

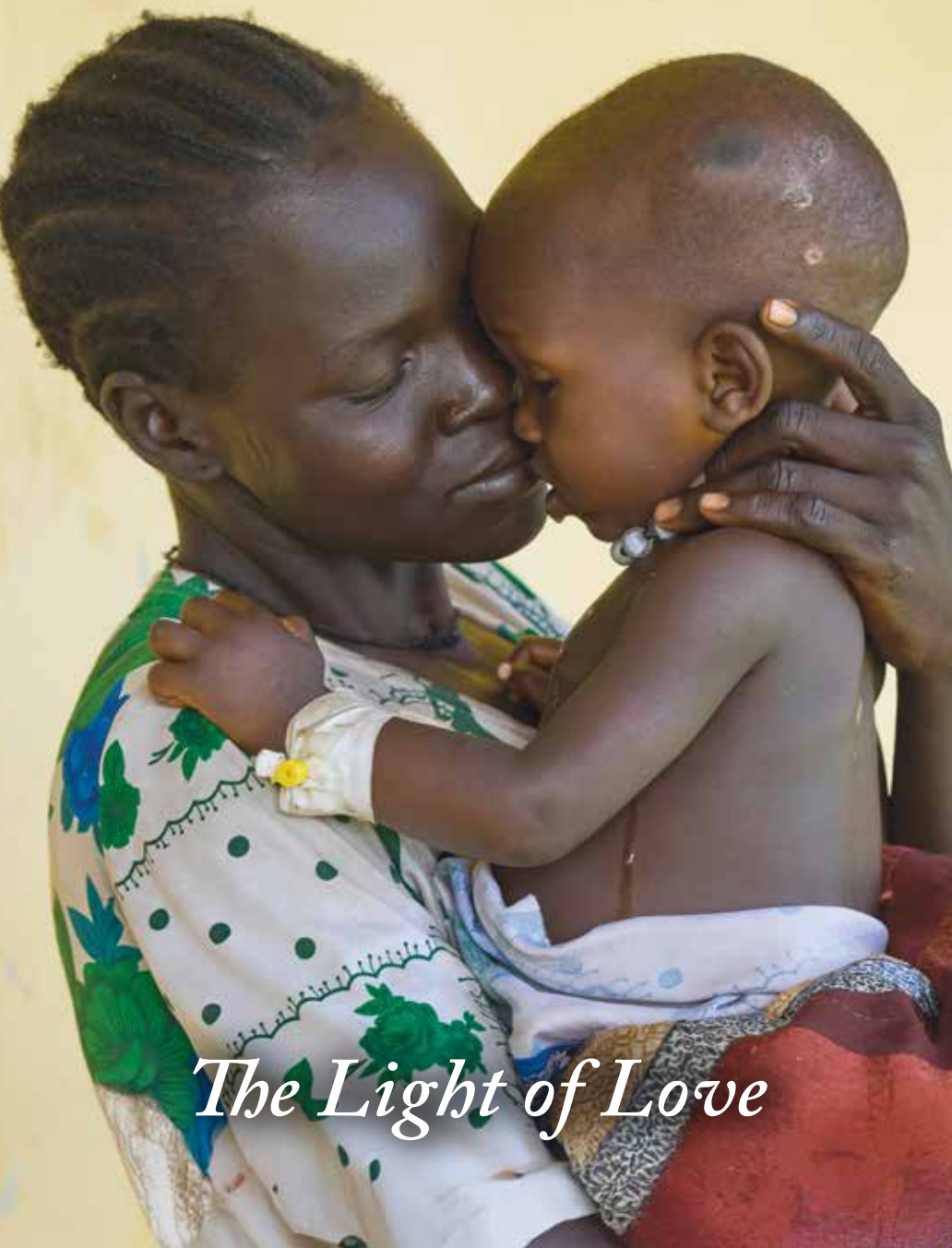


U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

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The Light of Love

FROM THE EDITOR

Immigration — and what is happening right now to immigrants in our country — is something we simply cannot be silent about.

We received various letters and comments on my interview with Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, in our Fall issue of *Maryknoll*, and some of them, both pro and con, are printed in our Readers' Responses. Immigration is an important issue for the Catholic Church, particularly in this country which was founded by and built up by immigrants. Since its early days, the Maryknoll movement has ministered to refugees and displaced people, and to this day Maryknoll missionaries serve migrants here and abroad.

We return to that topic in this issue with a photo meditation by Father Joseph Vereroso on Mother Cabrini, the patron saint of immigrants. In a moving reflection, Sister Catherine DeVito, who serves in Florida's farmworker country, writes of the trauma being inflicted on the children of migrant families by our government's indiscriminate and frighteningly cruel campaign of mass deportations. In another article, Deacon Leonel Yoque tells us the inspiring story of his journey: from Guatemala as an undocumented migrant fleeing his country's political violence, to becoming a permanent deacon who leads Maryknoll immersion trips to his country of origin that help participants better understand its realities.

Often, those who show compassion for migrants are accused to advocating "open borders." Having compassion for those in need and those who are suffering is not a political position; it is taking Jesus' words literally.

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/El Salvador

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The mother of a 1-year-old with raging fever due to malaria walked for five hours to Wau Teaching Hospital, where his life was saved.

COVER CREDITS:

Front: Paul Jeffrey/South Sudan
Back: Octavio Durán/El Salvador

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.



PICRYL/U.S.

Standing *HER* GROUND

Photo Meditation on St. Frances Xavier Cabrini

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*Against all odds she came to these
United States, though her heart longed
To serve the poorest of the poor in China.
Cardinals, bishops and priests opposed
Her every step of the way, dismissing this
Over-ambitious woman as being
In way over her head and beyond
Her abilities to survive, much less thrive,
In a man's world.*

*Politicians too, and the public at large,
Looked down upon her dark skin
And accented English as not belonging,
Not important, not worthy to be given
A second look, much less a helping hand.
Called names — alas, used even today —
Still she stood her ground*

*Not for herself or for her Sisters but for
The impoverished Italian immigrants and
Orphans dwelling beneath New York streets.
She pleaded, implored and protested,
Building from rubble a hospital open to all,
Challenging prejudices about women
And what they can or cannot accomplish.
Opening schools, hospitals, orphanages*

*Around the world, she became the first
U.S. citizen canonized by the Church
And named the Patron of Immigrants.
And thus to her we beg on behalf of
Our newest immigrants, who now suffer
Discrimination from even some descendants
Of those for whom she fought so long ago.*

*By the Sacred Heart of Jesus wounded
For love of the poor, may all who face
Arrest, imprisonment or deportation today
Find courage, comfort and strength
Knowing Mother Frances Cabrini still
Stands her ground by their side.*



MISSIONER TALES



Sean Sprague/Kenya

In Kenya, where I am serving as a Maryknoll lay missionary in the HOPE Project, I met a widow named Lucy. After the death of her husband in 2020, Lucy was left to care for three children with barely any means. Her youngest son, Athman, is now 13 years old but is only in sixth grade. He fell behind because he was in and out of school, depending on whether Lucy could pay the school fees.

In August, our project started supporting Athman's education. He is so happy to be back in school and not have to worry about being sent home because of unpaid bills.

We also included the family in our monthly food distributions and provided them with a water tank, as well as a new bed and mattress. Lucy says the HOPE Project has brought her smile back.

For me, this is what mission is all about — personal encounters, meeting Jesus in others, and sometimes even bringing smiles to those who feel hopeless.

Richard Tarro, MKLM

My wife Ann has been tutoring a 9-year-old Mexican boy whose family is living in fear of deportation. One day the

mom asked if he could stay with us until 10 p.m. Her work hours at a nearby burger flipping joint had abruptly changed, and she had no one to watch him.

Ann, of course, agreed. But how would we entertain our young guest? He's a sweet boy with a speech impediment who is only just learning English. He partially solved our dilemma by taking a nap. When he woke up around 9 p.m., I was prepared, having cooked some delicious pasta. He finished everything on his plate — and then ate seconds — and went home a happy camper.

It was such a small thing to do for that family, and I keep thinking that if all of us do these small things, maybe bigger things will happen.

James Coady, Maryknoll affiliate

Maryknoll Father Joshua Maondo and I are in the first months of our new mission assignment in Bolivia as recently ordained priests. We serve in the Amazon at the remote parish of Chipiriri, where we are becoming part of the people's lives. Energized, I go out to visit, talk and have meals with parishioners. In their sharing, I see a dim star of hope in their hearts.

Visiting families reminds me of Jesus' mission to the marginalized. He was deeply moved by others' brokenness, and their spiritual and economic poverty. He expressed his humanness and even wept.

One day while visiting some of our parishioners, I felt so moved by

the condition of their home. When it rains, their house floods, and a tree outside their door seems to float on water in the yard. They walk through all this water and mud without boots!

However, what most moved me was the reception I received from the family. In spite of their struggles, they offered a freshly caught fried fish, which we shared joyfully at their table.

Pray for me as I continue this mission of presence.

Charles Ogony, M.M.

While I was serving in mission in Kenya, the women in one community told me about rising alcoholism in their village. Most men were spending their daily earnings on illicit brew, draining family incomes and leaving all of the caretaking to their wives. The burden weighed heavily.

The women shared their predicament with the village chairman, but to no avail. Desperate, they decided to act. One early morning they confronted the liquor suppliers, chanting slogans and destroying the brew. They vowed to do this every day. Within a week, every woman in that village had joined this movement, and in less than a month they paralyzed the business of illegal brew. Some of the men started drinking responsibly, while others quit drinking alcohol altogether.

These brave women recognized the power of unity and came together in solidarity for a common cause.

Sia Temu, M.M.

REMEMBERING THE MARTYRS

By George Black

A journalist uncovers new information in the murders of four churchwomen, including two Maryknoll sisters, in El Salvador

For those of us who went to Central America as young reporters in the late 1970s, as bloody civil wars were erupting in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, one of the biggest challenges was to find some fixed compass amid almost unfathomable levels of violence and cruelty. Regardless of our own religious beliefs, many of us found it in the Catholic Church, and nowhere more than among the Maryknoll Sisters. Over the years, they became a moral touchstone for me.

If you wanted accurate informa-

tion that cut through the infamous “fog of war,” you went to the Maryknollers. No one had a deeper understanding of the human rights situation or responded more effectively to the needs of the poor. You were guaranteed lively conversation at a Maryknoll house, and even surprising moments of joy and laughter. Those visits felt like finding sanctuary — even though we knew that was an illusion once the Salvadoran death squads began to kill priests and church workers. No one was safe. Not even American religious sisters.



During a memorial service in Santiago Nonualco, El Salvador, people hold photos of four U.S. churchwomen killed there during the country's civil war. (CNS/Jose Cabezas/Reuters/El Salvador)



Maryknoll Sister Ita Ford (left) worked in Chile before Archbishop Óscar Romero called on religious congregations to help the Church in El Salvador. (Maryknoll Mission Archives/Chile)



Maryknoll Sister Maura Clarke (right) served for two decades in Nicaragua and three years in U.S. mission education before arriving in El Salvador. (Maryknoll Mission Archives/Nicaragua)

By 1980, death squads were operating with impunity, emboldened by the election of Ronald Reagan. Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford were savagely murdered by five members of the Salvadoran National Guard 45 years ago, on Dec. 2 of that year, along with their friends, lay missionary Jean Donovan and Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel of the Cleveland diocesan mission.

Sisters Ita and Maura worked in the northern province of Chalatenango, aiding refugees from the first of the great rural massacres of the war, the slaughter of 600 people on the Sumpul River. Sister Maura had only recently arrived, replacing Sister Carla Piette, who drowned in a flash flood. In the town of Zaragoza, near the grubby Pacific port town of La Libertad, Sister Dorothy and Jean ran a shelter for women and orphans

fleeing the violence in the north.

Three and a half years later, five guardsmen were convicted of aggravated homicide. To most of us who were there at the time, it was inconceivable that they could have acted without higher orders, and State Department officials such as Jeff Smith, the top lawyer assigned to the case, agreed. "It was always hard for me to believe that these guys acted on their own initiative," he told me. But nothing could be proved.

Once you crossed paths with Maryknollers you never forgot them, and for the Maryknoll and Ursuline communities and a small group of lawyers, human rights advocates and surviving family members, the search for the truth was like an ache that never went away.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as research director for the Lawyers

Committee for Human Rights (now Human Rights First), I was privileged to work closely with Ita Ford's late brother, Bill, a Wall Street attorney, and with lawyers from the Center for Justice and Accountability, on a series of lawsuits against two former Salvadoran defense ministers, José Guillermo García and Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, who had been discovered living quietly in Florida as U.S. permanent residents.

They were eventually extradited to El Salvador, but while the churchwomen's murders were part of the case against them, there was no evidence that they had ordered the killings — just that they had been derelict in exercising command oversight.

Since then, the same small group has reconvened periodically to keep the case alive. In 2022 I took one more attempt at uncovering the

true story, and *The New Republic* magazine offered me an assignment to explore all the unanswered questions in depth: how the operation had been conducted, who commanded it, who gave the orders.

I found that as sources grew older, they spoke more freely, if only to unburden a troubled conscience.

Reexamining old evidence yielded new clues. The Freedom of Information Act unearthed documents long kept secret. Conscientious officials at the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (whose mandate has now been scaled back by the Trump administration) tracked down the most secret evidence of all, a clandestine tape recording of the National Guard sergeant who commanded the death squad. With this, and the aid of advanced digital technology, the last

pieces of the puzzle fell into place. They formed a dark and chilling picture that traced the murders to the very heart of El Salvador's death squads. The results were published in the May issue of *The New Republic*.

After this new two-year investigation, we know the name of the officer who commanded surveillance of the Maryknoll sisters' arrival at El Salvador's international airport the night they were killed. We confirmed that the sergeant in charge of the murder squad did indeed receive orders directly from a superior officer and alerted other security forces in the area to the imminent operation. We even discovered that the chief of police intelligence who directed the initial investigation of the crime was himself a death squad leader.

The surveillance operation at the airport was run by a Chile-backed National Police unit commanded by perhaps the most notorious of all Salvadoran officers, Lieutenant Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, whose Atlacatl Battalion later carried out the worst atrocity of the war, the slaughter of 1,000 unarmed civilians of the village of El Mozote. The retired American officer who trained the battalion confirmed to me that Monterrosa had been an asset of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The police officer who ordered the initial criminal investigation of the missionaries' murders, Lieutenant Colonel Aristides Alfonso Márquez — described in one secret CIA cable as "a very mean person who is to be feared" — headed



what was probably the largest, best organized and most secretive death squad in El Salvador.

Another lieutenant colonel and especially notorious right-wing extremist, Roberto Staben, was responsible for gathering specific intelligence against Sister Dorothy and Jean in Zaragoza. The women were "terrorists," he later told an American military attaché, according to one secret cable I unearthed. It had been "a routine wartime execution." But what justified such a preposterous charge? the American asked. Because, Staben answered, they took "messages, medicines, shoes, clothes, and that sort of thing" to refugees.

Bishop Oswaldo Escobar Aguilar of Chalatenango makes a yearly visit to the graves of Sisters Maura Clarke, Ita Ford and Carol Ann "Carla" Piette. (CNS/Rhina Guidos/El Salvador)

Like all senior officers in the domestic security forces, these men came under the direct command authority of the vice minister of defense, Colonel Nicolás Carranza, the CIA's principal asset in El Salvador, who was paid \$90,000 a year for his services.

It was hard to go back to El Salvador for the first time in decades, to relive memories of that traumatic time. Yet it was also inspirational. I visited the quiet cemetery in Chalatenango where Sisters Ita, Maura and Carla are interred.

In a field near Santiago Nonualco,

where the four churchwomen were murdered, a small memorial chapel receives a steady stream of pilgrims. Villagers have erected a small white monument decorated with sculpted angels, photographs of the women and text from the Beatitudes:

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. ... Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:5, 9)✠

George Black is a journalist who covered the wars in Central America from 1979 to 1985.

Great Bridge to Unity

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

Last May 8 is destined to become one of those “Where were you when ... ?” moments. As white smoke rose from the Sistine Chapel and joy erupted at the words *Habemus papam!* I was sitting outside having lunch when Maryknoll’s bells joined the chorus ringing out from churches around the world.

We had an hour to wait to learn who would be the 267th vicar of Christ. Romans and international pilgrims filled St. Peter’s Square with excitement and speculation. Luckily, I am not a betting man, or I’d have lost my shirt! I never imagined that in my lifetime we would have a pope from the United States. Ah, but the Holy Spirit had other ideas.

Robert Prevost’s path to the papacy is unusual for even more reasons. He did not attend seminary in Rome; he joined a religious order; and he served as a missionary in Peru. Yet he clearly caught the attention of Pope Francis, who appointed him bishop of Chiclayo, Peru, in 2015, made him a cardinal in 2023, and named him head of the Dicastery for Bishops in Rome. The Italian press wryly declared him “the least American of the American cardinals.”

Apart from these biographical details, what do we know about our new Holy Father?

I called an Augustinian friend, Father Philip Yang, who studied theology under Father Prevost. Father Yang recalls the panic he and his fellow seminarians felt when Father Prevost became their teacher and formator. “He’s a canon lawyer. We thought, ‘he’s gonna enforce rules,’” Father Yang explained. Which he did, Father Yang says, but with fairness and gentleness, always safeguarding the dignity of his charges.

Pope Leo has signaled that he is Pope Francis’ successor — but not his clone. He made his official appearance in traditional regal attire: red *mozzetta* (shoulder cape), gold brocaded stole and ornate crucifix. In his initial address to the throng at St. Peter’s, he emphasized the peace of the Risen Lord, using the words “mission” and “synodality” numerous times. His humility, transparency and piety won over people from all sides.

Resisting easy labels of “conservative” or “progressive” that nowhere divide the Church more than in the United States, the new pope shows himself to prefer “both/and” rather than “either/or.” He retained his episcopal motto, *In Illo uno unum* (In the One, we are one).

In July he handwrote a letter in Latin to the traditionalist Cardinal Raymond



Pope Leo XIV blesses a child at St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience on June 25, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media/Vatican City)

Burke, who had publicly clashed with Pope Francis, congratulating the cardinal for his 50 years of priesthood and for his undaunted defense of the Latin Mass. Not long after, Pope Leo appointed Father Thomas Hennen, an Iowa priest with experience in campus ministry and LGBTQ+ pastoral care, as bishop of the Diocese of Baker, Oregon.

Our Holy Father already expresses his role as that of a pontiff, from *pontifex maximus*, meaning “greatest bridge builder.” Seeking to heal a deeply polarized Church, he deftly walks the fine line of appealing to both sides without alienating or aggravating either.

At the same time, his commitment to peace is unwavering, as evidenced by his persistent calls for peace in Gaza, Ukraine and other conflicted parts of the world.

In choosing his papal name, Pope Leo XIV clearly identified himself with the noted author of Catholic social teaching, Leo XIII. Yet the legacy of his name goes back much further. The first Leo, known as Pope Leo the Great (consecrated 440 A.D.), held off divisions that threatened to split the Church into East and West. The same Pope Leo I turned back the hordes of Attila the Hun by negotiating unarmed, in private, with the barbaric military leader. No one knows what was said, but Attila called off the invasion of Rome, never to return.

Whether Pope Leo XIV can heal the deep wounds and suspicions threatening Church unity, and whether he can push back against the individualism, materialism and secularism in today’s world remains to be seen, but already he shows himself as willing to try. ✠

'GUARD THIS TREASURE'

By Deirdre Cornell

A Maryknoll priest spends a lifetime in mission accompanying the people of El Salvador and honoring their martyrs

In the city of San Salvador, a street mural portrays a memorable Mass (see photo, page 3). One side of the painted altar shows images of devastation. On the other, vivid colors bring to life a thriving community. A quote on the altar cloth reads, "Guard this treasure." Maryknoll Father John Spain has spent his life in mission carrying out this message.



Father Joaquín Álvarez and Maryknoll Father John Spain (right) visit the tomb of Saint Óscar Romero in San Salvador's cathedral. (Octavio Durán/El Salvador)



Father Spain visits a family in Tutunichapa, a poor area in metropolitan San Salvador settled by people displaced by war and earthquakes. (Eric Wheeler/El Salvador)

Father Spain, known affectionately as “Padre Juan,” began his five decades of service in Central America in 1971. Ordained the previous year at the age of 26, he studied Spanish in Bolivia before arriving in El Salvador, a small country the size of Massachusetts.

The mural illustrates the reality Father Spain entered into as a young missionary. Depicted at the altar are martyrs of the Salvadoran church — including Saint Óscar Romero. “I came in June, and I met him in August,” Father Spain recalls. “The Church here has been shaped by him, along with so many others.”

Father Spain ministered first in the peripheries of the capital. Most residents lived in housing projects built for factory and construction work-

ers who migrated from rural areas. “Our pastoral challenge was to restore their sense of community and revive the faith they received growing up,” Father Spain says. “You may have a job, and even housing, but where was your community?”

The answer was found in base ecclesial communities. “They start talking about their lives, Scripture, the teachings of the Church, and it gives them a community identity again,” Father Spain says. “People come alive with other people.”

In 1978, Maryknoll was entrusted with the rural parish of San Pedro Apóstol in Ciudad Barrios — Óscar Romero’s hometown. Parishioners included subsistence farmers and coffee plantation laborers. “We were invited in to share the deep faith and love of the land,” Father Spain says. “There was poverty, but people had that sense of family, community, identity. They knew who they were.”

The missionary had served on the priests’ council and worked under Father Fabián Amaya, director of the diocesan newspaper and radio; these roles gave him a wide panorama. In both urban areas and the countryside, Father Spain recounts, there was great excitement, “an effervescence,” about implementing the teachings of Vatican II and the Latin American bishops conference.

Saint Pope Paul VI’s 1975 encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangeliza-



Villagers of the Ilopango parish outside San Salvador form a base ecclesial community to reflect on their lives in light of Scripture and Catholic tradition. (Eric Wheeler/El Salvador)

tion in the Modern World) heightened the enthusiasm. “The encyclical came like the May rains,” Father Spain says, echoing San Salvador’s archbishop at the time, who was succeeded by Monsignor Romero.

The “May rains” kept hope alive as El Salvador hurtled toward a civil war that claimed 75,000 lives. Social unrest grew throughout the country, and in the capital a state of siege was declared. Extrajudicial military units known as “death squads” targeted Church and community leaders suspected of “subversion.” “We knew different people who were killed,” Father Spain recalls sadly.

Archbishop Romero addressed the crisis in widely broadcast sermons. “There is a way to know if God is near us,” he said in a homily. “God is close to those who care about the hungry, the naked, the poor, the disappeared, the tortured, the prisoners, the suffering.”

“He had that gift of expressing the voice of the people, the voiceless,” Father Spain says.

On March 24, 1980, while saying Mass, Monsignor Romero was assassinated by a sniper. On Dec. 2 that same year, Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and the lay missionary Jean Donovan were murdered.

“Why did the sisters stay at what they were doing, in spite of threats? Why did Romero stay?” Father Spain asks. They were committed, he says, “to the basic conviction that this is what Jesus calls us to.”

“Father John Spain is a witness to the martyred North American churchwomen and Saint Óscar Romero. He comes alive when talking about them,” says Kevin McCarthy, who has led four immersion trips to El Salvador with Maryknoll’s Mission Formation Ministry. “He has a historian’s mind for details and facts, but because



Father Spain and community members prepare a simple altar for a traditional feast day at Santísima Trinidad Chapel of the parish of Jocoaitique in Morazán. (Sean Sprague/El Salvador)

he knew them, the information he shares is lasting and powerful."

"Their lives have not been in vain," Father Spain says resolutely. "They point a direction for our lives and what we should be doing."

Born in Troy, New York, John Spain was pointed in the direction of mission from an early age. The third of eight siblings, he grew up reading *Maryknoll* magazine. "On Mission Sunday every year in our Catholic newspaper, there was a full-page spread of the 300 missionaries from the Albany diocese, including many Maryknollers," he recalls. Spain left Holy Cross College to join the Maryknoll Society.

The year after Romero and the churchwomen's murders, Father Spain and other Maryknoll priests were asked by their superiors to leave El Salvador because of

threats. He served for nine years in nearby Nicaragua.

In December of 1991 — the cusp of the signing of the peace accords — Father Spain returned to the country he calls home. He joined two Maryknollers, Fathers Ronald Hennessey and William Boteler, in San Ramón at the parish of El Buen Pastor, which had lost some 600 members. Their main ministry, he says, "was to facilitate reconciliation and healing."

Father Spain eventually helped turn over the parish to the Archdiocese of San Salvador. Then he and Maryknoll Father James Lynch opened a new parish in San Roque, where they rebuilt homes destroyed by earthquakes. "Starting a new parish means getting to know the people," says Father Lynch, who is now vicar general of the Maryknoll Society. "It was important to listen



Father Spain chats with Cristo Salvador youth group member Ronald González Cornejo, whose mother and grandmother have served with Maryknollers. (Octavio Durán/El Salvador)

to their stories, their joys and sorrows, because listening is the first step of evangelization."

By 2005 the new parish church was inaugurated, with three chapels rebuilt, and that parish, too, was handed over to the archdiocese. "My mission has always been to support the local church," Father Spain says.

"Even during the most difficult years, I didn't go through it alone," he says. "That's the prized possession of my time here."

Father Spain, 82, has served since 2010 at Cristo Salvador Church in the Zacamil neighborhood of Mejicanos in metropolitan San Salvador. The parish — an oasis for communities marked by emigration and gang violence — formerly included the territory of El Buen Pastor.

The pastor of Cristo Salvador, Father Joaquín Álvarez Campos, says their

friendship goes back even further. "I met Father John when I was a seminarian," recalls Father Álvarez, who ministered throughout his country's civil war. He keeps a portrait of Saint Óscar Romero in the church. "His expression fills me," he says. "It gives me strength to help the people."

In addition to maintaining the church and two chapels, the parish runs a youth ministry and a ministry for the sick, in which Maryknoll Father John "Jack" Northrop served until returning to the States last year. "They walk with the people," Father Álvarez says of the Maryknollers. "We make a good team."

Mission is about "being close to the poor," Father Spain says. "They understand what suffering is, they know what loss is. But they also know what hope is. It's wonderful to be with people who know what life is all about."✠

FLOWERS *from* Tanzania

By Andrea Moreno-Díaz

*Two Tanzanian women
make final vows
as Maryknoll sisters*



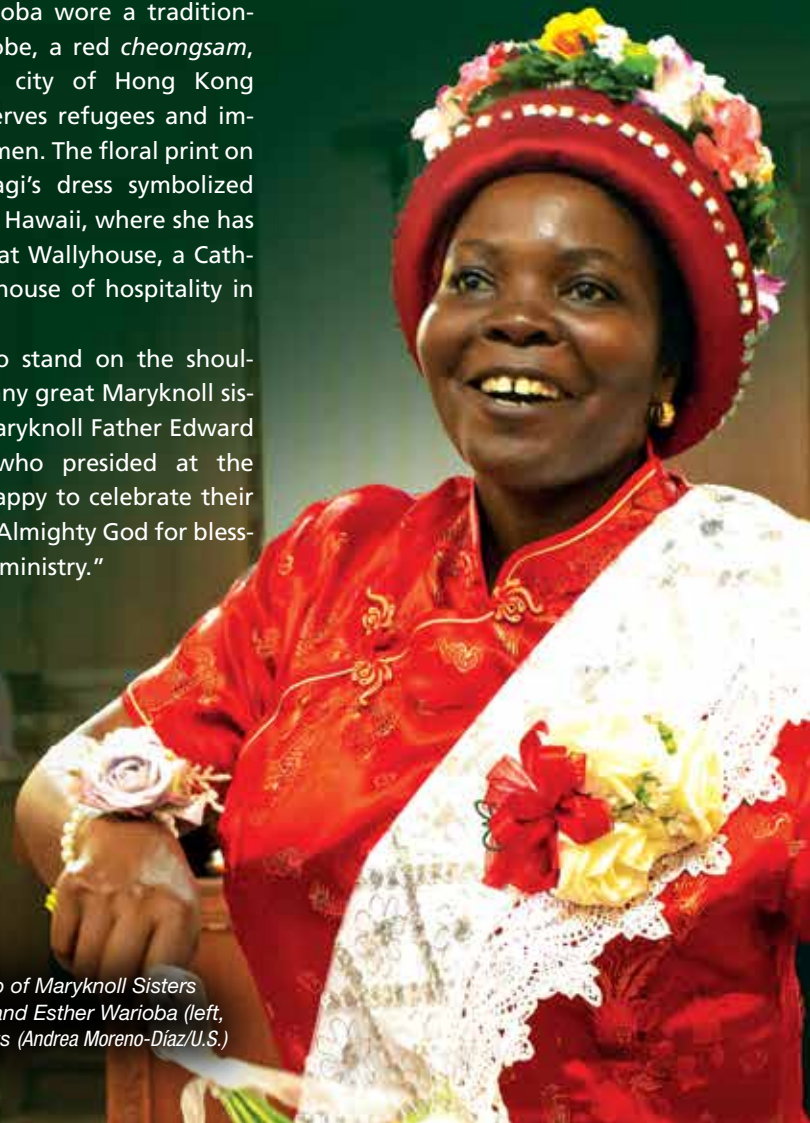
On June 22, the Maryknoll Sisters Center stirred with joy as Felista Wanzagi and Esther Warioba made their final vows at the Annunciation Chapel in Ossining, New York.

To the tune of a song in Swahili, Sisters Wanzagi and Warioba processed to the altar, adorned with Hawaiian garlands and wearing dresses that represented their mission journeys.

Sister Warioba wore a traditional Chinese robe, a red *cheongsam*, evoking the city of Hong Kong where she serves refugees and imprisoned women. The floral print on Sister Wanzagi's dress symbolized her return to Hawaii, where she has volunteered at Wallyhouse, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Honolulu.

"These two stand on the shoulders of so many great Maryknoll sisters," said Maryknoll Father Edward Dougherty, who presided at the Mass. "I'm happy to celebrate their lives and ask Almighty God for blessings on their ministry."

In her address, Maryknoll Sister Antoinette "Nonie" Gutzler quoted three verbs from the day's Scriptures: to become, to give, to gather. She told the new sisters to become the body of Christ, to give of themselves "for the life of the world" and to "gather the fragments of your community and mission experiences in Hong Kong, Guatemala, Tanzania, Hawaii and here at Maryknoll."



Composite photo of Maryknoll Sisters Felista Wanzagi and Esther Warioba (left, right) at final vows (Andrea Moreno-Díaz/U.S.)

These fragments, she continued, “will become the seeds of tomorrow.”

Originally from Tanzania, both women attest to the harvest brought forth by seeds of mission planted by the first Maryknollers in the African continent almost 80 years ago.

Sister Wanzagi, 39, was inspired since her childhood by missionaries such as Maryknoll Fathers Edward Dougherty and John Eybel, who served at her family’s parish. After high school, while she worked as a math teacher, her calling deepened.

“I encountered many students living with HIV/AIDS,” she says. “Their struggles ignited a fire within me to make a difference.”

Joining the Maryknoll Sisters in 2014, she worked in the sisters’ Home Care unit before her assignment in 2018 to Guatemala. There she served HIV/AIDS patients at Santa María Hospice, founded by Maryknoll Sisters Delia “Dee” Smith and Marlene Condon. An important part of the work, she says, was educating families to fight stigma and ease patients’ inclusion in society.

Returning to Tanzania the following year, Sister Wanzagi worked with Maryknoll Affiliate Constanca Bogoma in Chanua Group, a project in Mwanza that supports about 60 children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS, as well as a women’s group. In 2024, she was assigned to Hawaii where she volunteers at St. Francis Hospice and Maryknoll Grade School.

Sister Warioba, 43, was also inspired by Maryknoll missionaries while growing up in Tanzania.

After her father died of illness when Warioba was a toddler, her mother was left to raise four children alone. Unlike most other parents in the village, her mother had completed secondary school.

“She encouraged me to get an education,” Sister Warioba says. “I loved going to school.”

To help her pursue that dream, Maryknoll Father James A. Conard sponsored her education at Kowak Girls Secondary School, which he had founded in the early 1990s. Warioba then studied adult education at the University of Dar es Salaam. She wanted, she says, to give other women the gift she received.

“In my village, many women and girls didn’t go to school, or they only went up to fifth grade,” she says.

Joining the Maryknoll Sisters in 2014, Sister Warioba was first assigned to the Sisters Center in New York. There she worked as a coordinator for the Maryknoll Mission Institute and in Home Care for elderly sisters. In 2019, she was assigned to Hong Kong, where she volunteers in prison ministries that accompany inmates and offer them educational opportunities.

For both sisters, the final vows Mass and ceremony reaffirmed their vocation and their mission experiences. “I felt the presence of God,” Sister Warioba says. “For a moment, I saw God’s glory.”

Sister Wanzagi says that making final vows is a fulfillment of the path she was already on. “It’s why I said yes to God from the beginning.” ✕

“The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

— Matthew 19,14



Courtesy of Felista Wanzagi/Tanzania

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Pope Leo's Wisdom

for Seminarians

By Raymond Lee, M.M.

A Maryknoll seminarian reflects on his visit to the Vatican for the Jubilee of Seminarians

I am grateful that I was able to attend the Jubilee of Seminarians, along with my fellow Maryknoll seminarian Samuel Mutuku, last June 23 and 24. Rome's summer heat was unmerciful, but fortunately most events were held indoors. The main gathering was the meditation led by Pope Leo XIV in St. Peter's Basilica, which is spacious enough to accommodate all 4,000 participants.

In his meditation, the Holy Father called on seminarians to engage in sincere, ongoing examination. "Keep in mind Saint Augustine's constant invitation to return to the heart," he said, "because it is there that we will find God."

In my vocational discernment, I have been told that no matter how many spiritual direction sessions we have, we must turn to quiet prayer to truly know what God is asking of us.

In silence we can return to our hearts and hear God's voice. No spiritual director can take God's place. God is like an intimate Father who wishes to speak directly to our hearts. As Saint Augustine said, "The Lord is closer to us than we are to ourselves."

In his Jubilee of

Seminarians message, Pope Leo said, "Unless we encounter God, we will never really be able to know ourselves." I believe that frequent prayer and listening to God in the silence of our hearts help us know ourselves more deeply.

As a Maryknoll seminarian, I am grateful that Maryknoll gives me the freedom and space to cultivate my own interior life. In our formation, we are reminded that beyond our daily communal prayers and Mass, we must also make time for personal prayer to receive God's strength and guidance. Building this habit is essential for a foreign missionary, as there are times when we must carry out our work without the immediate support of a community. Without the habit of personal prayer, sustaining mission would be very difficult.

I hope that Pope Leo's advice will help me and other seminarians to walk faithfully on our vocation journeys. I see Our Lady as a perfect model for anyone discerning a vocation. She constantly pondered God's word in her heart and treasured it within.

Our Lady of Maryknoll, pray for us! ✞

Raymond Lee, who made his first oath to the Maryknoll Society last summer, studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

Maryknoll Seminarians Samuel Mutuku and Raymond Lee (left, right) went to Rome for the Jubilee of Seminarians. (Courtesy of Raymond Lee/Vatican City)



ORBIS BOOKS

Spotlight

Preview by Robert Ellsberg

"We come here to begin to relieve an ancient wrong. We wish especially to restore to this Earth its ancient joy. For while much of what we have done is beyond healing, there is a resilience throughout the land that only awaits its opportunity to flourish once again with something of its ancient splendor." — Thomas Berry



The work of Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest, ecological prophet and self-described "geologist," is the focus of this "Book of Hours." Editor Kathleen Deignan, a Sister of the Congregation of Notre Dame and the editor of previous "breviaries" drawn from Thomas Merton and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, has arranged readings from Berry under themes divided into eight days. Each day includes prayers, hymns and readings for the four moments of the day: Dawn, Day, Dusk and Dark. The result is truly a book of hours, a guide to daily prayer and meditation drawn from Berry's profound, faith-filled understanding of nature and our place in the earth community.

Berry, who died in 2009, became well-known for his work on what he called "the universe story," the effort to set our own human

story within the immensity of the vast and evolving universe. In his many books, including *The Dream of the Earth*, he outlined the principles of ecology and defined the "great work" that lies before us: to develop an "Ecozoic" consciousness capable of sustaining life on this planet. His work anticipated the principles of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* with its call for "ecological conversion" and a spirituality attuned to care for our common home. This Book of Hours could well serve as an invitation to incorporate that spirituality in our personal prayer and corporate worship.

The book begins with a meditation by Berry on a boyhood experience while standing in a meadow filled with lilies. That numinous moment, he said, provided orientation and meaning to his later life, an early intuition of the

mystery of life and our relationship with nature. "Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good," he concluded; "what is opposed to this meadow or negates it is not good."

This lesson applied to many dimensions of life, including religion: "Religion too, it seems to me, takes its origin here in the deep mystery of this setting. The more a person thinks of the infinite number of interrelated activities taking place here the more mysterious it all becomes, the more meaning a person finds in the Maytime blooming of the lilies, the more awestruck a person might be in simply looking out over this little patch of meadowland." This theme of interconnection of all created beings, and the challenge to allow this truth to shape our spirituality and our practice, permeates the texts gathered here.

Describing the motive for this work,

Sister Kathleen writes: "Ours is an era of both evolutionary and revolutionary transmutations affecting every facet of terrestrial life. We cosmic pilgrims are making our way on a heroic journey in an ineffable, still-unfolding universe toward a destiny both unknown and unimaginable. For such a hazardous adventure we need guides of all sorts. Most especially, we need spiritual guides — sages and shamans, mystics and mentors — to shine forth and illuminate the way before us with their hard-won and divinely-inspired wisdom."

Father Thomas Berry was such a guide. "May [his words] become a new vocabulary of Ecozoic prayer, as Thomas opens for you the doors to the 'house of life' shining forth at dawn, at day, at dusk, and at dark."✧

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

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A photograph of a vigil at night. In the foreground, a young girl with blonde hair, wearing a dark jacket and a patterned scarf, looks off to the side with a somber expression. She is holding a brown teddy bear and two lit candles in small holders. Behind her, a woman with blonde hair tied back looks down with a sad expression. To the left, the profile of a man is visible, looking towards the right. In the background on the right, another person wearing glasses is partially visible. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the candles held by the participants.

Christ goes before us.
The world needs his light.

— *Pope Leo XIV*
May 8, 2025

Mourners attend a vigil at Lynnhurst Park in Minneapolis Aug. 27, 2025,
after a shooting at Annunciation Church. (OSV News/Tim Evans/Reuters/U.S.)



FISHING *for* JUSTICE

Text and Photos by Paul Jeffrey

*A Maryknoll priest and his partners in mission assist
migrant fishers in Taiwan*

*Maryknoll Father Joyalito Tajonera, who serves in Taiwan, ministers to migrant fishers as
part of the Catholic Church's worldwide apostolate providing pastoral care to seafarers*



A migrant fisher untangles nets aboard a boat docked at Taichung Harbor. Some 7,000 Filipinos work long hours in difficult conditions on Taiwan-based fishing vessels.

Gerald Mustago left his home in the Philippines eight years ago to become a fisher in Taiwan, home to the world's second largest deep-sea fishing fleet.

"I couldn't make enough money to support my wife and children, so I came here to work on the fishing boats," he says. Every month he sends a few hundred dollars home to his wife and two children.

Mustago works on a ship that docks in Taichung Harbor but is never moored there for long. He spends weeks on end working the nets as his ship chases fish stocks being depleted by overfishing. Some Taiwan-based boats travel as far as Africa, relying on more than 20,000 Indonesian and over 7,000 Filipino migrants to do the hard work.

And the work is truly hard, says

Mustago, who often must work 10- to 12-hour shifts.

"Other times I'll rotate with another fisher," he says. "I'll work for two hours then rest for two hours while the other guy works. Then we'll switch again, over and over throughout the day and night." Mustago adds that the boat once ran aground off the coast of Japan when the captain fell asleep at the helm.

Maryknoll Father Joyalito "Joy" Tajonera, who directs the Taiwan chapter of Stella Maris, the Catholic Church's maritime ministry for seafarers and fishers, says inadequate sleep is just one of many challenges.

"It's not sleep; it's a nap. And it's a very cramped sleeping space," he says, describing an overall "dangerous work environment."

Father Tajonera came to Taiwan in

2002 to serve migrant workers from the Philippines. His ministry includes a bustling shelter and a lively Catholic community centered in Taichung.

Most migrants in Taiwan work on land, in factories that crank out computer chips, camera lenses, ball bearings and a wide variety of industrial components. The smaller number of migrants who work the boats aren't as visible, since they spend so little time ashore.

Yet Stella Maris — a worldwide network — is present in several Taiwanese ports.

"When we first started coming to the port, communication was a big issue for the seafarers and fishers," says Cecilia Huang, who since 2012 has coordinated the group's presence in Taichung. "They had no way to keep in touch with their families back home, much less have access to information about their salaries and rights. So we brought a laptop with us and used Skype." The volunteers would share food, clothing and other items with the fishers. "Sometimes the ship captains would invite us aboard to celebrate Mass," she says.

"But we also listened," she continues. "They told us about their difficulties with dishonest recruiters, illegal salary deductions, long hours and abuse, and how they had to stay on the boat even though it was docked. As we heard their complaints, we educated them about their rights and encouraged them to reach out to the Taiwanese government for help."

In recent years the Taiwanese government has become more responsive to the complaints of migrant workers. Yet the work of fishers is handled by the government's Fisheries Agency, part of the Ministry of Agriculture, rather than its Ministry of Labor. Sea-based migrant workers simply don't get sufficient official attention.

"If they're out to sea they are out of sight, and thus out of luck," Father Tajonera says.

The priest advocates for Wi-Fi on board vessels, which would allow workers to monitor their salaries, report labor violations and keep in touch with their families back home, he says.

Father Tajonera — who has modeled his shelter on Catholic Worker houses of hospitality — is quick to respond when called upon for help for migrant fishers, Huang says.

"I just call Father Joy. 'No problem,' he always says. 'Just come.' He makes space for them in the shelter, listens to their stories, and helps them figure out what steps to take to defend their rights," Huang says.

"We get referrals from the Fisheries Agency and from immigration," Father Tajonera says. "They'll call up and say, 'A boat is stranded here, and the workers have no place to go. Can you shelter them?' We always say yes." He adds, "We welcome everyone."

Father Tajonera and Huang often coordinate with other Stella Maris organizations. "When a fisher has problems in a foreign port," the



Father Tajonera blesses the rosaries of Filipino migrant fishers. In addition to pastoral services, the priest offers emergency shelter and human rights and labor advocacy.



Cecilia Huang, coordinator of Stella Maris ministry in Taichung since 2012, says that listening to the concerns of migrant fishers is essential to this mission.

missioner explains, “the local Stella Maris people can reach out to their counterparts in the worker’s home country and work together to resolve their immediate problems.”

They also collaborate globally with environmental groups and labor organizations. In May of 2024, Father Tajonera coordinated a conference in Taichung that brought together people from around the world who are working for fishers’ welfare. The participants committed to keeping up pressure on the fishing industry and regional governments to combat human trafficking and slavery at sea.

Taiwan’s government has been particularly singled out. In September of 2024, fish from Taiwan was put on the U.S. Department of Labor’s “List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor.” It was the third consecutive listing of Taiwan in the biennial report.

Then in December, the environmental organization Greenpeace published a report stating that it has received 10 reports from migrant fishers who allegedly experienced forced labor and illegal fishing on Taiwan-based boats. The workers named 12 Taiwanese vessels accused of confiscating identification documents from workers, with some ships practicing debt bondage.

Taiwan’s Fisheries Agency has responded to the pressure by increasing the monthly wage for migrant fishers to \$550, ensuring direct and full payment of wages and launching a fund to subsidize Wi-Fi. Officials at the agency say it has increased insurance coverage for fishers, installed video surveillance on some ships, improved labor and living conditions and better managed recruitment agents. They have hired new inspectors to guarantee compliance.

Father Tajonera believes the next

step is to turn the spotlight on the companies that acquire the fish.

“It’s not enough to visit the fishers in the port or welcome them to our shelter. Those are important ministries, but if things are going to change, we’ve also got to focus on who buys the fish,” he says. “What’s their public commitment to corporate social responsibility, to basic human rights? What are they doing to stop overfishing?”

According to Charles Niece, director of Maryknoll’s human rights and supply chain transparency project in Taichung, pressuring seafood corporations to honor environmental responsibility and labor rights has long been a challenge because of the difficulty in tracing fish from its source to the final consumer.

“Maryknoll helps individual fishers present their cases to the authorities, but we’ve had a hard time raising the issues with corporate buyers

because of the lack of traceability,” Niece says. “We’re working with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and other NGOs to encourage seafood buyers to improve their policies.”

Niece says workers’ advocates are overcoming this obstacle. In its December report, Greenpeace used the code stamped on cans of one brand of tuna sold in the United States to identify the individual boats that had caught the fish inside.

“Working with other NGOs,” Father Tajonera adds, “we’ve become a leader in pressing for change through following the supply chain that leads to that can of tuna in your neighborhood supermarket.”✱

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.

The Darkness of This Time

By Catherine DeVito, M.M.

A Maryknoll sister reflects on her work with migrant children and families

My commute each morning begins before dawn. Usually I welcome the darkness, which provides coolness, stillness and time for reflection. I make my way to the clinic where I work supporting at-risk moms and babies in a rural, underserved, predominantly migrant farm-worker town in Southwest Florida.

The people we serve are mostly from Central America and Haiti. Many arrived in the States with work visas or under the Temporary Protective Status (TPS) program, a humanitarian provision that grants temporary legal status to eligible foreign nationals who cannot safely return to their home countries due to armed conflict, environmental disasters or other pernicious conditions.

But in recent months, that protection was ended abruptly for many families, even as conditions in their home countries continue to deteriorate. As one mom told me, “We went to bed as legal and we woke up as illegal criminals.”

Their dream of raising their children in a country where violence and fear don’t govern has turned into a nightmare — the very type of environment that the TPS program was designed to relieve them from.

Out of desperation, others had taken the risk of entering the States without going through a process like TPS. If faced with similar circumstances, most of us would do the same for our family’s survival. It’s easy to distance ourselves from these realities, especially if we have not walked with others who live this situation daily.

Like us, these people have names, not labels; they have family histories. They love and are loved. There are lasting effects for immigrants who undergo trauma, not only on individuals, but on those who care about them and the local communities they are part of.

In my work in integrated healthcare for women, infants and small children, I have learned the importance of the experiences a child lives through. What happens in their environment, especially at an early age, impacts their development and behavior, influencing their health and quality of life later as adults.

Heidy Sánchez, deported to Havana, Cuba, cries after talking to her daughter, a toddler, in Florida. Deportation protections for hundreds of thousands of legal immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela have ended. (OSV News/Mario Fuentes/Reuters/Cuba)





Mexican migrant workers harvest blueberries at a farm in Lake Wales, Florida. The vast majority of U.S. agricultural workers are foreign-born. (OSV News/Marco Bello/Reuters/U.S.)

Recently, a parent shared with me her feelings of anguish because her husband was detained. The mother also worried about their 2-year-old daughter. Initially when the mom would speak to her husband on the phone, the toddler expressed excitement and delight. However, the child has started to turn away upon hearing his voice, and has stopped talking.

During my morning commute, I reflect on the families and babies I am scheduled to see. The number

of missed appointments concerns me. Parents are afraid they may be stopped on the road by immigration or local law enforcement officers. Infants and toddlers are not receiving their regular checkups or the medical attention they need.

Churches are encouraging their congregations to stay home rather than risk detainment. A communal culture based on *convivencia* (togetherness) with extended family and friends, that celebrates every passage of life and relies on min-

isters for encouraging words of hope and comfort, is being made to isolate and go into hiding.

Resilient, family-oriented, hard-working and faithful people face new and unreasonable challenges. Parents now hesitate to accompany their children to school. For young children, that absence can be unsettling; some worry that mom or dad might not be there when they go home. Parents are much less likely to attend school meetings, becoming less involved in their children's education.

Of the people who had entered the States without the protection of

programs like TPS, most would have begun the long process of seeking a legal means of remaining. That is no longer the case because of heavy interagency policing with the goal of expedited deportations. The fear and reality among the people is that if apprehended, they will not be permitted to follow due process.

Whatever our responses may be to complex immigration policy issues, they must include compassion. I'm reminded of what Jesus says in St. Matthew's Gospel (25:31-46) when he told his friends that they visited him in prison and welcomed him when he was a stranger. His friends couldn't remember doing any of these things. Jesus made it clear that when we perform these works of mercy for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do them for him.

When we respond to others with compassion, we love as he loves, and hearts are transformed. Policy is complicated, but it can be undertaken with compassion, dignity and respect, which from my perspective, are what we are missing.

The darkness of my morning commute always brings the light of a new day. Hope sustains me. Our acts of goodness and kindness toward each other will be the light that overcomes the darkness of this time. ✠

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Maryknoll Sister Catherine DeVito has served in El Salvador, Mexico, Panama and Bolivia as well as the United States.

God, Present in My Journey

By Leonel Yoque

A Maryknoll missionary disciple reflects on his story of migration and service

One day while I was studying law at the University of San Carlos in my native Guatemala, there was an evacuation order during final exams due to a bomb threat. Everyone left the building in dismay. Days later, 10 student leaders were kidnapped. Five were murdered and the others reported missing, never to be seen again. These events, which took place in August and September of 1989, were added to a growing list of kidnappings and murders of university students.

The students were among the 200,000 casualties of Guatemala's 36-year civil war. From 1960 to 1996, governmental armed forces clashed with guerrilla groups, resulting in serious human rights violations.

The government blamed subversive forces for the student killings. Later, international reports indicated that many students were victims of military operations.

During this time, the situation in Guatemala City intensified even more. The government declared a curfew; no one was allowed to go out after 6 p.m. University classes were canceled, and public gatherings were banned. At night, soldiers

patrolled the streets. If they found someone, they could arrest them and force them to join the army. Subversive groups also pressured young people to join their cause.

In rural areas of the country, where the conflicts first began, the violence became unbearable. Many Indigenous communities were trapped. Severe human rights violations, torture and murders occurred, and entire village communities were razed.

I found myself at a dead end, despite having been born in "the land of eternal spring." Protected by a chain of impressive volcanoes, with dense jungles and beautiful lakes and rivers that paint the landscape, Guatemala is teeming with life. Recognized among the world's 20 most diverse countries, it is home to a large part of the planet's biodiversity. In this multicultural nation, 22 languages are spoken including Mayan, Garifuna and Xinka.

I had a wonderful childhood in Guatemala City with my parents and two sisters. There were many role models for service within my family. My grandmother Gabina was active in the parish, accompanying families as a community prayer leader when



Deacon Leonel Yoque, who works for Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers' Mission Formation Ministry, awards a prize to Maryknoll Student Essay Contest winner Sophia Tejwani in Thousand Oaks, California. (Courtesy of Leonel Yoque/U.S.)



Above: In 2008, Leonel Yoque was ordained a permanent deacon for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. (Courtesy of Leonel Yoque/U.S.) Below: Yoque distributes Communion in 2017 at a religious education congress held in Inglewood, California. (Nelson Bracamonte/U.S.)

they lost a loved one. Growing up, I wanted to become a professional soccer player. I also considered a career in law. I was fortunate that my parents sent me to study at a prestigious university in the capital.

However, amid the violence, my dreams were dashed. The only option I had was to leave Guatemala. I understand now why people speak of “forced migration” when someone doesn’t want to leave their home but feels there’s no choice.

I embarked on a 20-day journey to reach the United States. I remember walking all night through the mountains to the border in San Diego, California. Thank God I arrived safe and sound.

Adapting to the United States was a whole other challenge, as I didn’t speak English and wasn’t familiar with the lifestyle. I had to work hard to make a living. I recall my first job, as a gardener. It was a sweltering summer, and I had no prior experience. I would come home exhausted and wake up with muscle pain. But I had to support myself and also send money back home to my parents in Guatemala, as the situation there wasn’t improving.

The owner of the gardening business convinced me to attend classes to learn English. One day he said, “I’ll get you a job at a restaurant in the afternoons so you can study in the mornings.” I was very excited to go back to school. By learning English, I could access better opportunities.

Hoping to return to my country, at first I thought I’d be staying in the

United States for only a short time. But although a peace agreement was signed in 1996, the violence in Guatemala hadn’t completely stopped.

I had applied for asylum in the United States and was granted a work permit and a driver’s license. But I couldn’t travel back to my home country. For 18 years, I couldn’t see my family. During those years, my grandmother Gabina and other relatives passed away. There were weddings, birthdays and other special moments that I missed.

With a backpack full of ideals and a lot of faith, I overcame many challenges in the United States until I achieved my dreams. God guided me with a clear purpose. I had a mission. At 25 years old, I began serving at Holy Cross Church in Los Angeles. In this community, I was able to deepen the faith that had been instilled in me since childhood. Inspired by examples of faith, I always saw myself as someone who wanted to serve others. When an invitation arose to study for the diaconate, I accepted.

Looking back, I see that my journey has been filled with challenges, sacrifices and hope.

After years of waiting unsuccessfully to be approved for asylum, I applied for status under a new law to assist Central American migrants called NACARA 203. I was granted permanent residency and later American citizenship. In 2008, I returned to Guatemala. It was an emotional homecoming, as my heart was filled with joy as well as sadness for the time and the people I had lost.



Immersion trips to Guatemala include a visit to Caminando Por La Paz, a center founded by a Maryknoll priest and now run by Maryknoll Affiliates. (Courtesy of Leonel Yoque/Guatemala)

Ordained a permanent deacon for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, I completed a master's degree in pastoral theology. I worked for nonprofit organizations serving neglected communities in Los Angeles until an opportunity arose to pursue mission ministry with the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.

For the past 16 years, I have served as a Maryknoll missionary disciple. Each year I lead mission immersion trips to several countries — including Guatemala. People from the United States can experience this beautiful country firsthand, connecting with its people and being enriched by their faith and culture, while also learning about their daily challenges and struggles.

For me, each trip allows me to

heal the emotional scars of leaving Guatemala as a teenager. For this, and for his constant presence in my life, I am eternally grateful to God.

Reflecting on my journey, I realize that migrants are not just numbers; we are people with dreams, families and hopes for a better future. I am grateful for the opportunities I have had in the United States and the chance to reconnect with my homeland. But I also know others who have not had the same opportunities and are still living in the shadows. I pray that the dreams of our migrant brothers and sisters will also come true. ✠

Deacon Leonel Yoque leads outreach to Hispanic Catholics for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.

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Mango Tree CATHEDRALS

By Marj Humphrey, MKLM

Maryknoll lay missionaries in East Africa lead a course in nonviolence and conflict resolution



Joanne Blaney and I, Maryknoll lay missionaries, were invited to Northern Uganda last year by the Archdiocese of Gulu. Much of our work took place in the shade of huge, leafy mango trees laden with ripening fruit.

The Gulu area is largely populated by a Nilotic ethnic group called the Acholi, whom I first met three decades ago. These resilient people, who had survived the Idi Amin military dictatorship of the 1970s, face cattle-raiding and land takeovers.

Current conflicts are exacerbated by past trauma. For over 20 years, the people suffered from what they call “the insurgency,” a reign of terror carried out by the Lord’s Resistance Army beginning in the mid-1980s. Boys were abducted to be child soldiers, and girls as young as 9 years old were subjected to horrific abuse. Those who avoided capture recalled with anguish spending their childhoods hiding in the forests. Most had family members killed.

“Our history is violence, violence, violence,” says Yasinto Okot, director of the diocesan Justice and Peace team. Joanne and I collaborated with the team to offer Trauma Healing, Nonviolence and Restorative Justice training courses for 60 parish and community leaders and 25 religious sisters. The first phase took place at central locations. In the second, we traveled with our Ugandan colleagues to reach the participants who had attended. In four months we covered a lot of ground.

Most of the 32 parishes represented are in outlying villages — some very remote — as far as the South Sudan border. Some days we drove for hours on rutted dirt roads in sweltering heat. At the end of each road, we were welcomed by catechists, religious sisters, teachers and community leaders. Seated on rickety wooden or plastic chairs, we were sheltered by the cooling shade of magnificent old mango trees, occasionally dodging as we heard a cracking sound above — sign of an impending mango falling!

Maryknoll Lay Missioners Joanne Blaney and Marj Humphrey (center, right) with Yasinto, Patrick, Lucy of the Justice and Peace team (All photos courtesy of Maryknoll Lay Missioners/Uganda)



The course taught them, many said, that nonviolence starts in their own hearts. Joanne recalls the insights of two participants. “I was very angry,” one said. “I used to beat my children. Now I listen and dialogue with my family and the community leadership team.” Another, who is a teacher, said, “I changed how I interact with the students. [Before the course] I did not listen, and my way of communication caused more conflicts. Now I bring them together.”

Under the mango trees, they described learning to manage grief and anger, dialogue effectively and consider each side of a story. “It is not about forgetting, but about seeing with new eyes,” Joanne explains. “Never justifying violence, the goal is to transform resentment and heal the wounds caused by conflict, violence or distrust.”

Joanne recalls that in one of the

farthest outposts, a catechist named Charles told about mediating between two feuding families. The family of a youth who was killed was threatening to avenge his death.

Charles was called to the conflict at a moment of high tension. He calmly listened to each family individually and then brought them together, facilitating discussion and avoiding further bloodshed.

The parish priest there said, “We need to learn much more of this method, and I hope we can train many, many more parishioners.” He added, “You see, much goes on out here in our mango tree cathedrals!”

On International Women’s Day, we were invited by Comboni Sister Giovanna Calabria to meet 30 women she works with. Sister Giovanna, who came from Italy in 1971, served in Uganda throughout the worst years of the insurgency. During that

time, another Maryknoll lay missionary, Susan Nagele, and I had offered medical care for Acholi refugees. Doctor Susan, a physician, reflects, “The Acholi, especially the women, are a group with hurt so deep it almost cannot be plumbed.”

The women accompanied by Sister Giovanna told of being abducted as children or teenagers by the Lord’s Resistance Army. All were sexually and physically abused during years in captivity. The hardest part of their ordeal, however, began when they returned home. Instead of being met with welcoming embraces, they were rejected as outcasts. The children they brought with them — fathered by LRA soldiers — were seen as cursed and kept out of schools and family homes. Two decades later, these women and their children (now adolescents and young adults) remain isolated and stigmatized.

During our four months in Uganda, Joanne and I met with about 200 women in similar situations.

We also spent time in Palabek Refugee Settlement, graciously hosted by Salesian Father Ubaldo Andrade. There we spent several weeks with refugees who have fled into Uganda to escape civil war in South Sudan — and whose trauma is compounded by hunger.

Time and time again, Joanne and I saw immediate evidence of the sudden, unexpected cuts to foreign aid by the Trump administration — but nowhere as stark and heart-breaking as in this refugee camp. While we were there, World Food Programme officials were visiting to inform people that the

The lay missionaries facilitated trauma therapy for 150 South Sudanese women refugees at Palabek Refugee Settlement.



Humphrey and Blaney visited with 200 women survivors of the Lord's Resistance Army, such as these women who find healing and support in groups led by a Comboni sister.

food supply was nearly finished.

Little Sister of Mary Immaculate of Gulu, Zipporah Waitathu, a Kenyan, lives and works in the camp. She introduced us to its women's groups. We heard stories of the horror and peril that had forced the women refugees from their homes.

Now, after reaching "safety," they have no way to feed their families. One mother told of going into the forests to find leaves to boil for dinner. There is no trauma worse than not being able to feed your child, she said.

As the women told their stories, they expressed some relief at simply being heard. They learned that they were not alone. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote in *The Book of Forgiving*, "When you tell your story, you no longer have to carry your burden alone."

Joanne and I taught exercises for dealing with stress, but we also identified helpful techniques that the

women were already using in their everyday lives. These included putting hands on a tree or walking barefoot on grass for strength and comfort; talking to another woman for support; taking time out for prayer and silence; and hitting the ground with a stick to release fear and anger. The women were delighted to realize they could continue to learn from one another even after Joanne and I left.

Joanne returned to her mission in Brazil, and I moved on to my assignment in Kenya.

It was an honor and a privilege to be entrusted with sacred stories on the holy ground that is Northern Uganda. Indeed, much goes on in these mango tree cathedrals — places of profound living homilies bearing witness to great faith, perseverance and hope. ✠

Marj Humphrey, who has been a Maryknoll lay missionary since 1987, is now based in Kitale, Kenya.

images & audio

past & present



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Prayer for Vocations

In Challenging Times

Dear God, in the midst of a noisy world I come before you seeking the silence to hear your voice. It is so easy to be distracted by daily headlines, the internet, phone calls and messages and all my comings and goings. In my heart I yearn for the peace and quiet to converse with you, to hear your voice alone.

I know that it is not necessary to go to the desert or a lonely place, but only to quiet the thousand monkeys constantly chattering in my brain. I yearn to sit quietly and listen deeply.

At times fear consumes me. Fear of the unknown, the quiet and what I might hear. Maybe this keeps me from hearing you. Am I afraid of what you might ask of me?

My prayer this day is a plea to grant me the blessing to hear your voice and the courage to believe in the plan you have had for me since the beginning of time.

The world stands in need of loving care and forgiveness. You are a God of love, faith, hope and new beginnings. Are you calling me to a yet unknown life that will grace me to walk in your footsteps?

God, with your blessing, I will find that quiet place to listen to your voice and be transformed to have the courage to say, "thy will be done." Amen.

— Joseph Thaler, M.M.



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Foreign Aid: A Moral Imperative

By Susan Gunn

We're witnessing the largest contraction in humanitarian assistance in history. Earlier this year, the United States abruptly shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which distributed over \$38 billion in aid in 2023 alone — which was less than 1% of the U.S. budget. European donors also have cut their foreign aid amid domestic pressures.

The cuts are happening even as many recipient countries, strapped with debt to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, spend more on repayments than on health and education for their people.

We have now reached the point where a private entity, the Gates Foundation, is the largest funder of the World Health Organization, effectively privatizing global health governance.

According to the U.N.'s latest Hunger Hotspots report, five places face the gravest risk of catastrophic hunger: Sudan, Palestine (Gaza Strip), South Sudan, Haiti and Mali. The report underscores a severe funding shortfall for addressing violent conflicts and food insecurity in these and other hotspots worldwide.

With 75% of humanitarian funding coming from just four donors (United States, EU institutions, Germany and

the UK), and half of that from the United States, cuts to U.S. foreign assistance reverberate across the entire world.

The human cost is staggering. Experts estimate 16.8 million pregnant women may lose access to essential services, 1 million children with severe malnutrition may go untreated, and we could see 12 million to 18 million more cases of malaria each year.

These funding cuts translate directly into human suffering — measurable increases in death rates from decisions made in donor capitals.

Proponents of cutting foreign aid argue that U.S. humanitarian aid and development programs do not make the United States safer, stronger and more prosperous — the three criteria named by President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the outset of the second Trump administration. This perspective, however, overlooks a key fact: Foreign aid is not charity, but a strategic investment in justice, human dignity, global solidarity, stability and, by extension, U.S. security and prosperity.

Foreign aid plays a critical role in preventing conflicts that could ultimately threaten U.S. national security. By addressing the root causes of extremism and poverty such as lack of education, access to healthcare and



Rohingya children eat from a jar with the USAID logo at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, on Feb. 11, 2025. (OSV News/Ro Yassin Abdumonab/Reuters/Bangladesh)

economic opportunity, it helps to build more stable and resilient societies.

Foreign aid fosters goodwill, creating a network of allies that can collaborate on global challenges, from combating pandemics to countering terrorism. A strong, stable world enhances trade relationships and ensures a more secure global econo-

my, which directly benefits American prosperity. Cutting aid severs these vital ties, ceding influence to rivals and undermining the very long-term security and economic interests it purports to protect. ✂

Susan Gunn is director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

FAITH IN ACTION:

- Read Pope Leo's message for the ninth World Day of the Poor on Nov. 16, in which the Holy Father says helping the poor is "a matter of justice before it is a question of charity." <https://bit.ly/WorldDayPoor2025>
- Ask Congress to protect lifesaving aid using this tool created by Catholic Relief Services. <https://www.crs.org/ways-to-help/advocate/take-action>

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.

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READERS' RESPONSES

BISHOP IS SPOT ON

I would like to comment on "False Narratives of Immigration," which ran in your Fall 2025 issue. Many of my fellow parishioners in our Michigan church have bought into the falsehoods being circulated by our current administration regarding this topic. I, however, have personally observed the cruelty caused by the outright tearing apart of Hispanic families when a family member (typically the breadwinner) is detained.

I am the president of the Lansing St. Vincent de Paul District Council, a large Catholic charity in southcentral Michigan. I have personally assisted our Hispanic fellow Catholics who have been impacted by this humanitarian crisis. I am not Hispanic, but I can only imagine what my Hispanic fellow Catholic brothers and sisters go through every day worrying about whether they will be detained. Your article about immigration was spot on. Keep up the good work!

Dave Rais
Pinckney, Michigan

PILGRIMAGE OF SOULS

Thank you, Bishop [Seitz of El Paso], for your genuine and honest perspective on immigration. From my vantage point as a Catholic American, I view immigration as a pilgrimage of souls called by the Holy Spirit. Maryknoll was founded on foreign mission, which presently appears to be occurring here in the United States of America rather than in countries it might otherwise establish

as mission territories.

I look forward to hearing more from Maryknollers!

Michele FitzGerald
Via YouTube channel

POLITICAL SLANT

I am writing in response to Father Lance Nadeau's article in the Summer issue of *Maryknoll* magazine. I will continue to support Maryknoll because I admire your work around the globe for those in need.

However, I am bothered by your political slant. Our administration cut unnecessary jobs and waste in funding. This needed to be done. Immigrants are always welcome in our country if they come legally. Criminals are not welcome.

I believe in our president. All should acknowledge the fact that he is for peace in our world, and he is striving to make it happen for all people worldwide.

I believe God is guiding our nation. We owe it our support.

Theresa Chmielewski
Cleveland, Ohio

BISHOP IS WRONG

Having read your Bishop Seitz interview on immigration, I cannot help but respond. It is clear that the bishop is promoting wide open borders; *let them all in*. Apparently, he has not paid much attention to the events of the past four years under the Biden administration of open borders that allowed murderers, rapists, drug dealers and sex traffickers, as well as

terrorists, into the United States.

Go tell the families of the many victims that it was OK to allow these undesirables into our country.

Do not misunderstand me, I agree that the majority of immigrants are good people. I personally love the many Hispanics I have met and welcome with open arms all those who enter the country legally.

I recently saw a news report that showed a man carrying a sign that read "I am not a criminal." I'm sorry, but anyone who crosses our border illegally has violated our laws, ergo, they are criminals. All countries, including the United States, have every right to provide secure borders to protect the citizenry. Open borders only create chaos and crime.

*Bob Rainer
Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Editor's note: *Neither Bishop Seitz nor official Church teaching advocate for open borders. The bishop said: "What the Church proposes is not that we would simply remove any kind of vetting to those who wish to cross. We believe that there should be an orderly process, both for crossing for economic reasons, and for in search of asylum." In the article, the first sentence was paraphrased and the second sentence quoted directly.*

WEAR A CROSS

I am writing in response to your Fall 2025 magazine issue. As a lifelong Roman Catholic (I am 78 years old), I

have spent much time thinking, praying and working on my religious beliefs. I reference two articles, "Planting Climate Justice in the Philippines" about Maryknoll Sister Misolas and "Holy Ground" about Maryknoll Lay Missioner Theresa Glaser.

I was a teacher in both public and Catholic schools, and I am scandalized and sad that in the photos neither woman wears any visible sign of my Lord and Savior. I believe that wearing a simple stainless-steel cross is an unspoken, ever-present testimony. Humans are visual creatures.

*Brenda Lopez
Tewksbury, Massachusetts*

A MOTHER'S LOVE

Maryknoll has always been a big part of my life, as your magazine was one of our mother's favorite reads and a constant presence in our busy home.

As a proud Maryknoll partner in mission, I still receive the magazine. After reading it, I would mail it to my mother in a nursing home in the Philadelphia area. She never lost her love for Maryknoll.

Our mother, Francina Collins, died in April after a long illness. She was a widow at the age of 46 and the mother of eight children. She was a devout woman who will be deeply missed. I am so happy that she shared the gift of Maryknoll with our family.

*Mike Collins
Valparaiso, Indiana*

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

Readers' Responses

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

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

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope ..." — Romans 15:13



Father John Spain greets young Hazel and her mother at Cristo Salvador. (Octavio Durán/El Salvador)

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In Parque Cuscatlán, San Salvador, a young mother reads names engraved on the Monument to Memory and Truth honoring civilians killed in El Salvador's civil war. Two Maryknoll martyrs, Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, are listed among the victims. (See stories pages 10 and 18.)

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