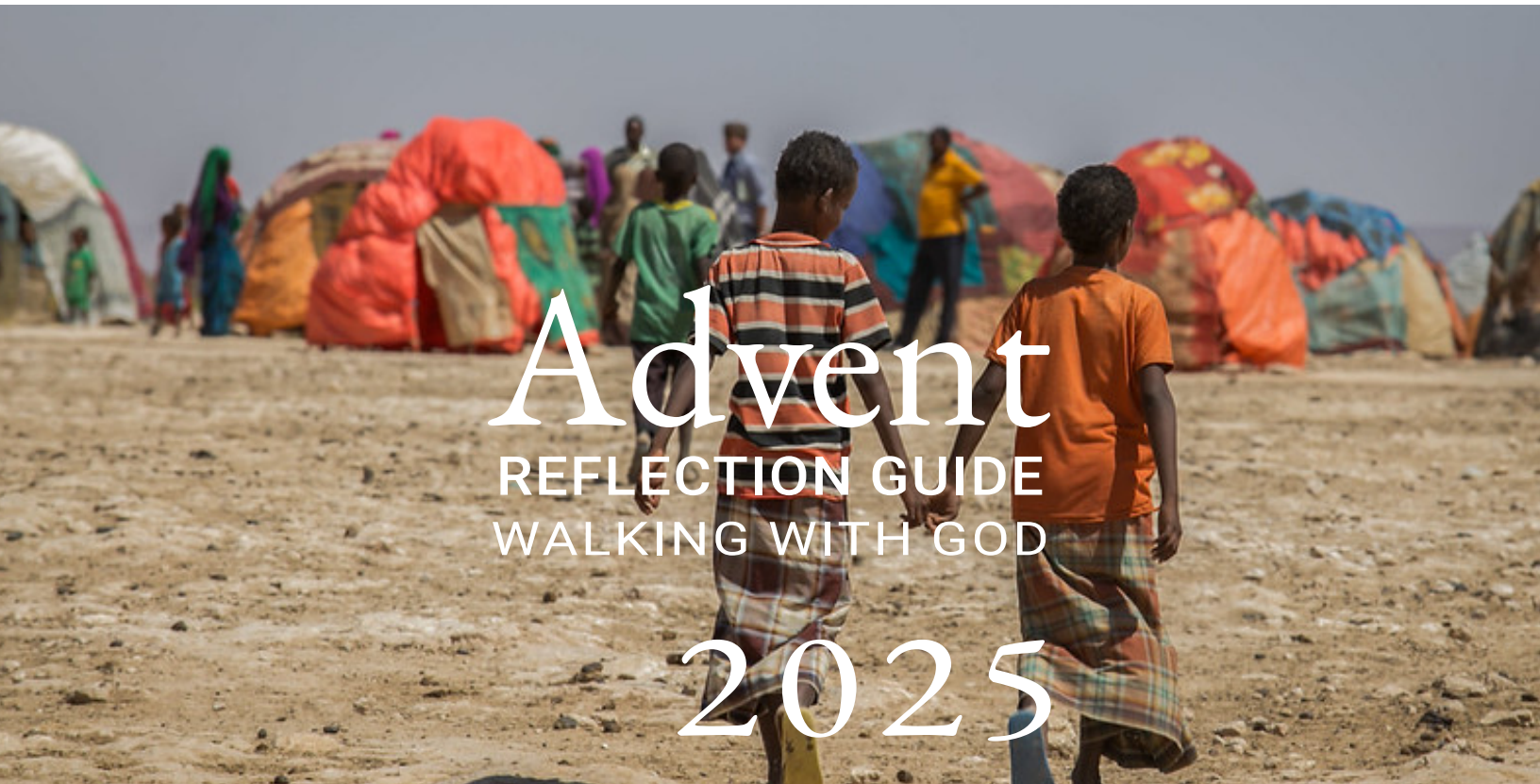




Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns



Advent

REFLECTION GUIDE
WALKING WITH GOD
2025

“

In a world darkened by war and injustice, even when all seems lost, migrants and refugees stand as messengers of hope. Their courage and tenacity bear heroic testimony to a faith that sees beyond what our eyes can see and gives them the strength to defy death on the various contemporary migration routes.

”

Pope Leo XIV

About this resource

In this Advent Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Scripture readings in light of Catholic social teaching and Maryknoll mission experience. Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life, to pray, and to renew your spirit.

Cover image: Photo of two boys walking to their settlement in Hadhawe village, Somali regional state, Ethiopia, February 1, 2017. Photo by UNICEF Ethiopia and licensed CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
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Quotes by Maryknoll missionaries come from their Scripture reflections available on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns website <https://maryknollogc.org/>

First Sunday of Advent: Photo of the bronze statue entitled "Let us Beat Swords into Ploughshares" in the United Nations garden in New York City, New York, by United Nations and licensed CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
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Second Sunday of Advent: Photo of Maryknoll Sister Ann Hayden with friends in Nicaragua in 1988, courtesy of Maryknoll Mission Archives <https://maryknollmissionarchives.org/maryknoll-poetry-at-easter/>. Screenshot of women of the Turu tribe singing in YouTube video by Heart Sound International
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Third Sunday of Advent: Photo of a mural of village life at the entrance of the district of Santa Rita in Chalatenango, El Salvador, taken December 22, 2022 by PzzaKing13 and available via Wikimedia commons, CC BY-SA 4.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mural_in_Santa_Rita,_Chalatenango.jpg
Photo of Heidi Cernaka courtesy of Heidi Cernaka.

Fourth Sunday of Advent: Photo of Maryknoll Affiliates at a prayer vigil in Albany, New York, on Nov. 13, 2025, from the Maryknoll Affiliates Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FsnWHi8n2/> Photo of Maryknoll Affiliates Don and Celine Woznica, winners of the 2025 Bishop McCarthy Spirit of Mission Award from the Maryknoll Lay Missioners
<https://mklm.org/mklm/spirit-of-mission-award-goes-to-celine-and-don-woznica-for-migrant-ministry/>

About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missionaries, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missionaries serve.

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First Sunday of Advent

*Therefore, stay awake!
For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.*
MATTHEW 24:42

The bronze statue Let us Beat Swords into Plowshares by Evgeniy Vuchetich in the United Nations garden in New York City.

Our three scripture readings for this first Sunday of Advent overflow with rich imagery that alerts us to be vigilant and make this a truly holy season. It is a time to walk with God by seeking peace, throwing off the works of darkness, and staying awake, always ready to meet the Lord.

The prophet Isaiah foresees that all nations will come to the Lord's mountain, hear God's word, respond by beating their swords into plowshares, and never train for war again.

A touching presentation of this profound vision is seen on the grounds of the United Nations in New York where one can see the dramatic bronze statue of a man hammering his sword into a tool for tilling the land, symbolizing the mission of the UN.

Paul's letter to the Romans encourages us to awake from sleep because it is a new day; we are to throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. In a word, we are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus presents examples of the need to be spiritually alert: most people missed the coming flood in Noah's time and the thief in the night catches the owner of the house unaware. Their lack of preparedness had disastrous results.

Our beloved Pope Francis pointed out that "Jesus, many times in his preaching, cautions us to be vigilant, to hold vigil, and keep watch." Francis added that on

one occasion, "Jesus advised watchfulness, 'for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'"

Indeed, 'vigilance' should be practiced 'in relation to the coming of the Lord.' On other occasions, Jesus emphasized the importance of 'being prepared,' for example, in the case of the ten maidens—both the prudent ones and those who were imprudent or unprepared. The former 'had everything prepared, even the oil for the lamps'; the latter, however, were complacent, 'without a thought to being prepared'.

Authentic watchfulness and preparedness demand concrete action on our part. We ask ourselves: Where and when am I sleepy and complacent? How can I turn my attention into concrete service for the needy, especially migrants and refugees? What actions can each of us take to become a vocal advocate for peace and disarmament?

As we begin a new liturgical year, we see Jesus in today's Gospel being insistent. As expressed by Pope Francis, Jesus constantly advises "watchfulness, prayer and vigilance in order to avoid temptation." Francis also refers to the example of Jesus instructing his disciples in the garden of olives. "They fell asleep." However, Jesus told them—and us—to "watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Mt 26:41). Heartfelt blessings for an fruitful Advent! ✠

- by Father James H. Kroeger, M.M.

Questions for Reflection

In what ways are you “sleepy and complacent”?

How can you turn your attention into “concrete service for the needy”?

Readings

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

Lighting the candle

One purple candle

We light this candle because, like God’s people centuries ago, we need a Savior who will forgive our sins and restore our hearts.

Prayer

Loving God, You call us to share your love. As a new missionary age opens, where the frontiers of mission are no longer solely geographical, but also structural, caging people into lives dominated by poverty and suffering, help us to be missionaries of hope with a vision for justice and peace for all.

Inspire us to open our arms and hearts to migrant brothers and sisters fleeing violence and fear. May we never meet their anguish with cold indifference or discrimination.

Move us to honor their human dignity above all else. Teach us that true mission is remaining with those who are suffering. Inspire us to proclaim Christ’s mercy and love through hospitality, compassion, and solidarity.

Strengthen our faith to be welcoming missionaries of hope. Amen.

- Susan Gunn, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns



Flávio's first Theater of the Oppressed play in 2005, performed at a Maryknoll parish in Brazil.

I am inspired when I meet young people in Brazil who are concerned about the destruction of our environment and who commit themselves to doing something creative to make a change for the better.

One example is the work that Maryknoll lay missionary Flávio Rocha [in photo] has been doing with the “Theater of the Oppressed,” where young people pick a topic of social concern to them and make a dramatic theatrical presentation in a public arena. They present the problem and then invite spectators from the crowd to enter into the scene and present a creative solution.

Jesus calls us onto the stage of life and invites us to present a creative solution to heal the social ills which bring about so much suffering. Do we have the courage and faith to respond? Maybe alone we don’t, but together with others we can!

- Father Dennis Moorman
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

Response

Use the four-session study guide “Papal Teaching and Migration” by USCCB Justice for Immigrants Campaign for small groups study and discussion
<https://bit.ly/USCCBPTM>



Second Sunday of Advent

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
All flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

LUKE 3:4-6

Maryknoll Sister Ann Hayden (far left) laughing with friends in Nicaragua in 1988.

Pope Leo XIV, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, said “Love for the Lord, then, is one with love for the poor. The same Jesus who tells us, ‘The poor you will always have with you’ also promises the disciples: ‘I am with you always.’”

Our new pope goes on to say, “We likewise think of [Jesus] saying: ‘Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’ This is not a matter of mere human kindness but a revelation: contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord. In the poor, he continues to speak to us.”

We live in a world similar to the times of the prophet Isaiah when Israel was being attacked by the Assyrians and Egyptians. Today there are wars happening around the world, from Ukraine to Sudan.

Here in the United States, which once proudly welcomed the poor and weary to our shores from many nations, those who are poor are sent away empty and homeless, the immigrant is shunned and refugees fleeing war or gang violence are sent to jail or away to third countries, while the rich live in luxurious homes and the president constructs a new ballroom.

The first reading from Isaiah proclaims the arrival of David, the son of Jesse who is righteous and will heal a wounded people and proclaim a time of peace and prosperity. People of faith everywhere are called to help build peaceful space where all are welcomed as neighbor and encouraged by the warm embrace of love and community support.

The second reading encourages us to be steadfast,

to live in harmony, and to have hope. We need to gaze at our lives with a love that takes action for the real truth, because love and hope know the way to inclusion and mutual mercy.

The quote from the prophet Isaiah that is read with the Alleluia acclamation before the proclamation of the Gospel this Sunday is particularly joyful and encouraging: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths: all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” The command to “prepare the way” and “make straight his paths” suggests that people have an active role to play. We can and should clear spiritual and moral obstacles in our lives. And the term “all flesh” breaks down boundaries and offers limitless hope that God’s grace is not restricted to one group.

In the gospel reading from Matthew, we hear John the Baptist quoting Isaiah to “prepare the way of the Lord,” and “make straight the path” of God among us. If we are indeed on a journey together, then we must slow down, spend quality time among friends and family while also inviting diversity among us by welcoming the “other.”

The imagery of clearing paths is an analogy for repentance and change. It suggests that the obstacles to salvation are not insurmountable mountains but figurative rough roads that can be smoothed out through intentional moral and spiritual effort.

In essence, John the Baptist is telling us “Get ready! You can do it! Something incredible and good is about to happen for everyone! Don’t miss it!”✠

- by Sister Ann Hayden, M.M.

Questions for Reflection

What “rough road” (habit, prejudice, fear) do you feel called to smooth out this Advent?

What is one way that you could “help build peaceful space where all are welcomed”?

Readings

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

Lighting the candles

Two purple candles

We light these candles because, like God’s people centuries ago, we need a Savior who will forgive our sins and restore our hearts.

Poem

Power asks:

How could you, why would you, leave your home?

Weariness answers:

We seek refuge from what
Robs the soul and breaks the body.
We have no faith in a future that steals our life.
So much has been taken from us
Our skin sags on our bones.
Our loss flaps around us like a vulture
Or like a demented “disappearing” cloak.
We want only to be seen with kindness
Or offered a shoulder to lean on and rest awhile.
We need to encounter a few hearts afire
With a little love for us.
Hearts ready to clear a path for our weary way
and perhaps to re-ignite the still warm ashes
Of our own, almost forgotten, fire of HOPE!

- Maryknoll Sister Ann Hayden



Tanzanians have taught me many times about the value of unity. Their Swahili proverbs abound with the notion:

“Umoja ni nguvu, utengano ni udhaifu.”
Unity is strength, division is weakness.

“Nguzo moja haijengi nyumba.”
One pillar does not build a house.

And a more earthy proverb: *“Kidole kimoja hakiui chawa.”* A single finger can’t kill a louse.

If we embrace unity, maybe we can learn to change the conversation: we can sit and listen, and we can be open to both sides of an issue. And in doing so, we practice the love that Jesus wants us to achieve.

- Sister Darlene Jacobs
Maryknoll Sisters

Response

Sign the Cabrini Pledge to remember our immigrant heritage and go deeper with our faith in response to current events.

<https://www.usccb.org/cabrinipledge>

Plan a “Stand with Migrants” rally and prayer vigil using a toolkit created by USCCB and sent to all U.S. dioceses. Ask your pastor about it and organize a rally and prayer vigil in your community.
<https://bit.ly/USCCBRallyToolkit>



Third Sunday of Advent

*Amen, I say to you, among those born of women
there has been none greater than John the Baptist;
yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*
MATTHEW 11:11

Mural of village life at the entrance of the district of Santa Rita in Chalatenango, El Salvador.

In this Sunday's reading from the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist waits in expectation from his prison cell. He receives reports about Jesus and wonders 'Is this the guy we've been waiting for?'

For all the hype, Jesus is making straight forward things happen: "the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Mt 11:5).

I imagine the incredulity of John the Baptist: "Is this *it*?"

As Maryknoll missionaries, we commit ourselves to a life of justice and nonviolence among the poor. From the outside, it often looks like: "Is *this it*?"

In my village in El Salvador, we bury the dead. We share *tamales* and coffee. We pray in people's homes. We embroider together and tell stories about the armed conflict. Is this *it*?

For in my village, we also feel the effects of U.S. migration policy. Salvadorans in the United States call home, frightened and scapegoated by society. A boy who had recently been deported from the United States was shut out of the Salvadoran school system for arriving irregularly mid-year. A 12-year-old girl here won't talk about what happened to her in Texas last year.

The hydra of forced migration is so monstrous, so multi-headed, that justice for migrants and refugees seems far off, unattainable.

But today's readings offer hope.

Jesus points out that the kingdom of God is also built upon small things: healing our neighbors, touching the wounds of the migrant, accompanying the poor and vulnerable.

Jesus doesn't absolve us from addressing structural injustices; rather, he frees us from becoming paralyzed by them: we become free to do *something*, for we cannot do *everything*, and do it with great love.

"Take as an example...the prophets," says our second reading. "Indeed we call blessed those who have persevered." (James 5:10-11). They were career-denouncers of structural injustice, yet prophets neither threw in the towel nor lived without hope.

Nowadays, I watch the Salvadoran girl deported from Texas begin to open up. "Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak," says Isaiah. She participates more in catechesis class. I visit her home and her mother. We share coffee. I wonder: *Is this it*?

For me, here, now, in El Salvador, yes— this is how God invites me to address the wounds of forced migration. To do something, not everything, but something: to attend and to heal with great love and attention, to participate in Psalm 146:

The Lord God keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets captives free.✠

- by Sarah Bueter, Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever felt the “Is this it?” tension between small acts of mercy and big structural injustices in the world?

What signs of hope for God’s saving power and justice do you see visible in your life or in the world that we can rejoice?

Readings

Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10; Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Lighting the candles

Two purple candles and one pink

We light these candles because, like God’s people centuries ago, we rejoice in the coming of our savior.

Prayer

O God, open our eyes so that we may see the needs of others; Open our ears that we may hear their cries; Open our hearts that we may feel their anguish and their joy. Let us not be afraid to defend the oppressed, the poor, the powerless, because of the anger and might of the powerful. Show us where love and hope and faith are needed, and use us to bring them to those places. Open our ears and eyes, our hearts and lives, that we may in these coming days be able to do some work of justice and peace for you.

Amen.

- *The Sabeel Center, Jerusalem*

Response

Explore “You Are Not Alone” a new program by the U.S. Catholic Bishops that lays out ways Catholics can provide direct aid and solidarity to immigrants in the United States. <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/you-are-not-alone/>



Living in El Paso, at a crossroads of the United States and Mexico, is excruciating.

I hear, see and feel the suffering of people who flee for their lives, who flee to protect their children’s lives, and have a door slammed shut in their faces.

As an immigration attorney, I meet people who pour out stories of torture, police violence, government threats and extortion, and people who talk about the dangers of waiting in Juarez to present their cases.

My heart breaks again and again each time I hear that a government authority decided that they are not in danger, they do not “deserve” asylum, they are not our problem.

Humanity is resilient, though, and people continue to hope against all odds. Solidarity and faith-based actions for justice inspire people to protect God among us by putting water in the desert and sheltering the homeless.

Thousands of volunteers give time and compassion, countless others pray for justice and love, and only God knows how many contribute money to support organizations that shelter and feed the migrants and fight for justice.

We don’t give up.

- Heidi Cernaka
Maryknoll Lay Missioners



Fourth Sunday of Advent

*"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"
MATHEW 1:23*

Maryknoll Affiliates in Albany, New York, hold signs at a prayer vigil on the feast day of St. Francis Xavier Cabrini, patron saint of immigrants, Nov. 14, 2025.

Last year, the Gospel reading for today focused on Mary's perspective. This year, we walk with Joseph. Both stories are profiles in courage and faith.

What do we know about Joseph? Not much, just that he is a carpenter. When Joseph learns his betrothed, Mary, is pregnant, he righteously plans to divorce her quietly, to protect her from public shame.

According to Old Testament law, Mary could have been stoned for being pregnant before marriage, as this was considered a crime punishable by death—if it were discovered.

An angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tell him, "do not be afraid" to marry Mary. Was Joseph afraid of breaking the law? Of harboring a criminal? Was he afraid that others would question his righteousness?

We know how the story ends so we cannot fully appreciate the dilemma. Few of us realize the terror young girls faced in this situation. Few of us credit foster father Joseph with integrity, empathy, compassion, selflessness and bravery.

Both Mary and Joseph demonstrated the courage and faith to do the right thing even when the law directed otherwise.

This tension between law and love is echoed today. Some people feel righteous when immigrants are deported, claiming they are violent criminals or a threat to our way of life who "stole their way here."

Yet, when we spend time with immigrants who lack papers, we see modern-day profiles of courage. Many leave behind horrendous situations in their home countries of extortion, corruption and brutal

violence. Would we not do anything to protect our own children from violence or poverty?

Operations by ICE agents—targeting a grandmother out to buy food, or a landscaper with Marine sons—may be legal, but are they truly the right thing to do?

A few years ago, we met a group of Central American men traveling north toward the United States. They were migrating in search of work to support their desperate families. Like Joseph, they felt called to this difficult journey, fraught with obstacles. And, like Joseph, they rose to the occasion, choosing to do what was right.

We recently met other migrants in Texas and in New York whose stories are like modern-day carpenters, trying to protect their families just as Joseph did. It takes a lot of courage to leave home and live and work in another country. Like Mary, they face the threat of "stoning" to remove them from our society.

What are we called to do in this fraught moment? What is the angel whispering in our dreams? What do Mary and Joseph teach us about doing the right thing for immigrants as opposed to being justified under the law?

In this Advent season, let us support organizations accompanying and assisting migrants, and support legislation that can improve the migrant path to citizenship. And let us recognize the quiet courage of many "little" people who are finding that they can be brave like Mary and Joseph, who took great risks to ensure that Christ was and is with us.✠

- by Louis and Janet Tullo, Maryknoll Affiliates

Questions for Reflection

Name an obstacle holding you or your community back from choosing the path of greater compassion and justice.

How can Joseph's example empower that choice?

Readings

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24

Lighting the candles

Three purple candles and one pink

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we trust in the coming of our savior.

Prayer

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, our first American Saint, pray for us. You came to the United States as an immigrant yourself, and worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor, the sick, and the otherwise marginalized who arrived on our shores.

As the Patroness of immigrants, you have a special concern for those displaced from their homeland in search of a new life. You understand their sufferings and the challenges they face as they navigate a new world in search of a new home.

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, intercede for migrant families who are separated from loved one, protect them from exploitation, and keep them safe.

May we, Blessed Frances Xavier Cabrini, receive through your prayers the grace to open our hearts so that we may provide hospitality for all who come in search of refuge. Give us the courage to welcome every stranger as Christ in our midst. Amen.

- USCCB Mother Cabrini Prayer Card

Response

Watch the one-hour recording of "Migrant Accompaniment In an Era of Mass Deportation" by Ruben Garcia, founder of Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas. <https://bit.ly/RGarcia2025>



We know that we cannot continue to live the way that we do – in the United States alone, 10 percent of households own 72 percent of U.S. wealth, and globally, the U.S. is home to five percent of the world's population but uses 30 percent of the world's resources and creates 30 percent of the world's waste. Put another way, it would take nearly 3-5 Earths for everyone in the world to live at the level of our present U.S. lifestyle. And yet how do we go about changing the way that we live?

Let us travel in our minds for a moment to Oaxaca, a state in southern Mexico, where Maryknoll lay missionaries once served. Specifically we find ourselves in the Mixtec Indian municipality of Santiago Tilantongo. There, land is held communally and its resources are shared among all the people. Similarly, participation in community activities, such as road repair, is a shared experience. Likewise, participation in local Indigenous community governance is an obligation for all. If we could modify our way of life in the U.S., from one of economic competition and accumulation of personal wealth, to one that was more cooperative and sharing of resources, would we not all be better off?

- Don and Celine Woznica
Maryknoll Affiliates - Chicago Chapter