



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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Current status of bills:
<http://thomas.loc.gov>

Catholics Stand in Solidarity with Migrants

Against the tide of an anti-immigrant culture, Catholics minister to migrants and face heavy criticism.

The number of migrants and asylum seekers who have walked across the treacherous jungle known as the Darién Gap so far this year has surpassed the record total set in 2022, according to the government of Panama. Panama's Director of Migration told reporters in Panama City on July 31 that more than 248,901 people have crossed the dangerous 165 miles connecting Colombia and Panama. The United Nations has warned that the number is on track to reach 400,000 by the end of 2023.

"We are facing a humanitarian crisis of major proportions," the Panamanian official said.

An unknown number of people die each year in the Darién, from drowning, injuries, or attacks by organized crime groups. Traumatized survivors report seeing bodies in the rivers and along the mountainside. We shared the story of a Venezuelan migrant who crossed the Darién in the July-August 2023 issue of NewsNotes. "The desperation really gets to you," the migrant said about his journey.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration have called for the creation of more legal pathways to migrate to the United States in order to reduce the number of people taking risky journeys. The United States, Panama, and Colombia have responded by launching a joint campaign to stop migrants from making the crossing, but the details have been vague.

The three countries have also pledged to open new, legal pathways to the United States, but the qualifications are restrictive. For example, Venezuelans need to begin the asylum process from Venezuela and have a U.S. sponsor who commits to financially support an immigrant for two years.

The factors compelling people to flee their countries remain. "Multiple interconnected factors, ranging from limited access to fundamental rights and essential services, to the impact of violence and insecurity, continue to push people into displacement," said UNHCR's director for the Americas, José Samaniego.

For those migrants who reach the U.S. border and successfully submit a request for asylum, many are held for a time in detention centers run by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). On Aug. 16, National Public Radio (NPR) reported disturbing findings in ICE-run detention centers from 2017-2019 of "negligent" medical care, "unsafe and filthy" conditions, racist abuse of detainees, inappropriate pepper-spraying of mentally ill detainees, and other problems noted by inspectors hired by the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

After their release from custody, many asylum-seekers are offered aid by faith-based organizations, like Catholic Charities USA. Because of this, a few Republican Congress members are threatening to reduce or eliminate their funding. Back in December 2022, four House Republicans sent a letter to the head of Homeland Security, accusing Catholic Charities USA, Jewish Family Services, and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service of breaking the law. The letter—from Congress members Lance Gooden and Jake Ellzey of Texas, Tom Tiffany of Wisconsin, and Andy Biggs of Arizona—included a warning: "Next Congress, we will continue to investigate your organization's role in facilitating the border crisis, your potential violations of federal law, and your misuse of taxpayer funds."

In its response, Catholic Charities USA said that its "humanitarian care (food, clean clothes, bathing facilities, overnight respite) is provided legally" and it "typically begins after an asylum-seeker has been processed and released by the federal government. Both U.S. and international law provide for the right to seek asylum at another country's border."

Rep. Lance Gooden of Texas sent a second letter in May, this time co-signed by Congress members Tom McClintock of California and Jim Jordan of Ohio. They accused the faith organizations that use federal funds to aid immigrants of creating an "incentive" for illegal immigration and demanded access to records about federal funding practices.

Rep. Gooden also sent an open letter to House colleagues that accused the faith groups of aiding illegal immigration. Gooden focused his frustrations on the federal Shelter and Services Program which reimburses organizations and local governments for offering certain aid to migrants.

Rep. Tiffany of Wisconsin said at a Judiciary Committee hearing in July, that Catholic Charities USA should be called to testify to explain "what they're doing down on the border to facilitate this illegal immigration."

In an email, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops described the claims as "false and misleading" and publicly shared a Q&A, "Catholic Ministries Serving Migrants and Refugees," available on their website. This resource explains Catholic social teachings related to migration, the Church's ministries serving newcomers. §

Faith in action: Sign two action alerts from USCCB's Justice for Immigrants Campaign.

In solidarity with Afghans: <https://mogc.info/JFI-Afghan>
Safeguard Children and Ensure Access to Religious Workers <https://mogc.info/JFI-Religious>

U.S. Report on Trafficking In Persons

The annual report on human trafficking around the world honors eight heroes making a difference.

The U.S. State Department released the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report in June, providing a comprehensive overview of the global state of trafficking in persons. The report also rates individual countries' efforts in combatting trafficking on a scale of four tiers, providing a powerful diplomatic tool for the U.S. government to engage foreign governments on human trafficking.

Although technology has contributed significantly to communication and development, cyber scam operations have also accelerated. With public and private job applications managed online, human traffickers often use unregulated social media platforms to recruit their victims.

Governmental involvement in trafficking features the use of state power to exploit nationals and the lack of legal status to manipulate stateless individuals. The U.S. State Department names the governments of Afghanistan, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, the Democratic Republic of Korea, Myanmar, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, and Turkmenistan as having a documented "policy or pattern" of trafficking in persons.

The report emphasizes the importance of effective partnerships between governments, civil societies, front-line workers, and the private sector in tackling trafficking in persons. Catholic Sisters are among the frontline workers fighting human trafficking. The International Union of Superiors General established Talitha Kum in 2009 to be an international network against human trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable populations. Their mission: "to end human trafficking and exploitation through collaborative initiatives focused around prevention, protection, social reintegration and rehabilitation of survivors, partnership and advocacy, promoting actions that tackle the systemic causes." Talitha Kum's current head international coordinator is Maryknoll Sister Abby Avelino.

It is imperative when establishing or working in partnerships, that governments, law enforcement, NGOs, civil society, and survivor leaders be sensitive to mitigate further harm to victims and survivors of human trafficking. The U.S. State Department suggests that all these stakeholders must:

- Avoid promoting stereotypes of survivors of human trafficking as damaged, weak, or powerless since doing so is counterproductive to empowering survivors and supporting effective anti-trafficking efforts and strategies.
- Ensure that staff and volunteers understand that human trafficking is a heinous systemic crime that requires survivor-informed and trauma-informed approaches to root

it out. Survivors must be engaged in designing and developing strategies to deal with this crime.

- Establish a culture of empathy within anti-trafficking organizations to apply trauma-informed principles.
- Fast-track immigration relief and work authorization for survivors of human trafficking to prevent prolonged suffering and the risk of re-victimization.
- Avoid inappropriately penalizing victims of both sex and labor trafficking, including children, for crimes they committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Utilize various investigative strategies rather than relying solely on victim cooperation and testimony. Victims' and survivors' access to exit and recovery services should not be pegged to their compliance in the investigations, which might re-traumatize them or cause them at risk of stigmatizing themselves.

The report also includes the 2023 TIP Report Heroes, eight individuals from around the world who have devoted their lives to the fight against human trafficking. This year's heroes come from Brazil, Cambodia, Iraq, Pakistan, Peru, Venezuela and Nigeria. These individuals include NGO workers, government officials, survivors of trafficking, and concerned citizens. They are recognized for their tireless efforts—despite some working in challenging environments where trafficking concerns remain pervasive and facing resistance or threats to their lives—to protect victims, punish offenders, and mitigate the underlying factors that empower traffickers.

One of this year's heroes is Eumelis Moya Goitte, the coordinator of the Office of Human Rights of Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB) Guayana in Venezuela. In this role, she investigates human trafficking in Bolivar state, with a special focus on the Orinoco Mining Arc—a strategic development zone in Venezuela.

Since starting her current role in 2018, Ms. Moya documents situations that involve the abuse and violation of the human rights of the inhabitants of Bolivar state, particularly hard-to-reach Indigenous communities. The 2023 TIP Report says "Ms. Moya has built strong relationships and partnerships in her work and relies on the support of community leaders, Indigenous communities, partner institutions, and the media to collect data." §

Faith in action:

Learn about current and past TIP Report Heroes at www.tiphheroes.org.

Talitha Kum at <https://www.talithakum.info>

Read the 2023 TIP Report <https://mogc.info/TIP2023>

Haiti: Illegal Flow of Guns from United States

Gang violence in Haiti is made possible by an illicit supply of arms the island nation does not have the capacity to prevent. Congress can address this with the U.S.-Caribbean Strategic Engagement Act of 2023.

On Sunday, Aug. 27, members of a local church in a suburb of the Haitian capital city Port-au-Prince were gunned down by gang members while they were rallying against gang violence in their community. CNN reported that seven people were killed by machine gun fire.

“Haitian criminal gangs and narcos could not hold the country hostage without the continuous flow of handguns, assault rifles, even belt-fed machine guns,” said Doug Barry, a senior adviser for Global Action on Gun Violence, in a letter to the editor published in the Washington Post on Aug. 10.

While exact precise numbers are impossible to calculate, the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration estimated in 2020 that there could be as many as 500,000 pistols, rifles, and light machine guns in the island nation with a population of 11 million. The national police reported only 58,000 registered guns in 2015. Assuming these figures, Haiti’s law enforcement agents are out-gunned by Haitian residents, private security company personnel, and armed gangs nearly ten to one.

Where do most of the weapons on the streets of Haiti come from? Sadly, the answer is the United States.

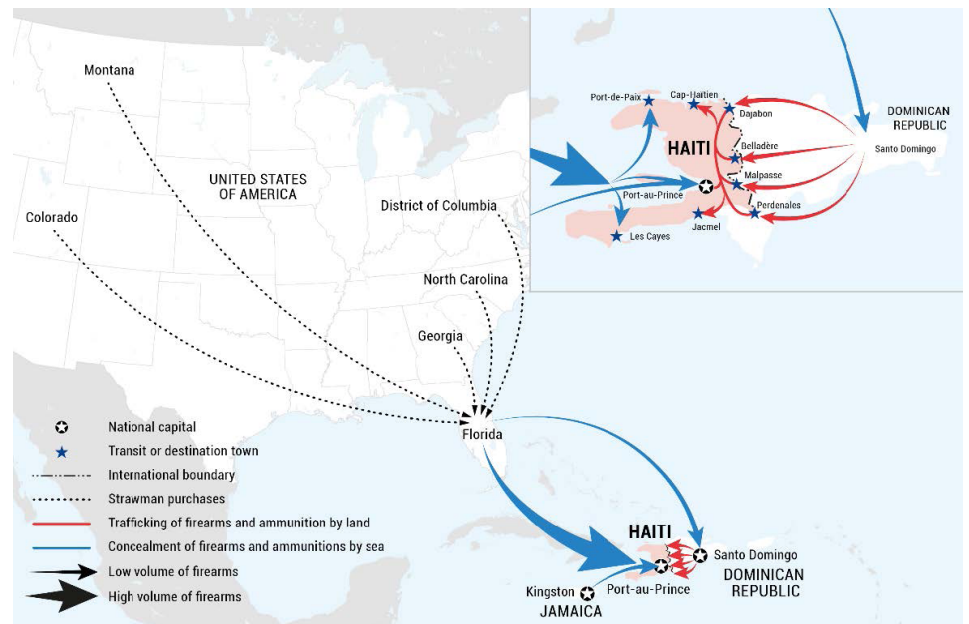
A UN report released in March mapped the source of illegal firearms to Haiti, exposing the network of criminal actors who often purchase weapons in Florida or other U.S. states with weak gun laws (Colorado, Georgia, Montana, North Carolina). The guns from these other states are transported to Florida from where they are illegally smuggled into Haiti. The guns might travel by land from the neighboring Dominican Republic; by air, including to clandestine airstrips; but most frequently they arrive by sea.

The numbers are staggering. One port of the Dominican Republic alone captured 112,000 units of firearms and ammunition heading to Haiti in the first six months of 2022. Most of these heralded from the United States.

Barry characterized the Haitian police and military as not well-equipped to deal with this level of smuggling,

resulting in the few illegal weapons seized comprising “only a fraction” of the illicit arms coming into the country. “Last summer, an arsenal was found in the hold of a ship labeled as goods from a religious charity,” he wrote.

One way to address the Haitian arms trafficking would be the passage of the U.S.-Caribbean Strategic Engagement Act of 2023 (H.R. 4015.) According to the Quixote Center, the act would require the U.S. government to create a strategy to reduce the illicit trafficking of guns from the U.S. to the Caribbean and would also provide technical support and training to Caribbean security



Map of the origin of guns from illegal arms smuggling to Haiti, from the UNDOC report

forces that monitor maritime borders to prevent illicit weapons from entering Caribbean countries. §

Faith in action: Tell your U.S. Representative to stop the flow of illegal guns to Haiti by supporting the U.S.-Caribbean Strategic Engagement Act <https://mogc.info/HR4015>

African Faith Leaders Call for Debt Relief

African religious leaders call for international debt relief to deal with climate, health, food and energy crises facing the continent. The following press release was published by Jubilee USA Network on Aug. 8, 2023.

Twenty-six religious leaders from 12 countries in Africa met in Nairobi in August to discuss their concerns for the upcoming G20 and African Climate summits in September. The leaders represent Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and other Christian denominations, the All Africa Council of Churches, Muslim, and Indigenous faiths.

\$130 billion in exchange for borrowers implementing participatory poverty reduction policies and economic reforms.

“The stakes of this debt crisis are much higher,” the statement reads. “We need large investments to save the planet that sustains life in Africa and elsewhere, during a window that is rapidly closing.”

The leaders stated that the low use of the G20’s debt relief initiative, in spite of the high number of countries in crisis, is a sign of ineffectiveness. Their document emphasizes the need to address private creditors that hold more than 45 percent of African debt.

“[M]ajor financial centers that govern their contracts have a special responsibility to pass laws that bind them to share in debt relief,” the interfaith statement adds.

They expressed support for the New York and International Debt Crises Protection Act. The bill, currently pending in the New York State Legislature would ensure that private creditors join debt relief initiatives. The bill is supported by almost a quarter of New York State lawmakers.

The leaders also addressed current needs for more development bank resources.

“African countries will need scaled up access to concessional and low-cost, long-term finance,” they said. “Multilateral development banks are the institutions most capable of deploying such type of funding, but cannot currently keep up with demand.”

In July, G20 finance ministers reviewed a report that makes the case for an additional \$500 billion in external public finance to help developing countries meet climate and development goals. Multilateral development banks would have to increase annual grants and loans by \$260 billion in order to meet the additional needs.

“Our convergence is... a robust testament to the cohesive strength of interfaith unity, combined wisdom, and a shared commitment to justice,” added the leaders. §

Faith in action: Read the full Nairobi African religious leaders statement here. <https://mogc.info/AfricaDebt>



Photo of the Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya by Nimara via Flickr

The group issued a joint statement, calling for debt relief and changes to the financial system to address growing crises of climate, health, food and energy in Africa. Caritas Africa and the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network Africa hosted the meeting.

African countries owe collectively more than \$1.1 trillion in debt and 25 of them face debt crises, according to the IMF and World Bank.

“In the late 1990s ... our faith communities were among those gathered in the Jubilee movement to advocate for breaking the chains of debt in developing countries,” the religious leaders said. “As we approach a new Jubilee year in 2025, that promise remains unfulfilled.”

The 1990s advocacy culminated with the largest debt relief initiatives to date. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries/ Multilateral Debt Relief Initiatives released

South Sudan: Local Church Responds to Refugees, Peace Efforts

The Catholic Church in South Sudan responds to the needs of refugees entering the country from Sudan while calling for greater efforts to maintain the peace process in South Sudan.

More than 130,000 people have fled fighting in Sudan for neighboring South Sudan since April, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Even more have arrived in Chad. Ethiopia and the Central African Republic have also received nearly 20,000 each. Numbers are expected to rise as fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces spreads across Sudan.

The situation for these new refugees in South Sudan is made worse by local skirmishes and communal violence in the young African country that threaten a five-year-old peace agreement that Archbishop Stephen Ameyo of Juba said has “not yet been implemented systematically.”

“Let us make peace and reconciliation our priorities,” Ameyo said at the South Sudan Catholic Bishops’ Provincial Council forum at the end of June in the capital city of Juba. “We stand on the crossroad of implementing the ecumenical messages left by our visitors, especially Pope Francis,” he said, recalling the historic joint visit in February by Pope Francis, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Reverend Iain Greenshield.

At the same time, the archbishop, now cardinal-elect, called on dioceses across South Sudan to set up emergency centers to receive Sudanese refugees, whom he said should be given “special consideration” to settle in the country.

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin echoed these priorities during his four-day visit to South Sudan in August. Upon his arrival in Juba, Parolin first met with President Salva Kiir, followed by a meeting with opposition leader Vice President Riek Machar. He spoke with both leaders about the need to “embrace the spirit of peace and reconciliation in order to build a harmonious society in the country.”

On the second day of his visit, Cardinal Parolin turned his attention to the plight of the Sudanese refugees when he traveled to the Diocese of Malakal, a place that has repeatedly suffered flooding and fighting between warring factions and now is taking in refugees from Sudan.

Speaking through a megaphone, Parolin told a crowd of refugees there, “We feel very sorry for you, for what happened to you in Sudan.” He added, “We can do something also from our side; we are the Holy See, we are the Vatican, the moral voice very powerful in the international community.”

He also reassured the refugees of Pope Francis’ concern and solidarity with them, saying, “This solidarity is not empty-hand solidarity because the Catholic Church is committed to helping you in whatever way they can. This is the solidarity of the Holy Father; this is the solidarity of the universal Church; this is the solidarity of the local Church.”

Maryknoll lay missionary Gabe Hurrish on mission in South Sudan. In June, Gabe wrote on the Maryknoll Lay Missioners website that he has moved to a new mission, after two and a half years in ministry at the Kuron Peace Village in the far western part of South Sudan.

Gabe’s new ministry is at St. Mary Magdalen Parish in a place called Riwoto, near Kapoeta City, which is 164 miles south of Juba. The parish lost its longtime pastor when Fr. Tim Galvin of the St. Patrick Missionaries died unexpectedly last February. Two young Nigerian priests are now assigned to lead the parish.

“Five young Ugandan sisters help run the nursery, primary and secondary schools,” Gabe wrote. “The parish is large and active, with a health clinic, tree planting, 12 small Christian communities, weekly religious classes, youth and adult groups, and many catechists.”

The number of students in need of teachers is tremendous, Gabe said. “The nursery has more than 500 little ones, ranging from 2 to 6 years old. The primary school has more than 1,000 students with 20 teachers. There is a huge demand for more students to enter, but, unfortunately, there is no more capacity.”

Gabe will teach computers and agriculture to the secondary school students and assist the other teachers and pastors with the many demands they face. Despite the immense work before him, Gabe said, “I am thankful to have landed in such a wonderful place.” §

Faith in action: Read more about the ministry of Maryknoll Lay Missioner Gabe Hurrish at <https://mogc.info/Riwoto>

Tanzania: Forceful Letter by Catholic Bishops

The thirty-seven Tanzanian bishops object to the government's business dealings with the United Arab Emirates.

In a statement titled “The Voice of the People, the Voice of God” issued August 18, 2023, the Tanzanian Catholic Bishops Conference decried the unpopular economic dealings with the United Arab Emirates, in particular, the transfer of the management of the nation's ports to the U.A.E. Ports, Customs and Free Zone Corporation approved on 10 June 2023.

At least 24 activists have been arrested and released for criticizing the deal. On August 11, the Inspector General of Police told the media objections to the deal were tantamount to “inciting the public into overthrowing the government.” Over the following two days, three more were arrested to be charged with treason, a crime that requires the death penalty in Tanzania.

In their statement, the bishops wrote: “We are driven by a conscience that aims to protect resources, solidarity, peace, freedom, and national unity; we dare to say that after 63 years of the independence of this country, the people have not wanted to leave the port of Dar es Salaam to be given to one investor to run it, since the Tanzanians

themselves have the experience of running it.

“We consider it important now to continue to build NATIONAL capacity, for our Tanzanian public and private sectors, establishing partnerships with technologically advanced companies from different parts of the world, and not partnerships from one country....

“Ignoring the voice of the people on investments has also brought suffering to the people of the areas where they live, as seen in the Maasai communities of Loliondo, whose cultural and social rights have been violated. Investments have been given unproductive priority and the Maasai people have been left to suffer....

“Now that the majority of citizens do not want investments with such bad conditions in all our ports; and since the Government is accountable to the people, the leaders must listen to the voice of the people, because their voice is the voice of God.” §

Faith in action: Read an update from the Maasai in Tanzania. <https://mogc.info/MISA-Sept2023>

Maryknoll in Korea: A Life of Compassion, Risk

A new book is available about the life of Maryknoll Fr. Gerard Hammond, a missionary with more than 60 years in ministry on the Korean Peninsula.

In 2019, Fr. Gerard Hammond, MM, gave a series of nine interviews to researchers at the Catholic Institute of Northeast Asia Peace that have been published in English in a book entitled “The Romance of the Mission: A Story of a Maryknoll Missionary Who Loved Both Koreas.” First published in Korean in 2020 under the title “The Journey of a Missionary,” the English translation of the book is now available for sale by Amazon as a paperback and ebook.

With more than 60 years in ministry based in South Korea, Fr. Hammond told the interviewers about his experiences pastoring people recovering from the devastation of war in South Korea as well as people isolated behind the world's last iron curtain in North Korea. Looking back, Fr. Hammond's message to readers is “more compassion is needed, and more risk.”

In a chapter called “Hard Times and Good Times,” Fr. Hammond describes the first church where he served as a pastor in the early 1960s. “The neighborhood was particularly impoverished in a country already devastated by conquest, colonialism, and war. North Korean refugee parishioners and young priests alike, we all struggled to

build our community together.” Remembering the bitter cold winters and thin shoes and socks, Fr. Hammond said, “Despite all the physical deprivations, the passion and sincerity of their faith was unwavering.”

For the last 20 years of his ministry, Fr. Hammond participated in quarterly visits to reclusive North Korea delivering lifesaving medications to people suffering from multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, the deadliest form of the highly contagious respiratory illness that often requires at least two years of treatment.

In his last interview at the end of 2019, Fr. Hammond said, “It is now four years since I have been able to return to North Korea with medicine for multidrug-resistant TB patients. I never had the chance to say goodbye and to mention that I had hoped to live the remaining years of my life in close contact with them. Together we were builders of reconciliation, unity and peace.”

Now 90 years old, Fr. Hammond has demonstrated with his life that a culture of encounter and dialogue is the way to dispel fear and build peaceful relationships. §

Faith in action: Read Fr. Hammond's book.

<https://mogc.info/RotM-GH>

Guatemala: Election Landslide

A candidate running on an anti-corruption platform unexpectedly overtook the former first lady.

Bernardo Arevalo of the Semilla party took sixty percent of the vote in the run-off election on Sunday, August 20. The dark horse candidate who ran on an anti-corruption platform came in a close second in the previous round of voting, which we covered in the July-August 2023 issue of NewsNotes.

The win came despite brazen attempts by some judges and government officials to suspend and disqualify the candidacy in court. On July 13, armed and masked police raided the independent Electoral Tribunal's Citizen Registry Office as part of an investigatory probe—under the direction of an attorney general on the U.S. State Departments' list of Undemocratic and Corrupt Actors. The attorney general made clear her intentions to criminally target Semilla Party officials.

In response, thousands took to the streets to protest, and the opposition candidate briefly suspended her campaign in solidarity. European Union members and the House and Senate Chairs of the Foreign Affairs

Committees made public statements condemning the undemocratic actions. Thankfully, the election took place without incident.

What now remains is for the country to see the peaceful transfer of power from the current president to the new on January 14. While the margin of victory (over twenty percent) is too large for the current government officials to easily overturn, the international community will still need to be vigilant against threats to the legal process. President Biden congratulated Bernardo Arevalo as have other world leaders, but the electoral tribunal has not yet certified the results.

For the Semilla Party, the difficulties have just begun. The time between an election upset and the transfer of power are the most fragile for a democracy. Afterwards, President Bernardo Arevalo will face both an oppositional legislature and the pressure to justify his candidacy with tangible achievements. §

Youths Prevail in Held v. Montana

The first climate change lawsuit to go to trial is now the first climate change lawsuit victory.

Montana's First Judicial District Court of Lewis and Clark County ruled in favor of youths, led by Rikki Held, age 22, in a lawsuit against their home state for their government's failure to address climate change. In particular, the lawsuit overturned a state law that prevented environmental regulators from considering the effects of climate change when approving or rejecting mining projects. Judge Kathy Seely agreed with the plaintiffs that climate change, exacerbated by their government, denied them a healthy environment to which they were legally entitled.

The youths' case was strengthened by Montana's constitutional green amendment, which guarantees that "The state and each person shall maintain and improve a clean and healthful environment in Montana for present and future generations." Only two other states in the United States have similar such constitutional amendments (New York and Pennsylvania,) but nine other states have introduced similar amendments this year.

During the trial, the lawyers for the plaintiffs presented evidence on the effects of climate change and the deleterious impacts that it would have on the younger generations' lives. The government attorneys arguing in the defense offered that the emissions for which Montana is directly responsible are too miniscule to be of significance. Judge Kathy Seeley was not persuaded by this

reasoning, writing that, "emissions from Montana's fossil fuel consumption, extraction, and infrastructure are globally significant quantities" pointing out that by conservative estimates, the state's greenhouse gas emissions were comparable to those of the entire country of Argentina.

The decision will likely be appealed. However, as the first such lawsuit to face legal scrutiny, the outcome is an encouraging sign. The court decision is one which offers itself as a precedent for all other lawsuits of this kind, especially those arguing on the grounds of a green amendment. §

Photo of the youths courtesy of Our Children's Trust



The Bridgetown Initiative

A voice from the Caribbean island of Barbados offers a plan to save the broken global financial system.

The Bridgetown Initiative—named after the capital city of the climate-vulnerable island nation of Barbados—looks to be a way forward for global finance reform to address three intersecting global crises (debt, climate, and inflation).

Representing the concerns of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley first presented the Bridgetown Initiative at the UN Climate Talks COP27 in Egypt in 2022, where it was praised by leaders of the IMF, World Bank and France. Specifically, the initiative creates more sources from which developing countries can borrow to mitigate emissions that contribute to climate change and build resistance to its effects.

Climate disasters have escalated as the world passed the hottest year on record this past July. The impacts of climate change have fallen disproportionately upon the world's poorest nations, who have contributed the least to the cause of climate change, that is – the burning of fossil fuels.

In addition, many poorer nations are drowning in debt and facing rising costs of food and fuel. These nations require several trillion dollars to invest in low-carbon energy and build resistance to climate threats, a sum that neither wealthy nations nor private businesses are ready to provide.

The Bridgetown Initiative calls for funds to flow where they are most needed and, thus, help cut global emissions. With that support, the most vulnerable nations will also have more resources to invest in quality education, better health care, cleaner energy, and stronger infrastructure, all of which are key to ending extreme poverty.

Development finance today is not designed to respond to current global challenges such as climate change, leaving vulnerable countries in need of a new plan. If anything, the debt created by international financial institutions has served to reinforce poverty in countries that are hit the hardest by climate change. Prime Minister Mottley minced no words in pointing to the ongoing legacy of colonialism that is reflected in the manner in which these institutions structure debt. While wealthier countries borrow at interest rates between 1 to 4 percent, rates for poor countries hovers at around 14 percent.

The Bridgetown Initiative claims that the world rose to the occasion during covid and can do so again. With a few revisions over the last year, the current version of the initiative proposes six key actions to reform global financial

architecture:

1. Provide immediate liquidity support including rechannelling at least \$100 billion of Special Drawing Rights (the IMF's emergency currency last issued during the covid pandemic) that were left unused by wealthy nations.
2. Restore debt sustainability today and in the long-term and support countries in restructuring their debt with long-term low interest rates.
3. Dramatically increase official sector development lending to reach \$500 billion annual stimulus for investment in the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
4. Mobilize more than \$1.5 trillion per year of private sector investment in the green transformation.
5. Transform the governance of international financial institutions to make them more representative, equitable and inclusive.
6. Create an international trade system that supports global green and just transformations.

The Bridgetown Initiative has been gathering attention at many global forums. It was the focus of the New Global Financial Pact in Paris convened by President Emmanuel Macron in June 2023. At the gathering, Kenya's President William Ruto stated "We need a new financial architecture, where governance, where power is not in the hands of a few people."

The Bridgetown Initiative will be debated at the World Bank and IMF Annual Meetings in Marrakech in October, and the UN Climate Talks COP28 in Dubai in November.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen added her voice to the need for reform, calling on the World Bank and other multilateral development banks to "evolve" to address climate change: "If the global community benefits from investments in climate, then the global community should help bear the cost." §

Faith in action: Tell the World Bank that you support global finance reforms like the Bridgetown Initiative to protect the planet <https://mogc.info/GC-POPCE>

Summit of the Amazon: New Plan to Protect Rainforests

Indigenous peoples join presidents of Amazon nations in pledge to protect the rainforest.

Thousands of people marched through the streets of the city Belém, in northern Brazil, chanting “Nothing is decided in the Amazon without Amazonians” during meetings about the rainforest Aug. 8 and 9 by the eight presidents of Amazon basin nations.

The presidents’ final joint statement, called the Belém Declaration, pledges to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples while also agreeing to a list of environmental policies to bolster regional cooperation.

Even though the presidents acknowledged that the Amazon is approaching a “tipping point,” they failed to agree on a common goal for ending deforestation and halting expansion of oil and gas production.

The World Assembly of the Amazon, a collective of peoples movements from the pan-Amazon countries that includes the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), presented their list of proposals to the presidents on the first day of meetings. Immediately following the Summit, the Assembly issued a statement that said:

“We have built a strong consensus over the past few months, which has succeeded in opening the Summit of Presidents of the Amazon to the participation of civil society. We convened the Amazon Dialogues, which were attended by almost 30,000 people, from Amazon organizations and popular movements. We recognize the efforts of the Brazilian government to facilitate these participatory spaces. Around 5,000 people marched through the streets of Belém chanting that nothing is decided in the Amazon without the Amazonians.

“We were able to get the voice of six representatives of the Amazon Dialogues plenary sessions to the presidents gathered at the Summit. Other representatives of the Peoples’ March were received by Brazilian government ministers and the Executive Secretary of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), presenting the Declaration of the Peoples of the Earth for the Amazon with our demands, which—with the radical urgency of this time—reflect the struggles and causes of all of us.

“We collectively evaluated the August 8th Presidential Declaration, the result of the Summit of the Presidents of the Amazon. It is important that the Presidents have relaunched the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO). We welcome the decision to welcome the fruits of the Amazon Dialogues, although we point out that there are important shortcomings in some of the reports.

“The Presidential Declaration recognizes that effective

solutions for the Amazon will only come from the full and effective participation of its people, especially indigenous peoples and women. We have succeeded in having our proposal for a Social ACTO heard and we hope to make progress in making it a reality. The Presidential Declaration failed to emphasize the need for the participation of other Amazonian segments, such as peoples of African descent, peasant communities and others. The agreement reached represents an important step in the construction of a sustainable, inclusive and solidary Amazon.

“The urgency that the document itself nominally recognizes at the beginning has not led to concrete and solid decisions on the most serious emergencies to be faced! There is no common goal for combating deforestation (only national commitments remain), there are no deadlines for solid actions in the face of the climate crisis. On oil and mining, there is only talk of “starting a dialogue on their sustainability”, far below the complaints and demands made by the peoples. Land conflicts, the criminalization and killing of leaders who defend their territories and the urgency of a popular agrarian reform are not taken into account.

“That is why we, the peoples of the Earth for the Amazon, popular movements and organizations, groups inspired by faith and strengthened by the spirituality of resistance, are not giving up and are continuing to put pressure on governments: there is no more time to lose!

“We call for a unity of initiatives that, from Belém to Belém, will take us to COP30, so that it can be the COP of an effective socio-environmental turnaround. Let’s change the history of the Amazon and the climate! Now or never again will we be given this opportunity....

“We already have a platform for meeting and consensus, and some decisive steps on this itinerary: the referendum for the Yes to Yasuní in Ecuador, next 20 August; the launch of the COP30 process in Brazil in parallel to COP28 in Dubai; the XI Pan-Amazonian Social Forum (FOSPA) in Bolivia, in 2024.

“We open this call to all people, peoples and movements passionate about life and willing to dive in, with all their strength, knowledge and skills, together with Mother Earth, for the present and the future.

“The Amazon calls the world to change: it is possible, now, or never again!” §

AIDS Relief Program Under Siege

The future of the highly successful U.S. global AIDS program is uncertain.

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is up for renewal by Congress by the end of the fiscal year, September 30. The bipartisan legislation, first introduced by President George W. Bush, has uneventfully been renewed three times before. In its twenty-year history, the program has seen some of the greatest foreign aid accomplishments, with an estimated 25 million lives saved, 5.5 million babies born HIV-free to HIV-positive mothers, and hundreds of thousands of orphans cared for.

PEPFAR is the "most amazing thing in the history of HIV," says Dr. Sharon Lewin, president of the International AIDS Society. Against this backdrop, one might think renewal of PEPFAR would be assured. Unfortunately, it appears that PEPFAR may become the latest U.S. culture war victim.

Early warning shots came from the Heritage Foundation in their May 1 report, "Reassessing America's \$30 Billion Global AIDS Relief Program." The report was written by Tim Meisburger, a former Trump appointee who has denied the validity of the 2020 election.

The report observes that "except in cases of rape or maternal transmission, HIV/AIDS in the U.S. and in developing countries is primarily a lifestyle disease (like those caused by tobacco)" and as such, it should "not enjoy greater priority than deadlier and more unavoidable diseases." In the view of the author, the fight against HIV/AIDS has been co-opted by the "Left" and the Biden administration, making resources available for "sexual and reproductive rights" which in turn implies abortion.

The head of PEPFAR, Ambassador-at-Large John Nkengasong, has denied the allegations, saying "PEPFAR has never, will not ever, use that platform in supporting abortion." Funding or promoting abortion through PEPFAR is prohibited by U.S. law. Abortion is also illegal or highly restricted in most countries with PEPFAR-funded programs, almost all of which are in Africa.

The concluding thrust of the Heritage Foundation report, however, focuses on the fact that "almost all political contributions from employees of PEPFAR agencies and assistance providers have gone to Democratic candidates and causes," a claim delved into with detailed breakdowns of campaign contributions from employees and accompanying charts.

On the same day the report was published, 31 pro-life groups, including the Heritage Foundation, joined a letter requesting an AIDS relief program that follows a "Mexico City policy," a Reagan-era policy that prevents any NGO that provides abortion counselling from receiving U.S. funding. The rule would eliminate at least three major NGOs

currently receiving PEPFAR funding.

As a White House source told the National Catholic Register, "the Mexico City Policy significantly inhibits our ability to confront health challenges, not only HIV/AIDS, but also tuberculosis and malaria, and also to support programs that prevent and respond to gender-based violence when it comes to women's health."

In Congress, Representative Chris Smith, formerly a leading champion of PEPFAR, wrote in his own letter to his colleagues: "President Biden has hijacked PEPFAR... in order to promote abortion on demand." The Congressman named the same NGOs highlighted in the Heritage Foundation report, and further alleged that funds have been illegally used to promote abortion.

None of the letters have provided any evidence or credible allegations that PEPFAR funding has gone towards abortion. Instead, Max Primorac of the Heritage Foundation is forthright with his reasoning. "They can say, 'we don't use PEPFAR money to support abortion,' but then they have their private money that goes ahead and does it," Primorac said. The fungibility argument should be a cause for concern for all NGOs, particularly religious organizations, whose charitable work could be barred from receiving federal funding by extreme secular voices in future governments.

Another letter, dated June 6, was sent to Congress under the subject "PEPFAR and Africa's Vales[sic]"; purportedly from 149 African leaders writing about values, "to express our concerns and suspicions that this funding is supporting so-called family planning and reproductive health principles and practices, including abortion, that violate our core beliefs." The letter, hosted on the Heritage Foundation website, includes the signatures of six Kenyan bishops. The Kenyan Bishops Conference released a statement signed June 30, confirming that the conference had no knowledge of the letter, nor had the bishops who were supposedly signatories.

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns sent a letter to Congress asking for renewal of an unaltered PEPFAR, signed by 44 faith organizations, many of them Catholic.

An unlikely ally, former Senator Rick Santorum wrote in defense of PEPFAR in a NewsMax op-ed: "A five-year, clean extension that carries us into the next administration may be the best outcome for everyone concerned. Especially for the millions of people living with—not dying from—AIDS, and who thank Americans for keeping them alive daily." §

Faith in action: Tell Congress to renew funding for PEPFAR at <https://mogc.info/PEPFAR>

UN: Insufficient Progress on Development Goals

Midway to 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 are woefully behind schedule.

At the High Level Political Forum held in New York from July 9 to July 20, the United Nations prognosticated on the future of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. The forum, in preparation for the SDG Summit with the General Assembly of heads of state, specifically focused on the progress of the goals on Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Sustainable Cities and Communities, and Partnerships for the Goals. The prognostications were grim.

Maryknoll missionaries were represented at the forum by Father John Sivalon, MM, and Sister Margaret Lacson, MM. The two reported back a harrowing global picture: the number of displaced persons worldwide is at the highest levels ever; global warming continues to increase, and even at present levels, threatens the very existence of small island developing nations; natural disasters are becoming much more dramatic and frequent; and rising debt and rising prices are crippling the most vulnerable nations.

For progress on the SGDs, only 12 percent of the targets on most of the goals had been reached and some goals had degraded. Secretary General António Guterres was most forthright in his remarks to the delegates, saying that while it was true that the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine had deterred progress in reaching the goals, little progress had been made even before the pandemic and war.

The lack of success was evident in the state of global access to clean water and food and nutrition: 2.4 billion people are living in water stressed countries. Other species are already being lost because of the loss of wetlands. Water-caused disasters are increasing in frequency and severity. Generalized national statistics tend to hide the disparities that exist with most people who lack access to clean water living in the rural areas. Among them, women and girls are often spending three hours a day fetching water for drinking, cooking, and bathing.

For food and nutrition, the forum presenters cited the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023 report. “Approximately 2.4 billion individuals, largely women and residents of rural areas, did not have consistent access to nutritious, safe, and sufficient food in 2022. Child malnutrition is still alarmingly high. In 2021, 22.3 percent (148.1 million) children were stunted, 6.8 percent (45 million) were wasted, and 5.6 percent (37 million)

were overweight. While global hunger numbers have stalled between 2021 and 2022, there are many places in the world facing deepening food crises. Over 122 million more people are facing hunger in the world since 2019 due to the pandemic, repeated weather shocks, and conflicts, including the war in Ukraine. As urbanization accelerates, there is a noticeable increase in the consumption of processed and convenience foods, leading to a spike in overweight and obesity rates across urban, peri-urban, and rural areas.”

The failure, the secretary general said, was due much more to the lack of commitment of member states to live up to the promises they made in 2015, when they unanimously agreed to these goals. The central issue is the failure of nations to provide the funding they promised. Thus, he called for a new stimulus to make up for the lost time. His stimulus proposal includes \$500 billion each year for the next seven years to be spent on implementing the goals.

Father Sivalon reflected on the forum, “On every one of the SDGs there was a singular sense that the problems facing us and our common home can be solved by ‘science, technology, and innovation.’ And while many decried the silo mentality of agencies, governments, and major groups, and blamed this mentality for further delaying progress, the one-dimensional approach of ‘science, technology, and innovation’ escaped all but one of the presenters.

“As we listened to panel discussions, researchers’ reports, and country interventions, I reflected on how Pope Francis’ holistic approach to social and ecological problems embodied in ‘Laudato Si’ had not been heard:”

Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it. (Laudato Si’ 63) §

The Plight of Christians and Palestinian Children in the Holy Land

Extremism has led to the most violent year in the Holy Land since 2005.

In December 2022, the Knesset returned Benjamin Netanyahu to power as Israel's Prime Minister after his 2021 ousting due to corruption charges. Netanyahu's government has pledged to prioritize settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories and the annexed East Jerusalem. This has led to accelerated violent attacks on Palestinians, home demolitions and evictions, and desecrations of Christian and Muslim holy sites.

Incidences against Christians include vandalism at the Cenacle Convent and a cemetery in the Old City of Jerusalem. Jonathan Kuttab (a Palestinian Christian and a Human Rights lawyer) said about these acts, "Attacks by religious fanatics on places of worship and individuals of another religion are... despicable. They go beyond racism and discrimination in that they invoke the name of God in justifying bitter hatreds and hostilities against entire communities. Those performing the attacks do so with zeal, venom, and a feeling that they are serving God. In a frightening incident recently, Jewish fanatics attacked Stella Maris Monastery in Haifa, claiming it is a Jewish holy site." Stella Maris Monastery is a Catholic monastery belonging to the Religious Order of Discalced Carmelites.

Moreover, there has been an increased clamp down on access to worship for Christian and Muslim worshippers. On Holy Saturday, only 1,800 Christians were allowed to worship at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, down from the high of 11,000. On August 18, Israeli Police prevented thousands of Christians from reaching Mount Tabor to mark the Feast of the Transfiguration for the second consecutive year.

The Israeli government proposed incorporating the Mount of Olives into its national park plan, thereby placing it under control of the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority. This could deprive Christian denominations of holy sites held by the Armenian and Greek Orthodox Patriarchates, the Catholic Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, and the Russian Orthodox Church. The site holds immense spiritual significance for Christians globally.

Meanwhile, more than 200 Palestinians and nearly 30 Israelis have been killed since the beginning of 2023, the deadliest year since 2005. In the town of Huwara, hundreds of Israelis attacked Palestinians with a violence so brutal that the Israeli military commander for the West Bank called it a "pogrom." A pogrom is a violent mob attack approved or condoned by authorities against

persons and property of a religious, racial, or national minority. According to CNN, the commander said the Israel Defense Forces were not prepared to prevent rioters from setting fire to Palestinian homes and businesses or from blocking emergency responders.

Recently, the world witnessed a show of military collective punishment when Israeli forces invaded Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank in the middle of the night. The New York Times reports that Israel cordoned off the refugee camp in Jenin, pummeled it from the air and ground and destroyed crucial infrastructure for water and electricity. Since 2022, Jenin has endured near-daily incursions by Israeli forces.

In May 2022, an Israeli officer killed a Palestinian-American journalist, Shireen Abul Akleh, in Jenin. Since then, there has been no accountability for her death.

Rep. Andre Carson re-introduced the Justice for Shireen Act in Congress (H.R.3477) to identify individuals and entities who carried out the attack, to identify any U.S. defense materials, funds, or services implicated, and to provide any relevant unredacted report.

Rep. Betty McCullum introduced the (H.R.3103) to protect the Palestinians arbitrarily arrested and detained in Israeli military prisons without trial, including children. The bill ensures that Israel does not use U.S. funds to commit human rights violations in the West Bank.

The United States gives \$3.8 billion to Israel in military support alone. Support for Palestinians in the form of \$75 million in food assistance is being obstructed by Rep. Michael McCaul and Sen. James Risch, despite the appropriations already being passed in Congress' 2023 budget. §

Faith in action: Ask Congress to support the legislation mentioned in this article

- Justice for Shireen <https://moggc.info/HR3477>
- Protect Palestinian Children <https://moggc.info/HR3103>

Ask for the release of refugee food assistance funds to Palestinian Refugees <https://moggc.info/UNRWA>

Resources

1. **Event: Webinar Roundtables** “Catholic Voices Confronting Violence with the Power of Active Nonviolence,” Catholic Nonviolence Initiative
 - **Sept. 1** 10AM ET - Latin America and Caribbean (Spanish) <https://mogc.info/CNI-LAC>
 - **Sept. 11** 7AM UTC - Asia/Pacific <https://mogc.info/CNI-AP>
 - **Sept. 19** 12PM ET - Africa (English and French) <https://mogc.info/CNI-Af>
 - **Sept. 21** 3PM UTC Migration in the Americas (English and Spanish) <https://mogc.info/CNI-mig>
2. **Event: March to End Fossil Fuels** hosted by 528 organizations including Maryknoll OGC, held in Manhattan, New York on **Sept. 17**, 1PM ET <https://mogc.info/EFF-2023>
3. **Event: Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action 2023** coordinated by the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative from **Sept. 21** to **Oct. 2**, <https://mogc.info/CNI-DA>
4. **Book: *The Romance of the Mission - A story of a Maryknoll Missionary who loved both Koreas*** by Fr. Gerald Hammond, MM <https://mogc.info/RotM-GH>
5. **Book: *No Guilty Bystander - The Extraordinary Life of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton*** by Frank Fromherz, PhD and Suzanne Sattler, IHM from Orbis Books <https://mogc.info/NGB>
6. **Season of Creation Guide: “Let Peace and Justice Flow”** for the Season of Creation **Sept. 1-Oct. 4** <https://seasonofcreation.org/>
7. **Guide: “Summit of the Sustainable Development Goals”** by the Justice Coalition of Religious for the UN General Assembly to be held **Sept. 18-19** <https://mogc.info/JCoR-guides>
8. **Toolkit: “National Migration Week 2023”** by Justice for Immigrants Campaign of the USCCB for the week of **Sept. 18-24** <https://mogc.info/JFI-NMW-2023>
9. **Newsletter: from the Maasai International Solidarity Alliance** for September 2023, first issue <https://mogc.info/MISA-Sept2023>
10. **Statement: “Voice of the People, the Voice of God”** translation of statement by the Tanzanian Bishop’s Conference signed **Aug. 18** <https://mogc.info/TEC-TZ>
11. **Summary: Global Wealth Report 2023** by *inequality.org* of the annual UBS and Credit Suisse analysis of global private wealth <https://mogc.info/GWR-inequality>
12. **Report: “Trafficking in Persons Report June 2023”** by the U.S. Department of State <https://mogc.info/2023-Persons-Trafficking>
13. **Report: “State of the Occupation - Year 56”** joint situational report by the Platform network of Israeli NGOs <https://mogc.info/SotO-2023>
14. **Article: “Why Christian Organizations Want Congress to Reauthorize PEPFAR”** by Doug Fountain, Dr. Samuel Mwenda, and Dr. Tih Pius Muffih, for the Global AIDS Policy Partnership <https://globalaidspolicy.org/>
15. **Article: “The Humanitarian and Strategic Risks of US Cluster Munitions Transfers to Ukraine”** by Elias Yousif and Rachel Stohl for the Stimson Center <https://mogc.info/OpEd-CM>
16. **Article: “For Israelis and Palestinians, a Tragic Spiral Reemerges - Is the Holy Land seeing the beginning of a third intifada?”** by Robert Barron for the U.S. Institute of Peace <https://mogc.info/USIP-HL>
17. **Opinion: “She was lucky to escape Afghanistan. Two years later, she’s stuck in limbo”** by Catherine Rampell in the Washington Post on the need for the Afghan Adjustment Act <https://mogc.info/OpEd-Afghans>
18. **Pope Francis Message for World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation** celebrated **Sept. 1**, published May 13 on the Vatican website <https://mogc.info/Pope-WMD-2023>
19. **Pope Francis Message for World Migrant and Refugee Day** celebrated **Sept. 25**, published May 11 on the Vatican website <https://mogc.info/Pope-CC-2023>
20. **Maryknoll Lay Missioners Webinar** Join us on **Sept. 8**, 3PM ET to learn about Maryknoll Lay Missioners and discern if mission is right for you. <https://mogc.info/MKLM-Webinars>
21. **Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Webinars:** on **Oct 11**, 4PM ET, join Fr. Stephen Judd, MM, as he reflects on his ministry in Bolivia. <https://mogc.info/MM-webinars>