

MARYKNOLL

U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

FALL 2026

maryknollmagazine.org



A Priest Forever

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome Father Victor Mutobera, Maryknoll's newest priest! In June, Father Victor was ordained by Bishop Joseph Perry of the Archdiocese of Chicago at the Maryknoll Society's chapel in Westchester County, New York, about 30 miles north of Manhattan. That's a long way from Kenya, where he grew up. As the headline of our cover story notes, it's a dream fulfilled for the young man.

Regular readers of our magazine are already aware that Father Victor is among a new cohort of missionary priests joining Maryknoll from outside of North America. They represent the opening of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers to vocations from mission countries and the affirmation that every baptized Catholic is a missionary disciple. Many Catholics in the States today are familiar with foreign-born priests ministering in their parishes.

As Bishop Perry says in an interview in this issue, in some areas of the world, especially East Africa, the Catholic faith is stronger than in much of the United States. In the last five years, Maryknoll has ordained five priests from Kenya and one from Singapore. Our current seminarians, who come from Asia, Africa and Latin America, reflect that changing face of Maryknoll — and the changing face of the Church.

On another note, our Fall issue usually contains an announcement for the Maryknoll Student Essay Contest, which we have been running for 36 years. This year, the contest is on hold as it is reevaluated. We hope to soon share news about a redesigned contest for next year.

*Lynn F. Monahan
Editor-in-Chief*



U.S. Catholic Church in mission overseas

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

Romans 8:28

Maryknoll, the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, Inc., was established in 1911 by the U.S. bishops to recruit, train, send and support American missionaries in areas overseas. Maryknoll is supported by offerings and bequests.

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Magazine of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers



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Gregory Shemitz/CNS/U.S.

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Maryknoll Father Victor Mutobera was
ordained June 6 at the Maryknoll Society's
headquarters in Ossining, New York.

COVER CREDITS:

Front: Octavio Durán/U.S.
Back: Paul Jeffrey/Kenya

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.



Octavio Durán/Guatemala



Teckla Samuel/Tanzania

Photo Meditation on Vocations

Answering God's Call

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

*Dying to self
Letting ego go
Giving up your
Plans, your dreams,
Your hopes and
Expectations
Offering to God
Your past, your pain,
Your wounds, your shame
That you might
Come before Jesus
In your emptiness
Your vulnerability
Your poverty
Surrendering all*

*This is but
The beginning
Of discipleship:
To follow in the footsteps
Of our Crucified Savior
Across borders of
Indifference and
Artificial boundaries
That separate us
From our unknown
Sisters and brothers,
Breaking down barriers
Of division and distrust
To stand with the oppressed
The outcast and the poor*



Paul Jeffrey/Philippines

*Giving voice to the voiceless
Recognizing in all broken hearts
The same Risen Lord revealed
In the breaking of the bread
Hearing prayer in the cries
Of those who mourn and
Seeing in their tears
Symbols as sublime
As chants of solemn high Mass.
Now at length you can
Remove the shoes from
Your feet, for the ground
On which you stand
With God's chosen ones
Is as holy as you are.*

Octavio Durán/El Salvador



Paul Jeffrey/Tanzania



MISSIONER TALES



Paul Jeffrey/Bangladesh

In Dhaka, Bangladesh, I was trying to reach the bus terminal to catch a ride home to the village of Srinagar, where I ministered to sick and disabled children. But the city was a confounded mess. Besides the normal business of people who come to shop in the jam-packed area, political demonstrations made all other activities difficult. By the time our local bus reached mid-city, I aborted my trip home and went back to where I had been staying.

Two days later, the traffic was still chaotic. Traffic in Dhaka is already heavy at 5:30 a.m., since drivers set out early to avoid the congestion starting around 7 a.m. Crossing the

street, I was suddenly and shockingly confronted with a speeding three-wheel vehicle without headlights. The driver had been relying on the lights of the truck ahead of him. It saves his battery but nearly cost me my life!

Walking on the sidewalks of Bangladesh isn't any better and, simply put, is dangerous for oneself and others. Narrow walkways merely encourage shoulder-to-shoulder collisions, which are so common among approaching pedestrians.

For adventure tourism, I highly recommend a ride at night through the city of Dhaka in a cold, dark, bumpy motorized rickshaw.

Robert McCahill, M.M.

When I was first assigned to the Philippines, I lived with some of our sisters who had been interned by the Japanese in concentration camps during World War II. The two superiors, who had been put in a special prison, were interrogated daily. Food was scarce for both the prisoners and the Japanese soldiers guarding them. Each night, after lights out, a young Japanese soldier would come to their cell and give the sisters two handfuls of cooked rice. If he had been caught, he would have been punished severely. In time, the sisters learned that he had been a seminarian in Japan and was drafted into the military. To give them a few handfuls of rice, he risked his own life.

Later, when teaching seminarians, I would find a way to include this story in every course to illustrate the Gospel question, "Who is my neighbor?" Each neighbor has a name and a face, even our so-called enemies.

Loretta Harriman, M.M.

Here in the Bolivian Amazon, where I serve as a Maryknoll lay missionary, we step across the small stream that runs by doña Francisca's house. She's too old and weak to make it to Sunday Mass, so we bring her Holy Communion every Saturday. We walk up to the house, which in its simplicity consists of wooden boards under a roof of metal sheets. Another lay missionary and I stand by while Maryknoll Father Michael Bassano calls out a greeting in Spanish. We're invited in and make our way to her bedside. Doña

Francisca and her daughter greet us, and we light a candle.

We make conversation, sing together, pray for her and her family, and give her Holy Communion. As we get ready to leave, each of us goes to give her a hug. When it's my turn, doña Francisca, her eyes bright, pulls me even closer, and earnestly thanks us for visiting. It's taken me a while to recognize Christ right in front of me, thanking me. We say our goodbyes and cross back over the stream.

Joshua Sisolak, MKLM

Four of us Maryknoll affiliates joined a pilgrimage to Assisi, Italy, to learn more about the nonviolence and peacemaking of Saints Francis and Clare. As part of the trip, we were led through a dramatization of the story of St. Francis making peace between a wolf and the city of Gubbio. Afterward, we talked about the lessons in nonviolence this story holds for us today. We thought about the wolves in our lives. Who do we scapegoat for our problems? St. Francis bravely stepped forward to acknowledge the wolf's hunger. What wolves are we not willing to confront? Can we appreciate the wounds that our wolves have suffered?

St. Francis and the wolf arrived at a solution to the wolf's hunger and violence. Solutions may not come quickly or easily to us, but we can try to better understand our wolf's situation and think about what would help us build a future better for all of us.

*Mary Ryan-Hotchkiss,
Maryknoll affiliate*



The Joy of a Dream Fulfilled

By Lynn F. Monahan || Photos by Octavio Durán, OFM

A Maryknoll seminarian realizes his lifelong dream of ordination

Saying he felt like he was dreaming, an exuberant Victor Mutobera could barely contain his happiness after his ordination June 6 as Maryknoll's newest priest.

"I feel so joyful, blessed by the people who have surrounded me," he said following the ceremony that filled Maryknoll's Our Lady Queen of Apostles Chapel in Ossining, New York. "I am filled with gratitude for what God has done for me in my life."

Father Mutobera says he dreamed of becoming a priest since he was a child growing up in Kakamega, Kenya, where he would pretend to celebrate Mass with his friends and twin brother.

Bishop Joseph Perry of the Archdiocese of Chicago, who conferred the sacrament of Holy Orders, expressed the same enthusiasm for the new missionary's future.

Maryknoll Father Victor Mutobera, who was ordained June 6 at Our Lady Queen of Apostles Chapel in Ossining, New York, celebrates the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) on the day following his ordination.



Maryknoll Father Lance Nadeau, superior general of the Maryknoll Society, lays hands on the ordinand, whom he mentored at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya.

"Father Victor will exhibit a joy that comes from knowing the love of God is the ultimate driving force of his ministry," the prelate said.

"First, a priest will be carrying out God's will primarily on behalf of the marginalized, the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, people who are enmeshed in hopeless circumstances, just as Jesus envisioned his own prophetic ministry," Bishop Perry said.

Referencing the first reading at the ordination Mass, Isaiah 61:1-3, he said, "Like the prophet, the priest is thrilled to be one to bring such good news to the people."

Bishop Perry later said he lives "practically around the corner" from the Maryknoll formation house in Chicago and that he sometimes celebrates Masses for the seminarians. "I used to get *Maryknoll* magazine when I was in grade school. I've been reading it ever since," he said, adding that he once envisioned himself as a missionary priest in distant lands.

Recalling the biblical metaphor of Jesus as a good shepherd, Bishop Perry said such service comes from "a commitment of the heart."

Maryknoll's superior general, Father Lance Nadeau, who served in



Lying prostrate during the Litany of Supplication, as saints are invoked, symbolizes the priest candidate's humility and dependence on God and the prayers of the Church.

Kenya as a chaplain at Kenyatta University in Nairobi and mentored Father Victor when the young man was a student there, used similar terms during the mission sending ceremony which took place later that day. The Creator, he said, "shapes a heart longing for God, and no human heart will be satisfied by anything or anyone less than the God of mission. Our hearts are restless until they rest in him."

Father Nadeau said the new missionary is assigned to Mwanza, Tanzania, "a great place to experience the mystery of the Triune God and us." Father Mutobera will minister

in a parish in a section of the city called Mabatini, "a densely populated, under-resourced informal settlement with many serious infrastructure problems, home to tens of thousands of struggling working-class families — a multi-ethnic, multi-religious community with streets crowded with vendors and children and filled with people bursting with kinetic energy."

Father Mutobera said he was excited about the assignment because of the vibrant faith in Africa and because there's "great need for people to serve in Africa."

While the new priest will be serv-



Bishop Joseph Perry congratulates Father Mutobera's proud parents, Roselyne Barasa Mutobera and Timothy Mutobera, who came from Kenya for the joyous occasion.

ing in Tanzania, which borders Kenya, his father, Timothy Mutobera, said that he and his wife, Roselyne Barasa Mutobera, would be happy for their son wherever he is sent.

"All we were praying for was his success to be getting ordained as a priest," his father said. "Now that he has been ordained, in the future, even if he may go to China, we will not mind, because he was given to God."

Both of the new priest's parents were present at the ordination, but his twin brother was unable to obtain a visa to the United States to attend.

The congregation included Kenyans living in various parts in the

United States who came to joyfully celebrate the important event.

Maryknoll Brother Ryan Thibert, with whom Father Mutobera served while doing his overseas training in Cochabamba, Bolivia, said he believes the new priest will be "a wonderful missionary who will keep going. No matter where he goes, the Lord will lead him."

Brother Thibert said his colleague had brought joy and happiness to the community where they worked.

"One thing that I noticed about Victor is that people really connected with him," Brother Thibert said. "They were drawn to him, and he was drawn to the people. Being a missionary involves vulnerability, be-

ing sent to serve, and being called from the people. Victor has always allowed the Holy Spirit to work in his vocation, particularly with the Bolivian people."

Father Mutobera's Spanish language teacher, who came from Bolivia to attend the ordination, gave further testimony to the missionary's gift for relating to others.

"He didn't know any Spanish when he arrived, but he always showed a great desire to learn, and was very curious about our language and culture," Karla Rojas Cuba said. She noted that the goal of the students in the overseas program is not only to learn the language but to immerse themselves in the culture — which he did during his two years in Cochabamba.

"To be at Victor's ordination has

been a great blessing for me because he was not only my student but a person with whom we shared a lot," Rojas Cuba said, noting that the seminarian would often give reflections to the teachers and students when a priest was not available to celebrate Mass.

While in the seminary in Chicago, Father Mutobera assisted at Mother of the Americas, a parish in the Little Village neighborhood with a primarily Hispanic congregation where his Spanish fluency was put to use. The pastor, Father Thomas Boharic, said that about 50 parishioners had made the journey to New York for the ordination.

"He has made a big impact on many people," Father Boharic said of the new priest. "So many people love Father Victor."

Father Mutobera has "this spirit of joy, a contagious happiness expressed in the way he carries himself," Father Boharic said. His preaching, he added, "transmits a holy joy of the Holy Spirit, the celebratory nature of our faith."

Father Mutobera will, no doubt, bring that same joy and zeal for community to mission.

"Right now, I think my greatest focus as I go into mission will be to learn, to learn and grow," he said. Long term, he said, he would like to minister to the sick, possibly with a hospital ministry, as he did in Chicago while studying for ordination. ✠

Giovana Soria and Deirdre Cornell contributed reporting to this article.

The Triumph of the Cross

By Joseph R. Veneroso, M.M.

Every loss brings sadness, but when death happens in a tragic or sudden way, it can seem unbearable. How does one mourn the untimely departure of a loved one? How do we deal with our shock, pain and even doubts? We wonder why it happened and we ask: Where is God in this?

These are the same questions the apostles faced 2,000 years ago after Jesus' crucifixion. They, too, went through a living nightmare — much like how we struggle to make sense of loss that feels senseless.

The apostles' anguish was perhaps worse, because of the fact that by mourning Jesus' death they put their own lives at risk. As his followers, they faced persecution.

Yet the early Christians not only overcame their grief, coming to terms with the Lord's violent and shameful death. They grew to accept, embrace, celebrate and proclaim it.

Rather than trying to forget that the Jesus for whom they had given up everything — who healed people and preached love — had been betrayed, abandoned, arrested, beaten, tortured and nailed to a cross like a criminal, they remembered his death with reverence and awe.

Two millennia later, many Christians

wear crosses around their necks. Catholic churches display a crucifix, a cross bearing the crucified Christ, and Mass cannot be said without one. We begin and end every prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

The very death which had caused the apostles' pain, shame and defeat became the sign of victory: of love over hate, of darkness over light, of life over death.

Only the power of the Gospel makes this mystery possible. In addition to his appearances at the empty tomb and in the Upper Room, the resurrected Jesus walks with his followers in all their pain and confusion. He appears to Mary Magdalene as a gardener; to two disciples as an unrecognized traveler explaining Scripture and breaking bread; and to the apostles as a fisherman preparing breakfast. He manifested his presence in ordinary occurrences of daily life.

So convinced were his friends that Jesus was truly risen that they could return without dread to the places they had frequented together before his crucifixion. They recalled his teachings and actions not with remorse or regret, but with grateful remembrance. They found the courage to recount and record the grievous details of his final hours.



A man holds a crucifix as Pope Francis celebrates Mass at Taci Tolu Park in Dili, East Timor, during the pope's 2024 apostolic trip. (OSV News/Dita Alangkara/Reuters/East Timor)

The early Church went from being a group of fearful, traumatized victims into victorious proclaimers of Christ Crucified. Their pain was transformed into proclamation, and this proclamation transformed the world.

Jesus said, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all things to myself." (John 12:32) Why would a tortured man who was nailed to a cross draw people to himself? Because, in the image of Christ Crucified, our deepest heart recognizes the human condition. Many of us undergo failure and betrayal or abandonment, and all of us will experience death.

The Cross plays three parts in our lives. First, we each carry our own cross. That is when we try to be faithful to the Gospel, even when we are met with hostility for the sake of love or justice.

Second, at times we help others carry their burden, or — like Simon of Cyrene — someone else helps us to carry ours.

The third is perhaps hardest of all. It happens when we, like the Blessed Mother and the Beloved Disciple, can do nothing more than stand in silence at the foot of the Cross and watch someone we love suffer and die.

The inclusion in the Gospels of each of these types of instances helps to strengthen and encourage us, especially in times of suffering and dealing with death. Encountering the Crucified and Risen Lord, the apostles overcame their grief and fear to boldly proclaim the Cross as the gateway to fullness of life.

Let us pray that all broken hearts may be healed by the same grace. This is the true triumph of the Cross. ✠

Finding LOVE in *Again and*

A family with three children serves in mission in Tanzania

When Stephen Veryser moved to Tanzania to serve with the Peace Corps over two decades ago, he fell in love with Africa. After his contract ended, he remained, working with nonprofit groups.

Steve met Loyce while they were teaching at neighboring schools. They married and started a family. Loyce, who is from a devout Catholic family in northwestern Tanzania, continued teaching while Steve worked in projects

MISSION *Again*

Text and Photos by Paul Jeffrey

launching school lunch programs and eradicating Guinea worm disease.

Although it was secular work, Steve saw it as a spiritual vocation.

"I found real meaning in a life of service across cultures," says Steve, who is originally from the Detroit area. "I didn't know about lay mission within the Catholic Church."

Then he got to know Maryknoll.

Maryknoll Lay Missioner Loyce Veryser teaches math at Kitangiri Secondary School, a government school serving low-income students in Mwanza, Tanzania.





A recent photo shows the Veryser family, who joined Maryknoll Lay Missioners in 2018: (left to right) Loyce, twins Abigail and Justin, now 17, Claire, now 15, and Stephen.

Not far from the Verysers' home in the city of Mwanza, Maryknoll Father James Eble was starting a retreat center overlooking Lake Victoria. After three decades of pastoral ministry, Father Eble saw the need for a place where Tanzanian religious and lay people could find respite from their busy lives and personal accompaniment on their spiritual journeys.

The Lake House of Prayer became a new spiritual home for Steve and Loyce, who relished the space and

silence to deepen their Christian faith. The couple got to know other Maryknollers, including two families in mission. Maryknoll Lay Missioner Judy Walter, who served at the retreat house, became Steve's spiritual director.

"I was pleasantly surprised to find Catholic lay people who shared a passion for social justice and a life in mission," Steve says. In 2018, Steve and Loyce joined Maryknoll Lay Missioners, along with their three children, and completed the orien-

tation program and commissioning ceremony in Ossining, New York. When they returned to Mwanza, Loyce went back to her job at Kitangiri Secondary School, a government school serving low-income students.

"There's a big demand for math teachers, and I could have gone to a private Catholic school where families can pay fees," Loyce says. "But here they don't have enough teachers. I'd rather work where I'm more needed and where I can be a positive role model for girls who are interested in math and sciences."

The head teacher at Kitangiri School, Anthonia Nkaka, says the

Maryknoll lay missionary plays an outsized role at the school.

Not only is Loyce the only woman teaching math, Nkaka says, "but she's always ready to find other ways to help." When parents are unable to afford school uniforms, for example, "Loyce finds a way."

Nkaka adds, "When we needed more desks, Loyce and Steve found a way to get them for us. And when we had water problems, they helped us get a big tank to supply water to the school bathrooms."

Loyce, who is also treasurer for a savings and loan group formed by the school's women teachers, has served as the school's "academic mistress." This role entails keeping track of individual students' progress and identifying in a timely manner those who need assistance.

"Being in Maryknoll allows me to be here as an expression of my faith, to support these students who go on to become intelligent and compassionate leaders in their communities," Loyce says.

Steve and Loyce, along with their children — twins Justin and Abigail, 17, and Claire, 15 — see themselves as part of a family in mission.

"Our kids have a unique experience that bridges cultures, races and geographies," he says, adding that they are discerning "their own paths of service."

Justin, who is good at math and science, "wants to design water systems so all people can have access to clean water," Steve says. "Abigail is interested in medicine because she



Instead of seeking a higher-paying job at a private school, Loyce Veryser chooses to work at a public school where, among other roles, she monitors students' progress.

has seen how difficult it is here to access reliable medical care."

Claire, who loves to travel, is interested in hospitality work. "She sees opportunities to do tourism in a way that bridges cultures and brings people together," her father says.

Steve — whose decades of experience are put to use in leadership for the lay mission organization — builds bridges through another ministry. After learning Tanzanian Sign Language, he returned to the Bwiru Boys Technical School, where he had taught as a Peace Corps volunteer. About a hundred deaf students now take classes there.

"The deaf students can't participate fully because the teachers seldom use sign language," Steve says, adding that this means the students "just copy off the board." Hearing

students help their classmates here and there, he says. "It's kind of piecemeal, but it's better than not being in school at all."

To supplement the deaf students' classroom learning, Steve tutors them in math after school.

"We sit in a half circle, so people can see each other signing," he says. "They do a problem and explain it with signs. They can ask questions, which I answer in sign language."

"It's been a special experience to be invited into that community, a mission within mission," continues the lay missionary. "The deaf community is yet another world within Tanzanian culture."

There is another way in which Steve has come full circle in mission. He was asked last year to take on the management of the Lake House



Using sign language, Maryknoll Lay Missioner Stephen Veryser tutors deaf students in math at Bwiru Boys Technical School, where he first served with the Peace Corps.

of Prayer when Father Eble and Judy Walter returned to the States.

"My experiences at the Lake House changed my life, rekindling my faith and introducing me anew to mission. I wanted to offer others a chance to encounter God in a similar way," Steve says.

"We're almost like a field hospital for people, especially people in the Church who work so hard to support others," he says. "We invite them to revel in God's creation and mercy and love, to rest their weary body and their overworked mind, to turn off their phone and be able to notice in the quiet around them God's presence in creation, in their lives and in their communities."

Time spent in silence and prayer allows the missionary to reflect on his calling, as well.

He shares an essential insight gained from being a lay missionary. "At one point in my life I thought I would have to choose between having a family and being in mission," he says. "But Maryknoll has been a great gift for Loyce and me. We're both committed to living here, being in mission." ✠

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



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missioners



Given to WHOLEHEARTEDLY God & Others

By Giovana Soria

A Maryknoll sister provides spiritual care to prisoners and patients

Maryknoll Sister Julia Shideler walks calmly through the busy halls of the medium-security section of Cook County Jail in Chicago. She serves there as a chaplain through Kolbe House, the Archdiocese of Chicago's prison ministry.

As Sister Shideler and another facilitator set out a circle of chairs, about 12 inmates in beige uniforms enter the room. The men in the circle take turns saying their names and how they are feeling.

"I have an icebreaker question to get some conversation going, so slowly we get to know each other," Sister Shideler explains. "We might hear about their childhood or what they hope for." Then she passes out a reading to discuss.

"Inmates start opening up," Sister Shideler says. "It can be about God or about psychological aspects of their lives, including their thoughts, memories and feelings. We talk about how to deal with trauma, and it can get kind of heavy, but it's a good discussion."

People in custody sometimes talk about the difference between the masks we wear and the true self that hides behind them, Sister Shideler says. She shares one inmate's testimony: "I am a tough guy, and the mask I wear to get around helps me feel safe. People don't mess with me," the prisoner said. "But when I go into my cell in silence, I'm aware, I'm afraid. I don't know what it's going to be like when I go out, or if my family's going to welcome me."

Maryknoll Sister Julia Shideler works as a chaplain and volunteers in prison ministry in Chicago, where she is earning a Master of Divinity. The missionary joined the Maryknoll Sisters two decades ago at age 26. (Octavio Durán/U.S.)



Sister Shideler and Dominican Sister Tien Mai lead centering prayer at Cook County Jail as part of the Archdiocese of Chicago's prison ministry. (Catherine Luchins/U.S.)



At Rush Medical Center, Chaplain Gordon hands off the day shift to Sister Shideler. Spiritual accompaniment is her "best response" to God's call. (Octavio Durán/U.S.)

Listening to one another inspires openness, she says, and the inmates build on each other's comments. "Sometimes inmates cry," she says. "We are there to accompany, listen and respond without judgment."

Sister Shideler, 48, says she has witnessed how grace and human goodness foster trust among some of Chicago's most vulnerable and distressed individuals. Incarcerated men gather for discussions and silent prayer, demonstrating grace toward one another. "I have seen growth and transformation," says the missionary, who leads centering prayer at the county jail. "Our Friday mornings together inspire me to live with greater hope."

In his apostolic exhortation *Dilexi Te*, Pope Leo XIV recalled the words

of his predecessor, Pope Francis: "Prison is a place of great humanity ... humanity that is tried, sometimes worn down by difficulties, guilt, judgments, misunderstandings, suffering, but at the same time full of strength, desire for forgiveness, and a desire for redemption." The more Sister Shideler encounters people in these situations, she says, the more her call to accompany them deepens.

As a chaplain volunteer, Sister Shideler also conducts one-on-one visits with incarcerated men in the Cook County Jail's Diagnostic and Residential Treatment Unit. Many inmates there are older prisoners who suffer from physical and mental illnesses, and many are Spanish speaking. "They want prayers and accompaniment," she says.

Besides her ministry to prisoners, Sister Shideler works as a part-time chaplain at UI Health, University of Illinois Hospital, and as a per diem chaplain at Rush University Medical Center. Her earnings support the education of other Maryknoll sisters.

Her role at the hospital is to provide emotional and spiritual support to patients and their families, she says, "whether people are inpatients or coming into the emergency room and feeling bewildered, scared or shocked."

She listens to the feelings and concerns of patients and family members. "We encourage them to share their stories and express what they might need," she says. "If a patient has faith but is experiencing doubts or doesn't understand God's

presence in their situation, we pray together for grace or healing."

At times, explains the missionary, she accompanies families through death, offering bereavement support. "We focus on the main emotions: grief, anxiety, sadness and confusion, then transition to providing spiritual care," she says.

Sister Shideler recalls a time when a woman lost her baby. "We held a naming ceremony and blessed the baby," the missionary says. "We wanted her to remember that, yes, this child died, but we did our best to honor the child and make the child a part of God's family."

Clare Takash, a music therapist at the Rush Center, says that Sister Shideler demonstrates exceptional empathy and attentive listening.

“During memorial services, she sits with grieving families, offers a comforting touch and provides prayers,” she says. “Julia made a positive impact on many people during some of their most difficult experiences. We are grateful for her ministry and caring heart.”

The missionary’s compassionate heart is nourished at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Chicago’s Hyde Park neighborhood. “I serve there weekly,” she says, “as an acolyte, lector or extraordinary minister of Communion.”

Sister Shideler, who was born in Oakland, California, was raised in a bilingual French American family. She graduated from Western Washington University with a major in Spanish and joined the Maryknoll Sisters in 2005.

“I felt called to become a sister because when I was in college, I realized I wanted my work to align with my lifestyle,” she says. “I didn’t want to just have a job, but to give myself wholeheartedly to God and to people.”

After considering different congregations, she says, she was struck by how the Maryknoll Sisters had missions around the world in developing countries, where she saw herself serving.

After a two-year novitiate in Chicago, her first overseas mission assignment was in 2008 to Timor-Leste (East Timor). There, in the municipality of Aileu, she taught at public and Catholic high schools, developing curricula focused on peace, holistic



health and ecological awareness. She supported students’ pursuit of higher education with scholarships and encouraged them through extracurricular activities.

Learning Tetum and Portuguese — the two official languages of the tiny country in the Southeast Asian Pacific — Sister Shideler also engaged in pastoral work in local villages and in vocational ministry. Serving in Aileu until 2022, she helped youth find their voices, identify their life paths and build inner strength through faith. These years in service sparked a desire for further education. “The seeds of the call that led me to study were sown in Timor-Leste,” the missionary says.

Sister Shideler, shown with Maryknoll Sister Susan Wanzagi (second from left) and with children from Daisoli village after a Mass in 2018, served for 14 years in Timor-Leste, working in education and pastoral ministry. (Courtesy of Julia Shideler/East Timor)

Sister Shideler returned to Chicago to pursue a master’s degree and training in healthcare chaplaincy at Loyola University Chicago. She earned board certification from the National Association of Catholic Chaplains this year. She also earned certificates in spiritual direction and pastoral counseling.

After she completes her Master of Divinity next year, the missionary will discern with the congregation how and where to apply her skills. No matter where she goes, she will help others grow in faith. “The gift

of spiritual direction is useful wherever people are open to deepening their faith and strengthening their relationship with God,” she says.

“Focusing my studies on the art of spiritual accompaniment — while serving in hospital, hospice, jail and parish settings — feels like the best response I can offer to God, who calls me to mission.” ✠



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maryknollsisters.org

Celebrating MISSION



By Joseph Healey, M.M.

Let us celebrate mission.

Let us celebrate the World Mission Rosary, created 75 years ago by Archbishop Fulton Sheen. Each color represents a continent. I especially like green since I served in East Africa for over 45 years. Green symbolizes the forests and grasslands of Africa. The green beads are either the first decade or the fifth decade, depending on where you start.

I grew up in a devout Irish Catholic family in Baltimore, Maryland. My mother was so strict she would not let even our dogs eat meat on Fridays! On Sunday nights we would say the rosary together as a family and then watch Archbishop Sheen's program "Life Is Worth Living" on television. I am sure the seeds of my vocation to be a Maryknoll missionary priest were planted there. Let us celebrate this great American evangelist, who will be beatified in St. Louis, Missouri, on Sept. 24.

This year marks another important milestone to celebrate: the 100th anniversary of World Mission Sunday on Oct. 18. Established by Pope Pius XI in

1926, World Mission Sunday reminds Catholics that we belong to a global Church. The theme Pope Leo XIV chose for this year, "One in Christ, United in Mission," reflects the wisdom gained through his decades of experience serving in mission in Peru.

During Masses in East Africa, a land of many ethnicities and languages, we would invite everyone to say the Our Father in their mother tongues to illustrate the universality of the Catholic Church.

Let us celebrate the Maryknoll family in mission — priests, brothers, sisters, lay missionaries and affiliates — proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people! ✠

Maryknoll Father Joseph Healey served in East Africa starting in 1968. A proponent of Small Christian Communities, he has written many books, including several published by Maryknoll's Orbis Books.

In Memoriam

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

Father Richard P. Albertine

Brother Robert A. Butsch

Sister Mary Ann Duffy

Sister Marian Teresa Dury

Sister Rose Lauren Earl

Sister Patricia Edmiston

Father John W. Eybel

Sister Patricia Gallogly

Sister Roseann Hanley

Sister Jane Heckathon

Sister Rosemary Huber

Sister Lilla Hull

Father Robert A. Jalbert

Sister Rita Kane

Sister Rosemary Kane

Sister Rose Andree Krieger

Sister Ann Mallmann

Father Francis T. McGourn

Father Gregory G. McPhee

Brother Frank J. Norris

Sister Euphrasia Nyaki

Sister Ramona Oppenheim

Sister Marie Rosso

Brother Leo V. Shedy

Sister Rose Patrick St. Aubin

Sister Cecilia Vandal

Sister Mary Vertucci



Water flows in Kibwezi

Text and Photos by Paul Jeffrey

Maryknoll project supplies water to parched villages in Kenya

For years, Mary Simon's life revolved around a punishing search for water. Under the relentless sun of southeastern Kenya, she regularly set out on a 10-hour walk to a distant river, accompanied by other women from her village. Her donkey carried a load of empty jerry cans. The women traveled together for safety on the long and dangerous journey. Once they reached the river, they filled their containers and then slept overnight on the riverbank, returning home the following day with their precious cargo.

The water they carried home would last just two days before it was time to make the journey again.

Today, Simon walks just five minutes from her home to a well at St. Michael the Archangel Church in the village of Kamboo. Laughing with other women as they gather water, she fills her container and heads home with time and energy to spare.

Mary Simon fills jerry cans with fresh water at St. Michael the Archangel Church in Kamboo, Kenya, where the Maryknoll Society has financed a well and storage system.



Workers put finishing touches on a water point at St. Michael the Archangel Church in Kamboo. The wider Kibwezi region has been devastated by climate change.

"The new well has given me a gift of time that I didn't have before," Simon says. "Instead of walking so far, I now spend time with my children and cooking for my family."

The well was drilled by the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, whose work in the region has transformed the daily lives of thousands of people. For Simon and her neighbors, access to clean water means more than convenience. It has restored dignity, improved health and opened new opportunities.

"It has made a huge difference in our lives," says Steven Mwalimu, the moderator of the church, a mission outstation not far from the town of Kibwezi.

"Now — instead of accompanying

their mothers to fetch water — the small children can stay in school," Mwalimu says. "Absenteeism is way down. And by reducing the burden of obtaining water, we can focus on other activities that help our families and the community to have a more sustainable economy."

The project started supplying water in 2025. The hope is to eventually pipe water directly to the village's school, market and clinic. Mwalimu says that goal will be easier when the church can add additional storage tanks at the well, which uses a solar-powered pump. When the sun is out, the existing tanks fill up quickly, although demand empties them just as fast.

Mwalimu says with the new well,



Regina Mumbua and donkeys walk with jerry cans to Christ the King Church in Kavete. Following page: Women carry the jugs they filled there at the community water point.

the community has begun planting fruit trees to build food security in an area where farming has been decimated by the climate crisis.

In addition, he says the 590-foot-deep well — called a borehole in East Africa — has an added benefit for some other Kamboo residents. "The donkeys have a much easier life now," Mwalimu says.

The Kamboo well is one of several that the Maryknoll Society drilled in the region.

Father Nicodemus Mbelenzi is pastor of Christ the King Church in Kavete, where Maryknoll also drilled a well and installed storage tanks. Villagers grow vegetables in a garden inside the parish compound, and a community water

point draws people from far away.

"With long-term drought, the situation has grown rather pathetic here," Father Mbelenzi says. "Children stopped going to school because of a lack of sanitation, or because their parents couldn't afford school fees. But with water, they are clean and happy, and their parents can grow a few crops to sell in the market and have money for school fees. Water is a blessing for our people."

Maryknoll's involvement in the area started when Maryknoll Father Lance Nadeau served as chaplain at Kenyatta University in Nairobi. Father Nadeau got to know students from around the country, often visiting them in their home



Priests in Mission:

communities. When he visited the Kibwezi area, he found people suffering the direct effects of the climate crisis.

"Since the late 1990s, what had once been a fertile region began to experience either severe drought or very unpredictable rainfall," says Father Nadeau, today the superior general of Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. "Families had moved to the region with the hope of farming the land, and at first they were successful, but then the changes in climate caught up with them. Poverty rates went up as people tried to grow food, but harvest after harvest failed."

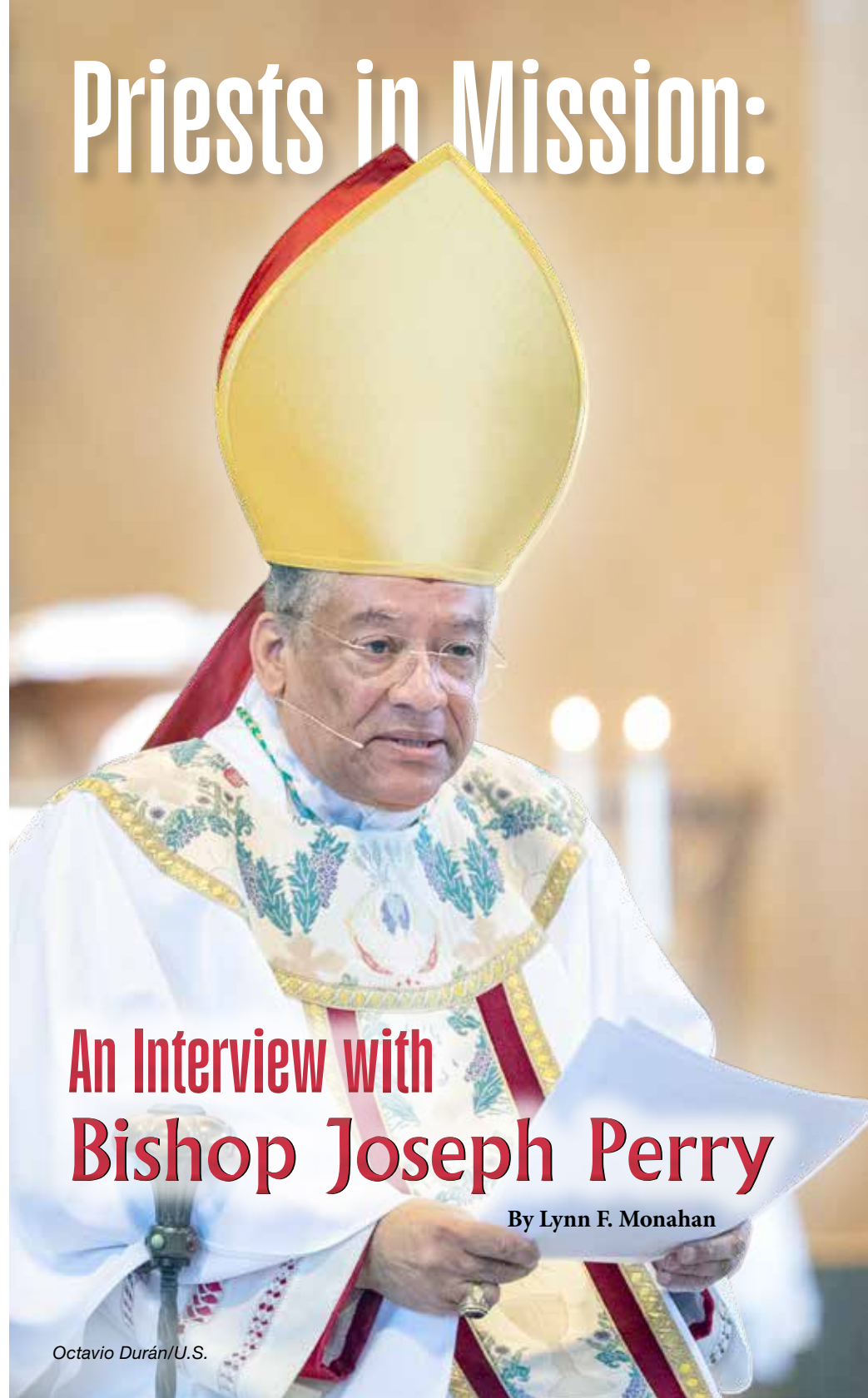
With support from Maryknoll donors, Father Nadeau started working with the Small Christian Communities in several villages around the center of Kibwezi. Besides digging wells and installing water storage tanks, they raised goats and planted trees. In the hardest-hit communities, Maryknoll

supported a food-for-work program that kept the poorest families alive during the worst periods of drought.

Daniel Muli, the deputy moderator of St. Anthony Church in Vengini, another small village near Kibwezi, says the completion of their well last year has already produced noticeable results. Even though the water in their location shows some salinity, he says, it's fine to use for washing and for irrigating most crops.

"You can see that our people are clean and our animals are healthy," he says. "And you can see all the fruit trees we've planted. We'll have bananas and other fruit. We've planted peppers and berries. Our children will eat well." ✠

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



An Interview with Bishop Joseph Perry

By Lynn F. Monahan

Octavio Durán/U.S.

Bishop Joseph Perry has been following the Church's missionary work — and Maryknoll — for most of his life.

After conferring the sacrament of Holy Orders upon Father Victor Mutobera at Maryknoll on June 6, the emeritus auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago discussed mission, his own vocation, immigration, racism and Pope Leo XIV, as well as the cause for canonization of Venerable Father Augustus Tolton, the first recognized African American priest from the United States.

"Being missionary is indigenous to the whole notion of priesthood," Bishop Perry says. "There has to be the whole notion of missionary in every priest's imagination. It's just that some do it more professionally than others."

The prelate has been reading *Maryknoll* magazine since grade school: "I remember the earliest days of my own vocational search as a kid; I imagined myself as a missionary in a canoe going down the Amazon River."

He now enjoys a friendship with Maryknoll priests and seminarians in Chicago, where he grew up.

While his vocation did not lead him to foreign mission, Bishop Perry says there are "different degrees" of being a missionary.

"More and more, I think we've come to understand that even parish urban ministry is very missionary these days," he says. "There are some phenomenal places in the world, even the developing world, where

the faith is even stronger than that in some of our cities."

Africa, where many of Maryknoll's current seminarians come from, is one of those areas, he notes.

The Church is strong there, he says, "maybe because they don't have as many distractions, and they're not wealthy, but they are wealthy in terms of spirituality and charity, and even people who have, in many places, had to suffer for the faith."

Bishop Perry, who was ordained for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in 1975 and appointed auxiliary bishop for Chicago in 1998, says he hopes and prays such vocations continue. He lamented, however, that the United States immigration system isn't more receptive of them.

"We just hope that somehow our system here can be a little bit more generous and open, and, as such, that people can appreciate that the education that these guys receive from here is very, very valuable and enriching for them," he says. "And, of course, we pick up something from them in light of their culture, their faith, their struggle."

Bishop Perry, a canon lawyer who has taught at several Catholic universities, is the postulator for the sainthood cause of Father Augustus Tolton, who was ordained in Rome in 1886. Father Tolton ministered at churches in Quincy, Illinois, and Chicago. In 2019, Pope Francis declared Father Tolton venerable, the second step in the canonization process.

"So, we're now in that quiet phase of looking for a miracle that would

get him beatified," Bishop Perry says.

Father Tolton was born into slavery in Missouri and, as a child, was taken to Illinois, a free state, by his mother, who fled with her children across the Mississippi River to freedom during the Civil War. There, he was educated in Catholic schools, including by Franciscans who saw he had a possible religious vocation.

"In those days, they didn't accept Black students in seminaries and convents," in the United States, the bishop says, so the Franciscans arranged for him to study in Rome.

Being missionary is indigenous to the whole notion of priesthood.

"He was in Rome for six years, and they were going to send him to Africa to be a missionary there," Bishop Perry says. "They perceived that he couldn't be a success here in this country, because no one had ever seen a Roman collar around the neck of a Black man before." However, the night before Father Tolton was to be ordained, the cardinal in charge of his assignment decided that the new priest should be a missionary in his own country.

Father Tolton suffered greatly from discrimination during his ministry in Quincy. People resisted the idea of a Black clergyman serving both white and Black Catholics, Bishop Perry says. Father Tolton was forced to leave Quincy and went to

serve in Chicago, working with Black Catholics there.

The bishop says that he first learned of Father Tolton in seminary and identifies with him as an African American priest.

"I identify him with a lot," he says. "He was thrust into a situation where he was really alone. He didn't have support in those days."

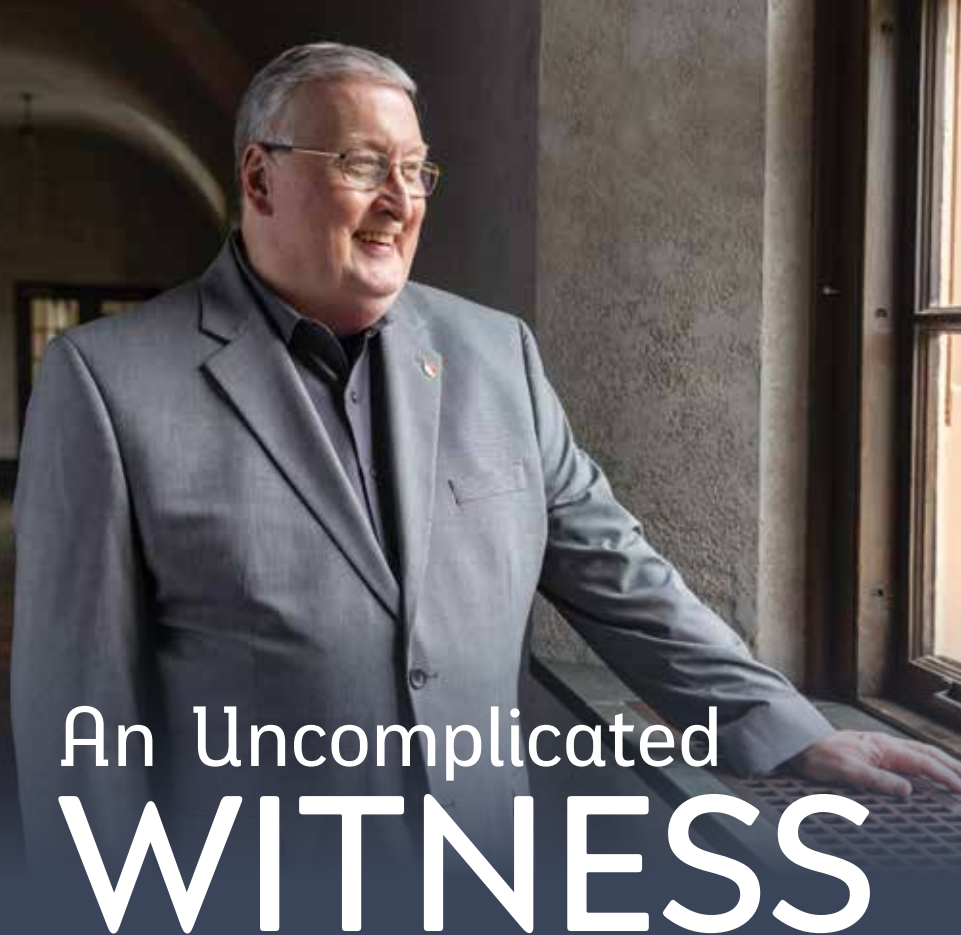
Bishop Perry notes that Father Tolton is "recognized" as the first African American priest because earlier, three African American priests who were of light complexion — brothers of the same family, with the last name of Healy — had passed as white.

Bishop Perry speaks about Father Tolton and his cause for canonization frequently, especially to those asking in prayer for his intercession, and is seeking the miracle that would lead to beatification.

Of Pope Leo XIV's recent apology for the Church's having in the past legitimized slavery, Bishop Perry says, "I think it's good for people to hear that apology." He adds, "Now we have a social teaching, a compendium of social teaching, where that is just not, at least in theory, not tolerated."

He continues, "We hope that things in the future will get even better, but sometimes with certain awful incidents that occur, it makes you wonder how much progress we've really made."

At the same time, he says, he remains hopeful, adding that we need to "see the gifts that people bring and not so much their intrusion upon our way of life." ✠



An Uncomplicated WITNESS

By Wayne Fitzpatrick, M.M.

The missionary brotherhood in Maryknoll is an uncomplicated vocation and witness in response to God's call to mission. The brother is called to be a man of prayer, community, service, ministry and hospitality. Brothers often turn to the Gospel reading of Jesus washing his disciples' feet as a clear foundation and anchor for the charism of the missionary brother.

"He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry

them with the towel. ... He said to them, 'Do you realize what I have done for you? If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.'" (John 13: 4-5, 12-14)

The Gospel story takes place at a meal, in community and the embrace of prayer. Jesus, our brother, demonstrates the depth of his ministry of service in the washing of the feet. He goes on to say, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." (15) A missionary brother

responds with his life to this call.

Once I was visiting my family in northern New York. My nephew, Kyle, was with two friends from high school. He introduced me as his "Uncle Wayne the Brother." I could tell from their expressions that his friends had no idea what that meant.

Kyle began to speak to them about his experience of Uncle Wayne the Brother. He explained in a very practical and realistic manner what his uncle's mission vocation was all about. In his own words, he expressed the importance of prayer, service, community and hospitality. Kyle ended by saying, "Uncle Wayne the Brother is a missionary who prays, lives with other missionaries and helps those in need, especially

the poor." His two friends then nodded and said, "OK, we get it now."

As a Maryknoll brother I believe my vocation is to invite others into relationship with Jesus, our brother. To say to others, "Welcome, make yourself at home," and to spend time with someone who is discouraged or struggling. This, I believe, is an invitation to share hospitality of the heart and spirit. This is the uncomplicated vocation and witness of a brother. ✠

Maryknoll Brother Wayne Fitzpatrick, who holds master's degrees in theology and pastoral counseling, has served in mission in Guatemala and in leadership for the Maryknoll Society in the United States.



*For more than five decades, Maryknoll Brother Wayne Fitzpatrick has answered Jesus' call to be a brother to all.
Facing page: Robyn Ivy/U.S., 2026
Above: Pat Goudvis/Guatemala, 1978*



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SAINT FRANCIS *at* 800 *Years*

By Robert Ellsberg

The feast of St. Francis of Assisi is observed on October 4, with Franciscans celebrating the preceding day as his Transitus — Latin for passage or crossing over. This year is the 800th anniversary of that passage.

After all these centuries, St. Francis undoubtedly remains the world's most popular saint, honored in every land, even by the secular-minded and people of other faiths. This reflects, in part, his winsome qualities and the romantic gestures that sometimes encourage sentimentality. But beneath all that, St. Francis stands as one who made the way of Jesus credible and concrete, both for those called to formal religious life and for men and women living in the ordinary world.

A hunter's moon rises behind a statue of St. Francis of Assisi outside the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Champion, Wisconsin. (OSV News/Sam Lucero/CNS/U.S.)



Jesus left no formal religious rule for his followers. The closest he came was his proclamation of the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers ... Francis took this spiritual vision to heart and translated it into a way of life. In various ways, other saints before and since have done the same. But for many men and women since the time of

the privileged son of a cloth merchant in Assisi. An experience of war and captivity, followed by debilitating illness, led him to search for some deeper meaning. He had always been a fastidious person, with an abhorrence for squalor and illness. Then one day, he encountered a leper on the road. After offering alms, he was moved by some impulse to kiss the man's ravaged hands.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love ...
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is sadness, joy ...
For it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

— attributed to St. Francis

Francis, his particular example has offered a distinctive key to the Gospel — or, as Pope Francis might have said, “a new way of seeing and interpreting reality.” Among the central features of this key: the vision of a church that is “poor and for the poor”; a resolve to take seriously Jesus’ example of self-emptying love; the way of mercy and compassion; above all, a determination to proclaim the Gospel not only with words but with one’s life.

Francis had begun his own life as

From that moment, he underwent a wholesale conversion, seemingly liberated from an identity based on status, security and worldly success. His life began to take shape around an utterly new agenda, contrary to the ambitions of his family and the values of his society.

While praying before a crucifix in the dilapidated chapel of San Damiano, he heard a voice speak to him: “Francis, repair my church, which has fallen into disrepair.” At first he took this literally, rebuilding

the ruined building with his bare hands. But soon he realized he was called to a wider mission — to renew the Church by recovering the radical simplicity of the Gospel, the spirit of poverty and the image of Christ in the poor. His example exerted a wide appeal among other young men of Assisi, who became the nucleus of a new order, the Friars Minor. With the arrival of Clare, they were joined by a community of women, and eventually a wider movement of followers inspired by his example. In his life and his relationship with the world, Francis represented the breakthrough of a new model of human and cosmic relationship marked by love, nonviolence and care for creation.

Across the centuries since Francis’ death in 1226, the Franciscan spirit has touched countless lives and inspired many movements of Church renewal. In our time, the most striking example may have been Jorge Bergoglio’s decision to become the first pope known as Francis. From the beginning, this represented more than a name; it signaled a mission and an agenda. One might say that Pope Francis read the Gospel through a Franciscan lens. He embraced St. Francis’ vision of an evangelizing church that steps out of itself to go to the margins and peripheries. In his outreach to Muslims and people of other faiths, he followed the example of St. Francis’ outreach to Sultan al-Malik al-Kâmil in Egypt. He drew on Franciscan references in the titles of three of his

documents, most notably *Laudato Si’* (on care for creation) and *Fratelli Tutti* (on social friendship).

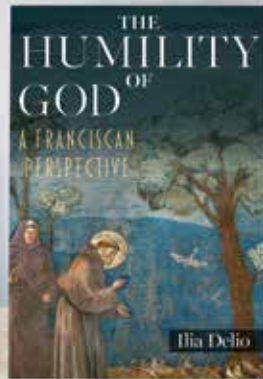
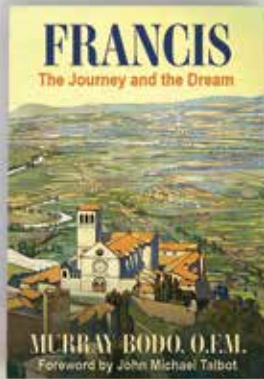
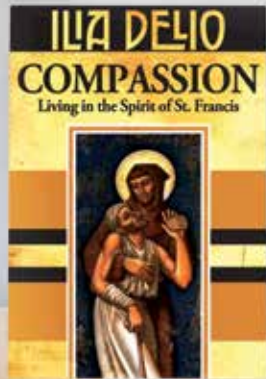
The elevation of ecological concerns to a central place in Catholic social teaching represented one of the clearest examples of the pope’s Franciscan agenda. St. Francis is famous for his love for creation and all creatures. Popular stories recount his preaching to the birds and his taming of the wild wolf of Gubbio. In his last years, suffering from painful afflictions that left him nearly blind, he composed his “Canticle of the Creatures,” thanking God for Brother Sun, Sister Moon and Stars, as well as Sister Water, Brother Fire and Mother Earth.

As death was approaching, St. Francis asked to be carried to the Portiuncula, one of the first chapels he had restored, and which had served as a headquarters for his order. There he wished to face his end. He composed a new verse for his Canticle, praising “Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living being can escape.”

Francis spent his last days praising God “and teaching his companions whom he loved so much to praise Christ with him.” Finally, he asked to be placed naked on the ground, where he breathed his last. His final words were: “I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours.” ✠

Robert Ellsberg is the publisher of Orbis Books. His many books include The Franciscan Saints.

ORBIS BOOKS Spotlight



Preview by Robert Ellsberg

St. Francis of Assisi, one of the world's most popular saints, has been the subject of many Orbis titles. His model of mission, centered on proclaiming the Gospel at all times — not just with words, but with one's life — speaks to the whole Church, and to Maryknoll in particular. It was mission marked by the spirit of poverty and love for those on the margins, care for creation, nonviolence and dialogue with those of other faiths.

In this Jubilee year, which marks the 800th anniversary of Francis' death in 1226, Orbis is pleased to have acquired a rich backlist of titles from our friends at Franciscan Media (who are suspending their book program). These include the classic by Murray Bodo, OFM, *Francis: The Journey and the Dream*, which conveys the story of Francis through a combination of lyrical prose and brief, absorbing vignettes.

We are also publishing several works by Ilia Delio, a Franciscan sister and visionary theologian. Two of them will appear this fall. *Compassion: Living in the Spirit of St. Francis* considers the essential quality that marked Francis' life, and how it might transform our own lives. In *The Humility of God: A Franciscan Perspective*, Sister Delio explores the humble dimensions of God — born in a stable, dying on a cross — who captured the heart of St. Francis, and invites readers to be transformed by the same divine dimension. Additional Franciscan titles will appear next year.

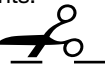
But for all those who wish to immerse themselves in the spirit of Francis and Clare, there are other popular works on our list. Howard A. Snyder's *Francis of*

Assisi: Movement Maker explores Francis's unconventional lessons in leadership. *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition*, by William J. Short, OFM, is widely regarded as one of the best introductions to Franciscan spirituality, while Carlo Carretto's bestselling classic, *I, Francis*, brings Francis to life and lets him speak to our time.

St. Francis and the Foolishness of God, by Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, OFM, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda and Stuart Taylor, lays out the counter-cultural features of Francis — especially his rejection of materialism, his model of community and his spirit of nonviolence — and shows their relevance today. The late Michael Crosby, a Capuchin priest, was the author of many books on discipleship and spirituality, including *Finding Francis: Following Christ*. A book by George Dardens and Marvin Mich, *In the Spirit of St. Francis & the Sultan*, recounts the famous gesture of Francis, who crossed the battle lines of the Crusades to meet with Sultan Malik al-Kamil in Damietta, Egypt, in 1219. Drawing on Francis' example, they show how Christians and Muslims can draw on values common to both traditions to work together to build more just and peaceful communities.

Finally, Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff is the author of *Francis of Assisi*, which focuses on Francis' preferential option for the poor, and *The Prayer of Saint Francis*, which explores the history, meaning and relevance of the famous and much-loved prayer of peace attributed to Francis. ✥

Robert Ellsberg is the publisher of Orbis Books and author of *The Franciscan Saints*.



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The CATHOLIC FAITH Was HIS MOTHER'S REFUGE

By Marietha Góngora V.



A Maryknoll priest in Japan ministers to migrants from his homeland of Vietnam

When Maryknoll Father Lo Xuan Dam speaks about his family, especially his mother, he recalls how his parents struggled to raise nine children in Vietnam during partition and war, and the role the Catholic faith played in their lives.

"I am not from a generational Catholic family," says Father Dam, who grew up in the historically Buddhist country. "In my family, the first one who became Catholic was my mother." At that time in his homeland, he says, "among many Vietnamese, there was still a biased belief that Catholicism was the religion of the West, and that meant the religion of colonialism."

In 1951, amid the French Indochina War, with hunger and displacement under French rule, his mother embraced the Catholic faith. The missionary says she found comfort and support in the Church, which led to the baptism of her then-six children. After the country's division the family moved to South Vietnam, where his father also converted.

Father Dam, the youngest of nine siblings, was born in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). When he reached sixth grade, his mother sent him to a Salesian minor seminary. "She wanted me to become a priest," Father Dam says. He recalls that "in 1975, when the communists won over the whole country, they disbanded all the Catholic schools," forcing him to finish his high school and college studies in communist-run public schools.

"I think the seed of the vocation was already there," the missionary says. "The years when I grew up in Vietnam under the strict communist rule, it was very difficult in many aspects of life, so maybe, part of that led me back to the idea of a vocation."

Since the 1980s, Vietnam has undergone economic and social opening while remaining under one-party rule. The missionary notes, "We are freer than before but we still do not have full religious freedom, because the government

Maryknoll Father Lo Xuan Dam serves in Toyama Catholic Church in the city of Toyama, Japan, where he offers others the same refuge of faith that his family found in the Church. (Adam Mitchell/Japan)



Three decades after first arriving as a seminarian in Japan for overseas training, Father Dam ministers to migrant workers from his home country, Vietnam. (Adam Mitchell/Japan)

still tries to manipulate and control the Church.”

When Saigon fell, two of Father Dam’s brothers fled and resettled in the United States. His mother died in 1983, and he, his father and two other brothers migrated to the United States in 1991, under the sponsorship of his brothers already there.

“When I came to the U.S., I immediately wanted to find some place that could help me pursue my vocation, and I came into contact with Maryknoll,” Father Dam says. Many people suggested that he simply join a diocese, he says, but after living for 16 years under communist rule, he felt that the United States was “too rich, too comfortable” for him.

He was admitted to Maryknoll in

1993 and ordained a priest seven years later.

“I wanted to go to somewhere where people need me more,” says Father Dam, now 65.

During his Overseas Training Program, which gives Maryknoll priest and brother candidates experience in overseas mission, he spent more than a year in Japan learning the language and then six months serving in parishes in the Diocese of Kyoto.

“Japan is very interesting because in some respects, it feels familiar, because Vietnam and Japan are both East Asian, and we share the ‘chopstick culture,’ so to speak,” he says. Both countries are influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism.

Maryknoll missionaries in Japan fo-

cus primarily on parish work, he says, although some have also developed social service programs, such as caring for the homeless.

In recent years, Japan’s aging population has prompted the country to open up more to migration, even though many Japanese are not culturally accustomed to it, he says.

In tourist areas such as Tokyo’s Roppongi district, known for its nightlife, many visitors attend Mass, while in the provinces most attendees are migrant workers who often do not speak Japanese or English.

Father Dam explains that Japan does not officially recognize immigrant workers. Instead, they are labeled “apprentices” who train in a trade during a three-year stay before supposedly returning to their home countries to use their skills. He disputes official figures of how

many actually return home, adding, “They come here to work.”

Most immigrants do jobs that are known as the three Ds — dirty, difficult and dangerous — work that most Japanese are not willing to do themselves, he says. The country “needs millions” of low-skilled workers, he adds.

“The Vietnamese are the biggest group,” says Father Dam of the newcomers. Other large groups of immigrant workers come from China and the Philippines.

Father Dam’s pastoral work focuses mainly on the Vietnamese in Japan, whom he estimates to be about 10% Catholic, though official statistics are unavailable. It is not easy for Catholics to find a parish in Japan, where less than one half of one percent of the population is Catholic. With so few churches,

Catholic Vietnamese immigrants form communities that welcome newcomers, celebrate Mass, receive sacraments and participate in special events. The missionary travels regularly to visit such communities and other parishes.

Father Dam notes that not speaking Japanese is a major obstacle to integration for Vietnamese workers — but many prefer to focus on working and saving money to return to Vietnam rather than fully adapting to Japanese society.

The Japanese population often sees migrants as problematic, he says. Yet the missionary agrees with what Cardinal Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, the archbishop of Tokyo, said in a 2024 interview: “I firmly believe that immigrants are not a problem, but a hope for the Church. They offer the Catholic community a unique opportunity to grow, especially with young people, and to proclaim the Gospel in areas where there is no active presence of the Church.”

It takes time for people to change their attitudes, Father Dam says. He hopes the situation for immigrants in Japan will improve in the coming years and emphasizes that migrants are not just the future of the Church in Japan, but the present. He points out that the vitality of many parishes is due to immigrants, as young Japanese people rarely attend Mass.



Lo Xuan Dam is ordained on June 10, 2000, by Archbishop Francis Hurley of Anchorage, Alaska, at Our Lady Queen of Apostles Chapel. (John Argauer/U.S.)

Immigrants in Japan are primarily seeking faith and companionship, he says. As his own mother once found refuge in her faith, he hopes they, too, feel at home.

“They come to church also because they want to find compatriots, to find activities in their mother language, and they find companions,” he says. “It’s a great chance for us to do outreach, and we have a steady stream of people learning about the Church and becoming Catholic.” ✠

This article is based on reporting by Adam Mitchell in Toyama, Japan.

Marietha Góngora V., a bilingual journalist, writes for Catholic media outlets. Originally from Colombia, she resides in Maryland.

From GUATEMALA to the World

By Deirdre Cornell

Rosa Beatriz Castañeda de Larios says that Maryknoll spirituality is “inherent” to her life. From first grade, she was formed by Maryknoll sisters at Colegio Monte María in Guatemala City.

Castañeda’s friend Rosa María de León, who also attended Monte María, adds, “She drank it in like mother’s milk.”

Now, Castañeda helps keep the Maryknoll spirit alive in Guatemala by leading the country’s chapter of the Maryknoll Affiliates. The affiliates identify with the Maryknoll family while remaining active in their professions, homes and communities. Each affiliate commits to living out the four pillars of community, spirituality, global vision and action. Since 1991, chapters have taken root worldwide.

The nucleus of the Guatemala chapter’s founding was Colegio Monte María. “Most of us are graduates,” says Castañeda, who earned a primary school teaching degree there in 1966.

Colegio Monte María stood out among the capital city’s prestigious all-girls schools, she says, because the Maryknoll sisters “were ahead of their time.”

De León explains that in those days women weren’t supposed to think for themselves, nor take initiative. Yet, she recalls, Maryknoll Sister Elizabeth McDermott had a favorite saying: “Think and then act.”

Rosa Beatriz Castañeda de Larios is a Maryknoll affiliate and lifelong educator. (Octavio Durán/Guatemala)

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Castañeda meets with Maryknoll Sisters Silvia Pacheco and Mary Lou Daoust (far left, right), Affiliates Claudia Samayoa and Rosa María de León (left, right). (Courtesy of Rosa Beatriz Castañeda de Larios/Guatemala)

Another distinguishing aspect of the school, Castañeda says, was service. Maryknoll sisters who worked with Indigenous communities in rural areas gave talks inviting students to perform a month of service.

In Guatemala City, the sisters organized a volunteer network to help people in need, such as squatters at the municipal garbage dump. The missionaries showed respect for the dignity of every person, Castañeda says, setting an example to follow.

In 1978, Sister Patricia Roe asked Castañeda to become principal of Monte María — a role she would hold for 34 years. That same year, Castañeda married; Maryknoll sisters later became honorary grandmothers to the couple's three children. They celebrated Christmas together every year.

Christmas gatherings continue at Castañeda's home — now, including Maryknoll affiliates.

Although their Affiliates chapter was not formalized until 2009,

Castañeda says, most of its members had long histories with Maryknoll.

She recalls the day that the late Maryknoll Father Thomas Goekler came to her with an urgent plea: "I need help in Zone 18." The priest was starting a neighborhood center in one of the city's poorest and most crime-ridden areas.

"So we started going every Saturday to Zone 18, setting up the house," she says. The Affiliates chapter continues to support the project, called Caminando Por La Paz (Walking for Peace).

Approximately four times a year, Castañeda, de León and other affiliates venture further afield, to the remote town of Catarina near the Mexico border. There, they offer educational workshops for health promoters trained by Maryknoll Sister Mary Lou Daoust.

In the nearby town of Pajapita, they support a project for people with HIV/AIDS run by Maryknoll Sister Delia "Dee" Smith. The affiliates

sell organic honey, fertilizer, eggs and other products in Guatemala City to benefit the ministry. Three of its staff have joined the Affiliates.

There are currently 45 members in the very active Guatemala chapter, Castañeda says proudly.

De León says that every undertaking "needs a driving force — someone who doesn't mind pulling people along, persisting with them, and recognizing their skills and best qualities." Castañeda, she says, "is that driving force."

Soon after she retired from Monte María in 2012, Castañeda, who is fluent in English, began to translate the Maryknoll Affiliates newsletter, "Not So Far Afield."

Before long, she and other affiliates saw the need to move beyond mere translation. The Guatemala chapter spearheaded an original Spanish-language version titled "No Tan Lejos Del Horizonte," offering reports and reflections from Latin America on a quarterly basis.

As the 2017 Maryknoll Affiliates Chapter conference drew near, Guatemala accepted the challenge of hosting the international gathering. "It was the first time the event took place outside of the United States," Castañeda says, noting that it took two years to prepare. They were made for it, she adds, explaining that Monte María's alumnae include professionals in various fields.

The chapter's organizing expertise was called on again for a two-day virtual gathering in 2024. The 85 participants, affiliates from around the world, deepened their commitment to Maryknoll's charism under the theme "Cultural diversity is our collective wealth."

As if to bring this theme to life, Castañeda has stepped into a new role. Having served on the Maryknoll Affiliates board of directors and executive committee, she was recently named board chair.

"The Affiliate movement has been trying to emphasize and more intently respond to our international nature," says Robert Short, affiliate and executive coordinator. "Having Rosa Beatriz as our chair will give that a boost." ✨

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World Watch

Digital Disarmament

By Susan Gunn

In his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas* (Magnificent Humanity), Pope Leo XIV presents a groundbreaking framework on the protection of the human person in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). Warning against a rising “throw-away culture” of digital exclusion, the Holy Father cautions that the breakneck pace of AI advancement is outpacing ethical safeguards, leaving the world vulnerable to technical domination.

Responding to this urgent global teaching, the four branches of the Maryknoll family, which includes the Maryknoll Sisters, Fathers and Brothers, Lay Missioners and Affiliates, released a joint leadership statement echoing the Holy Father’s prophetic message. Drawing from decades of lived experience crossing borders, Maryknoll missioners witness firsthand how profit-driven digital tech exploits marginalized communities, giving rise to what they term a new era of “digital colonialism.”

A primary focal point of the encyclical, amplified heavily by Maryknoll leadership, is the plight of the invisible global workforce that fuels the AI industry. Maryknoll points to two specific nations where their missioners serve and where outsourcing dominates digital labor: Kenya and the Philippines.

In Kenya, scores of highly qualified, university-educated young people are

now being absorbed into precarious, hyper-exploitative “grunt work.” These workers often earn as little as 89 cents an hour to manually label images, train complex algorithms, and sift through traumatic content to build AI companies’ safety filters.

On the other hand, in the Philippines, four to five million people employed in digital call centers and business process outsourcing face looming job displacement as generative AI automates customer service roles, threatening to push families back into poverty. In both cases the extraction of cheap human labor reinforces an unjust world order where the Global North reaps massive profits while the Global South bears the burdens.

Beyond labor exploitation, *Magnifica Humanitas* spotlights the danger of algorithmic bias. When transnational corporations use automated systems to evaluate individuals, those who do not fit rigid data profiles risk being denied access to vital public services, credit, healthcare and education. Furthermore, Maryknoll expresses deep grief over the severe environmental toll of the AI industry, pointing to the land, energy and water exhausted by massive data centers.

Ultimately, Pope Leo XIV does not demonize technology itself but calls for its urgent disarmament. He rejects the idea that algorithms are morally neu-



Joy Buolamwini, a computer scientist, presents a copy of her book to the pope at a Vatican conference on artificial intelligence Nov. 13, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media/Vatican City)

tral, insisting that society must evaluate how these systems are built and whose interests they serve.

In unison with the Holy Father, the Maryknoll family is calling on political, labor, scientific and business leaders to collaborate on robust international regulations that center on the common good, reduce environmental degradation and protect basic labor rights. As

the encyclical states, “Humanity — in all its grandeur and woundedness — must never be replaced or surpassed.” True progress alleviates suffering and unlocks new possibilities, while also preserving the human heart’s capacity for genuine relationship and love. ✠

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

FAITH IN ACTION:

- Read the Full Text of *Magnifica Humanitas* – Explore the complete introduction, five chapters and conclusion. <https://maryknoll.link/4p4>
- Read & Share the Maryknoll Joint Leadership Statement to learn our response to the encyclical. <https://maryknoll.link/r4v>
- Watch & Share the official Holy See resources, including a 4-minute video, one-page overview and extended summary. <https://maryknoll.link/axk>

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

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READERS' RESPONSES

CHRISTIANS TAKE HEED

The Son of God, human and divine, was always apolitical but stood up for the voiceless and powerless. All the present sons, daughters and grandchildren of immigrants are here, happy and healthy through the efforts, travails and sacrifices of their parents and grandparents.

After people arrive here, often from war-torn nations and brutal military dictatorships, the rocky road to legal, fair citizenship needs to be less lengthy and arduous.

Most immigrants are law-abiding people seeking jobs, decent housing, schooling, job training, friendship and the "good life" we all want and seek. Yet we are told, falsely, that the few criminal bad apples in the barrel are all immigrants.

Christians, what would our Lord, teacher and example have us do for our fellow humans?

*David Daugman
Attleboro, Massachusetts*

LESS THAN HUMAN?

In response to the readers' letters from the Spring 2026 issue, I ask: "What would Jesus do?"

Would he label immigrants as thieves and quote the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," or would he love his neighbor as himself in the land where God shed his grace?

Would he stand shoulder to shoulder with ICE agents, screaming obscenities and killing members of his flock, or would he tenderly hold his sheep in his arms and carry them up

to heaven?

Would he tackle, beat and shackle them, placing them in prison centers while regarding them as less than human? Or would he inspire hope by advocating for legislation creating realistic and accessible legal methods for reentry?

Maybe Jesus would list the commandments that were broken (all were broken) in acquiring this land.

*Jeffrey Finnegan
Sioux Falls, South Dakota*

SAME DECISION

Over the years *Maryknoll* magazine has documented the crushing poverty and unrelenting violence that many people in other countries are forced to live under. Some make the difficult decision to take the dangerous journey to America in hopes of a better life for themselves and their families. It's the same decision many of our ancestors made.

Our immigration system has been broken for a long time, and so far we have lacked the political and moral will to fix it. But that hasn't stopped people from looking for a better life. Many of these people have followed all the immigration rules, only to have ICE agents abruptly yank them out of their cars, their jobs and their homes for deportation.

These parents, grandparents and children are not vermin. They are not bloodthirsty, dangerous criminals. They are not a plague. They are fellow children of God looking for a way to save their families. If the tables

were turned, I'm sure many Americans would be making a similar journey to a more promising country.

*Christine Sandow
LaFayette, Georgia*

LETTER OF THE LAW

In the Gospels, some Pharisees criticized Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath because, in doing so, he broke the law against doing work on that day. In that same spirit, several of the letters in your Spring issue condemned showing any compassion for immigrants, documented or undocumented. That many of these immigrants have been living, working and worshiping in our communities for years and that most are more law-abiding than many Americans counts for nothing.

The rigid legalist knows only one thing: They broke the law, so deport them all. The brutal execution of the law has resulted in even legal immigrants being incarcerated or deported. The example of Jesus' treatment of outcasts like lepers and the Samaritan woman at the well and the calls of Pope Francis, Pope Leo and our American bishops, seem to count for nothing.

If our love does not go beyond the letter of the law, we cannot truly call ourselves Catholic.

*Mario D. Mazzarella
Newport News, Virginia*

HONORING FRANCISCO

Having recently lost my beloved husband, Francisco Jimenez, I am quite behind in reading *Maryknoll*. I was inspired to write because of your Winter 2026 edition. It overwhelms me with the magnificence of the work

your missionaries do for others: the lowest, the unsung, God's people.

Father Joseph R. Veneroso has touched our hearts many times over so many years, but his "Standing Her Ground" photo meditation, about Mother Cabrini's holy work and all she endured, was truly remarkable.

I was also in awe of the work being done by Father Joyalito Tajonera and Cecilia Huang in Taiwan to assist migrant fishers who are abused on many levels. I'm also grateful for the important work of Charles Niece in tracing those tuna cans to our supermarkets in order to protect labor and human rights.

Then I read the reflection by Sister Catherine DeVito on her work with formerly legal workers who are now being separated from their children and spouses and deported. She addressed these cruel and unjust policies with eloquence, and her work is truly what our beloved Christ has asked of us.

My husband Francisco was born into a migrant family that followed the crops throughout California. It broke his heart to see how little had changed since he was a child. He was drafted into the military and went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees. He loved sharing his stories that made people laugh and cry, so they could better understand the lives of immigrants.

God bless you and your work. My family and I will be forever grateful.

*Janice Lema Jimenez
Watsonville, California*

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

Look! I am bringing the city recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them an abundance of lasting peace. — Jeremiah 33:6



Maryknoll Father Dennis Moorman, who serves in trauma healing and parish ministry, gives Communion at St. Joseph Church in Perus, São Paulo, Brazil. (Nile Sprague/Brazil)

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Women harvest cabbage in a plot of land irrigated by a community water point in Kibwezi, Kenya, an area severely affected by the climate crisis. Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers has financed wells with solar pumps and water storage systems throughout the region. (See story, page 34.)

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