

MARYKNOLL

U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

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For the Least of These

FROM THE EDITOR

Change is inevitable. How change happens, however, isn't prescribed. In this issue of *Maryknoll*, we explore several areas where change is happening in our world and how Maryknoll missionaries are responding.

In our lead article, we visit the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program in Nairobi, Kenya. Founded by Maryknoll Father Edward Phillips more than three decades ago, the program provides antiretrovirals to HIV-positive people, allowing them to lead relatively normal lives. Abrupt cuts in U.S.-funded humanitarian aid worldwide have had a traumatic and severe impact on the program, including losses in staffing and the closure of clinics.

In another article, we look at the Church's response to the indiscriminate roundup of immigrants in the United States and ongoing mass deportations. Local pastoral leaders, the U.S. bishops and Pope Leo XIV speak in a unified voice to decry these policies. Foreign vocations to the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and the Maryknoll Sisters have also been affected. A retrospective article recalls a related topic, the Japanese internment, and commemorates Maryknoll's role during that tragic episode of history.

Addressing waste and fraud in international aid programs can be done in ways that do not condemn millions of innocents to death because of the sins and incompetence of a few. Likewise, investing in due process for immigrants navigating the labyrinthine U.S. immigration legal system would be far more Christlike than arming masked agents to snatch them from our streets.

Lynn F. Monahan
Editor-in-Chief

MARYKNOLL

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

Romans 8:28

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Paul Jeffrey/Kenya

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FRONT COVER:

A child is shown in the Mathare slum of Nairobi, Kenya, where Maryknoll founded a community-based AIDS relief program.

COVER CREDITS:

Front: Paul Jeffrey/Kenya
Back: Paul Jeffrey/Taiwan

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

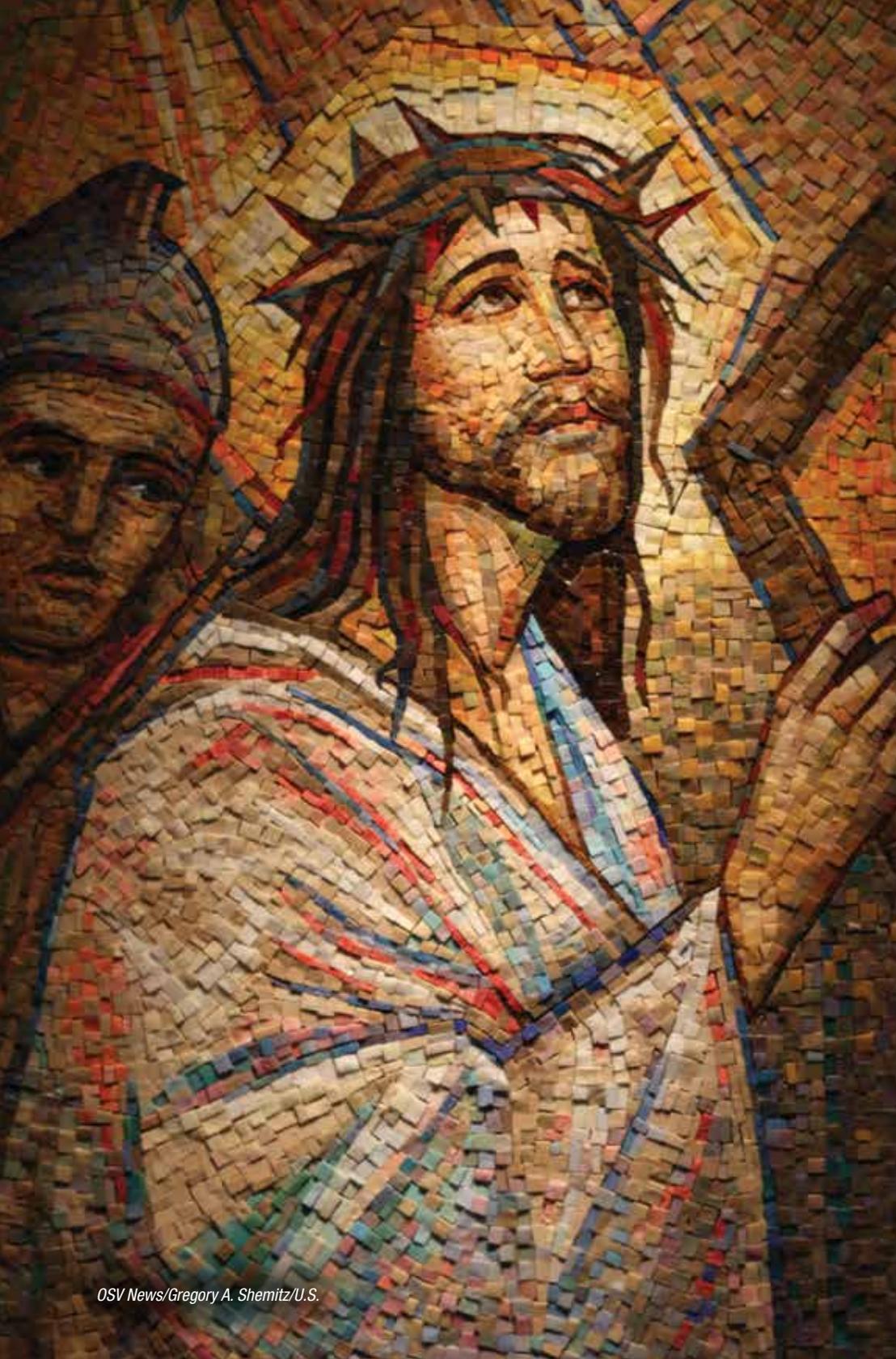


Photo meditation on *Dilexi Te*

YOU HAVE LOVED ME

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*Though exiled from Eden and rebellious
Not willing to be my brother's or sister's
Keeper, even when their blood cried out
To you from earth to heaven for vengeance,
You still marked me in my banishment
Showing all that, despite my guilt,
You have loved me.*

*Even when I sold my brother into slavery
And famine seized all in the land
You used my sin to raise him up with power
That he might show mercy to me, a sinner,
Feeding me and filling my greatest hunger
For reunion and community, proving again
You have loved me.*

*Delivering me from slavery's cruel chains,
With mighty signs and miracles, you heard
My plea and answered by calling me
To a terrible freedom, where out of fear
I erected idols in your place and longed
To return to the security of old ways and still
You have loved me.*

*When thirst and shame forced me
To draw water in the heat of day, you came
Offering to quench the longings of my heart
With spirit and truth. Overcome by your
Acceptance of our differences, I ran to tell
Others of your mercy, not daring to believe
You have loved me.*

*Along the way I anointed your feet,
Wiped your face, helped carry your cross,
Wept for your fate, listened as you cried out
Against God's abandonment and watched
You die, and taking into my arms your body
Bruised and bloodied, I realized at last
You have loved me.*

*You opened my ears to hear the cry
Of the lowly, my eyes to see their suffering,
My hands to help free the oppressed,
My heart to break for the least of these
Brothers and sisters, for they are you
Compelling me to love the poor because
You have loved me.*



MISSIONER TALES



Gregg Brekke/Tanzania

During my preparation for the priesthood in Cochabamba, Bolivia, I would walk from our formation house to the cathedral for the 7 a.m. Mass. I became familiar with many of the street vendors whose makeshift stalls and small retail shops lined the streets.

I noticed a curious thing. Whenever two or more people were at a stall, one would lightly pinch the other and whisper something as I passed. This happened with discernible regularity. I mentioned it to my language teacher, who explained that what was whispered was “suerte para ti” (good luck to you). This was done when someone of African descent was seen.

There was something spiritual about this Bolivian cultural response to those who are different. I was treading into the spiritual garden of a people.

John Siyumbu, M.M.

I met Francis while in mission in Nyakato, a suburb of Mwanza, Tanzania, through our AIDS outreach ministry. He had left a good job in the police force after contracting HIV. His mother reached out to us. Her sadness was compounded three times — Francis was her third son to contract the disease.

Francis, whom we accompanied for over a year, had not been a practicing Catholic but began to receive

the sacraments again. We would also take him to the hospital, six miles away. Soon, however, he developed a medicine-resistant fungus that left him bedridden.

One day, after months in bed, he said to me, “I know that Jesus suffered during his crucifixion, but my disease has caused me terrible pain. Why does this happen?”

We don’t know *why*, but with trust in God’s love, Francis endured his suffering until he died. Although burdened with unanswered questions, he trusted that the Lord “set my feet upon rock, steadied my steps, and put a new song in my mouth, a hymn to our God.” (Psalm 40: 3-4)

Veronica Schweyen, M.M.

I serve with the Deaf Development Programme (DDP) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which nurtures deaf young adults. Each student has their own gifts and interests, and as they enter job training, we start seeing their dreams take shape.

SreyVin was one of them. At 19 years old, she had already overcome many obstacles in her life. As a toddler she was abandoned by her father. In his eyes, she was not a daughter he wanted to take care of.

After previous schooling at another deaf school in Phnom Penh and two years of basic education at DDP, SreyVin enrolled in salon training. In her first month, the class focused on giving manicures and washing and straightening hair. She became confident in these skills and went on to more advanced work in hair and

makeup. SreyVin, who now has hope for the future, plans to set up a salon to support herself and her mother.

It is my prayer that for many years to come, more deaf young adults will complete our basic education program, move on to job training, and find a path that will allow them to support themselves and their families.

Julie Lawler, MKLM

While in mission in Tanzania, I was the Catholic chaplain at the national medical university in Dar es Salaam. There was a hospital on campus and a large slum not far away. News must have spread that Father Mike would help those in need, because a steady stream of people started coming to my door. When word also spread that Father Mike asked a lot of questions, the numbers subsided. One day, however, a woman stricken with AIDS came to the office. Her children and husband had died. She had no money to return to her parents’ home, 900 miles away. Her name was Rehema, which translated to English means “compassion.”

I gave her 50,000 shillings (50 U.S. dollars) for the trip. In tears, Rehema extended her hand and went down on one knee, thanking me. I took her hand into mine and prayed with her for a safe journey. It occurred to me that this was a precious moment. I had been in the presence of God. Jesus came to me as Rehema, asking me to never harden my heart to those who come in need.

Michael J. Snyder, M.M.

Christ's Hands and Feet in Kenya

Text and Photos by Paul Jeffrey

Despite funding cuts, AIDS ministry continues to provide hope in Nairobi

Florence Mwikani navigates the narrow passageways of Nairobi's sprawling Mathare slum on a sacred mission: to keep people alive.

For 33 years, Mwikani has accompanied people living with HIV, first consoling them as they succumbed to the virus, then encouraging them as modern medications allowed them to go on living.

Now she faces a new challenge. Funding cuts last year abruptly gutted the budgets of AIDS programs around the world.

Mwikani has been a community healthcare worker for the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program (EDARP) since 1993, when Maryknoll Father Edward Phillips asked Catholic churches in the eastern slums of Nairobi to recommend volunteers. Few came forward because of the fear and stigma associated with HIV.

Yet when she heard the appeal in a meeting of her small Christian community, Mwikani says she jumped at the chance. "I wanted to be Christ's hands and feet in my community," she says.

In their meager homes constructed from scrap lumber and rusting metal sheets, Mwikani nursed her patients when they fell ill. At times she carried them on her back to the nearby EDARP clinic. She and other outreach workers were often seen as harbingers of death. Sometimes

neighbors refused to answer when she knocked on their doors.

But then came antiretroviral medications, a pharmaceutical reprieve that suppressed levels of the virus in the body and allowed countless HIV-positive people to live relatively normal lives. Mwikani's role changed. She became a coach, making sure her patients stayed on their meds, while also assuring that their other needs in the slum were met.

Although her destitute patients had access to life-saving drugs, they often lacked sufficient food. As part of EDARP's commitment to the overall well-being of its patients, Mwikani provided nutritional assistance.

She also provided special care for pregnant women both before and after birth. By assuring that pregnant women stay on medication, EDARP has prevented mother-to-child transmission of the virus in over 98 percent of births in recent years.

Tuberculosis is endemic in Kenya and is the leading cause of death for people with HIV. As a result, EDARP integrated TB detection and treatment into its HIV programming, becoming an international model for treating the two diseases together.

When no other funding source was available, the Maryknoll Society often stepped in to fund EDARP's services, such as a screening program for cervical cancer — which HIV-positive women are about six



Florence Mwikani walks in the Mathare slum in Nairobi, where she serves as a community healthcare worker for AIDS patients.



Alice Njoroge, managing director of the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program, speaks with a client. Njoroge says that eight of EDARP's 14 clinics closed due to funding cuts.

times more likely to develop.

Father Phillips says that EDARP has always been about more than simply providing clinical treatment for disease.

"From our inception, we've been based in the slums where the poorest of the poor live," he says. "From the beginning we offered a warm welcome to anyone seeking our help, as Jesus welcomed the lepers and blind."

When Stacy Adhiambo learned she was HIV positive at the age of 15, it felt like the end of the world. But Josephine Kamau, an EDARP community healthcare worker, con-

vinced her not to give up.

"I felt like killing myself when they told me I was HIV positive," says Adhiambo, now 26. "But thank God for Josephine. She told me how important the drugs were, the reasons for me to take them. Because of her, I am still alive."

EDARP employs 46 HIV-positive peer mentors for additional support. Having themselves gone through diagnosis and treatment, they counsel newly diagnosed patients.

Maureen Mauti is one of them. She says the main thing that peer mentors provide is hope.

"People often feel hopeless when

they learn their status, but when you tell them your story, they gain hope that they can survive," she says.

As the health of older adults living with HIV in the slums of Nairobi stabilized, EDARP's managing director, Alice Njoroge, saw another need. The organization aims to reach younger people, who suffer higher rates of new infections and lower rates of compliance with antiretroviral therapy. Njoroge says EDARP recently began partnering with private pharmacies.

"A lot of adolescents will go to the pharmacies rather than come to the clinics. They go there, they buy their

medication and that's it," she says. "We've worked with the pharmacies so they will refer them to us."

Of the 1.4 million people in Kenya living with HIV, 1.3 million are on antiretroviral therapy, and the availability of medications and services remains critically important. In partnership with international organizations and local groups such as EDARP, the Kenyan government was moving towards fully managing and funding the national HIV response by the year 2030.

Njoroge says that EDARP was already working toward ways to sustain itself in the coming years. What

Nurse Mary Kamau vaccinates the child of an HIV-positive mother. Thanks to EDARP, transmission of the virus to all four of this mother's children has been prevented.





Josephine Kamau visits Stacy Adhiambo and 1-year-old Byalian, born HIV negative, at their home in the Mathare slum.

it wasn't prepared for, she says, was the abrupt end to U.S. support when President Donald Trump — on his first day in office — issued an emergency stop-work order for all U.S.-funded humanitarian work around the world.

With thousands of lives at stake, EDARP staff and volunteers weren't willing to stop their ministry. Although a memo went out immediately to all staff giving official notice of layoffs, about 95 percent of EDARP staff showed up for work

the next day, despite knowing they wouldn't be paid.

News of the stop-work order spread quickly, provoking panic.

"Patients were desperate, some of them were saying they're going to stop their medications," Njoroge says. "And some patients who had just begun treatment were saying, 'Why should I continue this medication if you're not sure that it's going to be there?'"

"I told them, 'We still have medications. Please continue taking

your medicine,'" she says. "Our role was to reassure them, although we didn't know ourselves what was going to happen."

Although some funding resumed after a few weeks, EDARP has struggled to keep delivering services. Last year, the organization's annual budget shrank from \$3.7 million to \$2.2 million. Vital funding continues to come from the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, as well as other Church sources, pharmaceutical companies, and the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention.

Of approximately 400 EDARP staff at the beginning of 2025, only 191 were still employed at year's end. Eight of EDARP's 14 clinics — more than half — were forced to close.

Many of EDARP's 1,537 community healthcare workers were receiving a stipend of \$20 a month, but in October, those stipends ceased. Nonetheless, the volunteers continue serving their neighbors.

"It's a calling," says Josephine Kamau, who with other community healthcare workers was formally commissioned for the role during a Mass in her parish. "We have a heart for serving our patients."

Njoroge says EDARP's staff and volunteers will continue to dispense hope.

"People follow closely what is going on in the U.S. So, whatever happens there, they come to us and ask how it impacts their lives and the medicines they take. We keep reassuring them that we won't abandon them," Njoroge says.

"I was there when they were dying, when we had nothing. I can't keep from worrying that we may have to witness the same thing again." ✂

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

All Things New

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

Something quietly profound happened to me recently: Something inside me — my mind, heart, attitudes, even my point of view — changed radically. This followed my being hospitalized with double pneumonia last June. I got wonderful treatment and, after a week's stay, I recovered.

It was then that I felt different, not just healthier and more rested, but centered and awake. More grounded. More focused. Peaceful.

I had an urge to go to confession, not out of guilt or duty, but because I didn't want to carry baggage around any longer. I wrote to people from whom I was estranged, offering to meet, to listen and, if necessary, to apologize. Temptations lost their hold even as I became acutely aware of my faults and insensitivities. The desire to pray increased.

The presence of God became overwhelming: in the trees, birds, stars, seashore, cities and on mountaintops. God's Real Presence in the Eucharist was mind-blowing. Like Moses before the Burning Bush, the ground on which I stood was holy.

I recalled Greek Orthodox liturgies with their exquisite chanting and sublime celebration of divine mysteries. After they make the Sign of the Cross,

some Orthodox bend to touch the floor in a "small *metanoia*." A full prostration is a "great *metanoia*."

Metanoia is translated into English as "repentance," which, to most of us, sounds like regret for our sins. Weak sauce indeed. A more dynamic iteration is a total change of heart and mind, causing one to see the world and faith and life and God differently. It's a whole new way of thinking, being and relating. It is Jesus announcing, "Repent (*Metanoia*!), for the reign of God is at hand!" (Matthew 4:17)

It is God's commandments written on one's heart (Jeremiah 31:33). For me, it was a fulfillment of Revelation 21:5, "Behold, I make all things new."

For the first time in my 77 years, I truly understood St. Paul's admonition to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the Temple, Jesus taught that while religion is transactional, true faith is transformative. The Pharisee recited a litany of his pious acts. The tax collector, however, cried out in his sinfulness for God's mercy. Dying to himself, the tax collector went away justified. Full of himself, the Pharisee walked away



A young woman receives ashes during Ash Wednesday at Sacred Heart Church in Prescott, Arizona, as the season of Lent begins. (OSV News/Bob Roller/U.S.)

untransformed, thus unredeemed.

Transactional religion teaches that if we say certain prayers or observe certain practices, God will reward us. Transactional religion tries to change God; transformative faith changes us.

All my life, religion meant outer practices, such as retreats, prayers, fasting, Lenten sacrifices and the Mass. These fed my soul — for a time. The feeling of holiness or blessing would eventually fade. Now I feel refreshed and renewed from within, as from the spring of "living water" Jesus promised the Samaritan woman (John 4:14).

These practices had been preparing me for eventual *metanoia*, like an athlete who trains for years ahead of a pinnacle championship. In the past, I prayed during crises for God to give me strength. Now, I pray from weakness, trusting God to be my strength.

Although religious practices may prepare us for *metanoia*, they cannot produce it. We surrender; God does the rest. The Way of the Cross leads through life and death to resurrection. "We cannot think our way into transformation," Franciscan Father Richard Rohr says. "We must live ourselves into it — often weeping our way through it."

Lent is a time of repentance, prayer, mindfulness and detachment as we enter into the profound mystery of Jesus' sacrificial death. We give things up. We do without. We share with the poor. The Way of the Cross is real. The dying to self is real. This time, it's my turn.

And so, with Christ, I set my face resolutely toward Jerusalem. After all, as disciples we are called to pick up our cross and follow. ✠

Heart and Mission for the People

By Deirdre Cornell || Photos by Octavio Durán, OFM

A Maryknoll team in Guatemala cares for HIV-positive people

A young mother named Norma nestles 2-month-old Pedro in her arms, carefully positioning his baby bottle. Norma — who also has a 3-year-old daughter — learned to bottle-feed only recently, after arriving at Hospicio Santa María six months ago, pregnant, severely malnourished and HIV positive.

“It’s not the first time we had a baby born at the hospice,” explains Brenda Ambrocio, the nurse coordinator. “But this case is very special.”

Norma, 28, is a single mother. She and her daughter had lived with her parents in a tiny house. “Nine people lived there in extreme poverty,” says Maryknoll Sister Delia “Dee” Smith, director of the hospice. When Norma was diagnosed with HIV, her toddler was put into foster care, and Norma came to Hospicio Santa María, in the town of Pajapita in the department (state) of San Marcos, to have her baby.

“Through ultrasounds, we knew he was also malnourished,” Brenda says. “Here Norma got milk and *atoles* (corn beverages), regular medication and excellent nutrition. The baby was born at 7 pounds and 6 ounces, a good size.”

“A nurse at the hospice is a jack of all trades,” Sister Dee says. Brenda not only taught Norma how to prepare baby formula (since HIV can be transmitted through breast milk), but also connects Norma with her daughter online for

A young mother who is HIV positive finds a home at a Maryknoll hospice.



their weekly virtual visit and accompanies her to family court.

This multifaceted approach is characteristic of Hospicio Santa María. The home, which can hold up to 16 patients, grew out of Sister Dee's work with Project Life, an organization for HIV/AIDS advocacy.

"Everything started with Project Life," says Bielman Juárez Ambrocio, Brenda's brother, who volunteered in his youth before formally joining the staff to work in programs.

At first, the organization offered only HIV testing and prevention programs. "Antiretrovirals did not exist here in Guatemala then," says Bielman, who is studying for degrees in law and pedagogy. "Sister Dee and the doctors she worked with were forerunners."

"We at Proyecto Vida (Project Life) were the first outside the two national hospitals in the capital to offer antiretrovirals, with the support of Doctors Without Borders," says Sister Dee, who has served in Guatemala for over three decades. When The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria came, she was president of the country coordinating mechanism that connected health ministries and organizations serving people with HIV/AIDS throughout Guatemala.

Antiretrovirals are medications that stop the HIV virus from replicating, thus protecting the immune system and preventing the progression to AIDS. They can even block transmission from mother to child — such as Norma and Pedro. The newborn,

who has been tested repeatedly, is not infected.

This medical miracle in Pajapita was made possible through a labor of love.

Sister Dee had been joined at Project Life in 1997 by Maryknoll Sister Marlene Condon, a nurse practitioner with public health experience in Chile. Sister Dee, who has a background in teaching, focused on advocacy and education, while Sister Marlene carried out home visits. Because Pajapita is close to the border with Mexico, it is heavily transited and has high rates of HIV and AIDS. The sisters saw the needs of abandoned AIDS patients.

"They were isolated as terminal patients," recalls Brenda, who has worked at Hospicio Santa María since it opened its doors in 2006. "Emaciated, dirty, they were left to die, because who wanted to touch them, clean them?" The sisters started the hospice, she says, so that people could "die with dignity."

With the care they received at Hospicio Santa María and the introduction of antiretrovirals, however, patients no longer came to the hospice to die, but to recover. More than 400 patients have found a home there over these 20 years.

"Every case is different," says administrator Carlos Sandoval. A 71-year-old man has lived at the

Above: Laying hens and broiler chickens are raised at Santa María, says Maryknoll Sister Dee Smith. Below: Santos Vásquez Hidalgo, Maryknoll affiliate and agronomic engineer, manages the hospice ecofarm.





Nurse Brenda Ambrocio has worked at Hospicio Santa María in Pajapita, Guatemala, since it opened its doors in 2006, serving 400 patients over the past two decades.

hospice since shortly after it began. Another patient, 20, was kicked out of the house when his parents learned he had HIV. Depression is not unusual, Carlos adds. “Many patients need psychological support because of family rejection, losing their homes, or being fired from their jobs,” he says.

The beautiful setting helps lift the spirits of patients, who are referred by their local HIV hospital clinics. They swim daily in an inground pool and enjoy home-cooked meals. In addition to physical therapy, they are offered reflexology, Swedish massage and aromatherapy. Two friendly Labrador retrievers, Cooper and Perla, offer affection and companionship.

Sister Marlene served as hospice director until 2016 and returned to the States soon afterward. She died in 2022, but her spirit of service lives on.

Carlos, who has a degree in business administration, tackles plumbing problems. The six nurses lend a hand in the gardens. The men on staff take turns on night watch, and once a month everyone pitches in for deep cleaning. Carlos and Bielman have become Maryknoll affiliates.

A third affiliate has worked with Sister Dee since 2010. Santos Vásquez Hidalgo, an agronomic engineer, oversees the hospice ecofarm. It took 10 years of cover crops and organic fertilizer to build up the soil, he says;

crop rotation keeps it from becoming depleted. Now, lush gardens attract numerous butterflies, unlike most parts of arid San Marcos.

In addition to offering cool, restful spots for patients and staff, the ecofarm provides for the hospice’s daily meals. “We grow what the nutritionists request for our patients recovering from malnutrition,” Santos says. He prioritizes fruits and vegetables that boost the immune system and maintain healthy intestinal flora in people taking heavy medications.

The hospice raises 150 broiler chickens, 300 egg-laying hens and a smaller number of free-range chickens. Beehives are kept at a separate location. “With those 70 hives, in 2024, we produced 1,005 liters of honey,” Santos says. Eggs and honey are sold to generate income.

The ecofarm recently hosted 150 schoolchildren from the nearby primary school, who came to learn about sustainable practices. Each student was given two tree saplings to take home.

“Our team has a heart and mission for the people,” Sister Dee says.

In the property’s large conference room, Project Life staff have trained two cohorts of women from poor communities to support their peers suffering from domestic violence (see separate story online).

As government agencies and non-governmental organizations reel from cuts by funding sources such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Sister Dee notes, the services offered by Project Life and Hospicio Santa María are needed more than ever. ✧

FUNDING CUTS TO HIV/AIDS SERVICES IN GUATEMALA

UNAIDS estimates that 33,000 people in Guatemala live with HIV/AIDS. In 2024, 78% of them were in antiretroviral therapy, and the number of deaths has plummeted since the virus peaked in 2002. Guatemala’s adult prevalence rate is among the lowest in Latin America, according to the non-profit The Borgen Project, due to “persistence and partnership.” NGOs had hired local outreach workers to keep records of transmission and to follow up with patients who missed appointments.

With UNAIDS losing half of its funding due to USAID cuts, Sister Dee says, a quarter of the personnel in HIV hospital clinics were laid off. Outreach workers were even more severely impacted. “When USAID pulled out, these NGOs collapsed,” she says. “So many projects have just disappeared.”

Although Hospicio Santa María and Project Life did not receive direct funding from USAID, Sister Dee says the loss of resources for patients living in poverty is felt deeply across Guatemala: “It is a real struggle for people.”

THE CHURCH RAISES ITS VOICE ON IMMIGRATION

By Lynn F. Monahan

Pope Leo joins the U.S. bishops in condemning the mistreatment of immigrants in the country, including many here legally

The Catholic Church has emerged with a united voice on immigration, one that is heard from parishes around the country to the Vatican, where our Chicago-born pope has made clear his disapproval of the mass deportations and mistreatment of immigrants.

Pastors and parishioners across the country were already responding to the needs of newcomers — indeed, some have been assisting migrants and immigrants for decades. The United States bishops went further this past autumn, issuing a “special message” during their annual assembly in Baltimore.

The bishops signaled the alarm and urgency with which they view the current campaign of mass deportations. It was their first special message in over a decade. Also remarkable, the message received overwhelming support: 216 votes in favor and only five opposed, with three abstentions.



Bishop Bruce Lewandowski (orange hat) of Providence, Rhode Island, leads a prayer service including a migration-themed recitation of the rosary outside the Donald Wyatt Detention Facility in his diocese. (Erik Scalavino/Rhode Island Catholic/U.S.)

Pope Leo XIV personally underscored the message, urging U.S. Catholics and other people “of goodwill” to read it. The pope condemned the “extremely disrespectful” treatment of immigrants living “good lives — many of them for 10, 15, 20 years” in the United States.

“We have to look for ways of treating people humanely, treating people with the dignity that they have,” the pope said. “If people are in the States illegally ... there are courts. There is a system of justice” to address that. He added, “no one has said that the United States should have open borders.”

Maryknoll missionaries have worked in longstanding ministries to migrants, immigrants and refugees — whether they are fleeing oppression and violence, displaced by natural disasters and climate change, or seeking immediate survival and eventual integration — both overseas and in the United States.

Father Lance Nadeau, the superior general of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, says missionaries are seeing the consequences of the administration’s anti-immigrant policies locally in Westchester County, New York, where Maryknoll is headquartered; in Chicago, where some of its seminarians study; in El Paso, Texas, where Maryknoll priests, sisters and lay missionaries have served for years; and in various areas from California to Florida.

“The physical abuse and conditions that people have to experience in detention are terrible,” Fa-

ther Nadeau says. “It’s outrageous that they’re breaking up families.”

He said the Maryknoll Society, along with Maryknoll Sisters and others in the Westchester area, are part of a coalition seeking to help immigrants now living in fear. Responses range from providing food assistance for those afraid to leave their homes to protesting the government’s actions and tactics.

“Our hope is to address the most urgent needs of immigrants who are in danger,” says Sister Teresa Hougnon, president of the Maryknoll Sisters. “We’re talking about food security, accompaniment and child safety.”

Both Sister Hougnon and Father Nadeau say the current restrictions on immigration are impacting vocational candidates from overseas. Tighter scrutiny for entry into the United States has forced the Maryknoll Sisters and the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers to restructure their formation programs for foreign candidates. The Sisters have taken foreign vocations almost since their founding, while the Society began welcoming prospects from mission countries a few years ago.

“They’re now going to the Philippines,” Sister Hougnon says, explaining that the congregation has opened a formation house for the novitiate in Manila.

The Society has done the same in Nairobi, Kenya, Father Nadeau says, establishing a novitiate there after some candidates were denied visas to study in the United States.



Susan Gunn, director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, vigils outside the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement headquarters. (OSV News/Leslie E. Kossoff/U.S.)

Sister Hougnon says that one elderly Maryknoll sister, who holds a green card, was so severely scrutinized upon returning to the United States from mission overseas that she opted to remain at Maryknoll for the time being, fearing she might be denied re-entry in the future.

The bishops’ message on immigration opened with a litany of concerns, among them “a climate of fear and anxiety” around the “vilification of immigrants,” conditions in detention centers and lack of access to pastoral care, as well as the ar-

bitrary elimination of categories of legal status for people already here.

“We are grieved when we meet parents who fear being detained when taking their children to school and when we try to console family members who have already been separated from their loved ones,” the bishops said, explicitly stating, “We oppose the indiscriminate mass deportation of people.”

For some, the bishops’ statement isn’t enough. Redemptorist Bishop Bruce A. Lewandowski, of Providence, Rhode Island, is one of them.

"Immigration isn't politics. It's part of our DNA as people of faith," Bishop Lewandowski said at a gathering of Church and pastoral leaders convened in Providence in early December at the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul. "God commands us to welcome the immigrant, to love the foreigner," he said.

"One by one, moms and dads, husbands and wives (are) plucked out of communities, sent on a plane to Guatemala and Mexico," said Bishop Lewandowski. "It is a strategy to destabilize the family. ... None of the people I know who've been taken are murderers, drug traffickers, rapists, terrorists or criminals of any kind. All they did was cross the border like Abraham, Moses, Sarah or Jacob — like Jesus, Mary and Joseph."

He calls for "a faith-based movement, a broad and far-reaching coalition to flood Washington with advocacy and advocates" akin to the Civil Rights Movement. What if, he asked, "we just started sending busloads of people like ourselves to Washington, to put before our government leaders the sorrow of our people who are being persecuted, who are being maligned and vilified, who are being detained and deported?"

Kevin Appleby of the Center for Migration Studies, one of the sponsors of the gathering, noted that St. John Paul II wrote that mass deportations are "intrinsically evil."

"What does that mean?" asked Appleby. "It means they cannot be morally justified." While deportation itself is not necessarily evil, he

continued, the individual in question must present a threat to the community and due process must be followed — which isn't happening in many cases in the current climate.

Maryknoll Lay Missioner Heidi Cerneka, an immigration attorney working for a nonprofit in El Paso, increasingly sees a disregard for due process.

"We have people who actually had some kind of status that ICE totally ignored," she says. "Although [the immigrants] are playing by the rules, the government isn't." Consequently, she says, people who have a claim to remain in the States are nonetheless detained and deported, or they are held in such horrific conditions that they ask to be deported.

Appleby said the Providence gathering, titled Witness to Hope: Responding to Mass Deportations, was the first of what he hopes will be many regional meetings. "Our goal is to get the Church together and build our network," he says, "and then, hopefully, one day pivot and try to get immigration reform."

Father Nadeau says the Church's response to immigration must come from the Gospel, including responding to the charge that immigrants are criminals if they entered the illegally or overstayed their visas.

"Jesus gave the thief dying on the cross a second chance," he says. "Many people make mistakes. We pardon people. Certainly, President Trump pardons people. ... Forgiveness and an opportunity for a new way of life is part of the Gospel."✠

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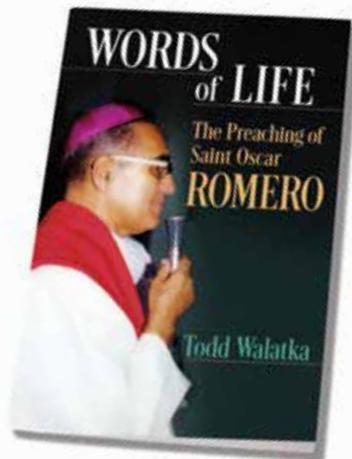
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Spotlight

Preview by Robert Ellsberg

The martyrdom of St. Óscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, was a powerful witness and an inspiration for the Church. He had made his own the plight of the vast majority of his flock and made them the center of his pastoral vision.

— Pope Leo, *Dilexi Te*



St. Óscar Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador, who was slain at the altar while saying Mass in 1980, is undoubtedly one of the towering figures of the modern Church. More than four decades later, we continue to meditate on and draw inspiration from his prophetic witness. At Orbis over the years we have published more than a dozen books by and about Archbishop Romero, including biographies, theological reflections, collections of his pastoral letters and excerpts from his speeches and writings.

It is arguably Romero's homilies that provide the best and most intimate portrait of his testimony. Yet that message has been hard to access. The complete translation of Romero's homilies from 1977-1980 is published in four large volumes totaling 2,500 pages. Todd Walatka, a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, aptly discerned the need for a

more accessible entry.

In *Words of Life: The Preaching of St. Óscar Romero*, he has selected a dozen of St. Romero's most iconic sermons, beginning with his homily following the assassination in 1977 of his friend, Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande, and concluding with his final homily on the day of his own assassination three years later.

Broadcast live by radio from his cathedral in the capital, San Salvador, Romero's Sunday homilies were a national and ecclesial event. While reflecting aloud on the Word of God, he related the Gospel to the daily events in El Salvador. Addressing the hopes, joys and anguish of his suffering people, he was also careful to document the accelerating incidence of human rights violations. While his words sustained the faith of the poor, they also

inflamed his powerful enemies.

However, if Romero's preaching had political implications, these sermons demonstrate how deeply his response to the world was rooted in his profound incarnational faith. Just as the Incarnation is the central mystery of the Christian faith, he urged his flock to incarnate the Gospel message in their own lives, through their commitment to both charity and justice.

Todd Walatka notes that it is difficult to distill Romero's preaching into a single theme or idea. Perhaps, he says, "the closest would be his goal of articulating what it means to be the true Church of Jesus Christ. But ... Romero's goal wasn't simply to provide a good, clear theology of the Church. He wanted his people to provide a good, clear theology of the Church. He wanted his people to grow ever more fully into being the Church, into living out their identity as the people of God in El Salvador. In the midst of confusions, competing

ideologies, and violence, he urged all — including himself — to put the Gospel at the center of their lives and feel the responsibility for living it out."

All the while, he knew the risks he was taking. Yet he persisted to the end.

In his final homily, just moments before his death, Romero spoke these words: "You just heard the Gospel of Christ: We must not love our lives so much that we avoid taking the risks in life that history calls for. Those who seek to shun danger will lose their lives, whereas those who, for love of Christ, dedicate themselves to the service of others will live. They are like that grain of wheat that dies, at least in appearance. If the grain does not die, it remains alone. If it yields a crop, it is because it dies, allowing itself to be immolated in the earth." ✠

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



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— *Zechariah 9:9*



A Shared 'Yes' to Mission

By Jennifer Tomshack

Maryknoll Lay Missioners sends forth eight new missionaries

As Maryknoll Lay Missioners and friends gathered at Holy Family Church in El Paso, Texas, the language of the liturgy revolved around one simple word: "yes."

It was present in the prayers, Scripture readings and covenant signing, and explicit in the "yes" given by those standing at the altar. For members of the Class of 2025, the sending Mass and ceremony on Dec. 6, 2025, marked the beginning of new chapters of service across the globe.

"Let us pray for these new missionaries as they proclaim their 'yes' to God's call, as they stand to proclaim 'yes' to hope and love through service and mission," said Elvira Ramirez, executive director of Maryknoll Lay Missioners.

She named the blessings this class brings: a family with children, members from Germany and the Netherlands, years of experience gained through other organizations and the testimony of mission at different stages of life.

"The Church is not just a house that we go to," Bishop Anthony Celino said in his homily. "The Church goes out, to proclaim boldly the Gospel." Missioners awaken us, he added, to an awareness of God, present already within people.

The sending followed an eight-week Orientation and Formation Program encompassing prayer, community life, practical preparation and study on topics such as Catholic social teaching and Maryknoll's history and charism. Candidates also served in ministry along the



The Class of 2025, which included international members and a family with two children, undertook an eight-week orientation in El Paso, Texas. (Daniel Lizárraga/U.S.)



From left to right: At Holy Family Church in El Paso, Texas, Bishop Anthony Celino presides at the sending Mass. James Pawlowicz serves as lector. Dorothy Ritter looks on during the liturgy. (José García/U.S.)

U.S.-Mexico border, where they encountered the realities of migration.

A registered nurse and certified spiritual director from Fraser, Michigan, **Dorothy Ritter** volunteered at the Detroit Catholic Worker soup kitchen and house of hospitality for two decades. She also participated in short-term mission trips to Appalachia and Kenya and joined peace delegations to the Middle East.

Eight years ago, her husband died after 43 years of marriage. "We were looking forward to retirement and sharing our end-of-life years together," says Dorothy, who has two grown children and five grandchildren. "I began to prayerfully discern, 'what now?' Through the mystery of grace I

was led to Maryknoll Lay Missioners." In Kenya, she hopes to be "a conduit of God's grace" for others.

Jana Schiemenz, from Chemnitz, Germany, is trained in pediatric nursing, special education and rehabilitation. She has worked with people with disabilities of all ages for 15 years, mostly in Tanzania, where in Mwanza she helped establish the Tunaweza Centre for Youths with Disabilities.

Now a lay missionary, Jana will return to Tanzania. "The way in which Jesus Christ respected the dignity and equality of all people has become an important orientation for me," she says. "It's how I want to shape my life and relate to others."

Like Jana, **Susanne Beentjes**, originally from Purmerend in the Netherlands, was serving in Tanzania when she felt called to join Maryknoll Lay Missioners. Susanne was commissioned ahead of the sending ceremony so that she could rejoin her spouse and children in Mwanza, where she has served in projects for women with the Society of African Missions.

Susanne, who has a background in global public health, is now working in a new initiative called Work&Shop Creative Center, where young artisans can work and sell their products.

"During mission work, you learn how to handle challenges and be flexible in your approaches," she says. "I focus on what is possible and

give others the confidence that they can do it," she adds.

Victor Artaiz, of Wallingford, Connecticut, was commissioned to return to Bolivia, where he was already serving.

After a career in international business, Victor had felt called to a different kind of work. Joining Franciscan Mission Service, he spent four years in Cochabamba, where he met Maryknollers while doing prison ministry.

Victor began working closely with the community of priests, brothers and lay missionaries. Victor is nourished by the Eucharist and daily *lectio divina*, as he serves in "accompanying others living on the periphery of society and sharing the faith, hope and peace of Jesus Christ."

Joining Victor and the Maryknoll community in Bolivia are spouses **Elizabeth Canales Almanza** and **Ray Almanza**, along with their children, Siena and Solomon.

Elizabeth is a Salvadoran American who has worked for 16 years with low-income, first-generation college students. She and Ray raised their children in a simple lifestyle at their home in Colton, California.

Before marriage, Elizabeth had considered joining the Peace Corps. A recent experience rekindled her calling to serve overseas. "My cancer diagnosis and treatment gave us the

opportunity to reflect more deeply on our family's values, purpose, and the way we want to live in the world."

Elizabeth shares Maryknoll's approach to mission: "It's not about helping from a distance, but about walking alongside others," she says. "Willingness to be transformed by those we accompany" is necessary.

Ray has held various ministry leadership positions, including for the Diocese of San Bernardino. "I've taught adult faith formation, youth ministry and marriage preparation, and I've contributed to national initiatives like V Encuentro and the Synod on the Family," says Ray, who is Mexican American. "In my most recent role, I led the young adult outreach team in Maryknoll's Mission Formation Ministry."

Working for the Maryknoll Society, Ray also led immersion trips, which affirmed the calling he shares with his wife to serve abroad. "I was especially moved by the churchwomen martyrs of El Salvador, whose lives and deaths are a powerful testimony," he says. "They didn't go there to 'fix' things; they went to be with people in their suffering. That kind of witness inspires me."

James Pawlowicz, originally from Bolingbrook, Illinois, has a unique background in animal science, non-profit management and pastoral accompaniment. "Working in animal control, I entered all kinds of homes and neighborhoods," he says. Volunteering in parish-based ministry for migrants exposed him to the trauma many have gone through.

James studied in the Twin Cities of Minnesota and most recently lived in Maryland, where he was an active member of St. Margaret of Scotland parish. His next address will be in Brazil: "I want to help others, and I hope to grow spiritually along the way."

Maria Corazón "Cora" Angeles will serve closer to home, bringing to the U.S.-Mexico border her four decades of expertise as an immigration attorney. "In my work with migrants and families, I have seen much suffering and brokenness," she says. "In spite of these challenges, they stay committed to their goals with incredible joy and hope."

Originally from Quezon City in the Philippines, Cora is a graduate of Maryknoll College in Manila. She came to the United States 43 years ago, making her home in Burbank, California. There, her involvement with Handmaids of the Lord, a women's ministry, nurtured her faith. Participating in Maryknoll immersion trips to Kenya and the Yucatán, Mexico, awakened her desire to witness to Christ's presence across cultures and borders.

At the sending Mass and ceremony, the candidates signed mission contracts for three and a half years, but the Maryknoll Lay Missioners covenant lasts for life.

As the community was dismissed "to proclaim the Gospel by our lives," the work of mission had already begun. ✠

Jennifer Tomshack is Maryknoll Lay Missioners' communications manager.

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Learning the Right Tone for Mission

Text and Photos by Paul Jeffrey

Seminarians gain mission experience in Taiwan through Maryknoll's Overseas Training Program

The walls of the Maryknoll House in Taichung, Taiwan, are covered with photos of Maryknoll priests and brothers who came here decades ago from the United States. Since the mission society began accepting vocations where Maryknoll serves, the young men who live in the house today look different.

"There's a new face of Maryknoll

in the world," says Maryknoll Father Joyalito Tajonera, the society's regional superior for Asia.

Yet no matter where they are from — and as an essential part of their formation — all priest and brother candidates must live and work in a new culture. Father Tajonera leads Maryknoll's Overseas Training Program (OTP) in Taiwan, which brings some of them to the island nation.



Maryknoll Seminarian Paschal Madukwa is preparing for the missionary priesthood through overseas training in Taiwan.

"OTP is not an easy experience," says Josephat Odundo, a Maryknoll seminarian from Kenya who arrived in 2023 to spend two years in the program. "You have to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations."

Odundo, now 33, spent his mornings at Providence University in Taichung, wrestling with the myriad tones of Mandarin Chinese. "Learning the language is the most important part of appreciating and understanding the culture," he says. "The better we can communicate, the more space we make for God's revelation among the people."

Odundo would spend the rest of the day in the neighborhood of Shalu, where Maryknoll Father Kurt Anderson is pastor of St. Bernadette Catholic Church. There the seminarian served the Chinese-speaking congregation — a role that kept him uncomfortable.

"In Kenya, religiosity is everywhere. Christianity is in our bloodstream. A Catholic priest is always one of the big men in the community," he says.

"But when I came to Taiwan, where Christians are a small minority, I realized that the simpler you become as a human being, the better you are as a priest. My approach toward priesthood has shifted to just being available and open to the realities of the people I'm working with."

Odundo embraces the Maryknoll legacy he inherits.

"Go to the cathedral and you'll learn it was built by Maryknoll. The first Catholic bishop of Taichung was



a Maryknoller," he says. Although "there is pressure when you carry this big name," he notes, the work of previous missionaries "makes my ministry easier because of the foundation they built."

Maryknollers "did more than build churches," continues Odundo. "They could interact with anyone." That closeness to the people, he says, "calls me to be like them." He is now studying for a Master of Divinity at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

Seminarian Paschal Madukwa is currently doing OTP in Taiwan. The physician from Tanzania volunteered with a ministry to homeless people around the Taichung train station while also studying language at Providence University. After a year, he moved to Kaohsiung, a city in the south, to begin a two-year graduate course in tropical medicine.

Madukwa says he felt called to the priesthood because he wanted to explore how medicine and spirituality could work together. "Someday I would love to be at patients' bedsides not only as a doctor, but also providing spiritual accompaniment," he says. "In the end stage of life, when medical interventions have run their course, being present as a spiritual companion could make a real difference."

His attraction to Maryknoll, says

Above: Prospect Guilveran Ignacio Omnes considered a career in law but instead set out for mission in Taiwan. Below: Prospect Jethro Natividad directs the choir of the Tanzi Church in Taichung. Both young men are now Maryknoll seminarians.



Josephat Odundo, a Maryknoll seminarian, learned Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan during his overseas training. He now continues his studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

Madukwa, started back home.

"I saw how Maryknollers from elsewhere had come to Tanzania and worked hard to learn the language and the culture, to relate with local people," he says. "That inspired me to ask Maryknoll to help me become a priest."

Madukwa, 33, says his OTP experience in Taiwan is giving him the skills needed for a lifetime mission.

"If all we did to prepare for the priesthood was study in seminary, it would be like reading a book on how to swim without ever getting wet," he says.

At first, "we are like babies, coping with a new culture and language.

We learn by making mistakes, and OTP provides a safe environment to do that," he says. "In my first months, I stumbled through the language and the nuances."

This process takes time, he adds. "We find patience, both with ourselves and others, which allows us to fall in love with the people and their culture. There is goodness in every culture. God is found in every culture," he says. "People are very generous, even with seminarians who constantly struggle to find the right tone to pronounce the right word."

In addition to supervising OTP in Taiwan for accepted Maryknoll candidates, Father Tajonera has established

an earlier first step: a vocational discernment program for "prospects," young men considering the missionary priesthood or brotherhood.

Jethro Natividad, of the Philippines, was one of them. Having studied at a diocesan seminary and having taught at Miriam College, founded in Manila by the Maryknoll Sisters, he was intrigued by Father Tajonera's invitation to Taiwan. After a two-month experience at the beginning of 2023, he resigned from his job to discern further. He serves at Ugnayan, the Maryknoll shelter for exploited migrant workers.

"I quickly learned that this is a different understanding of priesthood," he says. "Here in the shelter, we mop the floors, we wash the dishes, we walk with the people. We're reminded every day as we live among the migrants that Christ didn't come to earth as a mighty conqueror but rather as a poor baby who grew into a humble man."

Natividad also directs the choir of the Tanzi Catholic Church, where the congregation is mostly composed of Filipino migrants.

"Every Saturday morning we have choir practice. Even though many of them worked the night shift and just left the factory at 8 a.m., by 9 a.m. they are at church, ready to sing," he says. "They practice the songs all week long, and on Sunday morning they offer their talent to the Lord."

While Natividad plays the piano, Guilervan Ignacio Omnes — who also joined the vocational discernment program — accompanies the

church choir on his violin.

Omnes had left a diocesan seminary in the Philippines to pursue law in order to help victims of injustice. On the eve of entering law school, however, he heard about Maryknoll's vocational discernment program and headed to Taiwan, instead.

"One cold winter night, well after midnight, a guy showed up at our Ugnayan shelter, shivering in bare feet. He was a seafarer who had just escaped from his ship, where he didn't get enough food or sleep. From the moment I welcomed him into the shelter, I knew what I wanted to do with my life," Omnes says.

Omnes and Natividad applied to the mission society and were recently accepted. They are now officially Maryknoll seminarians.

Working with Father Tajonera, Omnes says, has "ignited a fire of vocation" in him — a flame that is fanned by challenge. "Father Joy is always telling us to be ready for whatever people will need," the seminarian says.

"Shortly after our arrival, Father Joy told us we were going somewhere. Jethro and I packed heavy bags," Omnes recalls. Then Father Tajonera told them to repack and take only the bare minimum. "Mission, he told us, is never about us. It's about them." ✠

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

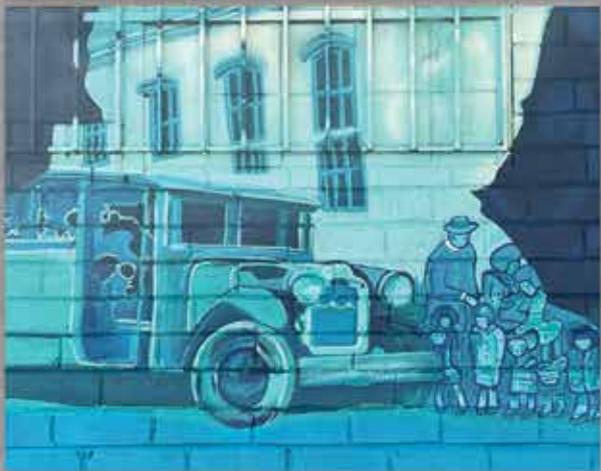
Light That Shines Before Others

By Joseph J. Donovan, M.M.

A humble ceremony was held in the Little Tokyo section of Los Angeles as the world recalled the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Japan and the incarceration of Japanese and Japanese Americans in the United States during World War II.

The ceremony on Aug. 31, 2025, was an occasion to bless a multi-wall mural at the only officially Japanese Catholic Church in the United States. Bishop Matthew Elshoff celebrated a bilingual English-Japanese Mass, with pastor Father Doan Hoang concelebrating. Long-time parishioners wanted the mural, painted by local artist Erin Yoshi, to reflect both their sad memories of years of suffering and the joys of their collective Catholic life. Maryknoll holds a special place in that story.

Outreach to Japanese Catholics in Little Tokyo began in 1912, when the Bishop of Hakodate, Japan, sent a priest to attend to the pastoral



Mural images (clockwise): Father Hugh Lavery, Sisters Mary Bernadette Yoshimochi and Susanna Hayashi at Manzanar; a woman facing a portrait of St. Francis Xavier; Brother Theophane Walsh as the school's first bus driver (Joseph Donovan/U.S.)

Top left: Members of Little Tokyo's St. Francis Xavier Chapel in Los Angeles and Maryknoll Father Joseph Donovan (third from left) celebrate the blessing of "The Spirit of Our Roots" mural by Erin Yoshi (in orange dress). (Kokawa Photography/U.S.)

needs of the community. In 1920, Rome assigned Maryknoll to assume that role.

A parish was established with three focal points: a school, an orphanage and the church, named after St. Francis Xavier, the first missionary to introduce Christianity to Japan. During those first decades, Maryknoll Father Hugh Lavery expanded the parish services and facilities. The Maryknoll Sisters were enlisted to run the school, which included a large multipurpose hall. School bus service began with Maryknoll Brother Theophane Walsh as the driver. Father Lavery also helped the Maryknoll Sisters acquire property in Monrovia, California, for use as a sanatorium for Japanese patients with tuberculosis.

The parish grew steadily until its greatest trial: the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Maryknoll met the challenge head-on in what was to become one of our mission movement's finest hours.

The school hall became a meeting place for the anxious Japanese Catholic community until the parishioners were evacuated to internment camps for the duration of the war. Since the school and church were now unused, parishioners' possessions could be safely stored in them. Father Lavery also negotiated the sale of families' homes at fair prices.

As mass incarcerations continued, the Maryknoll priests, brothers and sisters continually visited the camps to catechize, encourage the people

and celebrate the sacraments. Two Maryknoll sisters in particular are dearly remembered: Japanese-born Sisters Mary Bernadette Yoshimochi and Susanna Hayashi. Both were offered the protection of the sisters' motherhouse in New York, but refused to abandon their parishioners. They were interned along with them at Manzanar, and thus accompanied the community in the camp until the end of the war.

When the war did end, the families returned to Los Angeles. The church and school reopened, and parish life resumed. The school band, drum and bugle corps, volleyball teams, parish-organized picnics, karate club, the Catholic Family Movement, the Catholic Youth Organization and the Scouts revived their activities. Parish life thrived again, with a treasured new addition — an annual parish carnival! St. Francis Xavier became known throughout the city simply as "Maryknoll," and as one family put it, "Maryknoll became our second home."

This long and bittersweet history is celebrated in the inauguration of the parish mural, a tribute to the courageous and dedicated Japanese Catholics who suffered deep humiliation and tragic loss but remained ever confident in the faithfulness of their God and of the Maryknoll missionaries who loved them. ✠

Maryknoll Father Joseph Donovan, who has worked in Peru and in the States in vocations and promotions, currently serves in California.



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Maryknoll's young adult ambassadors joined with Catholic Climate Covenant young adults for a Jubilee pilgrimage to Italy last fall.

Young adults go on pilgrimage for the 10th anniversary of Laudato Si'

A Return to the Heart

Text and Photos by Andrea Moreno-Díaz

For the Jubilee Year, a cohort of young Catholics walked together through cobblestoned Italian streets, united by their passion for climate action. The group, made up of Maryknoll Young Adult Ambassadors and Catholic Climate Covenant Young Adults, convened in Rome last October for a pilgrimage of hope.

Ray Almanza, who led the trip as a Maryknoll mission educator and promoter, says he wanted the pilgrimage to have its own flavor. "The particular angle that we wanted to give is environmental justice that looks not only at the big needs, but at the forgotten people within those places — people of color and immigrant communities, especially climate refugees."

The Catholic Climate Covenant, Maryknoll's partner on the pilgrimage, is a nonprofit organization that offers resources and training for parishes, schools and universities.

"The spirit of striving and wanting more is inherent in our Church," says Diana Marin, the Covenant's program manager for Young Adult Mobilization. "There's a sacred potential ... a sacred anger," she says. "We can tap into that, not ignore it, but hold it with clarity, with discernment."

Listening to the anxieties of young people is key, Marin says. "They see the complexity of these issues and want to figure out their role. We need spaces that can foster young people to pursue the work that God is calling them toward."

To find that space, the pilgrims sought inspiration and connection with nature in the sunny hills of Assisi, hometown of St. Francis.

There, Maryknoll YA Ambassador Luna Stephanie shared pivotal moments of St. Francis' life and spirituality. For Luna, who serves the impoverished Tenderloin community in San Francisco, the saint models her ministry. "He was a rebel," she says. "St. Francis articulates my faith and how I live out my values."

While in Assisi, the group visited the Eremo delle Carceri — the hermitage where Francis and his friars often went on retreat. In the surrounding forest, participants joined in an activity offering rocks, flowers and branches to Pachamama, Mother Earth in the Indigenous Quechua language of South America. Set-



ting out for San Damiano — where St. Francis was called to rebuild the Church — the pilgrims read his "Canticle of the Creatures" and reflected on how to answer that call today.

"I sat in one of the caves and really tried to articulate these things that I believe so deeply in: presence, justice, unity, peace," says Connor Murray, a Catholic Climate Covenant young adult from Massachusetts. "I have a much better sense now of what those words mean to me."

In the town of Castel Gandolfo, the pilgrims attended the first day of the Raising Hope Conference with Pope Leo XIV to commemorate the 10th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*. A melting piece of glacial ice from Greenland was placed on the stage to represent the urgency of climate change.

Ogechi Akalegbere, a Maryknoll YA ambassador, works as a campus minister at Howard University in Washington, D.C. As the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, she says she's "keenly aware who's at the table, who gets invited and who gets listened to."

For people struggling to meet basic needs, she says, climate change might not seem like an urgent issue. But when she did tenant organizing in Montgomery County, Maryland, she saw a different picture.

"There's an intersection of hous-

Above: Lauren Pusich walks through the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica. Below: Young Adult Ambassadors Andrés García, Brinkley Johnson, Luna Stephanie and Ogechi Akalegbere pause in Assisi.



During their pilgrimage, the young adults attended a conference on climate action.

ing injustice and environmental injustice,” Akalegbere says. “Data centers in lower-income neighborhoods compound the impact and strain on health factors in communities that are already battling so much.”

At the conference, Pope Leo urged a “return to the heart.”

“The heart is the place where the deepest searching takes place, where the most authentic desires are discovered, where one’s ultimate identity is found, and where decisions are formed,” the pope said. “It is only by returning to the heart that a true ecological conversion can take place.”

For Maryknoll YA Ambassador Andrés García, the heart cannot be discounted. “It’s how God gives me

strength,” he says. “That connection with God is what calls me to fight injustice.”

Born in Colombia, García is pursuing a master’s degree in peace and justice at the University of San Diego. As an ambassador, he says, “you have to have joy to bring the message to others. Maryknoll has given us examples of priests, sisters and lay people who motivate us as young adults to change the world.”

Brinkley Johnson, another YA ambassador, says, “There’s a deep need for repair and healing.”

Johnson, who is studying for a master’s degree in restorative justice at the University of San Diego, volunteered for two years at Annunciation House, a network of migrant

shelters in El Paso, Texas.

“More migration will occur if we don’t address the root causes,” she says, “and respond in humane and dignifying ways with our best creativity and hope.”

In 2025, García and Johnson received a Laudato Si’ Award from the Diocese of San Diego for their ecological work with young adults.

Back in Rome, the pilgrims walked through the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. Mary Major to visit the resting place of one of their heroes: Pope Francis. Kneeling in front of his tomb, they tearfully mourned the pope who had referred to the young as “the very embodiment of hope.”

“Pope Francis always championed the voices of young people,”

says Jesús “Paco” Estrada, a Catholic Climate Covenant young adult from Los Angeles. “Young people are the leaders of today, not tomorrow. We are here to take action in the present.”

The group attended a papal audience and passed through the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica. The next day, they attended the Mass for the Jubilee of Missions and Migrants, joining “the larger community of pilgrims traveling from around the world to show solidarity for migrants, for the poor, for creation,” Luna says.

The pilgrimage culminated with the music of international performers at the Festival of Peoples in the Gardens of Castel Sant’Angelo.

Ray Almanza, who now serves with his family in Bolivia with Maryknoll Lay Missioners, says he has witnessed the transformative power of many such encounters.

“I see people on these trips not knowing what to expect,” he says. “They’re unsure; they’re strangers.” Through the shared experiences of an immersion trip, he says, they become a community. “They’re on fire when they return,” he adds.

“There’s really no substitute for bringing them to the well and having them drink from that well,” Almanza says. “Their faith is nourished. They return home with their sense of mission alive.” ✠

Prayer for Vocations

Prayer, Service and Hospitality

Gracious God, your invitation to serve our sisters and brothers is ever-present in the ordinary encounters of our daily lives and in the stillness, silence and peace that surround us in times of solitude.

Our response is a call to love, prayer, service and hospitality as missionaries. May we be attentive as we minister to our sisters and brothers, and they to us.

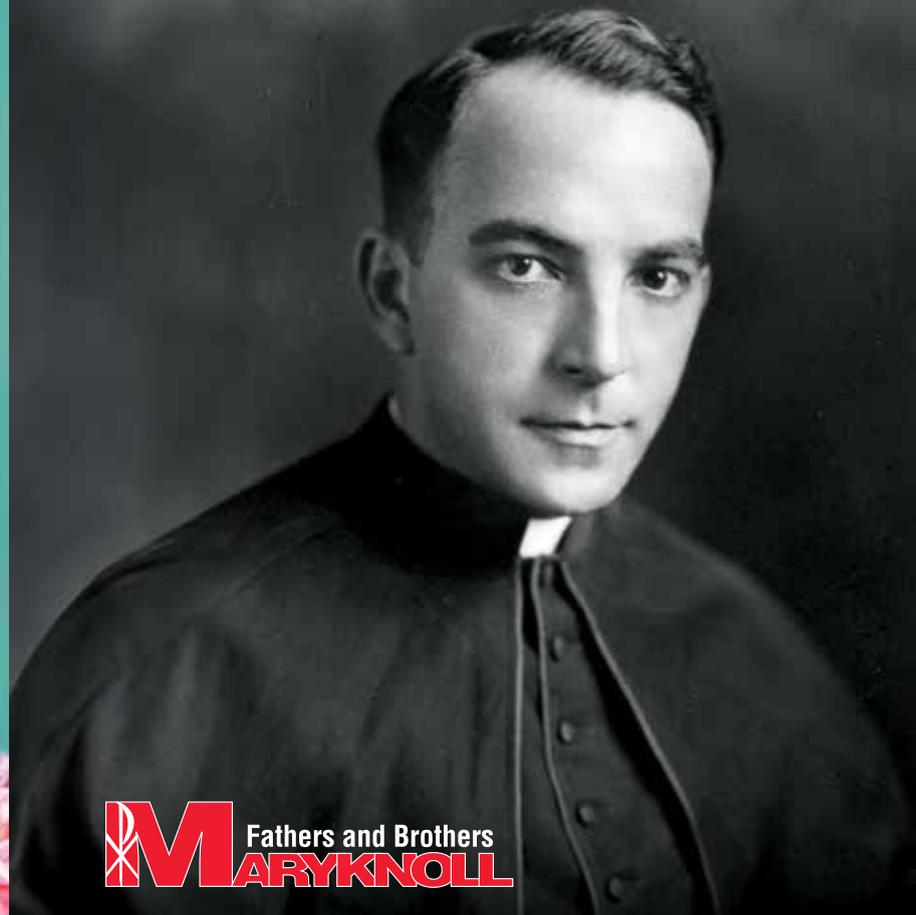
May our hearts be open to loving service of the poor. May we be willing to wash the feet of our sisters and brothers, as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the table.

What Jesus has done, let us do. We pray for the grace to invite all people into relationship with our loving God, and to share hospitality of the heart and spirit as missionary disciples. May we be generous in offering hospitality and have the same attitude toward all.

— *Wayne Fitzpatrick, M.M.*

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Guardians of Creation

By Lisa Sullivan

Maryknoll representatives attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference in November in the Brazilian city of Belém in the Amazon rainforest — land of torrential rains, thunderous rivers and communities whose calls for climate justice echoed far beyond the official venue. This was the 30th annual “COP,” or Conference of the Parties, which is the U.N.’s primary forum for addressing the climate crisis.

More than 56,000 official delegates from 193 countries attended, with significant participation from world leaders, scientists, businesses, faith groups and Indigenous peoples. Ten years after countries adopted the Paris Agreement — a global pact to limit catastrophic warming — many arrived in Belém hoping this COP would chart a clear path forward.

By formal measures, the summit achieved limited results. A small group of countries blocked the words “fossil fuels” — the primary source of heat-trapping emissions — from any of the final texts and could not agree to a proposed roadmap for a just and fair phaseout of coal, oil and gas.

However, the gathering affirmed the importance of multilateralism in addressing climate change, and, despite the U.S. government’s withdrawal

from the Paris Agreement, all other nations remained actively engaged. The United States was represented through civil society, faith-based actors and subnational elected leaders, underscoring the rising influence of grassroots and local action.

Outside the venue, the energy was electric. More than 70,000 joined the People’s Summit and the People’s Climate March. Nature itself punctuated the urgency: torrential downpours interrupted meetings, and a fire at the venue only hours before the final negotiations symbolized the world on fire — a stark, unforgettable reminder of the stakes of inaction.

Catholic organizations and leaders, including eight cardinals and 40 bishops, played an unprecedented and unifying role. The Global South bishops’ statement, “A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home,” called for an immediate halt to fossil fuel exploration, describing the climate crisis as “an urgent reality” and “an existential issue of justice, dignity and care for our common home.” Their message became the moral anchor of the conference and was the focus of a side event sponsored by Maryknoll featuring speakers from the African, Asian, and Latin American bishops conferences.



Maryknoll Father Patrick Okok and Lisa Sullivan attend the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Brazil’s Amazon region. (Courtesy of Lisa Sullivan/Brazil)

Pope Leo sent a video message to the bishops and cardinals at the conference, encouraging their efforts and reminding world leaders that “we are guardians of creation, not rivals for its spoils,” reinforcing the urgent need for climate action grounded in justice.

As the final negotiations closed without addressing fossil fuels, hope and momentum emerged in the form of a new coalition of 20 countries will-

ing to join the First International Convention on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels to be hosted by Colombia in April, signaling that meaningful climate action can — and must — happen at multiple levels. ✞

Lisa Sullivan, senior policy officer for integral ecology at the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, is a returned Maryknoll lay missionary.

FAITH IN ACTION:

- Read about the joint statement by bishops from the Global South titled A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home. <https://bit.ly/GlobalSouthBishops>
- Watch Pope Leo’s video message to bishops and cardinals at COP30. <https://bit.ly/PopeLeoCOP30>
- Tell your state leaders to take action on fossil fuels. <https://bit.ly/StateLevelAction>

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

NEED ICE

It's with a heavy heart that I write to you with my concerns about your Fall 2025 magazine.

About the article on Bishop Mark J. Seitz titled "False Narratives of Immigration," it's illegal immigration that worries me.

The article by Giovana Soria also deeply troubled me. The "humanitarian crisis" was not created by Governor Greg Abbott of Texas. The millions who crossed the Southern and Northern borders came because of the last administration, which didn't care about illegal migration. I have read of their terrible plight, but cartels, coyotes and smugglers made millions. Who's the bad guy?

These people are able to go home, given a thousand dollars each, and a free ride home. The gentleman who is afraid to go out and find a job knows he's here illegally. He will never be able to feel safe as greedy Americans will hire him under the table and exploit him.

I've never been afraid to walk the streets where I live. Now, when I hear a foreign language being spoken by young men, I can't help [but wonder] where ICE is when I need them.

*Kathleen Keltner
Silver Star, Montana*

TIME FOR MERCY

When are citizens, the Church and leaders of nongovernmental organizations going to start putting the blame for mass immigration where it belongs: on the national and inter-

national political leaders who ignore the fact that their people flock to the United States because they can't afford to live safely in their own countries? Those countries are either too dangerous or their economies are too slanted toward the rich while ignoring the plight of the poor.

It's time to call out U.S. political leaders for their failure to update our immigration laws to reflect this reality, and it's time to put even more pressure on other nations to adjust their national security and their economies to make it possible for people to live in their own countries.

Meanwhile, the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. As the parable of the rich man and the beggar shows (Luke 16:19-31), if those responsible don't pay now, they will certainly pay at Judgment. The time for mercy is now.

*Marv Sherman
St. Louis, Missouri*

NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

I remain optimistic in my convictions regarding immigration. It has been often said that we are a nation of immigrants. For centuries we've come to the United States to seek opportunity and prosperity from the work of our hands and, if necessary, sanctuary. By the grace of God, these values must persist. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops endorses this as well. Even if some have a storied past, we are all noted in the Book of Life and we are all capable of being forgiven.

“When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick.” — Matthew 14:14

The last issue of *Maryknoll* magazine, Winter 2026, provides many examples of why a unified faith in action is important. Mother Frances Cabrini, cited in the photo meditation “Standing Her Ground” by Father Joseph R. Veneroso, gives us that hope through her selflessness.

Our church, St. Suzanne/Our Lady Gate of Heaven in Detroit, Michigan, is small but mighty in that we gathered last summer with other parishioners to protest ICE policies.

*Mark A. Sleboda
Redford Township, Michigan*

THEY ARE CRIMINALS

I take issue with Bishop Mark Seitz in the article of your Fall 2025 issue where he said that 99% of the illegal immigrants are good people, when in fact they are criminals who broke our law as they barged across our border. The law states that you must enter our country at a port of entry with proper documentation and with the federal government’s permission. The 1% that the bishop admits aren’t good people still would amount to hundreds of thousands.

I’ve seen many clips of these criminals coming into our country. They all look well fed and clothed and equipped with smartphones. Everyone was required to pay an escort thousands of dollars, most of which went to the drug cartels. Where did these “poor” people get this kind of cash? I suspect that if they didn’t

have it, they wrote an IOU to the drug cartels that will certainly find them if they don’t pay up.

We need legal immigration for our country to continue to prosper. You people always seem to leave out that word, “legal.”

*Richard Ready
Shawano, Wisconsin*

ADVOCATING SIN

Remove me from all solicitations and subscriptions due to your article which advocated for illegal immigration. This is a violation of the eighth commandment, *Thou shalt not steal*. Illegal immigration is a crime and the theft of another nation’s resources and opportunities.

While no one opposes legal immigration, illegal immigration is wrong and a sin. I suggest you review your catechism before publishing such rubbish. Charity begins at home and also overseas, but not to those who break into your home. That is enablement and collusion in sin.

*Theodore DiVito
Olympia, Washington*

Editor’s Note: *While our missionaries across the world care for migrants regardless of status, Maryknoll does not advocate for illegal immigration. Maryknoll follows Church teaching on migration (see story, page 24).*

Maryknoll magazine reserves the right to edit letters to the editor for clarity, brevity and civility.



Paul Jeffrey/Kenya

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Maryknoll Fathers Joyalito Tajonera and Nhuan Nguyen (in vestments, left, right) train candidates such as Maryknoll Seminarians Josephat Odundo (center), Guilervan Omnes (back row, second from right) and Jethro Natividad (back row, far right) for a lifetime in mission. (See story, p. 40.)

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