The ADVOCATE

Queen of Peace Quarterly Newsletter **Fall 2026**

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Editor's Note:

As we approach the mid-term election, the stakes have never been higher to preserve our democracy. Every vote counts to ensure a fair election. The Fall Advocate includes two articles that remind us of the roadblocks faced by our Black sisters and brothers as they sought the right to vote. Fr. Tim reminds all of us to put our faith to action and if you haven't already — VOTE — and urge others to do the same.

Paula Cruickshank
Editor, *The Advocate*

Growing Up a Black Child in Arlington and OLQP Voting Rights Advocacy

By Veronica Dabney

In the early 1950s, my parents were Republicans, as were most Black people. After all, it was the party of Lincoln. I vaguely recall my father lifting me up on his shoulders so I could get a better view of an Eisenhower motorcade. During my parents' formative years, Presidents Herbert Hoover and then Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) had served in the White House. Though FDR, a Democrat, had done much more for the marginalized, including Blacks, during the Depression and WWII, there were still humiliations and unequal treatment, even though most of the young men, including my father, served in the military.

FDR needed a workforce at home—that workforce included my mother, who worked at the Pentagon. When the war ended, President Truman, in 1948, desegregated the military. So, Blacks, in the DC area at least, were a little better off than before. Yet when the GI Bill passed, 15 million Black soldiers were excluded. One step forward, two steps back. Very little had changed. In many states they still couldn't vote.

In the late 40s, my family moved from DC to Arlington's Green Valley where there was housing built for Black military, mostly veterans, and their families. Then, Green Valley was one of three segregated communities in Arlington. It was a time of relative peace between the ending of the Korean War and the beginning of the Vietnam War. Around that time my mother joined the Catholic church. Fr. Michael Kanda, CSSp was the pastor then. Our family, which had grown to 8, became Catholic and attended the new all-Black Catholic church, Our Lady Queen of Peace.

Soon after, came the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education, desegregating public schools. A full 10 years would pass before public schools desegregated in Arlington County, but Catholic schools began desegregating right after the decision. All six of us were enrolled in Catholic schools, but we attended an all-Black elementary school, St. Joseph's in Alexandria. Other schools, including St. Thomas More and St. Charles, were integrated. My sisters and I would be among the first to attend an all-White high school in Alexandria, St. Mary's Academy.

What has all this to do with voting? Everything.

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Growing Up Black
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The hope of the segregated Black communities in Arlington and others around the country rested in gaining access to the ballot and the ability to have a voice in governing; choosing leaders who listened to us; and enjoying equally all the advantages others enjoyed. A crucial aid in conveying our story was a new way the world could see it — the television. Our story could be broadcast directly into the living rooms of any family who owned a set.

It didn't take long for advantages of broadcast media to become evident. No sooner had the ink dried on Brown v. Board than Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy visiting Money, Mississippi, was abducted, tortured and killed in August 1955. The picture of his bloated, scarred body is engrained in the memories of anyone who saw it. It was a turning point — everything changed.

In that same year, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat and 26-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) was chosen to lead a movement that would change the course of history, not only for Blacks, but for all marginalized people in this country. It was the precursor to the Women's Movement. MLK led the successful Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama and the movement began. And we, along with the rest of the country, viewed it all on television.

Meanwhile at OLQP, in the late 50s, Fr. David Ray, CSSp, became our pastor. He was tall, stern, and very imposing, but fiercely dedicated to racial equality. Around that time, MLK and other leaders met with President Eisenhower, but were frustrated by his slow pace and reluctance to get involved. During the 1960 presidential campaign, MLK and the majority of Blacks, especially the Catholics, decided to support John Kennedy (JFK), not because he was Catholic (most Blacks weren't Catholic), but because he took the bold step of intervening and securing MLK's release from a Georgia jail – who was arrested for the "crime" of participating in a peaceful protest. Candidate, Vice President Richard Nixon chose the other side. JFK's social justice platform and his call for desegregation won over Black communities nationwide.

To my knowledge, Fr. Ray (and none of the priests who followed him) ever proselytized or campaigned for any candidate. But I do know that as Spiritans, they are dedicated to evangelizing to the poor and marginalized. Among my most enduring memories of Fr. Ray is when he acquired a school bus to take several parishioners to the "March on Washington" on August 28, 1963, where we witnessed Dr. King's historic "I Have a Dream" speech. And, even in that speech, there was no mention of politics or of the President. But I think everybody knew the assignment.

Just two months earlier JFK had announced his plans to sign a Civil Rights Bill. A day later, Medgar Evers, an NAACP official, was killed in Mississippi. A month after the March on Washington, in September, four girls were killed in a church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. And on November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. We witnessed it all on TV. It was devastating.

Lyndon Johnson (LBJ) was now President and the next presidential election was fast approaching in November 1964. LBJ signed the Civil Rights Act before the election, thus ensuring the majority of the Black vote, at least where they could vote. (He signed the Voting Rights Act in 1965 after the election.) Again, there was no campaigning in church for either one of the candidates. (He ran against Barry Goldwater.) But I do recall that OLQP arranged car pools to take voters to the polls. I was just old enough to vote for the first time that year. I won't tell who I voted for.

I feel fortunate to have witnessed Both Sides of segregation and the aftermath. So, despite what others think today, I feel certain that we will NEVER go back.

African Americans: The Quest for Political Equality

By Shiela Harmon Martin

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Centuries prior to the penning of these words in the Declaration of Independence and for almost two centuries later, the equality they evoked did not apply to African Americans. On the battlefield of equality, the quest for political equality in the American political system has been a long and arduous journey. The issue of race has been an indelible barrier denying African Americans the basic rights conferred to other Americans by the U. S. Constitution. Securing the right to vote dominated the black political agenda from Emancipation until the 1960s.

As the founding fathers of this nation made their famous Declaration of Independence from Great Britain, thousands of African inhabitants in the colonies were in bondage.

Thomas Jefferson's antislavery rhetoric in the original draft threatened to undermine the birth of the nation, as adamant representatives of southern states demanded the deletion of such blasphemous language.

As the Framers of the U.S. Constitution deliberated and debated the structural framework of the government, they never considered conferring equality — legal, political or social — on the slave population. It would take Supreme Court Chief Judge Roger Taney's infamous declaration in the Dred Scott decision that "…. they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit." (Dred Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S.393 1857) and the nation's bloodiest Civil War before the issue of slavery would be confronted.

When President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, freeing all slaves residing in rebel states, it was the beginning of the end of the institution of slavery in the South. However, it would take the passage of the 13th amendment which abolished slavery; 14th amendment which conferred citizenship rights; 15th amendment which provided black men the right to vote and a series of civil rights laws in the 1860s and 1870s to guarantee the newly freed slaves protection in the exercise of their constitutional rights.

During the brief period known as Reconstruction, newly freed men, under the protection of federal troops throughout the South, participated in the political arena - voting and holding elective office. African American men served at all levels of government —local, state and national.

The nadir of the Reconstruction era began with the election of Rutherford Hayes as U.S. President and his political deal with southerners to end military occupation of the South, lending tacit approval to white supremacy in that region. The rise of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and The White Knights of the Camellia and violence restored the South to its "beloved way of life" as segregation of the races became the social instrument by which African Americans were "kept in their place" — denied social, economic, educational, and political equality.

Segregation was enforced by a variety of public and private sanctions, from "black codes" to lynch mobs. To ensure political disenfranchisement, legal impediments like poll taxes, literacy tests, and all white primaries were developed. States as well as the federal government sanctioned and upheld separate but equal as constitutional in the Supreme Court case, Plessy v. Ferguson.

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The Quest for Political Equality

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For almost 100 years, African Americans, through individual acts of courage and organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Congress of Racial Equality, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee sought to abolish lawful segregation. On the battlefield of equality, one of the hardest fought battles by African Americans was to exercise their voting rights.

From 1870 until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the majority of African Americans did not participate in the political process. It was not until the mid-20th century that the struggle for political equality was launched on many fronts.

Under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the civil rights movement developed and refined political techniques, including nonviolent direct action. The nonviolent direct action strategy was utilized in numerous cities and gained widespread support as marchers in orderly and peaceful demonstrations were viciously attacked with fire hoses, dogs and cattle prods. The zenith of King's nonviolent philosophy occurred on August 28, 1963 when more than 200,000 blacks and whites participated in a march on Washington, DC which led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

By 1965, in some areas of the South, attempting to vote was a death wish. Selma, Alabama became the staging ground in the battle over voting rights and the Edmund Pettus Bridge became the symbol of the bridge to freedom. On March 7, 1965, infamously known as "bloody Sunday", the world watched in horror as Alabama State Troopers attacked peaceful marchers as they attempted to walk to Montgomery, Alabama to protest their lack of protections in efforts to exercise the right to vote.

On August 6, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965 hailing it as "one of the most monumental laws in the entire history of American freedom." With the passage of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), African Americans had at last gained access to one of the most potent tools of democracy — the vote.

Dr. Shiela Harmon Martin, Professor Emerita of Political Science, University of the District of Columbia has been a member of OLQP since 1989 and is presently serving her 7th term on the Parish Advisory Board.

Catholic Heart Work Camp 2026 – The Group Lead Perspective

by Rebecca Grant Jenkins

The tagline for Catholic Heart Work Camp (CHWC) is, **"**Love. Serve. Connect.**"** Catholic Heart Work camp, established in 1993, provides week-long mission trips to serve in neglected, marginalized communities. Adult-led work teams of teens are assigned to service projects with local agencies. Parish groups sleep on a school floor. The days begin at 6:15am and lights out is at 11:00pm. Every evening there is music, a talk, and prayer.

Who are these adults who sometimes take time off work to accompany our young people? Rebecca Grant Jenkins, who coordinates the trip for OLQP, asked two group leaders, Kimberly Davis and John Lynch, about their experiences at CHWC.

1. Was this your first work camp?

Kimberly: I did not make Michigan but attended the two prior years, in Niagara Falls and Morganton, NC."

John: Yes, but I did go to Army Basic Training right after high school at Fort Dix, NJ. Catholic Heart Work Camp was a lot more fun (and it had a lot less cussing.

2. Name one or two experiences at Catholic Heart Work Camp that made the biggest impression on you.

Kimberly: The Four Corners experience (consisting of a Dedicated Prayer; the Sacrament of Reconciliation; Prayer and Support; and Peer Ministry) is a game

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Catholic Work Camp

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changer for the youth and for the adults. But the overall tone and tenor of the camp consistently demonstrates that being Catholic is cool. Excellent worship music, adoration, seeing parish priests as "regular people" and digging down deep into mission work. I loved it all — just wish we had more sleep!

CHWC leaders putting their faith to action:
Kimberly Davis ("Saint Trainer")
and
John Lynch ("Lawn Mower").

John: The evening worship programs had the biggest impression on me. Basically, if you weren't singing, you weren't really participating. I'm not much of a singer. If I sing at church, I keep the volume down. Most people would rather listen to fingernails scraping a chalk board than listen to me sing.

But the musicians did a fantastic job getting the kids into the music. Throw in the Holy Spirit and a solid sound system and that place was rocking. The mood was infectious. I felt compelled to sing and to sing loudly. I've never had so much fun worshiping the Lord and I've rarely found worship so moving. Brandon Lake's song "Gratitude", which we belted out every night, sums it up best:

So come on, my soul
Oh, don't you get shy on me
Lift up your song
'Cause you've got a lion
inside of those lungs
Get up and praise the Lord.

I also found Four Corners to be memorable, especially the student-adult prayer "corner." I sat there by myself for quite a while, watching other adults visit and pray with the students. A young person paid me a visit and we prayed together for several of their intentions. It made my day!

3. How do you think the OLQP youth grow from attending Catholic Heart Work Camp?

Kimberly: I see it in the connections to our Parish — with each other, with Rebecca as the leader of Youth Ministry and with our mission of service. CHWC lets our youth grow in commitment to service and to each other. It is a foundation in building a true church community.

CHWC is one of the best, if not the best, investments we have made in the lives of both our daughters. There is no way alone that we could have brought them this close to God and our parish community.

John: There's no way they got through CHWC without growing closer to Jesus Christ. We started each day in the best possible way — with Mass. Then, we worked every day on a Catholic retreat campus, where Jesus was front and center. And to cap each

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Catholic Work Camp

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day off, the keynote speaker taught us how to become the best version of ourselves and grow in our faith, while the music team, with the Holy Spirit's help, had the kids praising Jesus at the top of their lungs. It was truly inspiring to see the youth singing their hearts out about God and their faith.

The youth also grew by meeting fellow teenagers from all over the country. For the work, we were divided into teams, each of which included youth and adults from different parishes. This setup facilitated making God-based connections with strangers, who within hours, were no longer strangers.

Finally, the kids grew by practicing servant-leadership. Some of the work we performed was humbling and required a sacrificial heart. For example, a urinal in the men's room was badly discolored by rust deposits over much of its surface. I was amazed when I saw that a teenager from another team and parish had cleaned it to the point it was virtually spotless. Other volunteers, some from our parish, spent hours on their hands and knees in the baking sun pulling weeds. Sign me up for next year!

Remembering Father Joe

By Madeleine and Melvyn Mendez

For those of us who were blessed to know Father Joseph "Joe" Nangle, OFM, his passing on December 14, 2024, left an emptiness that is difficult to put into words. Father Joe was much more than a priest to our community. He was a spiritual leader, a teacher, a friend, and a constant example of what it means to live our faith through love, humility, compassion, and service to others.

Father Joe shared a particularly special relationship with the community of the Sunday 1:00 p.m. mass at OLQP. He cared deeply for our community and walked alongside us through many moments of our lives. His kindness made people feel welcomed, his humility made him approachable, and his commitment to justice challenged us to look beyond ourselves and recognize our responsibility to care for one another.

After Father Joe passed away, we knew that although he was no longer physically present with us, the lessons and love he left behind could not simply end. We wanted to find a meaningful way to continue honoring someone who had given so much of himself to our community.

Father Joe's birthday, July 20th, gave us that opportunity.

In July 2025, members of our 1:00 p.m. mass community traveled from Northern Virginia to Butler, New Jersey, where Father Joe is buried. Our current priest, Father Martin Vu, joined us on this special journey. At the cemetery, Father Martin led a beautiful mass in Father Joe's memory. Together, we prayed, reflected, sang his favorite hymns, and stood beside Father Joe's resting place as one community.

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Remembering Father Joe

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That first visit became the beginning of a tradition.

Each year, on the weekend closest to Father Joe's birthday, our community returns to Butler to visit him. The 4-hour journey allows us to come together and remember the love, humility, guidance, and unwavering support Father Joe gave us throughout his years at our church.

Father Joe taught us through his words, but even more powerfully through the way he lived. His compassion for the poor, the marginalized, and those facing injustice showed us what it truly means to put our Catholic faith into action. Through his example, we learned that faith calls us to recognize the dignity of every person, seek justice, and serve others with love and humility.

Although his chair at Mass may now be empty and his voice no longer fills our church, his presence remains deeply rooted in our community.

The visit to Father José was initiated by the OLQP Ministry FranciscoClarianagroup. This is one of our ways of expressing our deep gratitude for his life and for the wonderful legacy he left us.

Below are the reflections of some members of our community after visiting Padre José's Grave.

"For me, visiting his tomb two years after his passing has been a very special experience … Each time I have felt a deep sense of peace, as if the essence of Father José were still present there, reminding me of his love, his joy, his simplicity, and that very special way he had of bringing us closer to God."

~ Carmen Elena Rios

"I visited Padre José's grave with immense love and gratitude, for he was a very special person to my family and cared deeply for my mother. He was present at the most important moments of my life: he officiated at our wedding and baptized our children, as well as administering their First Communion and Confirmation. He was part of our family history and our life of faith."

~ María Teresa Laguna

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"The 66th Anniversary of Fr. Joe's ordination was a cause for celebration among the 1 pm Mass community."

Visitng Father Joe

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"This annual pilgrimage not only honors his memory but also strengthens our community and deepens the bonds we share with one another….Our family is one of many three-generation families in the OLQP Latino Community whose lives have been profoundly touched by Padre José."

~ The Muñoz Family

"Every time I go to visit Padre José's grave, in my prayer I thank him for everything he gave us and for bringing the whole community together. He taught us humility and kindness."

~ Hilda Rocha

"Father José, I thank you for training me as a Franciscan over the past five years through my praying of the holy rosary via Zoom and your Saturday retreats, which helped me follow the call of my vocation as a Secular of the Third Order. I began my Aspirancy on February 7 of this year at the Franciscan Monastery Retreat in DC, where I was able to obtain my indulgences for the Jubilee Year of Saint Francis, and I was able to enter the Aspirancy on September 5 in DC, all thanks to Father Josecito."

~ Lilia Koechlin

"With his teachings and his example of life, he helped me have a mature faith and conversion, to not be afraid to say yes to God…I will work to help others and continue with humility and love for everyone."

~Ana Rios

"I have no words to thank God for the blessing of having put him in our lives and for his unconditional love, his affection, his dedication, his generosity, his friendship, and his words and advice for me! I will never forget that when I needed his spiritual support, he was there!"

~ María Margarita Cabrera

"For Manuel and I, Father José was not only our friend and brother priest, he was our right and left hand as we used to say, since he was present at all stages with us and our children from the moment we arrived at OLQP….[It was a] great privilege to have known and shared wonderful moments with a saint on earth."

~ Milagros & Manuel Lovo

Padre José Nangle Presente!!
Padre José Nangle Presente!!
Padre José Nangle Presente!!

The Girl Who Plants Hope in Medor, Haiti

By Sue Carlson, M.D.

Every Friday afternoon, when the bell rings at Medor's secondary school, twelve-year-old Rose-Marie* begins the long journey home. Hours of hiking lie ahead. There are no roads for cars or motorcycles, only steep mountain footpaths.

As she walks, Rose-Marie notices tiny tree seedlings growing along the trail. She pulls them up simply because she enjoys touching the tender shoots.

Rose-Marie spends the school week with her aunt and uncle in Medor because her parents' home is too far away for a daily commute. Every weekend she hikes home to be with her parents and five brothers and sisters.

The landscape she has always known is one of bare mountainsides. Forests had largely disappeared. During heavy rains, water rushed down the slopes, washing away fertile soil. During the dry season, dust filled the air, springs began drying up, and trees were cut for charcoal. Coffee trees, once abundant, had nearly vanished.

Yet Rose-Marie saw nothing unusual.

"I didn't understand that we were destroying the place where we lived," she says.

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Girl Who Plants Hope

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Everything changed in 2022, when Rose-Marie entered seventh grade and Medor's secondary school introduced an Environmental Education course taught by the Smallholder Farmers Alliance. Supported by local leaders and Father Frantz, the parish pastor, the program combined classroom lessons with hands-on learning.

At first, Rose-Marie wasn't enthusiastic. "It seemed too theoretical," she recalls. Already busy with school, carrying water, helping in the family garden, doing household chores, and hiking home each weekend, she saw it as just one more responsibility.

Then the practical lessons began. A truck arrived carrying shovels, rakes, watering cans, shade nets, and tree seeds. Students learned to establish tree nurseries and care for young seedlings. Environmental education suddenly came alive.

SFA agronomists led the students on hikes through the mountains, explaining how forests protect watersheds, prevent erosion, preserve springs, and improve harvests. They showed how deforestation contributes to floods, landslides, food insecurity, and disappearing water sources.

For Rose-Marie, everything began to make sense.

She learned one simple rule: If you cut down one tree, plant five in its place. She also learned never to damage trees growing near springs, along hillsides, beside ravines, or fruit trees that nourish families.

One lesson has stayed with her: "If the environment is beautiful, we are beautiful too. But if the environment suffers, we suffer too. Protecting the environment means protecting yourself."

The students became more than learners: they became ambassadors, encouraging their families to protect trees, care for springs, and become better stewards of the land.

Then, on July 11, 2026, Rose-Marie experienced a moment she will never forget.

Walking along a familiar mountain path, she spotted an avocado tree she had planted four years earlier. It now stood nearly twelve feet tall. Hidden among its leaves were seven tiny avocados.

She could hardly believe her eyes. She ran to tell her friends. Rose-Marie had eaten avocados all her life, but never from a tree she had planted herself.

That day she discovered something far greater than seven avocados. She realized that planting trees meant more fruit, more shade, more water, and more life. Most importantly, she discovered that her own hands could create something lasting and beautiful.

As her trees grew, so did her confidence. Today, Rose-Marie has planted and cared for more than fifty trees, including coffee, mango, avocado, citrus, mahogany, cedar, and papaya.

"It's as if we are living with the trees," she says. "As if they are our friends."

The changes are becoming visible throughout Medor. Springs that once caused conflict because of water shortages now provide more water. Coffee trees are returning to the mountains, creating new income for families. For Rose-Marie's family, coffee sales now help pay her school tuition.

During the 2025–2026 school year, more than 180

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Girl Who Plants Hope

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students participated in Medor's environmental education program. Rose-Marie has become one of its strongest advocates, and neighboring communities are now asking to establish similar programs for their own children.

Rose-Marie dreams of helping Medor. "When I grow up, I will come back to Medor. My heart is here. I want to help children just as this program helped us. I hope more young people learn to care for the environment and that this program spreads throughout Haiti. It will help our country prosper."

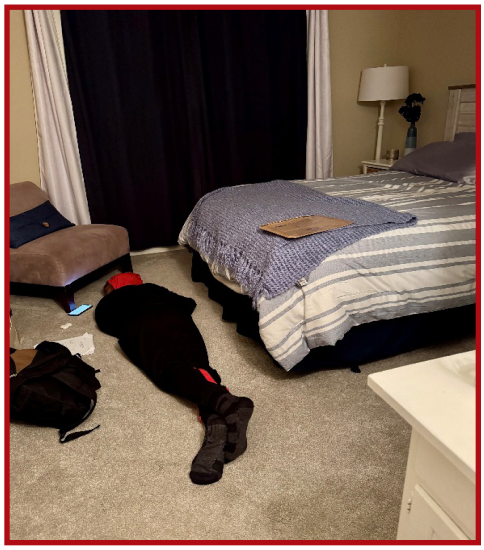
Only a few years ago, Rose-Marie pulled up tree seedlings because she didn't know any better. Today, she is helping restore a forest, and inspiring others to do the same.

Thanks to the generosity of Our Lady Queen of Peace parishioners, Medor's children are learning that caring for God's creation is one of the most powerful ways they can care for their families, their communities, and the future of Haiti.

*The name used in this article has been changed to protect the student's privacy.

Who is My Neighbor?

By Rebecca Carpenter



Recently I received a text from a friend in New York asking if I could help a young immigrant who was traveling to Washington for an asylum hearing the next morning. He didn't speak much English, had very little money, and was scared. He was on a bus, and planned to spend the night at Union Station. I imagined our own son, alone in another country, sleeping in a bus station, and I offered our guest room.

A few hours later, at 2:30 a.m., Thomas* was standing on our doorstep with a small backpack, looking exhausted beyond his 18 years. I offered him food, but he was fasting for Ramadan, so I showed him the bedroom and set my alarm to wake us before dawn so he could eat.

When I opened the guest room door a couple hours later, the bed was untouched. Suddenly, immigration wasn't a theoretical issue — it was someone's son, far from his family, vulnerable and alone, asleep on our floor.

I gently woke him, and while he ate a simple breakfast, we conversed with the help of a translation app. I learned about his family, what his country was like, and how he had ended up here. Later that morning, he came to my ESL class before heading to court with an ally we had lined up. "Bon courage," I offered, along with some food, money, a hug, and a prayer.

Thomas made it through his hearing, but urgently needed an attorney. The cost was $6,000, which might as well have been $6 million for him. So I shared his story with a small group of friends and family, and within 48 hours, his legal fees were covered. One friend had never felt particularly connected to the immigration issue, but Thomas's story changed that. "It's a different level when you put a face and name to it," she told me. She was right.

What happens when the anonymous people behind an issue become someone we actually know? Personal connection changes what we see and how we understand it. I have experienced this many times throughout

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Who is My Neighbor?

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my 25 years as a volunteer ESL teacher in Arlington. My students have become friends as we've exchanged our stories. I've learned about families separated by thousands of miles, careers left behind, children being raised between cultures, enormous sacrifices, and relatable joys. Over the years, immigration has become much less abstract to me because I know so many of the people living it.

My classroom is just one small part of a much larger Arlington community. More than 53,000 Arlington residents were born outside the United States, nearly one in four of us. How many do we actually know by name? Do we know about their families, what makes them smile, what they worry about, or what they hope for?

That question feels especially relevant to our faith. So many familiar stories about Jesus begin with him taking the time to know someone personally. He noticed Zacchaeus in a crowd, called him by name, and went to his home. When Bartimaeus called from the roadside and others told him to be quiet, Jesus stopped, listened, and asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And at a well in Samaria, he sat and had a conversation with a woman others would have avoided, talking with her about her life and his own. Again and again, he made the connection personal.

Perhaps the most familiar example of this is when Jesus was asked, "Who is my neighbor?" and he answered with the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan sees the stranger in front of him, is "moved with compassion," and draws closer to help him.

We also have the opportunity to draw closer and recognize immigrants as neighbors. It could be as simple as learning someone's name, sharing a coffee, talking with another parent on the sidelines, or volunteering with a local immigrant-serving organization. Ask where someone grew up, what they miss, what they hope for. Listen long enough to learn something you wouldn't hear in the headlines.

Thomas's story didn't begin when he arrived on my doorstep or when I shared it with others, it was there all along. His family, fears, faith, values, and the life he's trying to build were all part of him before we knew his name. What changed was the distance between us. From a distance, he was an immigrant. Up close, he is Thomas, my neighbor.

*Thomas's name has been changed to protect his privacy.

Rebecca Carpenter is the founder of Documented, a media platform that shares first person stories from the immigrant community, shining a light on the real people behind the headlines. Rooted in a belief that every person has inherent dignity, Documented builds connection, deepens empathy, and reminds us of our shared values. Documented is launching soon; learn more and follow along at DocumentedProject.org.

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