



U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

# MARYKNOLL<sup>®</sup>

Winter 2025

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*Pilgrims of Hope*

## FROM THE EDITOR

In announcing the Jubilee 2025, which begins on Christmas Eve, Pope Francis proclaimed hope as the central message of the year. Under the title “Hope Does Not Disappoint,” taken from the writings of Saint Paul, the papal bull is a treatise on hope. From the time of the early Church until Vatican II and into the present, the Church offers to the world tangible signs of hope. These signs also go to the very heart of mission.

Pope Francis calls on Christians to “abound in hope” by, among other examples, remembering prisoners and working for their reintegration into community; visiting the sick; and welcoming migrants, exiles and refugees in their search for a dignified state of life.

He also calls for signs of hope for youth, so that their dreams and aspirations may not become frustrated, and for the elderly, that they be esteemed for their wisdom and experience. He emphasizes in their relationship to one another a “covenant between generations.”

Our magazine coverage in the year ahead will follow the Jubilee theme of hope in each issue. It is core to what Maryknoll is all about. Signs of hope abound in our articles, made visible through the Works of Mercy. When Pope Francis references those who engage in the Jubilee as “Pilgrims of Hope,” we cannot but think of the missionaries — priests, sisters, brothers and lay people — whose lives are pilgrimages of hope to the furthest ends of the earth.

*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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*Adam Mitchell/Bolivia*

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A pilgrim arrives at the Corn Festival of Dulce Nombre de María parish in Chalatenango, El Salvador, where several Maryknollers served.

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Front: Octavio Durán  
Back: Courtesy of Ray Almanza

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.



# Pilgrimage of Hope

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*On a city street of asphalt and concrete  
where last winter's ice cracks a stubborn sidewalk,  
a defiant dandelion takes root and proudly  
Puts forth its floral sunburst.*

*A young couple prays test results will confirm  
If this time the Lord will at last bless them with new life  
Even as a world away another couple awaits word  
An orphaned child will soon make them a family.*

*With each interminable hour and passing day  
Prisoners and hostages alike long for news  
Their detainment is at an end and their  
Long-awaited deliverance is at hand.*





*With aching joints and weakened legs and a heart  
Broken by loss of too many loved ones over the years  
An elder reverently plants a delicate sapling  
under whose shade future generations will rest.*

*War-weary relatives bid a reluctant farewell  
As their young flee certain death for refuge  
In a land that once welcomed such as they,  
Trusting in a God known for liberation.*

*Hope thus infuses every moment of every day  
With a vision of a far, far better world  
Transforming the most mundane into a holy shrine  
Compelling us to take off our shoes and worship.*



# MISSIONER TALES



Paul Jeffrey/South Sudan

A friend of mine in Cork, Ireland, told me that over the years his daughter had slowly drifted away from the Catholic Church until she no longer attended Mass. In early December of 2023, she gave birth to a baby boy. Around the same time, the youth group in their local Catholic parish was preparing its annual Christmas Nativity play. They announced that they were looking for a real baby for the performance.

The father phoned his daughter and cautiously asked if she would “lend” her baby for the play. The

daughter happily replied, “Of course! When is the first rehearsal? May the young people please be gentle with my baby.”

Her father was overjoyed. The baby was part of the Nativity play before the Christmas Eve Mass, and the daughter has returned to church. Indeed, God’s ways are not our ways.

*Joseph Healey, M.M.*

The Missionaries of Charity, with whom I minister in Cochabamba, Bolivia, offer housing to men with disabilities. My

fellow Maryknoll Lay Missioner John O’Donoghue (who has since retired) had been praying for a Christmas miracle in the lives of these men who have suffered so much. But as Christmas approached, there was no proof in sight that his prayer had been answered.

Then, on the last day before the Christmas holidays, something wonderful happened.

Luis, who is unable to hear or speak and is usually withdrawn, went up to one of the staff members with a big smile and started dancing.

One of the other men began playing Christmas music on a boom box. John and I — along with several others — joined in. Even though, being deaf, he couldn’t hear the music, Luis laughed and danced and clapped his hands along with everyone else.

This lighthearted, exuberant display of Christmas joy came out of nowhere. For a magical hour or so, we danced to the beauty of the season. John and I looked at each other and thought: There is the miracle!

*Louise Locke, MKLM*

Here in South Sudan, where I serve as a Maryknoll lay missioner, I lived and worked for a time in the Kuron Peace Village. I used to walk regularly to the nearby Napil market to buy any items I needed. The kids there knew me well. I gave each of them a piece of candy and never walked alone in the market. Even old men followed me around to get a sweet!

Sometimes in the tin shack stores,

there are only children tending the place. One week I wanted to buy some pasta, and a boy no older than 6 years old waited on me.

“How much?” I asked.

“Five hundred,” he said in English.

“A soda?” I asked.

“One thousand,” he answered confidently.

“Sandals?” I continued.

“Two thousand five hundred,” he rattled off. We were on a roll.

“T-shirt?”

“Three thousand seven hundred,” he responded. The 6-year-old Toposa boy had not gone to school, but he had memorized the price of every item in the store!

*Gabe Hurrish, MKLM*

I traveled in December of 2019 to El Paso, Texas, to help serve an influx of migrants coming from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. One day, we were preparing breakfast and lunch for 20 migrants. For breakfast, we made scrambled eggs. For lunch, we were going to have spaghetti. All of a sudden, a bus with 30 more migrants came.

“Oh my goodness,” I said to myself and then I prayed: “Jesus, just as you multiplied the loaves and fishes, please multiply the spaghetti.”

And so it was. We were able to feed 50 people with what we had prepared for only 20. There was even a spoonful of spaghetti left over.

How could we not believe in the goodness, compassion and love of God for his poor?

*Jeanne Rancourt, M.M.*



# From South Dakota to Zona Sur

By Deirdre Cornell

Photos by Adam Mitchell

*A resourceful Maryknoll priest supports an education project for children in Bolivia*

**G**rowing up in South Dakota, young Paul Sykora came up with an innovative way to get around his family's farm. "I would take the motor off a lawn mower and put it on my bike," he says.



*Maryknoll Father Paul Sykora, shown with pupils and facilitators at a tutoring center on a mountainside in Cochabamba, Bolivia, is the heart of Maryknoll's Apoyo Escolar program.*





*At Apoyo Escolar, children enjoy learning, a nutritious meal, fun and friendship.*

Nowadays, Maryknoll Father Sykora nurses the engine of a 1985 Volkswagen Beetle. This beat-up but reliable vehicle takes him up the mountainous roads of Zona Sur, an arid, underdeveloped area on the southern outskirts of the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia.

There the missionary serves some of the region's poorest children in a Maryknoll project called Apoyo Escolar (School Support), which offers afterschool tutoring and a nutritious meal to this vulnerable population.

Father Sykora — “Padre Pablo,” as he is known — is the heart of Apoyo Escolar, says Jhovana Reyes. An accountant by training, Reyes coordinates the program, which last



year served 160 pupils. Apoyo Escolar reaches students in their own neighborhoods, and she and Father Sykora make the rounds to each of its three sites.

Their first stop is the local public elementary school of Lomas de Santa Bárbara. The principal provides classroom space and a sheltered outdoor area for the Maryknoll project.

Beatriz Beltrán has been a facilitator (as the tutors prefer to be called) in the Apoyo Escolar program for seven years. Teachers appreciate the extra help, Beltrán says. “They let us know what subjects the students are falling behind in.”

Ezequiel, for example, needs help with reading, she says. His classmate Francisco has to practice writing.

But the staff of Apoyo Escolar are familiar with more than their pupils’ academic needs. Zona Sur is home to a burgeoning population of poor Bolivians — mostly Indigenous — who have come to Cochabamba in search of work.

Reyes discreetly points out one girl, whose mother is handicapped. Another child lives with only his father after his mother abandoned the family. Two siblings are being raised by their grandmother since their parents emigrated.

The project provides a welcoming place for them. “Sometimes the children don’t want to leave,” Reyes says. She and Father Sykora deliver meals cooked by her mother, Severina Reyes, who prepares a soup, pasta or another dish for the children.

Then it is on to the next site, and Father Sykora’s hardy little VW Beetle heads toward the hills.

The Apoyo Escolar project started almost two decades ago at Nueva Vera Cruz chapel.

Sister Maribel Crispín Egúsqiza, of the Misioneras Parroquiales del Niño Jesús de Praga (Parish Missionaries of the Infant of Prague), was a catechist there at the time. She says that she and others simply started providing activities and helping children with homework. Jhovana and her sister Milenka Luján, also a facilitator, were among the youth who received both sacraments and support — and stayed on to help.

When the municipality stopped

*Facilitator Beatriz Beltrán patiently teaches first-grader Ezequiel to read.*

providing a small stipend for supplies, Sister Crispin explains, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers — who were ministering at the chapel — took up the program in 2009. The project flourished under Father Francis Higdon and Father Sykora. Over the years, other priests, seminarians, brother candidates and lay missionaries have served with Apoyo Escolar. The largest of the program's three sites is a neighborhood center built by the late Father Higdon with several classrooms and a spacious patio.

Diego Santiago Berrios Galarza, 16, attended Apoyo Escolar from 6 years old until high school. He says that his tutors helped him to stay in school: "They teach us well. They motivate us to do better."

With one more stop to make to complete today's rounds, Father Sykora downshifts the Beetle's grinding gears as it leaves the pavement to chug intently up a dirt road.

"If you've got a rosary, I suggest you get it out now," he tells his passengers wryly.

Further up the mountainside, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers built a small tutoring center in Alto Monte Rancho, a new settlement that is home to the Zona Sur's most recently arrived — and poorest — families. Many residents lack running water, sewer services or electricity.

The children were coming from higher and higher up in the hills, Reyes recalls. So, she explains, "Instead of making them come to us, we had to go to them."

Father Sykora arrives at the two-

room structure with an ample playground. Facilitators Sabina Mamani Ortega and Rosario Moreno take a break from their respective groups of about 20 students to greet him.

Mamani, a Quechua-speaking catechist who lives nearby, has worked with Apoyo Escolar for 11 years. She says people are receptive to the project because it is associated with the Church.

Working as day laborers or street vendors, the children's parents have little time to help their children with homework, Mamani says. Furthermore, she continues, few parents have gone to school beyond second or third grade, and many do not read or write Spanish.

The population is transient, with high rates of family disintegration. "About half of the children are from single fathers or mothers," she says.

In early January, when registration opens for the new school year, the spots fill up within two or three days, Mamani says.

She explains the meaning of the words *Tikuna Wasi* painted in a mural outside the center. The students' Quechua-speaking mothers chose the name, she says. "They wanted *Tikuna Wasi*, which means 'house of encounter.' It fit very well.

"We have earned the trust of the people," she adds.

Father Sykora, 79, has spent most of his life with Indigenous people. He grew up among South Dakota's Native American reservations. "We were relatives and neighbors," he says. Outside of his tight-knit com-



Coordinator Jhovana Reyes, daughter Khyara, and Padre Pablo prepare for the day's rounds at Nueva Vera Cruz chapel, where the Apoyo Escolar program started.

munity of 95 people, he became aware of discrimination against Native Americans.

While the young Sykora was in the seminary, his father died suddenly. The missionary took time off from his studies to run the family's farm. He also pursued training in aviation.

Ordained in 1976, Father Sykora served for 25 years in Chile, most of that time with the Mapuche Indigenous people.

In addition to exercising priestly ministry, the hands-on missionary started a dairy farm, fixed windmills, built chapels and provided transportation for medical needs. He has driven various types of vehicles and piloted planes and boats.

Wherever he serves, Father Sykora says, he feels most at home in small

rural communities where people define themselves through their kinship with one another. In mission, relationships are what is most important, he says. "Projects can be a failure, but people are changed by knowing you."

Jhovana Reyes says that Padre Pablo belongs to her family in Zona Sur. Her daughters Saraí, 11, and Khyara, 4, are Father Sykora's goddaughters.

The plainspoken priest summarizes bluntly his five decades of service.

"I said, 'I'll follow you, Jesus — but show me the way,'" Father Sykora recalls. "And he did."

However, he continues, mission is not for the faint of heart.

"Sometimes, you don't follow," he says. "Jesus pushes you." ✠



## The Thought that Counts

by Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

A rabbi was giving a workshop on Scripture to Maryknollers in Africa some years ago. As part of his visit, the missionaries showed him around Tanzania: Mt. Kilimanjaro, wildlife in the Serengeti, and of course, the wonderful hospitality of a Tanzanian family. As they sat down to dinner, Father John Sivalon, who was Maryknoll's regional superior for Africa at the time, suddenly realized a potential embarrassment for the rabbi and the host family. The family had prepared a delicious meal — of pork. The Maryknoller gently whispered to the women who had prepared the food that, like Muslims, Jews do not eat pork.

Chagrined, the hosts quickly took away the offending dish and were about to prepare a kosher meal of chicken when the rabbi stopped them. It's true that Jews do not eat pork, the rabbi explained, but the Torah also teaches that grateful reception of hospitality can override the proscription against eating pork.

Here, like Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, a real-life situation involving human interaction best illustrated the teaching of commandments. Human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, take precedence over the law. Or as Saint Paul wrote: "For the whole

law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).

Many of us, including some Maryknoll missionaries, know how to be generous givers but are stymied by how to graciously receive gifts. We pride ourselves in being thoughtful benefactors bestowing gifts on others, but we balk when people want to show their appreciation to us. Jesus exemplified the opposite of this when, to the vociferous disapproval and high umbrage of the disciples, he allowed a woman — a woman! — to anoint his head with oil.

In the Gospel of Saint John, Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet. That is, until Jesus explained that unless Peter learned to receive this humble gesture and accept this simple act, he would have no part in the salvation about to be bestowed on the human race: the sacrificial gift of Jesus on the cross.

Gift giving and receiving has long flummoxed us in the comparatively affluent setting of the United States. We "regift" items we don't really want or need, or we stash away things we don't intend to use. When Grandma comes to visit, we look frantically for that truly hideous Christmas sweater she knitted especially for us.



*Siblings in Guatemala open a Box of Joy, a package of small gifts donated by Cross Catholic Outreach of Boca Raton, Florida. (CNS/Cross Catholic Outreach/Guatemala)*

On the part of the receiver, there is no greater expression of gratitude than to use a gift to the fullest, even if it wears out or breaks. Conversely, there is no worse disappointment for the giver than when a receiver never bothers to even unwrap, much less use, the present.

When I served as a missionary in Korea, I noticed that one of many areas of etiquette where Koreans and Americans differ is in gift giving. Koreans are taught from childhood to receive a present with both hands. This honors the giver by demonstrating the gift's importance.

I had questioned whether Koreans

would accept receiving Communion in the hand. To my surprise, they took to it readily as an instance of accepting a gift with two open hands. Indeed, when receiving the Eucharist, nothing is more important.

How do our practices of giving and receiving affect our approach to the gift of all gifts — the Eucharist? What about our approach to the gifts of health, faith and life itself?

Perhaps most importantly, we can ask ourselves what we do with the gifts we have already received. How can we best accept and use the grace that God gives us, every second of every day? ✠





# Sharing Light in a Circle of Life

By Mary Ellen Manz, M.M.

*A Maryknoll sister brings joy and hope to a poor area of Zimbabwe*

In Zimbabwe, Maryknoll Sister Chiyoung Pak is known by a radiant name. “As I walk along the street, people greet me jovially, ‘Sister Chiedza, how is it going?’” she says. “*Chiedza* is the Shona word for light and brightness.”

It’s hard to tell from her sunny disposition, but Sister Pak’s optimism has been sorely tested in this country of southern Africa. The missionary

had to persevere for two decades to find a home for her ministry to impoverished children and adults.

Assigned to Zimbabwe in 1999, Sister Pak first spent a couple of years in Harare, the capital. She explored the city, practicing the Shona language and getting to know the capital’s street children. One of them told her he came from a nearby township called Norton. A township is an area

where the black population had lived under apartheid before Rhodesia gained independence in 1980 as the new country of Zimbabwe.

Visiting Norton, about 25 miles west of Harare, Sister Pak saw that many children did not attend school. For those who did, sessions lasted only half the day. There were high numbers of orphans due to AIDS and displacement of families. The already overpopulated town was growing rapidly and had few services and little infrastructure.

“I thought, ‘This is the place for me!’” Sister Pak recalls. In 2002, she moved there. The Norton Youth Center, as it would later come to be called, began with 10 children simply doing arts and crafts. Sister Pak

found the children eager to learn, she said at the time, “in spite of the fact that they are poor and hungry and many don’t have their parents.”

Unable to find adequate rooms for a center, Sister Pak rented a schoolyard and divided it into separate spaces for activities. By 2008, she had enlisted the help of six Zimbabwean teachers. The Norton Youth Center was offering a variety of classes including theater, traditional and modern music, art, dance, sports, academic tutoring and HIV/AIDS prevention and counseling.

Sister Pak — who had earned a black belt in Tae Kwan Do in Korea — also taught martial arts classes to foster discipline.

By 2012 over 1,000 children ages

*Maryknoll Sister Chiyoung Pak (first row, seventh from left) and members of the Norton Youth Center in Zimbabwe have found a place to call home. (Courtesy of Chiyoung Pak/Zimbabwe)*





Sister Pak spent her first years in Zimbabwe in the capital city Harare, where she began working with street children and promoting education. (Maryknoll Mission Archives/Zimbabwe)

The first Norton Youth Center activities took place in a rented schoolyard, with children divided into groups for programs such as tutoring. (Maryknoll Mission Archives/Zimbabwe)

9 to 14 were attending classes daily.

However, in December of 2012, Sister Pak and the students and teachers of the Norton Youth Center received devastating news. The school principal had decided to no longer rent them the schoolyard. The children of Norton lost one of the few places in the community where they could strive for a better life. "I can't forget the disappointed look on their faces when we closed our center," Sister Pak says.

As the missionary's dream suddenly seemed to come to a dead end, her faith renewed her hope. Born in Seoul, Korea, to Buddhist parents, Pak had become Catholic at the age of 12. Her parents were supportive, even when their daughter, at 30, joined the Maryknoll Sisters.

Sister Pak held fast to her goal. In 2014, still unsure about the future of her mission in Norton, she wrote,

"Each day, I try to grow in God's love and understand God's unconditional love. I have received so much love and care in Korea, and I will share all that love here in Zimbabwe."

Before losing the schoolyard space, Sister Pak had already begun the process of registering the project in Zimbabwe as a nongovernmental organization under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. Encouragement came in December of 2015 when the organization received official recognition.

"Since our registration as an NGO we have been focused on community development programs," the missionary says.

Reassessing the changing needs in the growing community, Sister Pak expanded the project's age range. Some of the children she had worked with had grown into young adults. She invited participants up

to 22 years of age for skills training. "The scarcity of jobs is very apparent," she says. "The majority of the youths who were coming to the center are still unemployed."

She also became concerned about the lack of training for older adults.

"Given the 85% unemployment rate, there are currently no special programs tailored for this older age group, which is in dire need of job skills," Sister Pak says. After the COVID-19 lockdown was lifted, the Norton Center welcomed adults.

Sharing space at the St. Padre Pio Poly Clinic, the project offered workshops in African bead jewelry, computer skills, and life skills and personal development for adults.

However, the arrangement with the clinic was not conducive to learning. Apart from one room, classes were still being held outdoors. Wind and rain often disrupted activities.

"September 28, 2023 is a day I will never forget," Sister Pak says happily. "After 16 years, we finally found a place, a block of five rooms to rent as our center!" The building is a space students and staff can call their own. Although the rooms are small, she says, they manage by having double sessions each day. "Now we are more focused on the quality of teaching, with four fully qualified professional teachers," she adds.

Participants are organized in two groups: youths ages 17 to 28 and older adults ages 29 to 65.

With 10 laptops, the center accommodates 10 students in morning sessions and another 10 in the afternoon. This is a favorite workshop for the youth, Sister Pak says, because there is no other place for them to learn computer skills for free.

The African beads workshop also has 10 students in each session.





The Norton Center offers the only free computer classes for adults in the community. Ten laptops are shared in two sessions, serving 20 students. (Courtesy of Chiyong Pak/Zimbabwe)

“Working with adult women, the joy and excitement they bring as they learn to make jewelry has been a great source of motivation,” says Olinda Makara, one of the teachers. She says she enjoys “the sense of pride and achievement I witness on their faces as they successfully finish their projects. It’s an honor to continue working with the women, witnessing them proudly embracing themselves and others, forming new support systems, bonding and gaining confidence in themselves.”

Sister Pak, 59, particularly enjoys working with women ages 40 to 65 in sessions about the challenges of midlife. She teaches them skills to help them deal with stress and anger, and offers them the opportunity to integrate any suffering from

problems they have faced in their lives. It is “a safe place to share, cry, laugh and have fun together, freely discussing and sharing their life experiences,” she says.

“As new groups of women join the workshops, they bring new insights and energy,” she continues. “Our center has gained popularity since there is no other community development program operating here in Norton.”

The missionary with the Shona name meaning light and brightness finds joy as she regards all that has been accomplished: “I am grateful to witness students who came out of our children’s center now rejoining our center as grown-up mothers and fathers, even grandparents, too. It is really a complete circle of life.” ✠

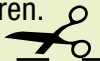
# “Witness to the true Light”

— Matthew 19:14



Courtesy of Chiyong Pak/Zimbabwe

Your generosity makes it possible for Maryknoll Sisters like Sister Chiyong Pak to witness to the love and light of Christ by helping people in impoverished situations build a better life for themselves and their children.



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# Finding Christ in Our Humanness

By John McAuley, M.M.

In our busy lives Christmas does not often offer us a peaceful time for purposeful reflection, but we do encounter God in our humanness.

The Bible readings of Christmas offer us several snapshots of humanness. One is that though Mary was betrothed to Joseph, she was with child before the marriage. This was seen as a stigma. And this stigma followed her and Jesus even when he was an adult.

After Jesus began gaining a reputation, he visited his hometown of Nazareth. And there, people reacted by asking: "Isn't this the son of Mary?!" They did not say "the son of Joseph," as was the cultural norm. No, the son of *Mary*. They went straight back to the fact that they definitely knew that Jesus was Mary's son, but they were still not sure about his father.

And what of Joseph? He was of the house of David of Bethlehem, far to the south. Why did Joseph leave his southern family, adjacent to cosmopolitan Jerusalem, and go so far north to rural Galilee? Did he get into trouble somehow and have to leave his kin? Maybe his move was due to political trouble or family infighting. Maybe even religious trouble — or maybe, all three. (The child he took as his son, Jesus, eventually got into all three kinds of trouble!)

All this may be mere speculation, but remember, when Joseph returned to his hometown of Bethlehem for the census, he found no doors open to him or his nuclear family. Strange that his kin did not take him in, provide for him or welcome his wife and child on his return to Bethlehem.

So, the scene we are shown is of Mary under suspicion and Joseph estranged from his family of origin. Maybe that's what they were reliving as they made their way to Bethlehem. A very human experience. Separation. Being alone. Just us.

Now, here is another human experience. One that we not only feel at Christmas but that we often consciously attempt to create.

We all know that there is a lot of talk about the commercialization of Christmas. But we do something else, too. Of all parts of the year, the Christmas season is a time when we go out of our way — sometimes to extraordinary lengths — to come together. To invite, to reconcile, to acknowledge, to make space for those whose lives we are part of — and even to make provision for people we do not directly know.

It might not be perfect, but we strive to make sure, to the best of our ability, that everyone has an opportunity to feel that they belong, that we are all part of a greater whole.

We encounter God in our humanness, even when only half-hearing the accounts of rejections of Mary, Jesus and Joseph found in the Christmas narratives. Maybe, just maybe, those narratives turn out to be the very tool God surreptitiously uses to open our hearts to others at Christmas. It doesn't have to be conscious. That's the mind. It only has to be felt. That's the heart. And the heart almost always knows how best to react and respond. ✧

*Maryknoll Father John McAuley has served in mission in Japan and Hong Kong as well as on the Maryknoll Society's General Council.*





# An OASIS in the BORDERLANDS

By Andrea Moreno-Díaz

*Catholic missionaries and volunteers act as 'pilgrims of hope' for migrants and refugees*

The arid, rugged terrain of El Paso, Texas, could be described as inhospitable. El Pasoans, however, are anything but.

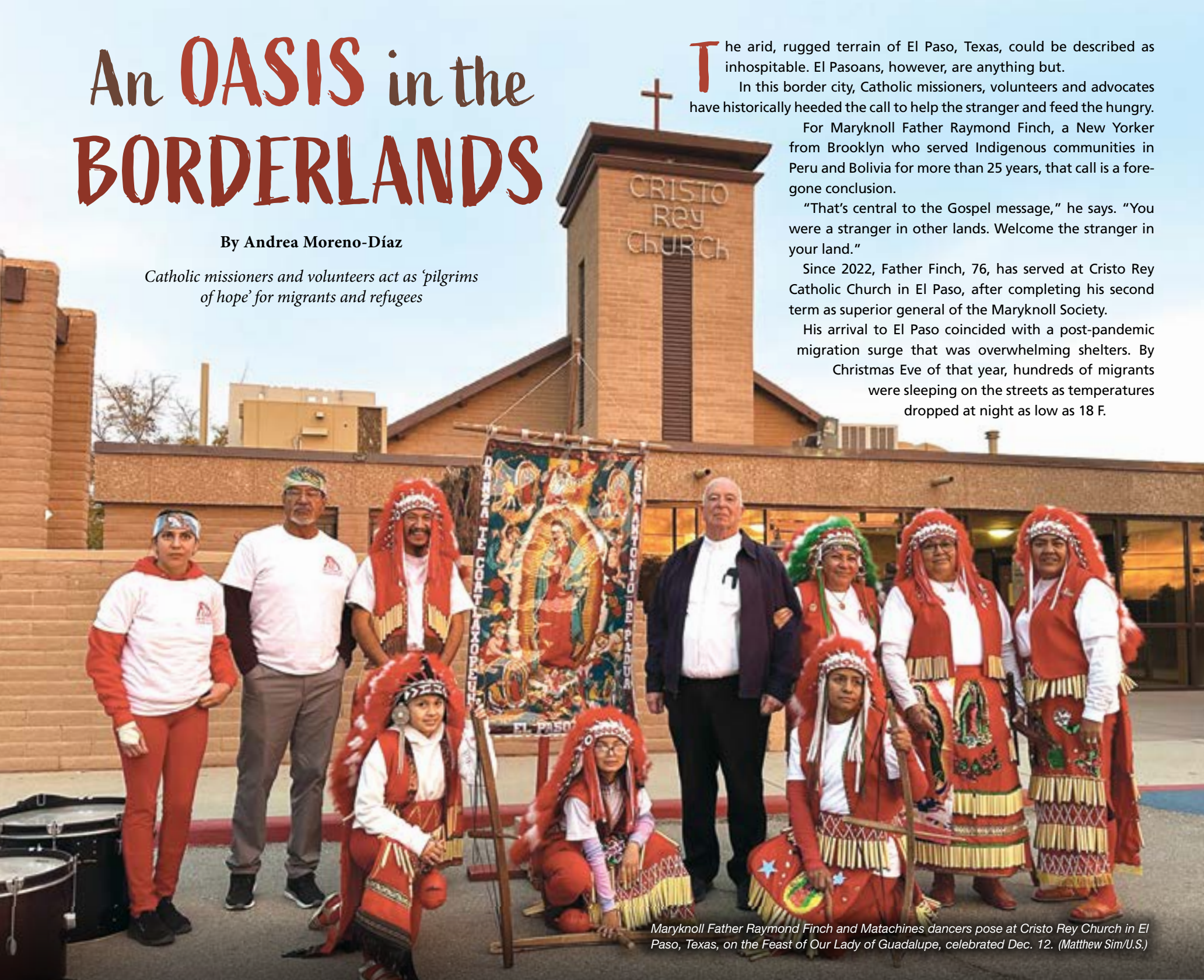
In this border city, Catholic missionaries, volunteers and advocates have historically heeded the call to help the stranger and feed the hungry.

For Maryknoll Father Raymond Finch, a New Yorker from Brooklyn who served Indigenous communities in Peru and Bolivia for more than 25 years, that call is a foregone conclusion.

"That's central to the Gospel message," he says. "You were a stranger in other lands. Welcome the stranger in your land."

Since 2022, Father Finch, 76, has served at Cristo Rey Catholic Church in El Paso, after completing his second term as superior general of the Maryknoll Society.

His arrival to El Paso coincided with a post-pandemic migration surge that was overwhelming shelters. By Christmas Eve of that year, hundreds of migrants were sleeping on the streets as temperatures dropped at night as low as 18 F.



Maryknoll Father Raymond Finch and Matachines dancers pose at Cristo Rey Church in El Paso, Texas, on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, celebrated Dec. 12. (Matthew Sim/U.S.)





*Cristo Rey parishioners Claudia Díaz and Gloria Ibarra (left, right) prepare hot meals for migrants and refugees staying at shelters in El Paso, Texas. (Courtesy of Gloria Ibarra/U.S.)*

"The people in the parish here, and most people in El Paso — and I was very impressed with this — responded to help," Father Finch says.

One of them is Gloria Ibarra, a parish staff member at Cristo Rey. She runs a ministry that provides hot meals every Tuesday for two migrant shelters.

The initiative began in 2018 when Ibarra received a call for help from Martyrs Hall shelter, at the time a makeshift emergency shelter located on property owned by the Diocese of El Paso.

Ibarra says she "jumped" at the opportunity to serve. Seven other parishioners joined her.

"Our ministry started by us buying food out of pocket," Ibarra says. "We would prepare breakfast or lunch and take it down to the Diocese."

The team prepares up to 130 hot

meals in the parish kitchen of the St. Oscar Romero Center, named as such by Father Finch. They cook with migrants' needs in mind.

"They probably haven't had something homemade," Ibarra says about the migrants on long journeys. "So we always provide things like spaghetti, salad and a piece of bread or Mexican cuisine."

Now with a team of 10 members, the parishioners transport the meals to Martyrs Hall shelter. Holy Family Refugee Center, the other shelter being served by Ibarra's team, sends volunteers to pick up the food at the parish.

This ministry allows Ibarra, 62, to fulfill a dream she had held since high school: to be a missionary.

"I didn't get to be a missionary abroad," she says. "But I've come to realize that missionary work is where

you are, where God calls you. We all have a mission."

Working with Father Finch, she says, has "enhanced that vision."

"People in the parish do what they can," Father Finch says. "My job as a pastor here is to help them live their faith, deepen their faith, go out and spread that faith. Hopefully I can encourage them, inspire them and, once in a while, give them direction."

Ricardo Lopez has been a parishioner at Cristo Rey since he was a teenager. Now at 62 years old, he serves there in various ministries.

Lopez expects to be ordained as a permanent deacon for the Diocese of El Paso in January of 2025. Then, along with a group of about 120 people, he will go on pilgrimage to

Rome for the Jubilee. As a native of El Paso, he has witnessed the "spirit of welcome" that Pope Francis encourages for the Jubilee year in the hospitality of his people.

"The way we look at it is that we are called to serve God's children," Lopez explains. Regardless of newcomers' immigration status, he says, "it's up to us to provide, to serve them with open arms. Our parish community strives to do that."

Maryknoll has had a presence on the U.S.-Mexico border since 1993 with priests, sisters and lay missionaries serving at shelters, parishes or immigration advocacy centers. As missionaries, they have insight into why people migrate.

Most people "look specifically at



*Monsignor Arturo Bañuelas celebrates a Mass to pray for an end to border violence at the foot of the Santa Fe bridge to Ciudad Juárez. (CNS/Christ Chavez/Rio Grande Catholic/U.S.)*



the border between Mexico and the United States," Father Finch says. "But the border is a border between different parts of the world. It's a border between north and south, and Maryknoll is involved with both worlds."

The response of the community in El Paso models a Christian alternative to the demonization of migrants and refugees and the militarization of the border.

"For us on the border, solidarity is not just accompaniment," says Monsignor Arturo Bañuelas. "They no longer become 'the migrant' or 'the poor.' They are a sister or a brother."

Monsignor Bañuelas is an advocate for migrant rights and founding chair of Hope Border Institute in El Paso, which documents migration patterns, human rights abuses and root causes of migration.

The encounter with refugees in shelters, says Monsignor Bañuelas, becomes transformative when "you hear the stories of the people, and experience their humanity, their suffering, their hope, and why they came against all the odds."

He relates the experience of a woman with strong anti-immigrant views who visited a shelter. She talked over dinner with a Central American woman who fled north with her two children after her husband was murdered.

"All of a sudden it wasn't somebody talking to a migrant. It was mother to mother," Monsignor Bañuelas says. "God is present in

that exchange of solidarity."

Anti-migrant Senate bills and legal attacks that target shelters have not disrupted that solidarity.

On March 21st, 2024, hundreds poured into the streets of El Paso for a demonstration called "Do Not Be Afraid: March and Vigil for Human Dignity," organized by Hope Border Institute.

Volunteers registered at Cristo Rey, and a sign-making party was held at the parish.

The march and vigil commemorated the one-year anniversary of a harrowing fire in a detention center that killed 40 migrants in Ciudad Juárez. It also protested a legal suit to shut down Annunciation House, a network of migrant shelters where Maryknoll missionaries have served.

"It's the central tenant of Christianity for Catholics," says Father Finch. "To feed the hungry, to help the needy, to seek Christ in the person who needs our help. To criminalize that would be disastrous."

In true El Pasoan character that has been tried and tested, Catholics at the border will continue serving as pilgrims of hope.

"Hope never fails," says Monsignor Bañuelas. "It engenders in us possibilities of love that are bigger than hate. When you struggle with the poor, you march, you work in shelters ... it's not a painless experience. But when you look at life from the perspective of hope, you [believe] that love is going to win, that justice is going to win. And it's on its way." ✠

# Prayer for Vocations

By Rodrigo Ulloa-Chavarry, M.M.

## The Star of the Magi

I want to discern my vocation, Jesus.  
But right now my life is a bit complicated.  
I seem to have lost sight of the Star.  
I heard that the three Magi returned to their  
country by a different route.  
Without the star.

Can I discern my vocation through  
a different route?  
A different star? A different start?

Contemplating a decision to align  
my life with yours, Jesus,

I can't help but think that the journey ahead  
is too long.  
Is my star really gone?  
I hear a resounding No. The star is not gone,  
I hear you say. It is inside me, you whisper.

Help me trust more, Jesus,  
To go where there is no road.  
Sustain me. Return my Star.  
I will follow you.  
Even if it entails traveling  
by a different route.

Amen.



*I ask with all my heart that hope  
be granted to the billions of the poor,  
who often lack the essentials of life.*

—Pope Francis  
*Spes Non Confundit*  
Jubilee 2025





# Love Exists in Tonacatepeque

By Deirdre Cornell

*A Maryknoll lay missionary serves in prison ministry in the country with the world's highest incarceration rate*

It's Wednesday. Robert "Bob" Cunningham gets up early in Zaragoza, El Salvador, where he and his wife Elizabeth "Liz" Cunningham serve as Maryknoll lay missionaries. He sets out for Ciudad Merliot, 45 minutes away.

At 8 a.m., Bob meets up with Mercedarian Father Jonathan Vásquez and other volunteers. They drive for an hour to a juvenile correctional facility, where they share the Eucharist, food and fellowship with 180 teenage inmates. "We pack the van, then say a prayer that we bring light and hope to the boys," Bob says. "Love exists in the youth prison of Tonacatepeque," he adds. "I have seen it."



*Suspected gang members are arrested in San Salvador.  
(CNS/José Cabezas/Reuters/El Salvador)*



Coming to El Salvador in early 2022, the couple was eager to accompany Maryknoll Father John Northrop to La Esperanza prison (also known as “Mariona”). At this large, overcrowded jail in the capital city, Father Northrop heard confessions and offered Mass. “We’d socialize with the men, sing in the choir and hand out food,” Liz says.

But prison ministry in the Central American country was about to change drastically.

El Salvador had been plagued for decades by gangs. Following a particularly harrowing spate of homicides, in March of 2022 President Nayib Bukele instituted a “state of exception.” Certain constitutional rights were suspended. Armed forces swept up anyone suspected of belonging to or abetting a gang. The prison population tripled.

By early fall, chaplaincy visits to La Esperanza were halted. Just when the need was greatest, the country’s prison gates slammed shut.

“What are we called to do?” Bob and Liz asked. It was a familiar question.

Originally from Long Island, New York — where he and Liz met in high school — Bob joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps after college. His placement took him inside a California county jail.

The facility “smelled and sounded like a zoo,” he recalls. “After I finished my year of service, I never wanted to go inside a jail again.”

Bob and Liz raised their three children in the Boston area, where



(From left) Maryknoll Lay Missioner Robert Cunningham, Marta Elena Arévalo Barraza, Rubia del Carmen Benítez Brioso and Mercedarian Father Jonathan Vásquez (Courtesy of Robert Cunningham/El Salvador)

he worked for nonprofits and universities. But he never forgot what he had witnessed behind bars. “I couldn’t get it out of my heart,” he says. “I couldn’t live my life as if this world didn’t exist.”

He began to volunteer in prison ministry, and soon Liz joined him. Eventually Bob became the chair of Concord Prison Outreach and even received an award from the Massachusetts Department of Corrections.

“I’ve been involved in everything from job training to alternatives to violence to retreats and catechesis. The content is important,” he says. “But it’s nothing compared to the presence of just showing up.”

On mission in El Salvador, a door opened at the end of last year. Father Vásquez, who coordinates a network of Catholic chaplains throughout the country, called a meeting for volunteers. Some 20 people including Bob showed up.

“There are approximately 93,000 inmates in jails,” says Father Vásquez, whose order was founded to care for people in captivity. “What keeps me up at night is that they might think the Church has abandoned them.”

The state of exception, he explains, caused “a rupture” in access to correctional facilities.

In the past, imprisoned leaders ran their gangs from behind bars. Under current protocols, all communication with the outside world — such as visits, phone calls and internet connection — is blocked. Families often go months without word of their detained relatives.

“Like so many mothers who can’t enter the jails for visits, who try to communicate with their children and don’t know where they are — whether they are still alive, if they have eaten, if they are sick — that’s what the Church is going through,”

Father Vásquez says.

“We have not been able to enter any of the prisons for adult males,” he says, “only centers for minors.” One of those sites is the Tonacatepeque Penal Center.

Arriving on Wednesdays at the juvenile correctional facility, the team unloads the van. Guards inspect the donated baked goods. Some young inmates carry the bins and sound equipment to an outdoor recreation area, where they help set up the altar. The liturgy is enlivened by Father Vásquez’s guitar and singing.

Most of the boys are ages 15 to 17. Dressed in white t-shirts, shorts and shoes, they sit on the ground. “Many of them have had difficult histories that led them to a place like this,” Father Vásquez says. Each case is different, but all the boys come from broken families living in poverty. Some parents are themselves in prison.

In their neighborhoods, the priest continues, joining the *maras*, the local term for gangs, is a real temptation: “They give them belonging, they give them safety.”

Liz notes that the couple’s full-time ministry in Zaragoza offers alternatives to disadvantaged children and youth. The community center El Patronato Lidia Coggiola provides tutoring, programs and scholarships. In contrast, the boys





The Cunninghams display artwork made by the children in their full-time ministry at the El Patronato Lidia Coggiola community center in Zaragoza. (Octavio Durán/El Salvador)

at Tonacatepeque have “little or no support,” Bob says. “A lot of their support was in the gangs.”

His hope, the lay missionary says, is that when the boys are released, they seek “some form of family and community in church, in faith.” Fifteen have asked for the sacraments.

The boys may not understand the rituals or prayers, Bob says, but at some moment, no matter how fleeting, all have known love in their lives. The visitors try to reconnect them to that. “They have known suffering, they are suffering,” Bob says. “But it is healed somehow through that saving power of love.”

After Mass, the volunteers joke and converse with the inmates, and some of the boys let down their guard. “There is an opportunity for exchange,” Bob says. “It’s a lot of small but meaningful interactions over time, but who knows where that can lead?”

“What we say or do is just a drop in the bucket,” Father Vásquez says. The real message, he continues, is simple: “We are here with you. We won’t abandon you.”

The boys hold out the hems of their shirts and the visitors fill them with sweet breads, pie and French toast slices. It gets messy, Bob says, adding, “People’s lives are messy.”

Prison rules forbid giving the boys anything else — even a holy card.

One recent Wednesday, the team was met with unsettling news. More than half of the 420 inmates had been abruptly moved to another facility. And only 30 to 45 will be allowed to attend Mass.

“Each one of them is a child of God,” Bob says. “Hope can be found in small acts of humanity and compassion and in the joy of connecting with people. May Pope Francis’ call to be pilgrims of hope lead us to enter the darkest of places.”✠



Bolivia is one of nine countries where Maryknoll lay missionaries serve.



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# Helping Kenyans Live with HIV/AIDS

An Interview with Alice Njoroge  
Photos by Adam Mitchell



*Alice Njoroge, the managing director of the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program, talks about the program, its success and the role of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers during the last three decades. Njoroge spoke with Maryknoll's Adam Mitchell in Nairobi. This transcript has been edited for clarity and space.*

I've been in EDARP for the last 30 years. We started the program with Father Ed Phillips in 1993. Then we were offering community-based programs, just accompanying people who were ill with HIV/AIDS when there was a lot of stigma in the village, in the community.

... It was a time when our hospitals were really full, and patients with AIDS would be sent home to die. So we had to teach the people of the communities how to accompany and take care of them. A lot of patients were abandoned even by their own relatives.

There was a felt need to really accompany and work with these patients and also model to the community, teach them that you cannot get AIDS by touch. You cannot get AIDS by being close to the patients. With time, we trained small groups of volunteers from the Small Christian Communities on how to give basic home-based care and to be there for the patients.

This had a lot of impact because through the volunteers being seen by neighbors going into the homes of people they feared, other people started getting involved with the patients. They would no longer see them as people not to be touched, but they started having a bit of compassion for them. We cannot say today that we are completely rid of the stigma, but it's not as bad as it was in the 1990s.

Along the way tuberculosis became a huge problem. We had to look for a way of dealing with the number of patients with TB because they were increasing by double the numbers that we were used to. We approached the Ministry of

Health and asked [the head of the TB section] to help us to establish a small laboratory within the community so that we could take care of the patients with TB. It was not easy, but God touched him and he responded to our call.

From a small laboratory in one parish, we have grown to seven. The major one, we are proud of saying, is state of the art. We have increased our number of community healthcare workers since 1993. We have 1,012 community healthcare workers and they're all active.

The kind of patient we see in EDARP is not the average patient seen in other hospitals. A lot of these patients have given up on





*EDARP Managing Director Alice Njoroge and Mathare Clinic staff: (from left) Site Manager Caroline Karimi, Deputy Site Manager Elizabeth Chege and Clinical Manager Ivone Wafula*

themselves. By the time they come to us they have multiple issues.

Some of them are very poor. They don't have a job. They survive on a daily wage. Others are criminals. Others are drug peddlers. Others are sex workers. We see everybody. We have street people and a lot of street children, a lot of street families and we are taking care of them. Those are our clients and they have special needs.

We don't only give them medication. This program has grown and developed based on what people need. If we see a patient, and that patient does not have food, we are not going to give them medication

and tell them go and look for food. We are going to address the issue of hunger because we know that without food, they will not be able to take their medication.

If they're an alcoholic, we have interventions that address alcohol and drug addictions within the program. We are not going to be blind to that part of their lives. EDARP does not focus on one thing. We are holistic. We take care of the patient in totality. Whatever issues that come, we are with them.

Now in the current economic situation, number one is funding. The money is getting less and less. In terms of looking at 30,000 patients,

the number is not growing any smaller. We grow our patients on an average of about 1,000 patients every year.

Then there is the spiritual aspect, which Father Rick Bauer really brought into the program. Now we have integrated spiritual screening. Previously we would do it, but not at that scale. There are churches all over and a lot of those pastors are praying for people with HIV and telling them they are healed. And they stop taking their medication. We are able to address those issues from the screening.

We work with our patients to help them, so that they understand that, yes, your spiritual values are very important, but also your care and treatment is equally important. We have to strike a balance so that you continue to believe in God, but at the same time, take your medication. Other patients go to medicine men and we are also able to catch those and work with them. Of course, those who become victims of the medicine men come back and they are our ambassadors: "Take your medication."

When I joined this program, my faith and my religious beliefs were not where they are today. The people who have made my faith grow are the community healthcare workers. Those are the people who are the living example of the Gospel of Jesus. They go out, they give themselves, and they teach even though they are not professionals or highly educated. They don't

have much, but they are very happy to serve God through serving other human beings.

Our people have learned from these community healthcare workers to see Jesus in the patients that they serve. To me, that is the greatest prayer that is answered every day in EDARP. We all come from different denominations, but this is one thing, one identity we have in common, that people identify with the patients as if they were their own brothers, their own mothers, their own sisters. That is where we are today with EDARP. ✨



*EDARP Soweto Clinic staff: Site Manager Belinda Loice (left) and Clinical Manager Violet Anamanda*



# Vatican II at 60

## The Father of Vatican II

By James H. Kroeger, M.M.

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

*Pope John XXIII leads the opening session of the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Basilica on Oct. 11, 1962. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano/Vatican City)*





**A**ggiornamento, the Italian word that means “bringing up to date,” expresses the multifaceted agenda for Church renewal undertaken at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), initiated by Pope John XXIII. He is remembered for his pivotal role in Vatican II, and his annual feast day is October 11, commemorating his opening of the Council on October 11, 1962.

The fourth of 13 children of peasant farmers, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was born in the village of Sotto il Monte in Northern Italy in 1881. He entered the seminary as a young boy and at the tender age of 15 began writing his spiritual diary, published as *Journal of a Soul* after his death. His aim in life was to be a saint — and he made it!

The young Father Roncalli began the varied assignments which would later serve him well during his pontificate. He served as the bishop’s secretary and taught in the seminary. He was designated a military chaplain during World War I, and then worked in Rome at Propaganda Fide. As a bishop, he was papal representative in Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece, served as apostolic nuncio to France, and became cardinal-patriarch of Venice.

Before and during the dark days of World War II, Bishop Roncalli profoundly felt the tragic plight of the Jewish people. He initiated working bonds with several Jewish and non-Jewish individuals and organizations to protect Jews from being handed over to the Nazis. In one of

many concrete examples, from 1938 to 1939 he helped organize the transport of 10,000 Jewish children to safety. After World War II, Bishop Roncalli continued his active support of the Jewish people and promoted establishing the state of Israel.

Beginning his pontificate at age 77 on October 28, 1958, Angelo Roncalli brought a whole new pastoral and personal style to the papacy. Over the years of his short pontificate (1958-1963) John XXIII became a beloved figure worldwide, popularly known as “Good Pope John.” On the 50th anniversary of Pope John’s death, Pope Francis noted that John XXIII’s life is a lesson in how obedience and trust in God lead to interior peace.

Pope Francis said: “The whole world recognized Pope John as a pastor and father, a pastor because he was a father. ... It is so beautiful to find a priest, a good priest, filled with goodness.” He was “an effective weaver of relationships and a solid champion of unity, both in the ecclesiastical community and outside it.” He was always “open to dialogue with the Christians of other churches, with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim worlds and with many other people of good will.”

Indeed, the world loved Pope John XXIII and his cheerful, affectionate nature. He was an optimist, a true “pilgrim of hope,” and communicated this spirit to the Church — particularly through the Second Vatican Council. In his spiritual diary he noted: “I have never met a pessimist who accomplished any good.”

He had retained his good humor even during very difficult assignments, choosing to seize the moment and emphasize the potential good to be accomplished.

His joviality and humor became legendary. Two examples suffice. One day he overheard some Italian women speaking of his appearance, saying that he was old, obese, and homely. Pope John turned and benignly observed: “You must remember that being pope is not exactly a beauty contest.”

A diplomat newly accredited to the Holy See asked the pope how many people worked at the Vatican. “Oh, no more than half of them!” replied John XXIII, winking an eye.

John XXIII’s outlook is, in fact, a spirituality that he communicated to the world. He took the call to holiness seriously throughout his entire life. His profound trust was evident in his simplicity, patience, gentleness and affability, qualities manifested in his varied writings.

Yet, John XXIII could be very forceful in asserting his conviction that the Christian faith should result in deep, joyful hope. In his opening speech to the Second Vatican Council, he said: “We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand” (quoted by Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 84). He believed that divine providence was renewing humanity through a perceptive reading of the “signs of the times.”



*Pope John XXIII as drawn by Jesuit Father Henry Ponce, once a student of Maryknoll Father James Kroeger, this article’s author*

Some insights from his “Daily Decalogue of Pope John XXIII” are:

- Only for today, I will be happy in the certainty that I was created to be happy, not only in the other world but also in this one.
- Only for today, I will do one good deed and not tell anyone about it.
- Only for today, I will have no fears. In particular, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful and to believe in goodness.

We marvel at Saint John XXIII’s wisdom and seek to put it into practice — each and every day, transforming us all into a truly joyful community of Jesus’ missionary disciples! ✠

*Maryknoll Father James H. Kroeger served in mission in Asia for over five decades. He is the author of Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language (Orbis Books – 2023) and A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis (Faith Alive Books – 2024).*

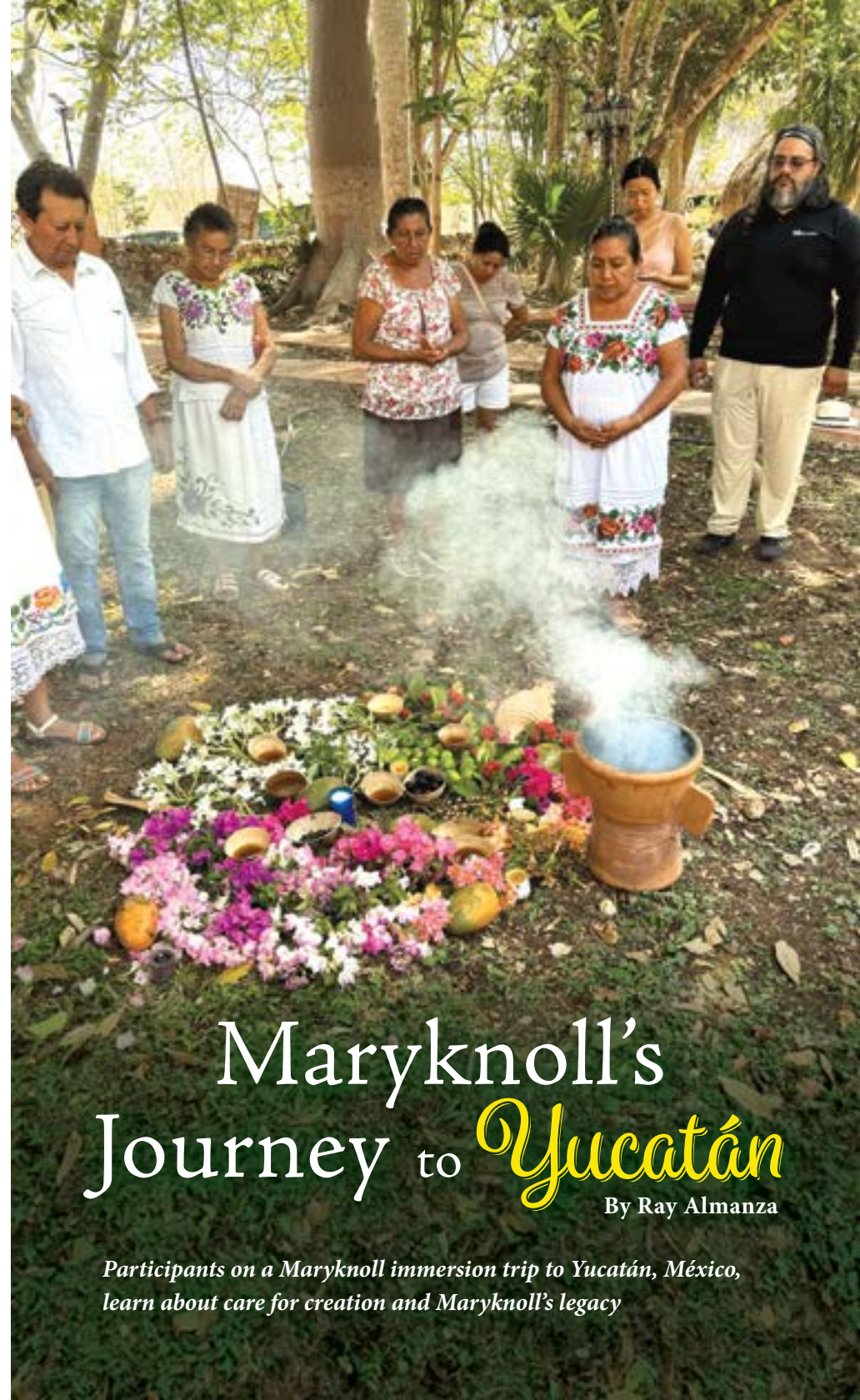




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# Maryknoll's Journey to *Yucatán*

By Ray Almanza

*Participants on a Maryknoll immersion trip to Yucatán, México, learn about care for creation and Maryknoll's legacy*



**M**aryknoll accompanies U.S. Catholics to discern how to share the gift of mission, says Deacon Leonel Yoque, who leads the Maryknoll Society's Missionary Disciples team.

Deacon Yoque, Maryknoll Father John Martin and I guided two immersion trips last June. The destination for both groups was Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. Adults from different states and university students from the Catholic Community at Stanford set out for our program offered in this cradle of Mayan culture.

The Yucatán is characterized by lush jungles and an abundance of water. However, this year was the second driest in recent history. Drought and a heat wave proved deadly for wildlife. For example, a news article I read reported that howler monkeys were so dehydrated they were falling from the trees.

With the theme of care for creation, participants learned about ecology, Indigenous spirituality and human responsibility. The itinerary centered on engaging with local communities and hearing stories of Maryknoll missionaries who accompanied the people for over eight decades. Grateful for Father Martin's presence, both groups held daily prayer and reflections.

One of the roots of the current climate crisis can be traced back to

the subjugation of the original caretakers of the land. We visited Maní, which was the capital for Tutul-Xiu, a Mayan city-state. It had been an important religious center for the Indigenous people who have inhabited the region for thousands of years.

The key encounter of the immersion trips was our stay at the agricultural school *U Yits Ka'an* (Dew that Falls from Heaven). There, participants experienced the school's mission, promoting sustainable agriculture according to Mayan cosmology. We were served traditional Mayan meals prepared with ingredients grown on the land. Besides agriculture, the school offers workshops on Mayan practices of beekeeping, traditional homeopathic medicine and Indigenous theology.

"We learned from Indigenous locals about their pursuit to maintain and recover their ancestral ways of being and to protect their cultures and lands from the exploitation and destruction that come from Western 'development,'" says participant Brinkley Johnson, who works at Refugee Services of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego. This type of knowledge, she continues, can help us discern "how we ought to proceed as we try to face this moment."

The Yucatán peninsula was selected as the site of our newest mission immersion trip because of Maryknoll's long history there. As the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers began its presence in Latin America in 1942, a group of missionaries including Bishop James E. Walsh and Father Alonso Escalan-

te departed from New York for Bolivia. Along the way they visited the Yucatán at the invitation of Enrique Muñoz, who had been a classmate of Bishop Walsh at Mount St. Mary's College in Baltimore.

"Exactly one year later, in 1943, about 12 Maryknoll missionaries arrived in Mérida, one half to stay and the other half to go to Nayarit on the Pacific Coast," Father Martin says. Ordained in 1966, the missionary was first assigned to the Mexico region. Even as he served in other countries, the missionary maintained relationships in Yucatán.

Participants felt the Maryknoll spirit at the human rights organization *Indignación* (Indignation), which helps Mayan communities fight for their rights. The director is Cristina Muñoz, a granddaughter of Enrique Muñoz. She promotes equality for Mayans, who are often discriminated against.

The work of *Indignación* shares a common thread with Caritas of Yucatán. The Caritas center, led by Eduardo Seijo, takes a truly holistic approach. It provides clothes and household items, offers programs on values and courses on Catholic social doctrine, trains volunteers, maintains a cadre of local benefactors and covers the high costs of medical procedures for people of limited resources.

"Connection in community needs to move past church gatherings and



*Previous page: Maryknoll immersion trip participants join elders at U Yits Ka'an school for a Mayan ritual of thanksgiving. (Denny Davis/Mexico)*

*Left: Maryknoll Father John Martin, trip participants and affiliates gather for Mass at St. Joseph the Worker parish in Mérida. (Marisol Perez/Mexico)*





Participant Brinkley Johnson (far left) and two local partners create traditional Mayan herbal products at U Yits Ka'an. (Courtesy of Brinkley Johnson/Mexico)

into everyday life. To meet people where they are and help uplift one another," says Adelina Almanza, my sibling, who joined the trip from Phoenix, Arizona. "God in action is what I saw at Caritas, a movement in activism, education and basic needs."

Johnson says, "The unforgettable adventure with Maryknoll filled me with a renewed commitment to live the Gospel. To venture into new experiences, to learn from different cultures and people, and to pursue — relentlessly — my vocation to serve others."

Testimonies like these from young people show the importance of Maryknoll's immersion trips. "Through this experience, participants rekindle their faith," Deacon Yoque says. "Through encounters with other people, they broaden their cultural horizons."

Both groups visited the archeological sites of Chichén Itzá and Izamal — as well as witnessing contemporary displays of an ongoing rich cultural life. Artistic and musical presentations in the City of Mérida

exemplified the message that Father Martin emphasized throughout the trip: "Mayans are still here!"

On the final day of each trip, we were invited to join the Maryknoll Affiliates in Mérida. Father Martin celebrated Mass at St. Joseph the Worker Church. After the Mass, all were invited by the affiliates community to a special dinner of traditional dishes. We enjoyed the hospitality of our hosts who continue the Maryknoll mission spirit in their local church.

The visiting groups benefited from Father Martin's extensive knowledge of the Yucatecan culture and Maryknoll's presence throughout the years. The warmth of the Yucatecan people was felt in no small part because of the relationships Father Martin has nurtured, in some cases spanning multiple generations within a single family.

After years of working and living alongside the people of Yucatán, Father Martin shared, "I felt a special burst of pride in the richness and creativity of the Yucatán and the Mayan people." He felt a sense of joy, he adds, that this rich Maryknoll connection was "able to resonate with folks from the United States." ✠

*Ray Almanza serves the Southern California region as a Maryknoll mission educator and promoter.*

Have you ever felt the call to be a priest or brother?  
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Phone: (914) 504-1196  
Cell: (914) 260-6342  
MaryknollVocations.org



Maryknoll Seminarian Deacon Matthew Sim served in El Paso, Texas. (Matthew Sim/U.S.)

ORBIS  BOOKS  
Spotlight

Preview by Robert Ellsberg

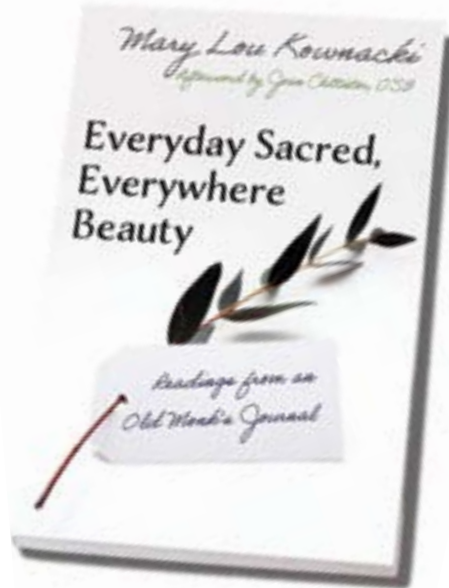
*If we're wise we find a book like this one ... with every hope we ever dreamed, and every word we remember of its insights, and all the joy and possibility it ever brought to all our wishes and all the promises we promised before these times to celebrate the rest of life.*—From the Afterword by Joan Chittister

**M**ary Lou Kownacki, who died in 2023, was a Benedictine nun, a poet, a longtime activist in the Christian nonviolence movement, and blogger of “Old Monk’s Journal,” a 12-year collection of personal and spiritual writings. Her column was the best-loved feature of the Monasteries of the Heart website.

In this lovingly chosen selection of these reflections, some written near the end of her life, she offers timeless wisdom on faith, community, monastic life, and the things that truly matter.

In one of her entries, she writes:

*I found this lovely quote by Terry Tempest Williams from her Ode to Slowness in which she dreams of making a living by watching light like Monet and Vermeer and being “a caretaker of silence, a connoisseur*



*of stillness, a listener of wind where each dialect is not only heard but understood.”*

*Isn't that a beautiful profession — watching light and being a caretaker of silence. Someone should be paid to do it. Hmmm ... Maybe that's what monks are for.*

*As you know by now, I'm always trying to figure out who or what monks are. So I was grateful to come across this definition by Cistercian monk Dom André Louf:*

*What is a monk?*

*A monk is someone who every day asks:*

*“What is a monk?”*

*Now there's a koan for you. God willing, I still have a few years left to figure it out. Of course, if I figure it out, I may no longer be a monk.*

In a reflection called “Hold Fast to Beauty,” Kownacki asks what to do in times of despair and hopelessness:

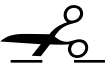
*The church knows all about the power of beauty. Amid the most horrific of human circumstances — betrayal, torture, mutilation, crucifixion, murder — we are given a beautiful story. Once a year the church presents us with the Easter story, awash with angels of light, sweet-scented perfume, an empty tomb, a garden of promise, and the resiliency of the human spirit to overcome any force of evil. ...*

*Yes, it's beauty that we must*

*hold fast to. It's beauty — in words, painting, music, nature, and in the stories of scripture — that can transform despair into confidence and helplessness into hope. It's beauty that reveals our common humanity and gives us the courage to roll away the stone and rise anew each day.*

One of her editors writes of these entries, “They chronicle a wise, outrageous woman’s insights into her professional and spiritual life, the evolution of monastic life, and ultimately, her own mortality and desire to live fully while undergoing treatment for a rare and aggressive cancer. Her stories and commentaries offer material for *lectio divina* that will last a lifetime.”✧

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



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## Modern Slavery at Sea

By Thomas Gould

**M**ore than 130 people from at least 17 countries participated in the three-day International Conference on Fisher's Welfare in Taichung City, Taiwan, this past May. The conference was organized and hosted by Maryknoll Father Joyalito Tajonera, who serves as the director of Stella Maris-Taiwan.

Stella Maris is the Catholic Church's Apostolate of the Sea, which serves people who live, work or have a connection to the sea. The plight of fishers is particularly fraught, since workers are isolated aboard vessels under their employers' control. The inordinate power that employers hold over employees' lives at sea can lead to severe abuse.

A Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative report by The Associated Press in 2016 found that some seafood sold in supermarkets in the United States had been caught and processed by enslaved workers, mostly from Myanmar and Cambodia, on boats off the coast of Thailand. The report describes seven-day workweeks of 18 to 20-hour workdays; inadequate food; blatant disregard for basic medical needs; hazardous and life-threatening conditions; and routine beating and even torture. Some workers are

trapped at sea on large fishing vessels for years.

Father Tajonera, who is originally from the Philippines, ministers to Filipino migrants working in Taiwan. Over two decades, he has established a migrant shelter and a thriving Filipino Catholic community. In recent years, his organization has initiated investigations into forced labor and wage theft. It has helped return more than \$4 million to approximately 1,000 workers. It has also restored thousands of documents confiscated by employers to prevent migrant workers from leaving exploitative job placements.

At the May conference, labor union leaders from Indonesia spoke about their efforts to protect fishers' human rights and labor rights. A seafood campaign organizer with the organization Global Labor Justice also detailed his work to protect fishers' rights to access Wi-Fi and health care while at sea.

A fisher named Hadi described his experience under a boss who withheld access to Wi-Fi, cutting off workers' communication with the outside world and blocking the fishers' access to medical care when sick or injured. The boss extorted more work from the employees in return for



Stella Maris volunteers Cecilia Huang and Roberto Canta (in yellow vests) approach crew members aboard a cargo ship docked in Manila. (Courtesy of Joyalito Tajonera/Taiwan)

access to these essential services.

As the largest importer in the world, the United States is in a unique position to demand information on the production of the food we consume and goods we use every day.

As Catholics, we vehemently oppose human trafficking and modern-day slavery as a violation of human dignity. Cardinal Stephen Brislin, archbishop of Capetown, South Africa, offered the Fisher's Welfare

Conference a mission that might well be extended to world leaders: "See workers at sea not as commodities, but rather as individual persons made in the image and likeness of God who strive for agency over their own lives, the means to support their families and themselves with dignity." ✠

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

### FAITH IN ACTION:

- Read more about Father Tajonera's ministry <https://mogc.info/FisherWelfare1> and <https://mogc.info/FisherWelfare2>
- Learn more about the USCCB Coalition of Organizations and Ministries Promoting the Abolition of Slavery at Sea. <https://mogc.info/COMPASS>

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

## Love Lives On

By Giovana Soria

Tears flowed from her eyes as Maureen Long recalled her parents' last wish. Francis and Patricia Lafferty, a couple from Pennsylvania who were married for 58 years, wanted their wedding rings to become part of an enduring sacred symbol.

A few months before Patricia passed away in September of 2022, she expressed this wish: "That our wedding rings be used towards a chalice and paten given to a newly ordained priest."

Patricia also wanted her engagement ring and Francis' mother's wedding ring to be included in the chalice. "My parents had a strong faith, belief in God and belief in the family," Maureen says. The couple volunteered at their parish and raised eight children educated in Catholic schools. The family attended Mass weekly.

Francis served in the army and was a firefighter. He was a catechist, and was also active in the Knights of Columbus. He died in January of 2014. Patricia was a stay-at-home mom and a typist for the sisters at St. Francis de Sales School in Philadelphia. She enjoyed crocheting and sewing and, at the age of 81, learned quilting.

Maureen asked friends and family, as well as her diocese and religious orders, for ideas about who could be the recipient of the special gift. "My parents wanted to give the chalice and paten to a deacon, but how do you find a deacon who needs them?" she says.

After a tiring search that produced no response, Maureen recalled that her father had corresponded with a missionary in Africa. "I remember we received *Maryknoll* magazine," she says.

It turned out that the Laffertys supported Maryknoll missions for 38 years.

Finding out about her parents' partnership with Maryknoll was a godsend, Maureen says. She contacted Father Rodrigo Ulloa-Chavarry, vocation director for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, who embraced the idea. He described to her the seminarians who were about to be ordained.

Maureen was especially drawn to the story of seminarian Charles Ogony of Kenya. "He was raised Catholic and had grown up in a large family. We have similar upbringings," she says. "He was a wonderful young man to receive the gift."

Maureen contacted the jewelers of



*Maryknoll Father Charles Ogony celebrates his first Mass using a chalice and paten given to him by the Lafferty family, fulfilling their parents' last wish. (Octavio Durán/U.S.)*

Adrian Hamers in Larchmont, New York, where she purchased a gold chalice and paten. The four rings were placed inside the base of the chalice. On the outside, the diamond from Patricia's engagement ring was put in the center of a small cross. The words "In Loving Memory of Francis and Patricia Lafferty" were engraved on the chalice.

"Maureen's persistence in searching opened my inner eye," says Father Ogony, who was ordained last June. "In the heart of her parents, God had already chosen who to fulfill their wish. It took a heart-searching mileage and finally landed in my hands."

"We are those people who bridge the gap between cultures, an American and a Kenyan culture, through a chalice and paten," says Father Ulloa-Chavarry. "We thank the Laffertys for

being part of the Maryknoll family."

With her sister Merceda, Maureen attended the ordination at the Maryknoll headquarters in Ossining, New York, where they met Father Ogony. The new missionary priest was assigned to Bolivia. "I want to foster the friendship, and follow him and the chalice and paten as he ministers to people in Bolivia," she says.

Maureen, who lives in Maryland, says she feels a sense of peace now that she has fulfilled her parents' wish.

In the States and while visiting his home country of Kenya, the missionary has already been celebrating the Eucharist with the chalice and paten. "As I raise the chalice in memory of Maureen's beloved parents, I hold them deep in my heart in gratitude," Father Ogony says. "Maureen's family has indeed inspired me with this gift." ✠





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# READERS' RESPONSES

## MISSION AND FAITH

A friend gifted me your magazine years ago and I continue to receive it. Currently I go to it most mornings to read a page or two as part of my prayer time. It offers much helpful wisdom. The mission and faith of those who serve around the world is an inspiration to me to live my faith.

*John Howe  
Jefferson, Ohio*

## MISSION APPRECIATION

Catholic Schools Week offered our students at Mary Star of the Sea School in Honolulu an opportunity to think about vocations and appreciate the many choices our religious communities make for us. We wholeheartedly thank you for your religious life. You and your community are wonderful role models for us all.

*Stephanie Conching  
Honolulu, Hawaii*

## TWO-STATE SOLUTION

A contributor to the Readers' Responses in the Summer 2024 issue expressed disappointment with the magazine's previous From the Editor statement on the Israel-Hamas War and humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. The respondent maintained that "Israel is not in a conflict with Palestine" and implied that much of the media's coverage is based on "false information." I respectfully disagree.

A permanent solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict lies not in military victory but in mutual accommodation and compromise. Ideally, it should take the form of a two-state solution.

It is high time to rekindle the flame of hope for reconciliation and peace in the Holy Land. Scripture says: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Mt 5:9)

*Nicholas Stigliani  
Bellingham, Washington*

*Below is a sampling of letters from Ms. Conching's 4th- and 5th-grade students:*

Dear Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers:

Thank you for teaching about God and Jesus. Also, for teaching Catholic school kids to believe in God and Jesus so we can go to Heaven.

*Justin*

Thank you for being there for us when we needed you. Thank you for teaching us new things.

*Taimane*

I like to go to church because I get to pray with my friends. Sometimes I read my Bible. I hope you have a good time teaching Mass.

*Merry*

Thank you for teaching us all about Jesus, God and his friends. Sometimes I read the Bible before I go to bed.

*Clara*

The editors invite Maryknoll readers to send us their views. Write to:  
Readers' Responses  
P.O. Box 302, Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545-0302  
Our e-mail address is: [mklmag@maryknoll.org](mailto:mklmag@maryknoll.org)



# Advent of Our Very Own Christmas

*"If a soul is seeking God, its Beloved is seeking it still more." — St. John of the Cross*

As surely as the sun (in silence)  
follows the morning star  
(even when unseen)  
the Word arises in our hearts  
when we are open  
to the coming of God.

As the morning star  
gives way to everything new  
the world is born  
(in silent light and by itself)  
so our lives are flooded  
with a light we cannot see  
and our actions flow  
in that unseen morning  
(freely and fully alive).

The Christmas story is not a past event  
to which we say "Amen"  
rather it is a continuous "Amen"  
to the newness of God ... now.

In the Advent of our very own Christmas  
we listen in the silence of God  
and await the promise of the morning  
star that heralds the dawn  
and the Birth for which we were born.

*— Martin J. Shea, M.M.*

*From his book Through the Tears — Insights  
from Mission: Poems, Parables, and Stories  
(from Guatemala)*

*"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you  
have love for one another." — John 13:35*



*Father Paul Sykora has served in  
Cochabamba, Bolivia, since 2009.  
(Adam Mitchell/Bolivia)*

## Don't forget to include the Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers in your year-end giving plans!

Your generous contributions enable Maryknoll Missioners such as Maryknoll Father Paul Sykora to spread the Good News and embody our Catholic faith among our needy brothers and sisters in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

This year, please consider making a gift to the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in your year-end giving. By doing so, you are sharing God's love.

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*Maryknoll Father John Martin (far right) and Maryknoll mission promoter Ray Almanza (second from left) lead a group from the Catholic Community at Stanford University to the Chichén Itzá ruins as part of an immersion trip to the Yucatán peninsula in Mexico. (See story, page 49.)*



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