

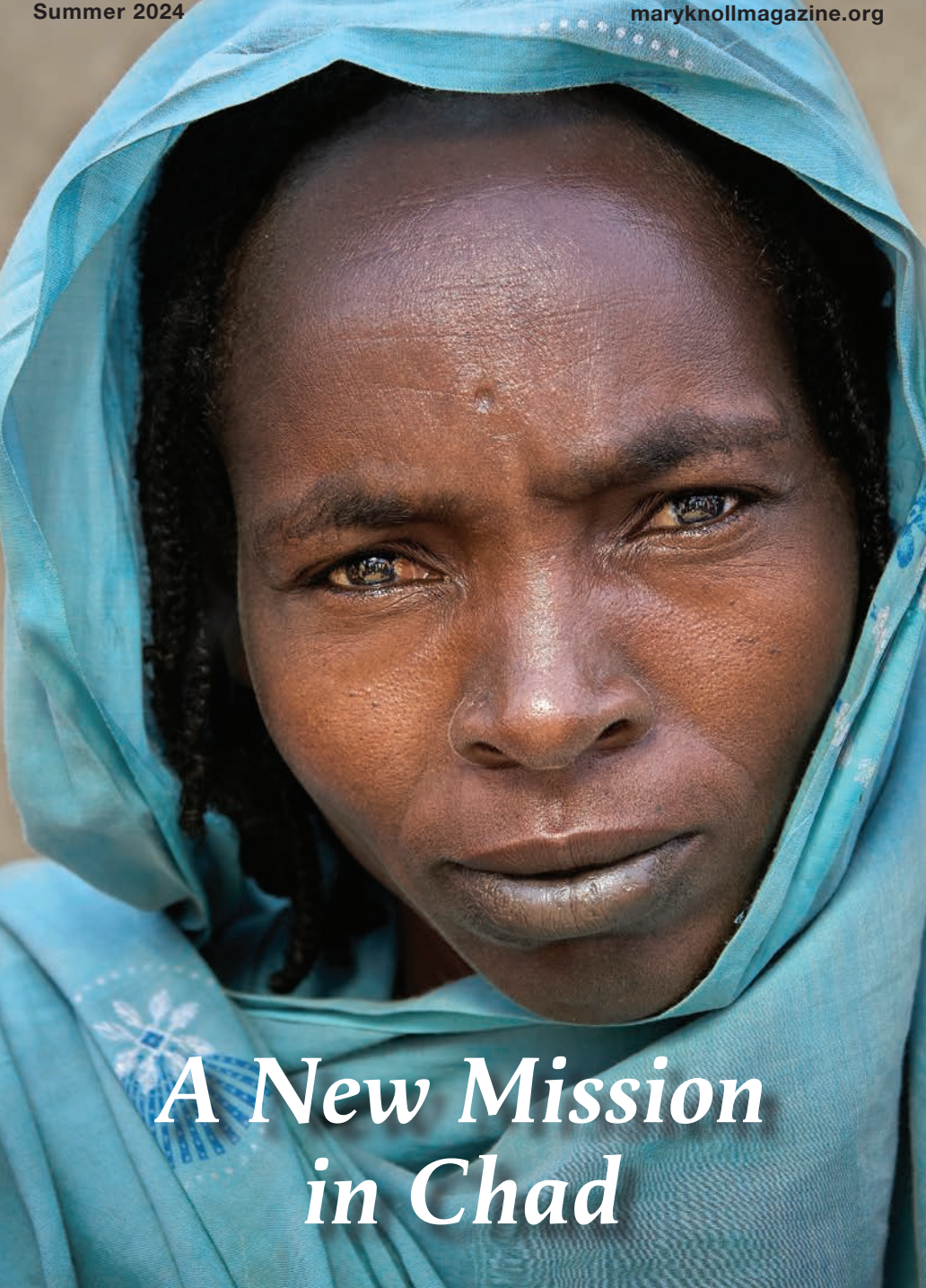


U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

MARYKNOLL®

Summer 2024

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*A New Mission
in Chad*

FROM THE EDITOR

In each issue of our quarterly magazine, we include a recurring theme that dovetails with the work of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers education program Discover Your Neighbor. The theme for the Summer issue is “Going Forth.” As a mission movement, that is certainly what Maryknoll does, all year long.

Our cover story epitomizes this mission spirit. In journal form, “A New Mission Presence in Chad” chronicles the joys, trepidations, frustrations and even tragedy of four Maryknoll sisters who set out last year for the Central African nation.

We also explore the mission journeys of Maryknoll seminarians undertaking overseas training in Bolivia. The young aspirants to the priesthood serve people in the city of Cochabamba and in remote Indigenous communities of the Amazon. Managing Editor Deirdre Cornell, who visited the seminarians last year, also writes about the ministry of one of Maryknoll’s newest priests, Father Gregory McPhee, ordained in 2020.

Going forth to mission can mean martyrdom. In 1976, Maryknoll Father William Woods’ small plane went down in a suspicious crash in the Guatemalan jungle. Meinrad Scherer-Emunds revisits that tragic event from the perspective of a young lay missionary couple who had joined Father Woods as volunteers. The husband, John Gauker, was one of four passengers on the plane, none of whom survived.

Going forth to live the Gospel is a risk, an adventure and a challenge. Yet, as Father Joseph La Mar says in our vocation prayer, when God calls, “it’s tough to say ‘no.’”

*Lynn F. Monahan
Editor-in-Chief*



Adam Mitchell/Bolivia

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FRONT COVER:
A woman is shown in Chad, where the Maryknoll Sisters started a new mission.

COVER CREDITS:
Front: Paul Jeffrey/Chad
Back: Selwyn Puig/Maryknoll Mission Archives/Guatemala

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.

MARYKNOLL

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

Romans 8:28

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Magazine of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers



GOD OF HOLY LIBERATION

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*You, who delivered us when we were still enslaved
By sin and selfishness, do not abandon us
Now in our time of despair nor turn your face
From our pitiful plight when all else fails
And faithless friends flee,
But come to us again in our hour of need.*



*Not from among mighty empires, nations or peoples
Did you choose one worthy to bear your truth
But from among the impoverished and oppressed —
The nobodies of the world — you lifted up Moses
As liberator and lawgiver to forge a royal race
By revealing your divine and liberating Name.*

*Yet now as then it is that very freedom we find most
Frightening and so fashion for ourselves new idols
Not of gold but greed and power and fame
And willingly rebind ourselves with chains
Not of iron but rather deceptively pleasant potions
To soothe our conscience and wounded pride.*

*This time not up Sinai's soaring slope but on
Calvary's consecrated crest you bid us
Take the shoes from off our feet
For the very Earth on which we stand is holy ground
And nothing must ever come between us
And this first sacrament revealing exactly who I AM.*

MISSIONER TALES



Nile Sprague/Taiwan

When I served in Taiwan, I got numerous requests from people who wanted to learn or improve their English, whether for business or to visit sons or daughters working abroad. I started a course called Practical English for Travelers. As part of our lessons we played Bingo. Not the ordinary game with numbers, but a specially-designed version using words and phrases from our class. Usually, the winner got a small prize or a piece of candy. I also had the idea to write short quotes or inspirational messages on colorful pieces of paper. They loved it! Hardly anyone chose the other prizes.

One day during our game, a student, Lily, was getting discouraged because it seemed that everyone but she was winning. I could see she was eager to win.

I quietly bent over and reminded Lily to be attentive in playing; in doing so, I took a quick glance at which words were still left on her card. Then I discreetly cheated and called the words she needed. What a shriek of joy when she won!

Well, after all, the point of the game was to learn English and keep all the students engaged.

Katrina Eggert, M.M.

Life is a gift to be shared. Back in November 2021, fraternal twins were born in our United Nations camp for internally displaced people in Malakal, South Sudan, where I served for 10 years.

One day, after our liturgical celebration, George Alphonso invited members of our church to go to his tent home to meet his wife, Angelina, and these newborn twins, named

Martin and Estella. We prayed together that God would bless and protect all newborn children in our camp. At the conclusion of the prayer, we were offered a glass of mango fruit juice.

Then George and Angelina spoke of how grateful they were that we came to support them. They looked forward to the baptism of the twins in our tin-roof church.

God's gift of life flourishes and is celebrated even in difficult places where people live, such as our camp.

Michael Bassano, M.M.

My first experience of preparing children for Communion took place in Bolivia while I was still learning Spanish.

On the day the children were to make their first confession, I worried about whether my pupils had understood me. Had I explained sufficiently? Had they learned enough? I sat in the church, praying nervously. Two or three boys had gone in and out of the confessional — in those days, a dark, box-like place where the person confessing spoke through a semi-opaque screen.

One of my students, little David, came out. He stood there looking all around until he saw me. He ran over and said excitedly, "I saw him do it!"

"What did you see, David?" I asked. David put his hand in the air and made the sign of the cross. "I saw him do it!" he repeated. "He took all my sins away!"

I have never forgotten the fervor of that act of faith. I may not have explained the sacrament perfectly, but the Holy Spirit did.

Elizabeth Roach, M.M.

At the United States-Mexico border where I serve as a Maryknoll lay missionary, an Annunciation House shelter for asylum seekers was in full swing. At the time, the shelter was welcoming 15 to 60 guests per day. The majority of arrivals were families.

I especially got to know a single mom with three children ages 1 to 7. The youngest son was a toddler when they arrived; soon he was attempting to stand and push chairs (as walkers) around the halls.

One day, the middle child wanted to play outside the building but needed a sweater. Our clothing room was tem-

porarily out of service. With only limited pieces of clothing at hand, in place of a sweater, I took a big T-shirt and wrapped it around his neck like a cape. He was thrilled and imagined himself to be Batman. Along with his sister and a friend, they became superheroes — Superman and Wonder Woman.

It was great to see them having fun with simple stuff, playing make-believe as children should.

Coralis Salvador, MKLM

BINGO! The sound of that word brings a smile to everyone's face — along with an excited feeling that they won something.



Building a Team for Christian Community

By Deirdre Cornell

A new Maryknoll priest describes his learnings in ministry in Bolivia

Sister Faviola Condori Quispe, Maryknoll Father Gregory McPhee and Sister Clara Mamani Limachi (left to right) prepare alpaca wool yarn for sale to benefit their ministry in Los Molinos, a village on the outskirts of Cochabamba, Bolivia. (Adam Mitchell/Bolivia)

When he was ordained four years ago, Maryknoll Father Gregory McPhee says, the term *yanapanakuna* was not part of his vocabulary. Now he spends every day putting this Quechua term into practice: “let’s help one another.”

Father McPhee, 54, is forming a chapel community in Los Molinos, a small village in the township of Tiquipaya. A 30-minute drive from the city of Cochabamba, the village is nestled in hills with abundant vegetation in an area known for flower cultivation.

“Los Molinos is in transition,” Father McPhee says. Most families — largely Quechua Indigenous — have been there for generations. In recent years, newcomers of retirement age have arrived, attracted to the tranquil setting and ready supply of water.

“The main challenge is building trust between the families,” Father McPhee says.



Victor Artaiz, Rosse Mary Miranda, Father McPhee and Mabel Ramírez (left to right) hold a meeting at the Maryknoll center and residence in Cochabamba. (Adam Mitchell/Bolivia)

Sister Faviola Condori Quispe of the Missionary Sisters of the Thirsting Christ explains further. She and other young Aymara sisters, including most recently Sister Valeria Mita Uchupi, live and serve in Los Molinos, guided by the wise Sister María “Mery” Figueredo Valverde.

The chapel had fallen into disuse, Sister Condori says. Their pastor in the growing town of Tiquipaya had more than enough to do, and when he came to say Mass, attendance was too low to fill the chapel’s 50 seats. The sisters lamented the palpable lack of a faith community.

Problems they witnessed in Los Molinos included depression, domestic violence, untreated illnesses and overconsumption of *chicha*, a homemade fermented beverage.

“We were discouraged,” Sister Condori says.

“Father Greg suggested forming a team,” she says. Since coming to Cochabamba from La Paz, another region of Bolivia, the sisters have collaborated with Maryknoll priests.

“Our goal is to re-evangelize,” Father McPhee says, noting that in many places, the Church needs to be “reignited.”

Drawing on Maryknoll’s wide circle of partners in Cochabamba, he identified three laypeople to join him and the sisters.

Victor Artaiz, of Wallingford, Connecticut, is one of them. Artaiz became a Franciscan Mission Service volunteer after a career in sales. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he found himself reflecting on the



On a trip to the Andean Altiplano last year, Father McPhee and the Missionary Sisters of the Thirsting Christ bought a supply of alpaca fleece. (Courtesy of Gregory McPhee/Bolivia)

call to mission. “I was doing a lot of praying and reading my Bible, praying for guidance,” he says. He arrived in Cochabamba in January of 2022 and met Maryknollers in prison ministry. “I was immediately befriended by the Maryknoll community,” he says.

“My ministry is letting God lead me and sharing his word and applying the Gospel to daily life,” he continues.

“Victor delivers a strong message, especially for the men,” says Father McPhee, who also enlisted two Bolivian psychologists.

Mabel Ramírez Cornejo got to know Maryknoll through the Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation (ESPERE) program. She brings to the team her vast experience in

family counseling.

“Our first step was going door to door,” she recounts. “The whole team went together to each house. Why? To get to know them, and from there to evaluate their needs.”

Of the approximately 100 houses in Los Molinos, a sizeable number are still under construction, but the team reached about 60 families.

“They have welcomed us,” Ramírez says. “Their openness is incredible,” she adds.

Making home visits “really gives me a sense of what’s going on,” Father McPhee says. “It’s one thing when people come to the sisters’ house, but when you go inside you see what they’re dealing with, how they’re living.”

“There was a case of an adolescent

girl with epilepsy. It wasn't the common kind," Ramírez says. "She hadn't been given the right medications, nor did she get tested properly." Ramírez's husband, a medical doctor, volunteered his services. He made sure that the girl, named Sheila, received adequate care and appropriate prescriptions. Father McPhee, who helped pay for the treatment, says Sheila is now doing fine.

Rosie Mary Miranda Miranda is another member of the pastoral team. As a Quechua speaker who lives in Tiquipaya, she offers an insider's perspective.

The visitation campaign was a real success, she says: in this reserved, insular Indigenous culture, "our campesino brothers and sisters don't usually open their doors" to outsiders.

Miranda, a psychologist who works with children, also points out that campesinos are unfamiliar with counseling. "They think only crazy people go to the psychologist," she says. Yet a couple of families have already sought out therapy — provided free of charge.

It was Miranda who proposed the Quechua name for the team's project: *Yanapanakuna*. "It encapsulates all the values of sharing, partnerships, solidarity and communal tasks," she says.

To support the work in Los Molinos, the Missionary Sisters of the Thirsting Christ sell alpaca yarn. Traveling with Father McPhee to the mountains bordering Chile, they bought sheared fleece from families who raise alpaca herds.

The sisters wash, dye and card the wool, then use a drop spindle to

spin the fibers into yarn. "We have a couple of buyers in the States," Father McPhee says. He hopes to raise funds for repairs to the Los Molinos chapel.

Counseling and assistance for struggling families, Father McPhee explains, are only part of his vision. Indigenous people in Bolivia, he notes, tend to open up more in communities of trust. He envisions base ecclesial communities, also known as small Christian communities, to gather people regularly for prayer and Scripture reflection. Formation of lay leaders is key, as are workshops, such as one given last year at the sisters' house on communication in the family.

Recently, classes in cooking and confection were held, also at the sisters' house. These enable families to sell baked goods, thus supplementing their meager incomes.

Although the team's goals are large, Father McPhee says, ministry begins with small steps. "As Americans we think of results. How many people do we get in, how many projects do we have, how much is the budget," he says. "Right now, it's much more about building relationships." He shares that he draws inspiration from Saint Paul's letters to the early Church.

A cradle Catholic, the young McPhee had fallen away from his faith until his late 30s. He came back to the Church while working as a criminal defense attorney in Syracuse, New York.

Ordained at 50, Father McPhee recalls the words that propelled him into mission: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations"



Father McPhee joyfully celebrates Mass and the sacraments in Los Molinos, where he and a pastoral team are forming a chapel community. (Courtesy of Gregory McPhee/Bolivia)

(Matthew 28:19a). "It was like Christ speaking to me," he says. "I felt called to accompany people in our universal Church."

The COVID-19 pandemic postponed his ordination and delayed his sendoff, but in April of 2021 the missionary arrived in Cochabamba. He first served at a chapel of the thriving, well-organized parish of Nuestra Señora de La Salette (Our Lady of La Salette), which introduced him to "the basics" of pastoral ministry in Bolivia.

At the Maryknoll Fathers and

Brothers center in Cochabamba, he says, "I love the photos on the wall and the history of the work of Maryknoll. It was going out to the Indigenous and the poor."

Now, in Los Molinos, Father McPhee says, he is serving in that same mission.

"Often, I felt before that I had to be the expert. I had to bring the message," he says. "Now I am listening. I am seeing where is the place of trust, the Spirit of Christ in us — and among us — that's teaching me that God is present." ✠

Spirit of Mission

On Finding Jesus

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

“Who do you say that I am?” If you could go back to the time of Jesus, what would you see? The first challenge, of course, would be figuring out which one was Jesus. He wouldn’t be wearing the bright white, red and blue robes portrayed on holy cards. He would be wearing the same faded cotton or linen robes as everyone else. Without a halo, he’d look like so many other itinerant preachers, teachers and healers who perambulated the countryside of Judea and Galilee.

And his name wouldn’t be Jesus! That’s the English translation of the Latin (by way of Greek) from the Hebrew *Joshua*, which in his native Aramaic was rendered *Yahoshua*, meaning “Yahweh saves.”

Contrary to what some believe, Christ is not Jesus’ last name. It means “the anointed,” that is, “the Messiah” or “king” and is the title for which he was crucified. But even a perfunctory reading of the Gospels shows that for those who encountered him, recognizing Jesus as the Messiah is a gradual, step-by-step process.

Lepers encountered Jesus as a healer, who delivered them from disease — and social isolation. Demoniacs experienced him as an exorcist

who freed them from the power of evil.

At the synagogue on the Sabbath or listening to his Sermon on the Mount, people recognized him as a great preacher and teacher, Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth. At the Resurrection Mary Magdalene calls him “*Rabboni*” (my teacher and master).

But the title Jesus used most often for himself was “Son of Man.” The Gospels record Jesus using this reference no fewer than 80 times. That’s *Bar Nasha* in Aramaic or *Ben Adam* in Hebrew, both titles rich in meaning. At its basic level it means simply a human being, or a son of the human race. In the Book of Daniel, it refers to the one who comes to judge the human race at the end of the world.

The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:4-30 shows a step-by-step recognition of who Jesus is. The woman sees him first as a man and a suspicious adversary. She thinks, “Why would a Jewish man talk to an unaccompanied Samaritan woman?” When Jesus tells her to go call her husband, she dissimulates, “I don’t have one.” Instead of chastising her for duplicity, Jesus praises her honesty. “You don’t have one. You’ve had five and the one you have now is not



An image of Christ is pictured at the entrance of New Mexico’s historic El Santuario de Chimayo shrine, renowned for its soil’s legendary healing properties. (Bob Roller/CNS/U.S.)

your husband,” he retorts.

In short order the Samaritan woman goes from calling Jesus a Jew to “sir,” “rabbi,” and finally, “Messiah.” This is one of only a few places in the Gospels where Jesus clearly admits he is the Messiah. And to a Samaritan woman, no less!

Each of the four Gospels lead us through different processes of discovery. Matthew reveals Jesus as the Messiah of the Jewish people. Luke proclaims him Savior of the whole world. For Mark, Jesus is the Son of God and for John, Jesus is present as the Word who was with God from the beginning. John’s Gospel makes clear that Jesus isn’t just the Son of God but God the Son (John 20:28).

Even non-Christians wrestle with the

challenge of understanding who Jesus is. Hindus regard him a guru, but many consider him also an *acharya*, a spiritually advanced teacher whose life and teachings are one. Some even venerate him among their gods and mystics. Buddhists say Jesus is a *bodhisattva*, who postponed entering Nirvana so he could show others the way to Enlightenment. Islam numbers Jesus among the greatest of prophets, born of the Virgin Mary — to whom an entire chapter of the Quran is dedicated. They consider both Jesus and Mary as embodying characteristics of what it means to be Muslim, that is, one who surrenders to the will of God.

And you? Who do you say Jesus is?

More importantly, does your life reflect your answer? ✠

A New Mission Presence in Chad

By Claudette LaVerdiere, M.M., NgochÀ Pham, M.M.,
and Norma Pocasangre, M.M.



In April 2022 the Maryknoll Sisters began to consider a new mission. After months of prayerful discernment, they chose the Central African country of Chad. Sisters Lourdes Fernandez, Claudette LaVerdiere, NgochÀ Pham and Norma Pocasangre embarked on this new mission journey. The following entries are condensed from their diary.

May 1 - 20, 2023: We four sisters left Monrovia, California, on a 14-hour flight to Istanbul, only to find on arrival that the next flight to Chad wouldn't leave for four days.

On May 5, we arrived at N'jamena, the capital, to learn that not a single suitcase had been loaded onto the plane! Our driver took us to the diocesan hospitality center, gave us our keys and said, "Bonne nuit." We had arrived.

Our first Chadian liturgy can only be described as exuberant, even in this 110-degree heat. The xylophone and drums blended with the ululations and gentle swaying of the congregation. The liturgy, in French and Ngambay (the local language), was a feast.



Maryknoll Sister Norma Pocasangre (center) serves in pastoral ministry as part of a new mission recently started by the Maryknoll Sisters in the Central African country of Chad. (Courtesy of Norma Pocasangre/Chad)



In Chad many children from struggling families, such as these young street vendors, must work from an early age instead of attending school. (Courtesy of Ngochà Pham/Chad)

After many trips to the airport we decided that with or without our luggage we had to get to Moundou.

A nine-hour bus ride took us to our host, Bishop Joachim Kouraleyo Tarounga of Moundou, who had invited us to “come and see” the possibilities for mission in his diocese.

He asks three things of every religious community: that they set up their own house; learn the language; and foster local religious communities. Father Amédée Ekeurbe, the vicar general, would help us in every possible way. Father Constant Djerassem, diocesan *économiste* (bursar), would help set up our bank account and arrange our temporary housing.

We soon learned that electricity is available only from 6 p.m. to 8:30 or 9 p.m.

The first rain of the season brought the temperature down to 103 degrees!

Things are falling into place very

nicely. Lourdes, Claudette and Norma got their new local phones. We invested in a small router to get a Wi-Fi connection.

Claudette was having trouble maintaining her electrolyte level, which required a few trips to the local clinic.

Lourdes and Ha take early daily walks to the market, practicing their broken French and always coming back with a treat and sometimes an article of clothing. We are still hoping our luggage will appear!

Norma, Ha and Lourdes went to the bank together with Father Constant to open the account. Not so fast! One more letter from the bishop was required.

June 2 – 20: Today marks the end of our first week of French language school. There is a 12-minute walk during which we dodge the piles of onions, mangoes, grains, etc., that share the street with trucks, cars, motorcycles, bikes, *rascha*



Maryknoll Sister Ngochà Pham (right) visits Logone River where local people fish, wash clothes, prepare food and collect gravel for brickmaking. (Courtesy of Ngochà Pham/Chad)

(three-wheelers), goats and people.

We attended an early Mass, exclusively in Ngambay. It was refreshing that the priest really welcomed people to share the meaning of the Gospel with one another. Incense is predominant — all in unforgiving temperatures.

At 8:30 a.m. the phone rang: “We have your luggage.”

Lourdes and Ha braved the afternoon heat to attend a program entitled “Violence Against Women.” The following day, Ha’s professor commented that women in Chadian society are treated as second-class citizens and education is not encouraged. Children as young as 9 and 10 are commonly seen selling in the streets.

July 1 – 22: Water has not been reaching the taps in our rooms. You should see Norma balance a bucket on her head, even going up the stairs!

We now need a rubber stamp, “Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic,

Inc.,” for our bank account.

All week, Lourdes has been ill and going to the clinic. On July 7, when Claudette arrived home from language school, she found Lourdes breathing with difficulty and unable to get up. We gathered by her bedside. Lourdes and Ha had often paused at a grotto of the Virgin Mary to say the Hail Mary in French. To comfort her, Ha prayed it in Lourdes’ ear. When she came to the end, “*maintenant et à l’heure de notre mort*” (“now and at the hour of our death”), Lourdes’ breathing relaxed. She turned to look at Ha and in that brief moment slipped into eternity and into the fullness of God’s embrace.

For a week, sisters and priests from neighboring parishes, as well as parishioners, came to pray with us.

We received our visitors as best we could.

Ha already had malaria. Then Claudette was diagnosed with malaria.



Sister Pham, a nurse with specialized training in counseling shown here meeting with a client, was asked to help launch a mental health program. (Courtesy of NgocHà Pham/Chad)

Even though Norma also got malaria, she and Ha hosted the Legion of Mary, the Catholic Women's Group and the church choir. The outpouring of sympathy was more heartwarming than we can express. Following Lourdes' death, the entire church of the Diocese of Moundou and beyond was present to us.

From the time of our arrival in Chad, Claudette was unable to digest the food. She was down to 83 lbs. from her normal 106. It was time for a drastic decision.

Claudette left Moundou for Maryknoll, New York.

Aug. 12 – 19: Norma and Ha continued to process all that had transpired and to prayerfully discern together whether or not to continue their presence in Chad.

The Congolese Contemplative Sisters of the Assumption welcomed us into their home and have

become our extended community. We share meals and prayers with the sisters and take turns cooking.

Oct. 28 – 30: Ha was attacked from behind by a thief who pulled out a knife when she resisted. The strap around her neck broke, and the thief fled with her purse. To fill out a form at the police station cost 2,000 Chadian francs. The next day the purse was found, minus the 30,000 francs (about \$50 USD) and the phone it had held, but we had to pay 60,000 francs (\$100 USD) to collect it from the police.

Nov. 2 – 30: After Mass Norma did not feel well. It was the third time in five months that she had malaria. Fortunately, it was a mild case, and with medication we were able to attend a monthlong program for new missionaries to familiarize us with the realities of Chad. We had sessions on church, history, health systems, education, politics



(From left) Sisters Norma Pocasangre, Claudette LaVerdiere, NgocHà Pham and the late Lourdes Fernandez pose with Bishop Joachim Kouraleyo. (Courtesy of NgocHà Pham/Chad)

and traditional marriages, practices and languages. In the afternoons we learned some Ngambay.

Dec. 1 – 29: Upon our return to Moundou, Bishop Joachim proposed that Norma work in parishes and Ha, who is a nurse, in the cathedral's hospital. We agreed to stay in Moundou.

After six months, we were approved for a bank account! Things finally seem to be moving forward.

After months of triple-digit temperatures, we now enjoy evenings and mornings that are cool enough for a sweater. Visiting our neighbors not only warms the body, but also friendships.

We hung some ornaments in our windows and placed a Christmas tree on the balcony.

Christmas Mass was outdoors, and Bishop Joachim presided. It lasted nearly four hours with singing, drumming and dancing. We

celebrated with French toast made with bread saved for this special occasion.

We will be moving to a smaller house in the New Year. With all the changes and surprises we've been experiencing, we remain open for almost anything.

At the annual Christmas gathering for religious in the diocese, Father Amédée recalled the arrival of the Maryknoll Sisters and the passing of our dear Sister Lourdes and two diocesan priests. He then invited the congregation to stand for a moment of silence to remember them.

Despite the unknowns that still lie ahead, Norma and Ha choose to continue our presence in Chad. We are grateful for the support of Maryknoll, of our family and friends, and of the local church. We trust that God is guiding us in our new mission every step of the way. ✠

Trial by Fire in the Amazon

By Deirdre Cornell

Maryknoll seminarians in Bolivia respond to pastoral needs and discern a lifetime of mission

Few places on earth are as challenging as the Amazon rainforest. Yet that is precisely where four Maryknoll seminarians are training to become missionary priests.

The young men are spending two years in Bolivia as part of their Overseas Training Program — an essential part of formation for Maryknoll priest and brother candidates.

“The first requirement of OTP is that they really experience a missionary’s life,” says Maryknoll Father Alejandro Marina, the local program coordinator. “What it is like living in another culture, another language, and whether they will feel comfortable.”

Leonard Kabaka, 27, says that every month they accompany Father Alejandro to the Amazon. “We carry our mission activities to different villages in the forests,” he explains.

Another candidate, Lawrence Mutiso, 30, adds that the experience is “the core” of his mission learning in Bolivia.

The missionaries assist in the Isiboro

Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (known by its Spanish acronym TIPNIS). Maryknoll was invited to serve there by Father Enrique Bustamante Ramírez of the Archdiocese of Cochabamba, who oversees pastoral care in this rugged tract of over 4,700 square miles. Roughly six dozen small communities are spread throughout the territory. Most of the 14,000 inhabitants are Catholic.

“The main challenge is access,” says Kabaka, of Kisii, Kenya. Some communities can be reached only by boat — depending on water levels. Once, to get to the next village, he recalls, they had to push, rather than row, their canoe. “It took three hours,” the seminarian says. “But that’s what mission is all about. Bringing the Good News and sharing it with the people.”

Although on paper TIPNIS is doubly protected as a national park and as Indigenous-held land, the reality is different. Climate change and socioeconomic upheaval are exacerbating already existing poverty. Illegal logging and land theft by

In a remote Indigenous community of the Amazon, Maryknoll Seminarians Lawrence Mutiso and Leonard Kabaka take Communion to the homebound. (Adam Mitchell/Bolivia)



Left: Maryknoll Seminarian Barrack Odeka brings experience in agriculture to Maryknoll's work of helping with reforestation projects in Cochabamba and in the Amazon.



Center: At a Communion service led by the seminarians in Santísima Trinidad in TIPNIS, Kabaka greets parishioners. Right: Mutiso distributes Communion. (Adam Mitchell/Bolivia)



outsiders are increasingly common.

"People are migrating to the Amazon to farm," Mutiso says. "And the more they migrate, the more they cut down trees." Deforestation is both cause and effect of wildfires that rage out of control.

Julia Molina is secretary of the parish of Santísima Trinidad (Most Holy Trinity) in a town of the same name. "God gave us nature. We have to care for it," she says.

She weeps as she lists the "disasters" facing her Mojeño-Trinitario

community: stripped forests, high temperatures "that don't let us sleep," drought, dry riverbeds and the loss of fishing and irrigation.

"The Church gives me strength," Molina says through tears.

Pastoral care is crucial. "Without someone to enrich you with the Word, the Body and Blood of Christ, you start losing faith," says Mutiso, of Machakos, Kenya.

He and Kabaka usually stay on for another week after Father Marina and the other two seminarians re-

turn to their responsibilities in the city of Cochabamba.

"Here at the Maryknoll center (in Cochabamba), we have staff," Father Marina says. "There, they have to care for the house and cook. It's a whole training of how to organize your life in mission."

Father Marina notes that the community had some children and youth of age for First Communion and Confirmation. "Kabaka and Lawrence offered to prepare the program," he says. "If they go to a parish that is al-

ready set up, the pastor or director says, 'do this.' But in TIPNIS they had to think about the program — and how to give it. They had to modify what they prepared to adapt to the concrete people in front of them."

As a result of their effort, last October, 20 children received their First Communion and 15 young adults were confirmed, he says.

Upon arriving in Cochabamba, each candidate begins OTP with a homestay with a local host family, followed by six months of



Maryknoll Seminarian Yohana Maswizilo and a catechist prepare a dynamic for the First Communion class at Santa Ana of Cala Cala parish in Cochabamba. (Deirdre Cornell/Bolivia)

A Seminarian's Reflection

Human beings are God's language. If you want to hear God, you have to hear God through the people.

We OTP students experience mission with a people, a cultural community. The missionary and the welcoming community learn from each other as God mysteriously evangelizes both of us.

[The Amazon region we visit] is home to the Mojeño, Chimanes and Yuracaré Indigenous groups, who live from the land and are mostly hunters, fishers and gatherers. Meeting the people of these communities helps us to develop greater sensitivity to the importance of culture in mission.

During the weekend just after Pentecost, the Santísima Trinidad community holds a big celebration of three days to commemorate their founding. The celebration includes colorful cultural dances and honors the creator and protector, the Most Holy Trinity. The Eucharist

language study at the Maryknoll center. Afterward they are given the opportunity to serve in a wide range of ministries.

Yohana Maswizilo, 34, was eager to begin serving. "I thought to wait would not help me," he says, "because I need to learn more about the culture of the people, and mission." The seminarian, from Buhangija in Shinyanga Region, Tanzania, has found a spiritual home in Santa Ana of Cala Cala. In this parish — founded by Maryknoll — he assists on the altar and helps with religious education.

Last year, Maswizilo accompanied the First Communion class for children. "I decided to start with that age because of the language," he says, "but also to experience how the classes are being done." This year, he will move up to older groups.

At Santa Ana, Maswizilo also dis-

covered a new ministry: Alcoholics Anonymous. He says about the group members, who meet there regularly, "I am learning from them to be compassionate."

Trying out new ministries is part and parcel of the formation program, says Father Marina.

"OTP is open for you to express the gifts that you have, the talents you have been given by God," says Barrack Odeka, 32, from Sindo in Homa Bay, Kenya. "You present yourself, put yourself there, and allow God to do his work."

Odeka says that for him care of creation started from home. "Where I come from, we are surrounded by mountains and the lake," says the seminarian. "Most people who are not employed do farming and fishing." In Cochabamba and TIPNIS, he grows trees for reforestation.

Some of the young trees will take

is its key event. In addition, families take this opportunity to introduce their sons and daughters to the Christian family through the sacrament of baptism.

Our faith in Christ and confidence in mission is strengthened when we are blessed with seeing the Christian faith manifested through the traditions, customs and heritage that still exist in the Indigenous cultures of the Amazon. For the people living there, this is the heartbeat of their existence.

Coming from Africa, I could not be any happier than experiencing this simple, humble and kind encounter of life in the Amazon. We miss our homelands. We miss our families. But joining in Christ's mission and experiencing life with the communities here gives us a taste of home and family in these beautiful and blessed fields afar.

That is what mission is all about: sharing in and listening to the stories of others though they are different from us, and ultimately learning the beauty and richness hidden in our cultures. Mission is always about God's beautiful language: human beings.

—Leonard Kabaka



Young parishioners in Santísima Trinidad follow the Sunday readings. Like most of the Amazon region, this community in TIPNIS lacks a priest in residence. (Adam Mitchell/Bolivia)

10 years to mature. At first the villagers in the Amazon were not enthusiastic about tending these saplings in the nursery, Father Marina says. "I asked them, 'What is happening? If you don't care for them, they won't grow,'" he recalls.

"They told me, 'Father, we understand the need to grow these trees. But we also need to make money. We need cacao trees, too, so we can sell the cacao. Because if we have only these trees, what will happen is that we will need money ... and then we will cut them to sell!'"

The solution, Odeka learned, is to grow both.

Besides the trips to TIPNIS, Odeka goes to El Abra prison in Cochabamba on Thursdays for a Communion service attended by about 40 inmates.

"There are strong Catholics there who really need Holy Communion," he says.

Accompanied by seasoned Maryknollers, local communities and each other, the seminarians are being trained for missionary priesthood in a trial by fire.

The hardest thing to witness, they say, is what most motivates them. All four young men have been profoundly moved by the pastoral needs of the local church and its scarcity of ordained ministers — especially in the Amazon.

There, Maswizilo says, "I was able to recognize the hunger of the people." ✠

Adam Mitchell contributed reporting to this article.

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Courtesy of Rodrigo Ulloa-Chavarry/U.S.



“Come to me, all you who
labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest.”

- *Matthew 11:28*

Martyrs of the Ixcán

By Meinrad Scherer-Emunds

Almost 50 years ago, lay missionary John Gauker died with Maryknoll Father Bill Woods in a suspicious plane crash in the Guatemalan jungle



*Clockwise: John Gauker delights in his children, Monica and Johnny; Phyllis is embraced by a woman who whispers, "I am a widow, too;" construction workers attend a Mass for John.
(Courtesy of Phyllis Gauker/Guatemala)*



In 1976, a powerful earthquake struck Guatemala, destroying more than 250,000 houses and leaving 1.2 million people homeless.

In Auburn, Alabama, John Gauker and his wife, Phyllis, wanted to help. John owned a construction company and felt a call to help with reconstruction.

They knew Spanish from having lived in Spain for three years. Phyllis was two months pregnant, and they had a 2 ½ year-old son, Johnny.

At their parish, a retired engineer had served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala. He said he had worked with a priest pilot there who, if they wrote him, might tell them, "Come on down."



Maryknoll Father William Woods distributes deeds for land in the Ixcán jungle where he helped 2,000 families settle. The photographer of this photo was killed with John Gauker and Father Woods in the plane crash. (Selwyn Puig/Maryknoll Mission Archives/Guatemala)

So they did, and Maryknoll Father William “Bill” Woods did tell them to come.

Father Woods told them the plan was to build apartments for earthquake-displaced people on land he had purchased in Guatemala City for that purpose. He said he was waiting for the contractor to show up. John Gauker was that contractor.

For more than a decade, Father Woods had been involved in a land reform project in a remote jungle area called the Ixcán. The project had secured land for landless, Indigenous Mayan campesinos and helped them to build homes and farms. By 1976, about 2,000 Mayan families had been settled in five new towns, complete with schools and health clinics.

But Guatemala’s military and land-owning elite also had their eyes on this jungle area. The rise in oil prices in the 1970s was attracting foreign oil companies. The army was increasingly active in the area, and had begun kidnapping, disappearing and killing people associated with the land reform project.

In April 1976, the U.S. ambassador told Father Woods in a private meeting that the Guatemalan military were accusing him of collaborating with guerrillas and that his life was in danger.

Following the meeting, Father Woods sent a letter directly to Guatemala’s then-president, General Kjell Laugerud García, stating, “I have never had any relationship with the guerrillas, and I have no



At a memorial Mass in Guatemala City, Phyllis Gauker looks on as a Canadian missionary priest holds Johnny and Maryknoll Brother Robert Butsch addresses the construction workers gathered to attend the service for John. (Courtesy of Phyllis Gauker/Guatemala)

political ideals.” He continued, “My only interest is to help make the peasants better Christians, better Guatemalans, and thus help them produce more for themselves and for their country.”

After they arrived in Guatemala, Father Woods told the Gaukers about this threat to his life. “We really didn’t know what to do,” says Phyllis. “I think he was offering us a way out, as in, ‘If you want to leave now, I’ll understand.’”

She and John thought and prayed about it. “We decided we were in for the long haul and would not abandon Bill.”

The couple moved into an airplane hangar that Father Woods had leased. He had learned to fly in 1965 and used planes to transport people

and supplies for the Ixcán project.

The official Maryknoll lay mission program had been launched and Father Woods talked to the couple about attending the orientation and formation program at Maryknoll in Ossining, New York, but that did not happen.

Shortly after the birth of the Gaukers’ daughter, Monica, Father Woods invited the whole family to fly with him to the Ixcán to see the project there. They were to fly on Nov. 20, 1976.

On another recent trip, Phyllis recounts, “We had had a trying experience with Moni” because of the heat and humidity. “Therefore I knew she could not tolerate the heat in the Ixcán, so I declined for me and the children.” Phyllis recalls that as

she closed the door to the plane, “my son was still crying to go with his daddy.”

Besides John, three other passengers were on board. At 20 years old, Ann Kerndt, of the U.S.-based Direct Relief Foundation, was the youngest. Accompanying her was Michael Okada, a medical doctor volunteering in Guatemala. Selwyn Puig, a photographer familiar with Father Woods’ work and a mother of four, was to take pictures for *Maryknoll* magazine.

Phyllis recalls: “That afternoon at sunset, I called on the ham radio in the hangar to Mayalán, asking for Bill. The answer was, “*El padre no ha llegado* (Father has not arrived).”

In their book *Murdered in Central America: The Stories of Eleven U.S. Missionaries*, Donna Whitson Brett and Edward T. Brett wrote about the plane: “The Cessna, after weighing in to assure that it was not overloaded, took off at 10:01 a.m. Just as it cleared the last ridge through the canyon leading into the jungle, when the aircraft was only about 150 feet above the ridge, witnesses saw the plane begin to plummet towards the earth, then twist around and smash into the mountain it had just cleared.”

Although witnesses testified that the weather was perfectly clear that day, the Guatemalan army tried to blame bad weather for the crash. The military arrived at the site very soon afterward, removed the bodies and tampered with the evidence. Phyllis remembers a colonel from the



Guatemalan army coming to the hangar to tell her the bad news: “The plane had been found and all were dead. As if in explanation for the cause of the crash, he showed me weather reports (which clearly showed clear skies!). Did he think I could not read?”

Today, it is generally accepted that Father Woods, John and the three other passengers on that fateful flight were murdered by order of the Guatemalan military. There have been reports of officers who were overheard drunkenly boasting that they had killed the missionary priest.

Father Woods’ and John’s names are the first in a long list of Catholic priests, religious, lay catechists, lay missionaries and even a bishop who were assassinated and martyred in Guatemala between 1976 and 1998.

Not long after the crash, the Guatemalan army occupied the Ixcán settlements, a European oil conglomerate built roads through



Left: Phyllis and Johnny are shown with Monica at her baptism. Right: Maryknoll Father Edward Moore walks in procession during the funeral Mass for the plane crash victims. Father Woods’ brother is seated at front right. (Courtesy of Phyllis Gauker/Guatemala)

the area, and a highway was built to connect to the newly acquired lands of Guatemala’s next president.

Then, according to the Bretts, in March 1982, “over 300 people were murdered by the army at La Unión, one of Father Woods’ pueblos. Similar massacres were carried out by the military throughout the Ixcán project from March to June.”

According to the United Nations Historical Clarification Commission for Guatemala, more than 200,000 people were killed or disappeared in the decades-long civil war.

In 2006 Phyllis sent a letter to Thomas R. Melville, a former Maryknoll priest who wrote *Through a Glass Darkly* (a chronicle of atrocities in Guatemala and El Salvador, told through the eyes of Maryknoll Father Ronald Hennessey). She wrote of her late

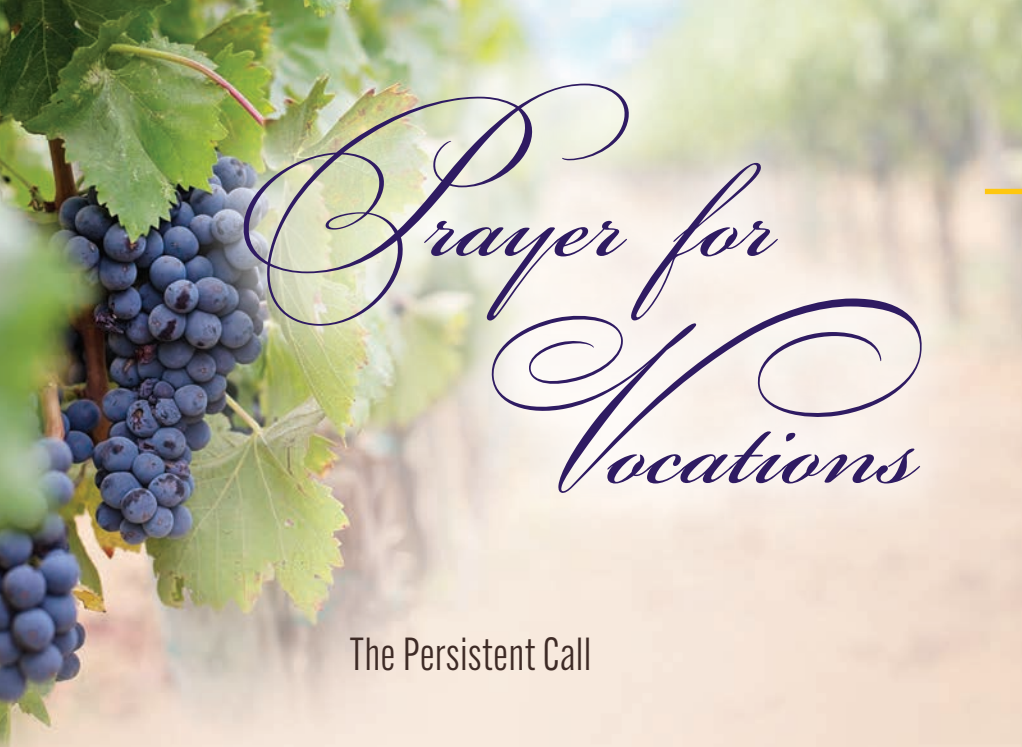
husband and Father Woods, “I didn’t know if I should consider them martyrs or fools.”

Father Woods and John were buried in the Maryknoll section of the cemetery in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. In 2000, at the request of the Ixcán people, Father Woods’ body was moved to Mayalán, Ixcán.

Phyllis Gauker returned with her two children to Auburn, where she eventually remarried. She has taught choral music and directed the Auburn Music Club Singers. “Music, specifically singing,” she says, “has been what held me together.” ✦

A longer version of this article can be found at mklm.org.

Meinrad Scherer-Emunds is director of communications for the Maryknoll Lay Missioners.



Prayer for Vocations

The Persistent Call

Jesus, why did You call me
to Your work at age 11?
Why make me imagine
my mother's jubilation
before the ordaining bishop?

At the time, I thought I knew.
It wasn't my vocation;
it was my mother's. Whew!
Surely one so sinful wasn't being called
to work in the Vineyard.

I thought it was over – but You
returned like the hound of heaven.
You wouldn't let go. Again

You fired me up to enter the seminary.
I thought surely by then I was too old.
Oh, thank God. Free.

Yet again, even in my fear,
Your guiding hand directed me: Enter.
Imagine, a 43-year-old military veteran, fearful?
I gave up, and said yes. And now
after 40 years as a missionary priest,
I say "thank you" for challenging me.

It's tough to say "no" when given
the opportunity to share Your love
with my brothers and sisters.

— Joseph P. La Mar, M.M.

Photo by Pixabay

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2023 MARYKNOLL STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

We asked students to reflect on this essay prompt: "Jesus teaches us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. How can we, as followers of Jesus, stand up for peace and against the growing violence in our country?"

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

Division I (Grades 6-8)

FIRST PLACE WINNER: EVELYN KEOWN, GR. 8

St. Joseph Catholic School - Winter Haven, Florida

A Life of Peace



Corrie Ten Boom once said, "You never so touch the ocean of God's love as when you forgive your enemies." Ten Boom was a Christian woman placed in a concentration camp for hiding Jews in her home. She spent the rest of her life speaking on the courage to forgive, just like when she chose to show peace to a Nazi guard responsible for her sister's death. In today's world, wars, cruelty and discrimination have become part of people's everyday lives. However, we can be like Corrie Ten Boom and act with love in our hearts as God would want. As our society becomes more violent, we can follow the example of Jesus by showing grace to our neighbors, practicing the Catholic Social Teaching on solidarity, and being an example of peace.

By showing grace to the people around us, we can bring peace to our world. As I have grown older I have had the opportunity to meet many new people and through these people, I have learned that everyone is fighting their own internal battle. Mental illness has taken over many people's minds and hearts. While a person may look normal, inside they can be fighting a struggle that we could never begin to understand. Romans 5:20 says, "Where sins abound grace abounded much more." God has repeatedly shown us his mercy through the forgiveness of our sins. We can learn from his example by empathizing with those who need it. I have worked to be a friend and shoulder to lean on which has helped me show grace to all of God's creation.

Continually, the Catholic Social Teaching on solidarity has become a vital principle to living a life with Jesus at the center. Through the development of social media, I faced many incidents of cyberbullying. As humans, we are quick to judge what we see, but we must remember that everyone was made in God's image. The Catholic Social Teaching on solidarity calls us to see everyone as our brothers and sisters. I try to work in my life to recognize all people as part of God's family and welcome everyone no matter their race or social class. Working as one united community can bring our world the love it deserves and through solidarity, we give hope to those who have none.

As our world grows apart, we can be good examples of peace through our words and deeds. In my life, I have begun working as an assistant to help little children learn to dance. Through this experience, I have realized how much of a role model I am for them. They look up to me not only as a teacher but also as a friend. I want to show those little girls how to act with grace and love in all aspects of their lives to make our world a brighter place. Even though I am working on a small scale to spread joy to others, this can lead to a ripple effect of kindness. As a disciple, I show other people the Jesus in my heart by the attitude I emit to the world. Through my words and deeds, I work towards being an example of how to model the love God gives me, therefore, spreading peace to our community.

Many inspirational people have changed our outlook on life through their work to make our world a more peaceful place, however, everyone can work

Maryknoll Father Leo Shea (left) presents the Bishop Francis X. Ford Award to Evelyn Keown, first-place winner of Division I of the 2023 Maryknoll Student Essay Contest. With Evelyn are Principal Jennifer Insua and Father Tom LaBo. (Courtesy of Leo Shea/U.S.)

toward this goal by what they say and do daily. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to do this we can show mercy to all of God's creation, practice seeing everyone as equal, and be a model of the Catholic faith. Even though I am just one person working toward peace, I know this amounts to thousands in the eyes of our Heavenly Father, so it will always pay off.

Division II (Grades 9-12)

FIRST PLACE WINNER: OLIVIA MIKKELSEN, GR. 12

Sacred Heart Parish - Gettysburg, South Dakota

Peace the Saint Francis Way



This evening I went to Mass with my family to celebrate All Saints Day. During the offertory, one of my favorite hymns, based on "The Prayer of Saint Francis," started playing. As I sat in the pew, meditating on the words, "Make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred let me bring your love," I felt the deeper meaning of the song in the world we currently live in. The lyrics of this song encapsulate how I desire to live my life, and how I believe young Catholics need to live in this day and age. With all of the violence in our country, not just physical, but

in our words and our actions toward others, there is no better time for the young Christian community to step up and fight for peace in a world full of darkness and despair.

It often feels like every direction we turn these days, we are surrounded by violence, making it challenging to bring peace into the world. Just because it is challenging doesn't mean it is impossible, though. With God's guidance, as the hymn says, we as Christians can bring "light in the darkness, hope in despair, and joy in the sadness." I believe that our actions speak louder than our words. My journey as a young Catholic disciple began in middle school when I started attending youth discipleship camps. These camps lit a fire and desire in me to follow the only person who can bring peace to our lives.

As a young Catholic disciple, living out my faith has not come without challenges. However, I have found that in our small community, there is a great need for role models in a world full of bad influences and scary situations. For several years I have been following God's call to be this person for the young people in my community. When I was in 8th grade, my sister and I were asked to teach a catechism class for the first graders. My immediate response was yes. I wanted to be an example for these children, just like the incredible people who had taught me about Jesus. Without their guidance, I don't know where my path would have led. I'm so thankful that Jesus gave me supportive parents, guiding missionaries and amazing priests along the way who have formed me into the leader I am today.

Over a year ago, my friend, sister, and I established a youth group for the young people in our community. This group was formed to be a place of peace in youths' busy lives filled with tough relationships, family problems, bullying and education struggles. Young individuals encounter numerous difficulties on a daily basis, and they don't all have access to a place of peace to help them through the challenges. Our youth group also provides a platform to discuss the violence happening in the world from issues with war, sex trafficking, and mass shootings, to all of the other atrocities surrounding us.

I believe that if we as Christians are able to promote peace in our communities through various programs, the younger generation will take inspiration from these actions and continue to bring peace to their communities in the future. I believe that no one is too far gone to be transformed by the power of God through the people around them. Our small acts of kindness and words of encouragement can quite literally change a life, and when those actions continue, entire communities, cities, states and even nations can be transformed, and turn from their violent ways. My hope is to leave a lasting impression on my community, and that the generations after me will continue to lead our youth group as a place where all youth are welcome to come and enjoy peaceful interactions with other each other and our Lord.

As I move on to the next step in my journey, I am committed to live out the words of Saint Francis and be a "channel of peace" for everybody I encounter along the way. ✠

Maryknoll Father Donald Glover presents the Bishop Patrick J. Byrne Award to Olivia Mikkelsen, first-place essay winner for Division II. (Courtesy of Donald Glover/U.S.)

Division I (Grades 6-8)

Second Place

CLARE GARNER



*Grade 8
Immaculate Conception School
Jackson, MO*

As Clare writes, she can already work for peace — by enacting kindness in daily life. She cites the maxim that an action as small and simple as a butterfly flapping its wings can cause a tsunami elsewhere. “One small act of kindness can trigger a ripple effect,” she writes. Helping others can have a huge impact, even beyond our knowing the extent of its reach. Praying for peace can also help bring about change.

Third Place

CYRUS PATEL



*Grade 8
St. Perpetua School
Lafayette, CA*

Cyrus feels troubled by the violence in our country and in the world. No wonder there are so many mental health issues among young people nowadays, he writes. Cyrus finds hope in Jesus’ teachings on peace and forgiveness. “Engaging in open and honest conversations with those who hold different beliefs can be a powerful tool for peace,” he writes. So can conflict resolution and positive actions.

Essays of all winners will be published on MaryknollSociety.org/winners and discoveryourneighbor.org.

Division II (Grades 9-12)

Second Place

SOPHIA TEJWANI



*Grade 9
La Reina High School
Thousand Oaks, CA*

Sophia has always been a fan of Marvel movies with their heroes and villains. However, she writes, she no longer finds helpful the label of “evil” when applied to people, only to actions. She now looks past black and white caricatures to “the gray hues that our world presents.” Her essay, aptly titled “Empathy, How Marvelous!” explores how empathy can keep people from dehumanizing one another.

Third Place

HANNAH HOOG

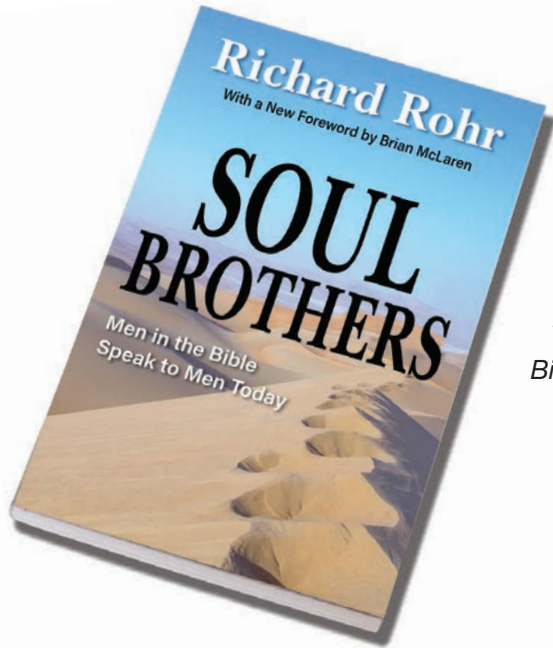


*Grade 11
St. Viator High School
Arlington Heights, IL*

In “The Sacrificial Chain,” Hannah draws deeply on her faith to assert that, like Jesus, we can break cycles of violence. She donates her time serving as a local peer juror. In this role, Hannah helps middle and high school students to confront their own acts of aggression and vandalism. It is easy to ignore or even ignite conflict, she writes, but as Christians, we must “choose to embody Christ through peaceful action.”

For future news of the Maryknoll Student Essay Contest, stay tuned to MaryknollSociety.org/essay.

ORBIS  BOOKS
Spotlight



Preview by Robert Ellsberg

This book on “men in the Bible” really has a message for everyone.

If you are a man (or know one), I am happy to recommend the new edition of Richard Rohr’s *Soul Brothers: Men in the Bible Speak to Men Today*. Rohr, a Franciscan priest, is recognized around the world as one of the leading spiritual teachers of our time. (An anthology of his writings in the Orbis Modern Spiritual Masters Series is a bestseller.)

Rohr begins by saying that his book is “not just for men and not just for Christians,” but hopes “it will be helpful to anyone involved in the human struggle.” So it is. Each of the men he profiles — including Abraham, David, Moses, John the Baptist, Peter, Jesus — engaged in that struggle, shaped by their own complex personalities,

as they responded to God’s call to be fully human. “This book is an invitation to let their souls touch our own.” Here are some excerpts.

On St. Peter:

Why was this man given any keys? Why would this largely unsuccessful working man be given the keys to anything?...

The whole Gospel story, with its cast of constantly unlikely and un-pious people, reaches the level of farce when we come to Peter. He is the only one whom Jesus ever calls a devil; he is the only one who directly denies Jesus. His first response in every encounter is always wrong, and yet he is clearly the one whom Jesus makes the spokesman and the symbol for this whole new

enterprise that he is starting. ...

Peter is undoubtedly everyman and everywoman. Peter is humanity at its most lovable, disheartening best ... often presented as a bit of a buffoon — but the very buffoon that we all are and that God in Jesus loves and uses for God’s purposes. ...

Peter is a grand and honest statement about how we all come to God ... We are all saved in spite of ourselves, and never is that more clearly illustrated than in the life of Peter. God does not love Peter because Peter is good. God loves Peter because God is good, and that is what Peter finally sees and what makes him fall in love with Jesus in return.

On Jesus:

We are not human beings trying to become spiritual. That task has already been done for us by our initial creation as “images of God.” That is God’s gift. Our desperate and needed task, the one we have not succeeded at very well after all these centuries, is how to become human! Jesus lit-

erally turns religion on its head. He is always moving down, descending into the fully human, identifying freely with our tragic and finite situation. We miss him entirely when we are always running up the down staircase. Our task is to follow and imitate him, not offer him incense, titles, and shrines that he never once asked for. Again, all we need to do is take his lead. Most of the world is so tired of “spiritual people.” We would be happy just to meet some real human beings. They always thrill the heart, just as he did.

As should be clear, this book on “men in the Bible” really has a message for everyone. As Richard Rohr concludes:

The authentic foundation of all true religion is the rediscovery of the defaced image of God inside of the human person, inside of this world, in what will always feel like the naked and empty now. This is the ladder to heaven, and it is everywhere. ✠

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



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MARYKNOLL *at the* UN: Mission *to* Missions

By Lynn F. Monahan

Missioners bring their experiences of and among the marginalized to a global forum

The United Nations headquarters in New York City might not seem like mission territory, but for Maryknoll and the missioners who serve there, it very much is.

For Maryknoll Sister Margaret Lacson, the distinctive U.N. building on the East Side of Manhattan is a long way from her native Philippines or Japan, where she spent 30 years in mission. Yet, growing up in a developing country and then serving vulnerable people gave her the kind of experience that Maryknoll seeks to bring to the U.N.: voices from the margins.

After taking her first vows in 1992, Sister Lacson questioned her assignment to Japan, a developed country.

"But then, God has mysterious ways," she says. "I said, 'OK, this is a first-world country, but the situation of women is not that of a first-world country, so I will focus on the women and women's issues.'"

She worked with victims of domestic violence, initially with Japanese women, and later with Filipino migrants. Some suffered not only physical

abuse but also what Sister Lacson calls cultural violence.

"'You Filipinos are no good,'" she says, echoing how some abusive men would address their Filipino wives. "'You don't know anything.'" These husbands, she continues, would tell their spouses not to cook Filipino food — or even to see friends. "'Your friends cannot come here in my house. You are in Japan; you have to speak Japanese.'"

Sister Lacson brought this knowledge and experience with her in March to the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. There she attended various events around such topics as gender equality and the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts.

Sister Lacson's other areas of focus at the U.N. are social development, climate change and care of creation. She sits on the Committee on Financing

Maryknoll Sister Margaret Lacson, the Maryknoll Sisters representative to the United Nations, is shown at the U.N. headquarters in New York. (Lynn Monahan/U.S.)



Sister Lacson, Lisa Sullivan and Maryknoll Sister Susan Nchubiri (left to right), of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, attend a session at the U.N. (Lynn Monahan/U.S.)

for Development and a subcommittee on climate finance, which deals with the impact of climate change on poorer nations and Indigenous communities.

While Sister Lacson serves as the official Maryknoll Sisters representative to the U.N., Maryknoll Father John Sivalon serves as the representative for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. The two missionaries work through the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC), which was established in 1997 by the Fathers and Brothers, the Maryknoll Sisters and the Maryknoll Lay Missioners as a collaborative ministry for peace, social justice and the integrity of creation.

"We have a voice in terms of representing the people that we serve around the world," Father Sivalon says.

"We are one among a number of religious organizations, faith-based organizations, that are approved as an NGO [nongovernmental orga-

nization]." This "gives us the ability to have input, especially around economic and social development issues, sustainable development goals," he says.

Father Sivalon, who joined the MOGC ministry a year ago, brings to the U.N. his background as a missionary for 25 years in East Africa, as well as a term as the Society's superior general from 2002 to 2008. His focus at the U.N. is on issues related to migration and to extractive industries, particularly mining.

The missionary's work on mining issues is deeply personal.

"Growing up in Butte, Montana, was integral to my joining the Mining Working Group at the U.N.," Father Sivalon says. As a child, he explains, his neighborhood bordered an open pit mine. "Every day our house was rocked by blasting that was being done in the pit," he says.

"Eventually the expansion reached our block and a decision



Delegates represent their countries or organizations at a session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the U.N. headquarters held in March 2024. (Lynn Monahan/U.S.)

had to be made, to accept money or alternative housing for our house. While those discussions were going on, unfortunately my father had a heart attack and passed away."

That mine, the Berkeley Pit copper mine — opened by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company in 1955 — is now closed, but remains one of the nation's largest Superfund environmental disaster sites.

"Three communities were destroyed and an open pit mine sits idle, filling with toxic water, a gaping scar on Mother Earth," Father Sivalon says. "I have witnessed firsthand the destruction that happens from extractive industries not only to the physical environment but also to the social and cultural environment of communities."

Mining and migration overlap, the missionary continues. The impact of climate change and the move toward non-fossil fuels are both causing people to be displaced. He

cites the Congo River Basin in Africa as an example. There, the push to develop so-called "clean energy" is having devastating effects because of mining for the precious minerals needed in new technologies.

"The river basin itself takes up six countries in Africa, and each one has their own specific kind of minerals being mined," he says. "The toxins coming from each one is very different [as are] the effects they are having on children."

Lisa Sullivan, a returned Maryknoll lay missionary who served in Venezuela, now follows issues of faith, economy and ecology as a program officer for MOGC. She echoes Father Sivalon's concerns. "As we transition to clean energy, there's a mega push for minerals," she says. "So, as usual, who do we sacrifice? Indigenous communities, poor communities."

Sullivan, who is based at MOGC's offices in Washington, D.C., attends U.N. climate conferences, including



Maryknoll Father John Sivalon, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers representative to the United Nations, celebrates a Mass for benefactors. (Maryknoll Mission Archives/U.S.)

the latest COP28 conference in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates last December. Sullivan was accompanied by Maryknoll Sister Susan Nchubiri, who also works at MOGC in Washington and who focuses on migrants and refugees, as well as human rights in the Holy Land.

The minerals needed for new technologies are often on Indigenous lands, points out Sullivan, who attends sessions of the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. She also came to New York for the Commission on the Status of Women.

"Women are disproportionately affected by climate change," Sullivan says, citing Africa as an example. "Women fetch water and get firewood, right? With climate change, water is increasingly hard to find. So you add those hours that they're fetching water or firewood. And the heat has gotten so much greater," she says. "All those things are just a huge burden on top of ev-

erything else that women carry. The idea is to involve women leaders in climate change solutions."

As societies move from the fossil fuel era to more sustainable energy, the emphasis is on transitioning in a way that will ensure that the communities being contaminated, or that potentially will be affected, are consulted, she says.

"We feel we have the pulse of the people and the issues and the places that often aren't at that table," Sullivan says. "That's our gift, Maryknoll's incredible gift, to be so inserted in those margins and global conversations."

Father Sivalon says that Maryknoll, along with the other religious groups with NGO status at the U.N., brings a faith perspective to the table.

"Out of our commitment to Christ we have this obligation, to represent policies that would be most helpful for the vast majority of people," he says. ✠



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World Watch

Indo-Pacific Economic Prosperity?

By Thomas Gould

Out of the limelight of public awareness, a deal is being forged right now between the United States and 13 major economies in the Indo-Pacific region that would cover 28% of all global goods and services trade and 40% of global gross production.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) was launched on May 23, 2022, by the Biden Administration. The “framework” sets up the basis for trade negotiations in the Indo-Pacific region, covering such topics as digital trade and ecommerce, mineral supply chains, carbon removal and methane regulations, and tax enforcement information sharing and anticorruption enforcement. It is an ambitious and comprehensive deal that will shape the future of the Indo-Pacific region. As of now, the 14 partner countries include Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the United States.

Trade deals such as these are easy to get wrong. It was not long ago that the details of another trade deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, were released after six years of secretive negotiations. We wrote at the time, in

2016, of our criticisms of that deal. We opposed provisions that would have allowed corporations to sue countries for lost profits if environmental regulations limited business, and the failure of the trade deal to protect labor rights. The Trump Administration formally withdrew the United States from the trade deal almost exactly a year later.

There are some encouraging signs about current IPEF negotiations so far. For one, the system which allows corporations to sue countries, the investor-state dispute settlement system, has been rejected in the earliest drafts. This has significant implications for the environment since these trade provisions have been used to overrule domestic and democratic laws that encourage “buy local” campaigns or raise environmental or labor standards. Most recently, some more extreme digital trade proposals have been withdrawn, including those that would give tech firms unfettered use of user data and artificial intelligence.

On the other hand, there remain concerns that workers’ rights will not be adequately addressed in the final trade deal. The initial list of countries selected as IPEF partners includes many with records of labor rights violations, including unionist assassinations, human trafficking, forced



A vendor arranges vegetables at a market in Manila. The Philippines is one of 13 Indo-Pacific countries joining the U.S. in a trade agreement. (Dondi Tawatao/Reuters/CNS)

labor, child labor and more. It does not benefit the people of any country when the work of trades protected by labor unions is outsourced to countries where workers lack protections and are prey to human rights violators or to multinational organizations that deny them the value of their labor.

The Indo-Pacific Framework for Prosperity is too powerful to be ignored by the public: it deserves our attention. In it lies the potential for a

more connected economic world, with a unified front against climate change, tax evasion, human rights violations and corruption — or the license for a privileged few to further plunder the planet and its resources. It is the details of the IPEF that will decide which direction the world takes. ✂

Thomas Gould is communications manager for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

FAITH IN ACTION:

- See a faith letter to the U.S. Trade Representative on IPEF signed by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns that outlines areas of priority: <https://mogc.info/IPEF-letter>
- Read the Maryknoll leadership statement on trade and investment, “Trade in Justice: The local impact of global economic decisions” from 2002 – still relevant today: <https://mogc.info/Trading-in-Justice>
- Sign the petition organized by the Trade Justice Education Fund to Prioritize Working People & the Planet in Indo-Pacific Trade Deal: <https://mogc.info/IPEF-TJEF>

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.

Partners in Mission

Return to the Border

By Andrea Moreno-Díaz

In July 2023, Doctor Guadalupe Jimenez signed up for a Maryknoll immersion trip to El Paso, Texas. But it wasn't her first time at the border.

Thirty-nine years ago, her family crossed that same border after a perilous journey from Puebla, Mexico. Hunger, poverty and danger had driven them to seek a better life.

"I was in my mom's womb," says Jimenez. "She had to sleep outside in the desert and go without water for days, but she knew the risks were greater in Mexico."

The immersion trip was more than a personal endeavor. "I wanted to learn about what's happening at the border," she says. "The goal was to take that information and then be better able to help migrants."

As immigrants, Jimenez's family did not see their struggles end after settling in their new home, but their needs were assuaged by the generosity of Catholic and government organizations that provided food, clothes and community. Jimenez says she never forgot that kindness, nor her parents' sacrifice.

"I just want to give back. 'Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Matthew 25:40). That resonates in my head," says Jimenez.

The horrors of the 9/11 terrorist attacks set her on a path of service after graduating from high school. Jimenez served as a medic in three deployments with the U.S. Navy in Iraq and Afghanistan, after which she decided to become a physician to continue healing people.

Today, she holds a master's degree in medical science and a medical degree from the University of Indiana and is a resident physician for the New York Presbyterian system at the Columbia University Irving and the Weill Cornell medical centers in New York City.

Her Catholic faith continues to guide her life and work. "When I'm taking care of people in need," Jimenez says, "I try to see the face of Jesus Christ."

The immersion trip was sponsored by the Mission Formation Program of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and led by the Encuentro Project, an organization that introduces participants to the realities of migration.

Jimenez and other participants also visited migrant shelters. At one shelter, she led the preparation of a meal for about 60 people.

During her free time, Jimenez returned to one of the shelters, at Sacred Heart Church, to visit and talk with the migrants.



Guadalupe Jimenez (front row, far right), Andrea Moreno-Díaz (far left) and other participants on a July 2023 Maryknoll border immersion trip meet with Mujer Obrera, a community-based organization in El Paso, Texas. (Courtesy of Guadalupe Jimenez/U.S.)

There, she says, she met other physicians, including Brian Elmore, an emergency medicine resident. Elmore leads Clínica Hope, a project run by Hope Border Institute to offer basic health care to migrants on both sides of the border.

Elmore took Jimenez to meet a burn victim of the March 2023 migrant center fire in Ciudad Juarez that had taken the lives of 40 migrants. Some of the victims had been in such critical condition that they had to be taken to El Paso for life-saving treatment.

"People are doing the impossible in order to have safety and a better life," Jimenez says. "Access to health care, everybody should have that."

Returning to the border in November, Jimenez volunteered again in the migrant shelters she had visited during the immersion trip.

Jimenez heard many stories. She

spoke to a man who made the journey with a broken foot. She learned that many migrants do not seek medical help for fear of being deported. Some with chronic illnesses had their medications taken away in detention centers.

Equipped with knowledge and inspired by the volunteers at the border, Jimenez, with the support of the Columbia University Irving medical center, is creating a telemedicine project for migrants. Through same-day appointments, providers will address physical and mental health needs, offer information about the migrants' rights, and connect them with primary care doctors.

"My family and myself were in their shoes. I know what the outcome could be if we take care of these people," Jimenez says. "I see my family's faces in them. They're God's children and it's my responsibility to help them." ✨

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READERS' RESPONSES

A NEW HERO

I am hitting 80 and have been reading *Maryknoll* magazine since I was a small child. It was always my real-life adventure story with the heroes in black, white, and grey habits all around the world.

Today the saga continues. And a new hero is Father Joseph Veneroso. The Spring 2024 issue is a keeper with a prayer poem reflecting divine beauty — “Laudate Deum” — and a Lenten meditation on the value of human suffering and disability embraced as mission, “In the Shadow of the Cross.” Father is always pithy with just the right words that go straight to the heart, and the photography is perfect.

Jan Hicks
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

MISSIONERS SAFE?

Some time ago, *Maryknoll* published an article about the new lay missionaries who were being commissioned for their assignments around the world. Included in that list was a married couple being sent to Haiti. The article acknowledged that the situation in Haiti was precarious because of the political situation there and the general instability of the country. However, I recall that the article also expressed an expectation that the new lay missionaries would be a sign of hope for that troubled land.

As the situation in Haiti has only gotten worse, I wonder about that couple and how they are doing. Would it be possible for you to inform the readership about their current status?

Are they still in Haiti? Are they safe?

I pray and hope for the wellbeing of all the Maryknoll members in Haiti, as I also do for all the people of that suffering country.

Frank Hector Galvan
Beaumont, California

Editor's Note: According to the *Maryknoll Lay Missioners* the missionary couple, Michael Lattanzi and Susan Silveus, had been visiting family and were not able to return to Haiti due to the escalation of violence. They are now in El Paso, Texas, where they have begun the process of reassignment. The other lay missionary, Sami Scott, had to leave her mission site in Gros Morne when criminal gangs took over even this remote rural area. Because Haiti's international airports were closed, it was necessary for her to travel by land to the Dominican Republic, from where she left for the States. Scott hopes to return to Haiti.

HAMAS TERRORISTS

As a lifelong Roman Catholic, I appreciate the help that Maryknoll does for the poor. However, I was very disappointed in the Spring 2024 From the Editor letter. Israel is not in a conflict with Palestine. This false information has led to protests throughout the world. Israel is fighting the terrorist group Hamas after that group attacked Israelis on Oct. 7, 2023. When Israel defeats Hamas, then Palestine will be free.

Diane Brawdy Miller
Copley, Ohio

BOLIVIA UPDATE

Thank you for sharing in the Spring 2024 issue of *Maryknoll* what is now happening on the Maryknoll property in Cochabamba, Bolivia. I was a student there in 1970 and we had a large group studying the three languages the school offered, mainly Spanish [and also Quechua and Aymara]. It was a great group.

Now I am fascinated by the interesting projects taking place on that same land, but also thrilled that the center is continuing to offer language classes. It is a need and a great opportunity for missionaries to Latin America and other places. Please keep up the good work.

*Sister Antona Schedlo FSPA
La Crosse, Wisconsin*

JESUS LIVES

The arrival of each issue of your inspiring magazine is a wonderful day for me. The latest Winter issue is extraordinary, with the beautiful poetry of Father Joseph Veneroso and the introduction to the amazing dedicated life of Father Robert McCahill.

The magazine introduces me to the people of countries I will never visit and also to their struggles in life. God bless the Maryknollers who show them that Jesus lives.

*Mary Lou Frandina
Buffalo, New York*

SEEKING LETTERS

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the article about the work of Father Robert McCahill, a true inspiration of a life

lived with Christ in every breath. It was mentioned in the article that Father McCahill has written an annual letter since 1984 which the *National Catholic Reporter* publishes. Do you know if it would be possible to obtain a copy of the annual letters?

*Phyllis Smith
Walnut Creek, California*

Editor's Note: *Father McCahill's letters can be found on the National Catholic Reporter's website at <https://www.ncronline.org/authors/fr-bob-mccahill>.*

IMMERSION TRIPS

Thank you for the article "In Search of Lakota Spirit" in your Winter 2023 issue. It was so good to read about our forgotten Indigenous people of the United States. Last year, we had the opportunity to visit the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana. In the town of Browning, we went to Mass at Little Flower Church. How welcome we felt! The congregation sang a blessing song for all visitors. How touching! I would encourage all travelers to visit a reservation and support our Native Americans.

*Theresa Chmielewski
Cleveland, Ohio*

Editor's Note: *For information about Maryknoll immersion trips, please visit <https://www.maryknoll.us/mission-trips> or contact Zahira Sandoval at zsandoval@maryknoll.org or (773) 493-3367 ext.263.*

As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace...

— 1 Peter 4:10



Courtesy of Gregory McPhee/Bolivia

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Readers' Responses

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Maryknoll Father William Woods, of Houston, Texas, offered homes and livelihoods to thousands of Indigenous families in Guatemala through a cooperatives project. Father Woods and his four passengers were killed in a suspicious plane crash in 1976 in the jungle. (See story, page 34.)

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