had no money left and feared that the smugglers would take their children. "At that moment, I just entrusted us to God," she says. A Good Samaritan — a fellow migrant — paid the smugglers to let the children go.

Now, seeing her children succeed, Yahelis feels those efforts were worthwhile. She also says she is grateful for support from the Migrant Ministry of the Catholic Parishes of Oak Park, Illinois. The ministry is run by a team of interfaith volunteers, including returned Maryknoll Lay Missioners Celine and Don Woznica, who are now members of the Maryknoll Affiliates.

The project started in May 2023 as a response to the humanitarian crisis created the previous year, when Texas Governor Greg Abbott began sending busloads of migrants from the border to Chicago. As the city's shelters filled to capacity, buses dropped off migrants at the 15th District Police Station, near Oak Park, a suburb adjacent to Chicago.

A group of volunteers called Police Station Response Teams, created on the phone application WhatsApp, began collecting tents, bedding, clothing, sleeping bags and food for the new arrivals. "We were getting up to 40 people a week," Don recalls. "We gave them a suitcase with basic toiletries and a blanket. It was called the welcome kit."

Newly arrived migrants are served at St. Edmund Center in Oak Park, Illinois. The project is run by Maryknoll Affiliates Celine and Don Woznica.



Celine says that among the migrants' first concerns was where they could take showers. The vacant rectory of St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy was opened for that purpose.

In January of 2024, the Migrant Ministry moved to a former grade school, which became the St. Edmund Center.

At the center, decorated with flags from the various countries from which the migrants originated, volunteers welcome migrants with a hot breakfast and fresh donated clothing, while the children are shown a room where they can play. The center relies on dozens of volunteers.

"The Holy Spirit connects all these people," says Celine, who is director of program development.

Margaret Burk was invited by a neighbor to volunteer. "I felt like this was an opportunity to serve people in need," she says. A former teacher, Burk helps in the clothing area, where twice a week migrants can select clothes.

St. Edmund volunteers also connect migrants with medical providers, immigration support services, ESL classes, spiritual support and housing or temporary shelter.

"Mentors help migrants with what they need," says Margaret Rudnik, who, as director of housing and legal services, finds apartments for the newcomers. The center has paid up to a year's rent and utilities for 23 families and individuals, allocating up to \$20,000 for each case. Housing is funded by direct dona-



Above: Celine Woznica welcomes guests to St. Edmund Center. Since it began the project has received 19,000 migrant visits. Below: Volunteers serve a warm breakfast.

tions and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Manuel Pérez, 36, is a migrant bussed from Texas to Chicago. "I believe in miracles, because the center provided me an apartment to live in," he says. After getting on his feet, Pérez volunteered at the center.

"Seeing families being torn apart breaks my heart," Rudnik says. "We help to keep families together and give a hand so they can be on their own in a year's time."

The Flores family was having difficulty paying rent for their apartment. José, 27, used to wait at The Home Depot for work as a day laborer. But starting in January, he became afraid to do so, fearful that he would be targeted by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Yahelis contacted Celine and asked for help. The ministry provided \$1,300 to cover rent.

With migrants facing the threat of mass deportations, the center has increased the reach of its immigration support, education and accompaniment programs. Celine created a 24-page Family Action Plan to help migrants prepare in case they are detained or deported.

The plan includes a letter from the pastor of Oak Park's Catholic parishes, Father Carl Morello. "We find ourselves in difficult times, but



Don Woznica (left), a family physician who served as a Maryknoll lay missionary before joining the Maryknoll Affiliates, is co-director of short-term services at St. Edmund Center.



The center offers a wide range of support services, thanks to generous donors and dedicated helpers such as this volunteer assisting a migrant mother and child.

be assured that you continue to be welcome in our community," the letter states. "Do not give up hope, for our Loving God, who has been at your side in your long journeys from your native lands, is the same Loving God who will be at your side now."

"They are too afraid to go out," Celine says of the people she serves. Volunteers give out red, wallet-sized cards informing people of their rights during encounters with ICE.

"We had one case of a migrant who was stopped by ICE, and he showed them the red card we provided," Don says. "ICE let him go."

Don, who is co-director of short-term services, says it is important to make people feel safe at St. Edmund. No one is let through the door until their ID is checked outside. "We never thought about doing this before,"

Don says, "but if the doors are open, anybody can walk in."

The immigration support team continues to help with asylum applications and other documents. While the number of migrants has decreased since January, the center has assisted over 140 asylum seekers with their applications. Since the Migrant Ministry started, the center has received around 19,000 visits from migrants who have benefited from its many services.

Don, who is a family physician, and Celine, who has a doctorate in public health, joined Maryknoll Lay Missioners with their 3-month-old baby in 1981. After studying Spanish in Bolivia, they served in Nicaragua for three years. Don worked at a health center, and Celine worked as a health promoter.

They then served in Oaxaca, Mexico, for six years, working with base ecclesial communities, also known as small Christian communities, and in a project for orphaned girls. In addition, Don volunteered at a parish clinic. After nine years of overseas mission, the couple returned with four children to the States, where they had their fifth child.

Now the Woznicas find themselves again in mission — in Illinois.

Recently, Celine received a call from Yahelis, who wanted to pay back the \$1,300 they were given for rent. "Isn't that amazing?" Celine says. "Yahelis also brings Venezuelan *arepas* (stuffed cornmeal pancakes) to the center."

"Celine has supported us through difficult times," Yahelis says. "I thank God for putting her in my path." In

case she and José are detained, they have designated Don and Celine to take temporary custody of Alfonso and Sarita. Considered part of the Flores family, the missionaries attended the Students of the Month ceremony.

For Don and Celine, the migrants are an inspiration. "They are my heroes, for what they went through," Celine says. "All they want is to work and create a new life." ✧

The names of the migrants mentioned in this article have been changed to protect their identities.

FOR INFORMATION ON BECOMING A MARYKNOLL AFFILIATE,
Contact Robert Short
affiliatebshort@gmail.com
maryknollaffiliates.org



Back from the Brink

By Thomas Gould

Eighty years ago, the United States dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan, killing and maiming hundreds of thousands of people. Despite the terrible lesson of lives lost, tremendous destruction and chronic suffering and illnesses for survivors, the world is dangerously close to another nuclear precipice.

During the past year, Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine. India and Pakistan, both nuclear-armed states, faced off in territorial disputes. In the Middle East, Israel and the United States in June attacked Iran over its accelerated nuclear program.

Since 2023, the United States and Russia have elected to end data sharing of their deployed warheads and launchers as mandated by their New START Treaty. That treaty — the only remaining nuclear treaty between the two largest nuclear-armed states — is set to expire in February 2026, and no replacement treaty has materialized.

In January, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists acknowledged the gravity of the situation by moving the hands of the Doomsday Clock to 89 seconds to midnight, the closest to midnight it has ever been.

The Elders, a group of global lead-

ers working for peace and justice founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007, noted a heightened risk of “nuclear catastrophe” in a May statement titled “No More Hiroshimas.” The statement stresses, however, that “war and nuclear confrontation are not inevitable.” The coming years present an opportunity to reverse course.

President Trump has signaled his willingness to negotiate with Putin. And faith groups, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, have written to the White House to urge nuclear negotiations, referencing President Trump’s own statements. In the U.S. Congress, a resolution introduced in the House of Representatives, H. Res. 317, similarly asks the executive branch to “lead the world back from the brink of nuclear war.”

The de-escalation of nuclear risks is not a partisan issue. It is a moral one.

Pope Saint John XXIII made the Catholic position on nuclear disarmament explicit as early as 1963 in his encyclical *Pacem In Terris* (Peace on Earth): “Nuclear weapons must be banned. A general agreement must be reached on a suitable disarmament program, with an effective system of mutual control.”

The late Pope Francis was a champion of disarmament. Visiting Hiro-



A girl releases paper lanterns on the Motoyasu River to commemorate the World War II atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. (CNS/Francis Mascarenhas/Reuters/Japan)

shima and Nagasaki for the 2019 anniversaries of the bombings, he preached from the pulpit, “The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral. ... How can we speak of peace even as we build terrifying new weapons of war?”

Pope Francis promoted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), a United Nations treaty that aims to eliminate all nuclear weapons, and the Holy See was among the first states to sign and ratify it. The United

States has not signed the TPNW and has voted against U.N. resolutions supporting it. None of the countries possessing nuclear weapons have ratified the treaty.

Until nuclear-armed nations realize that assured mutual destruction is not a means of deterrence but rather a self-fulfilling prophecy, life on earth will hang in the balance. ✞

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

FAITH IN ACTION:

- Read the faith letter to President Trump to ask for nuclear negotiations. <https://mogc.me/ifl-5-15>
- Write to your Representatives in Congress asking for their support of H. Res. 317 <https://mogc.me/HRes317>

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

Like Mother, Like Daughter

By Deirdre Cornell

Raising two daughters with her husband on the outskirts of San Salvador, Clelia Estrada de Cruz instilled in them her own parents' values. "They taught us to be generous with others, and to share," Clelia says.

The family belongs to Cristo Salvador, a resilient parish in the Zacamil neighborhood of Mejicanos, El Salvador, where Maryknoll Father John Spain serves. Maryknoll has a long history in this marginalized community.

"The parish promotes mission, and the integration of its different ministries," Clelia says. "We are in an urban zone with a lot of difficult situations."

Clelia, 67, has worked for the Archdiocese of San Salvador in its Episcopal Vicariate for Human Development since 1991. She has served in disaster relief, HIV/AIDS ministry and health care, and integral ecology based on the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Now, she works with children up to 7 years old and their families. In this country wracked by decades of bloodshed, her program breaks cycles of violence starting in the home.

"The cultural belief is that the belt and yelling are the ways to discipline children," she says. "We try to replace this with a discipline of love and tenderness. We teach different methods.

"Working with the Catholic Church has been a blessing," adds Clelia, whose daughter Carolina Guadalupe, an architect, works in marginal areas.

Her other daughter Sofia Beatriz Cruz Estrada, now 34, follows in her mother's footsteps by working closely with the Church.

After receiving the sacraments of First Communion and confirmation, Sofia helped with catechism classes, often walking alone the dangerous streets to the parish. "I just knew I had to go," she recalls. At around 20, she joined the youth ministry, where she was soon was given a leadership role.

After a year, pastor Father Joaquín Álvarez asked Sofia to represent the parish and its youth ministry at vicariate meetings. The vicariate, in turn, sent her to meetings at the archdiocesan level. Sofia then represented the Archdiocese of San Salvador, serving on the national Bishops' Youth Commission. She joined the World Youth Day pilgrimages to Poland and Panama and attended a special young adults gathering in Rome.

In 2019, Sofia received an extraordinary invitation. The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life was establishing its first International Youth Advisory Body. Sofia was among the 20 young people around the world selected for



Sofia Cruz and Clelia Estrada gather with Maryknoll Fathers John Northrop (far left) and John Spain and with pastor Father Joaquín Álvarez (far right). (Courtesy of Sofia Cruz/El Salvador)

this new advisory committee.

During her four years on the committee, Sofia and other members reflected on relevant issues together. Each year for Pope Francis' celebration of young people on the Solemnity of Christ the King, they responded to his choice of Scripture verse, and the Holy Father considered their input for his message.

For World Youth Day in Portugal two years ago, the committee was "blessed to give ideas to create the Stations of the Cross," Sofia says.

She says she is amazed — and humbled — by her own trajectory. "God has put me here," she says.

Sofia had earned a bachelor's degree in marketing, but began to pursue social work. "I like working with people," she says. As part of a master's degree in project management, she did an internship at Caritas, where she later worked in a joint project with

Catholic Relief Services.

Her work brought her into the same circles as Clelia, her mother.

"We shared the same work, in different ways," Sofia says. Their active participation in the parish, too, serves to "strengthen the bond between mother and daughter." She says she "never feels alone in mission."

Sofia credits Maryknoll Fathers Spain and John "Jack" Northrop for supporting her ministry and for transmitting joy and enthusiasm. For young people, it can be difficult to express themselves, she notes. "Their openness has been a great help."

After the COVID-19 pandemic, Father Joaquín called on Sofia to restart the parish's youth ministry and "reanimate the youth." Once again, she makes her way along the well-worn path to Cristo Salvador.

After all, she says, "We have come to serve." ✠



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2025 STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST



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3RD PLACE: \$150

ASSIGNMENT: Pope Leo XIV is a "Pope of the Americas" — a citizen of both the United States and Peru whose life was shaped by different cultures. In his first words as pope, he spoke of building "bridges with dialogue, with encounter, uniting us all to be one people, always at peace." Share a personal story of how you, or someone close to you, was changed by an encounter that bridged cultures and revealed God's love.

ENTRY: Entries should be 500–750 words. Essays should include your name and division typed on each page. Note: Spelling and grammar count. Students may 1) submit essays and the entry form page online at MaryknollSociety.org/Essay (if 13 or older) OR 2) mail essays to the address below. Mailed

essays should be typed and stapled, each attached to an ENTRY FORM PAGE (available at MaryknollSociety.org/Essay). Essays will not be accepted without an entry form.

ELIGIBILITY: Students in grades 6–8 (Division I) and grades 9–12 (Division II) who are currently enrolled in a Catholic school, religious education program, or youth ministry program are eligible. See MaryknollSociety.org/Essay for official rules.

DEADLINE: Entries must be submitted online or postmarked by MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2025. First-place essays will appear in the Summer 2026 Maryknoll Magazine. All winning entries will be published online at MaryknollSociety.org/Winners by May 1, 2026.

MAIL TO: 2025 Student Essay Contest, Division _____, P.O. Box 117, Maryknoll, NY 10545

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Call 1-914-570-4118 or email Walter Hidalgo at whidalgo@maryknoll.org.

For more educational and catechetical resources, please visit: <https://discoveryourneighbor.org/>

READERS' RESPONSES

STATEMENT APPLAUDED

I applaud the statement from the Maryknoll superior general published in the 2025 Summer issue.

Rather than tens of thousands of federal workers losing their jobs, current available data suggests about 250,000 positions have been affected. While funding for PEPFAR is absolutely critical as described, its effective implementation requires many federal workers who have lost their jobs.

Maryknoll has been a tremendous missionary partner in the fight against HIV in Africa and Asia. The valid reference to “draconian cuts” goes well beyond HIV and affects many other scourges causing great human suffering, including tuberculous, malaria and diarrheal disease.

Much progress has been made, due in part to the decades-long co-operative approach of U.S. private and governmental entities with global partners, including religious organizations. In terms of what we can do, I agree with the specific call to action and add that we should all also call our congressional representatives.

When I reflect on my medical and public health career, which started in northeast Kenya with an externship under the vocational tutelage of Maryknoll Sister Lucia Yu, M.D., M.P.H. and Maryknoll Father Jim Kuhn, and as I witness the current unfolding impacts,

I am very concerned for our world's brethren.

*Michael Iademarco
Washington, D.C.*

*Medical doctor, retired rear admiral
and assistant general for U.S. Public
Health Services*

LIVE IN HOPE

The message of hope in the Summer 2025 edition of *Maryknoll* magazine is encouraging. What especially stands out are the student essays submitted by young people. Their well-thought-out submissions make evident their commitment to the Church and humanity.

These essays are a manifestation of the person and mission of Christ. Who knows, perhaps the featured students will be inspired to serve as lay or ordained ministers?

*Mark A. Sleboda
Redford Township, Michigan*

GUATEMALA MISSION

Another inspiring magazine. I was especially struck by the article “Hope Triumphs in Guatemala” on the ministry of Maryknoll Father William Senger. The photo leapt out at me, and I said to myself, I know him. When I served in the Pando of Bolivia, we worked together. He was a gentle, caring soul. I am encouraged to see him still serving.

*Larry Brixius
Poulsbo, Washington*

The editors invite Maryknoll readers to send us their views. Write to:
Readers' Responses
P.O. Box 302, Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545-0302
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Paul Jeffrey/Bangladesh



Maryknoll Sister Marvelous “Marvie” Misolas, who connects remote forest communities with faculty and staff of Manila’s Miriam College to work together for ecological sustainability, carries on the Maryknoll Sisters’ legacy of 100 years of service in the Philippines. (See story, page 26.)

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