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Elizabeth C. Reilly

Loyola Marymount University, elizabeth.reilly@lmu.edu

Katherine Brown

katherine.brown@lmu.edu

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Seeing with New Eyes: Costa Rican Pilgrimage as Transformation

Elizabeth C. Reilly
Professor, Department of Educational Leadership
School of Education
Loyola Marymount University
elizabeth.reilly@lmu.edu

Katherine Brown
Director of Mission and Identity Programs
Office of Mission and Ministry
Loyola Marymount University
katherine.brown@lmu.edu

We must always remind ourselves that we are pilgrims until we arrive at our heavenly homeland, and we must not let our affections delay us in the roadside inns and lands through which we pass, otherwise we will forget our destination and lose interest in our final goal.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola

Abstract

In summer 2019, eleven faculty and staff members selected as fellows from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California embarked on an immersion study trip to Costa Rica. As an integral part of the university's commitment to mission and ministry, the institution provides a number of opportunities for its members to explore the mission and its Jesuit identity within a global context. Framed around the Ignatian principle of pilgrimage, this article describes the focus and goals for the study trip, pre-trip preparations, and the trip itself. We highlight some of the activities in which the fellows participated and individuals they met, and a summary of their reflections of the experience. We conclude with considerations for next steps.

Introduction

The 2019 Loyola Marymount University (LMU) immersion study trip to Costa Rica with faculty and staff (hereafter called “fellows”) resulted from its longstanding commitment to mission and identity that recognizes the transformational nature of engaging in and with a broken world.¹ The idea of pilgrimage, or *peregrinatio*, is prominent in the writings of Augustine in the fifth century, where he examined the notion of the “City of God” expansively.² Augustine's use of the terms in late Antiquity had many meanings, well explicated in numerous works that comment more comprehensively than are our purposes.³ The concept of a pilgrimage is deeply embedded in the Jesuit tradition, having begun with Ignatius Loyola.⁴ It played a recurring role in the life of Ignatius, both literally and figuratively, as one expression of the religious experience.⁵ In his autobiography, the last of his books, Ignatius wrote principally in the third person, describing

himself as “the pilgrim” when talking about his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as well as throughout the narrative.⁶ Two themes recur for the pilgrimage. First, he was called to make this journey—and “had a great assurance in his soul that God would provide a way for him to go to Jerusalem [which] gave him much confidence that no arguments or fears suggested to him could make him doubt.”⁷ Ignatius held a steadfast conviction that braving the plague, which ravaged the region, and perilous traveling conditions—inclement weather, criminal elements, health challenges, unconfirmed itineraries—should not interfere with the call.⁸ Second, he trusted God through His people to provide all basic needs. Ignatius gave away what little money he had throughout the pilgrimage, trusting that others within the community he



Loyola Marymount
University

**Solidarity and
Global Citizenship
Collection**

Reilly & Brown,
*LMU Solidarity and
Global Citizenship
Collection: Introduction
and Overview*

Snyder, *In Students We
Trust: The Solidarity
Generation*

Brown, *Mission and
Mundialización:
Solidarity and Global
Citizenship through
Immersion Experience*

Reilly & Brown, *Seeing
with New Eyes: Costa
Rican Pilgrimage as
Transformation*

Sebastian, *Encountering
Grace: A Theological
Framework for Faculty
and Staff Immersion
Programs*

Connelly, *A Long,
Loving Look at the Real:
An Experiential
Ignatian Approach to
Immersion*

Brown & Reilly,
*Solidarity and Global
Citizenship: A Photo
Essay*

visited would feed and shelter him, and provide passage to his next destination.⁹ Disregarding dangers, discarding all worldly goods, and holding a single and singular focus allowed him to keep clarity of his purpose.

Stoltz defined pilgrimage as a particular kind of “intentional dislocation for the purpose of transformation using the body to mentor the soul.”¹⁰ Moving the physical self to a new space can provide an opportunity for spiritual growth. Why would one take a pilgrimage? Ignatius described a trip by sea from Valencia, Spain to Italy where the crew and passengers were met with a devastatingly life-threatening storm. He recalled,

At this time, examining himself carefully and preparing to die, he could not feel afraid for his sins or of being condemned, but he did feel embarrassment and sorrow, as he believed he had not used well the gifts and graces which God our Lord had granted him.¹¹

Ignatius did not fear dying, but instead lamented over squandering what he recognized to be the God-given abilities that to that point he did not discern had been put to the best use. In embarking on a pilgrimage, indeed, there are risks, but the benefits permit one to cultivate and use one’s gifts.

This paper chronicles the pilgrimage of fellows who sought to mentor their souls by engaging with others committed to likeminded values. As *peregrini*—pilgrims—we sought to experience a pilgrimage not only as a place, but a state of perpetual transit with no end in mind, a continual journey rather than an arrival at a destination. We provide three, principal sections. First, we describe pre-trip work—our preparation for pilgrimage—focusing specifically on the engagement with the theme of the visit through selected readings. Second, we present the trip itself and some of the individuals and groups with whom we engaged that brought the theme to life. We conclude with implications and recommendations for other institutions that elect immersion programs as pilgrimage to deepening an understanding of mission, education, and *la mundialización*.

Preparation for Pilgrimage

In organizing immersion study trips, a number of steps are essential to ensure a successful outcome. One of the most critical aspects is that an institution establishes the “why” of events such as these. For example, the purpose of our pilgrimage was fostering the fellows’ global citizenship and solidarity, but other pilgrimages might elect to focus on themes related to the in-country hosts. We describe the rationale our institution employs in a separate article in this collection titled, “Mission and *Mundialización*: Solidarity and Global Citizenship through Immersion Experiences”.¹² The article also discusses considerations for facilitating immersion programs such as selection of goals and themes, practical and logistical arrangements, and outcomes. This section focuses on the preparations specific to the Costa Rica trip. We discuss the theme, the readings in which fellows engaged, and the focus on building community prior to our departure.



“Mosaicos en la Pared”
San José, Costa Rica
Photo Credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

Several months before the trip, fellows began to prepare by attending a series of conversational

meetings around specific topics. The following two questions guided our thinking about preparing for the experience:

1. What relationship does LMU's mission as a Jesuit/Marymount university have to immersion experiences like the one we will undertake?
2. How do you understand the difference between globalization and *la mundialización*, and how might your work at LMU contribute to forming world citizens?

Two sets of readings provided prompts for discussion of those questions. The first related to the service of faith and the promotion of justice by considering how they related to LMU's mission, Jesuit education in general, and *la mundialización*—a broader conception of globalization, translated as global citizenship.¹³ The second set of readings provided context about Central America generally and Costa Rica specifically. While the conversations were guided by the questions and the readings, they were free-flowing, permitting fellows to begin to build community as we explored our varying experiences that had brought us to this pilgrimage. Every discussion emphasized Ignatian principles of experience, reflection, and action: looking towards the future and the pilgrimage, what did we hope to experience, on what might we reflect, and what actions might result?

The preparatory sessions helped us to consider mission in the context of pilgrimage and to focus specifically on some of the unique aspects of Central American thinking, such as liberation theology.¹⁴ For a deeper discussion on that topic, consider reading Joseph Connelly's article in this collection titled, "A Long, Loving Look at the Real: An Experiential Ignatian Approach to Immersion".¹⁵ The anticipatory lens through which we prepared helped us to consider what we already knew about Costa Rica and what we hoped to gain from the experience. Finally, our preparations set the stage for ongoing reflections that would happen in many contexts: individually, with a partner or other small configuration, and as a larger group.

Pilgrimage: Experiencing Solidarity and Engaging in Global Citizenship

The itinerary for the trip presented recurring opportunities for engagement that centered on the themes of the service of faith and the promotion of justice. Our group engaged with a number of individuals representing a range of communities within Costa Rica. They included leaders in non-profits focused on human rights issues such as those of the poor and of refugees, leaders of refugee communities, leaders of Christian churches, artist-activists, and professors of history and sociology. Each visit helped our fellows broaden and deepen their understanding of Costa Rican culture and society. In this section, we focus on three of the highlights—a conversation with Fr. Luis Gonzalo "Mateo" Álvaro and his colleague, Nubia, who support migrants and persons indigenous to Costa Rica; a visit to La Carpio—a community of Nicaraguan refugees and Costa Rican citizens living adjacent San Jose's largest landfill; and a self-sufficient community in Southern Costa Rica with Salvadoran refugees, Longo Mai.

Iglesia San Francisco de Asis: Seeing with New Eyes

Father Mateo is a missionary who spent many years in Panama working with indigenous peoples and Afro-Panamanians before he arrived in Costa Rica in 2008. Nubia is one of the other leaders. She was a Colombian refugee who moved to Costa Rica over two decades ago and has worked with immigrants for most of that time. Their work and commitment at Iglesia San Francisco de Asis are to immigrant and refugees and to the human rights of the eight indigenous groups of Costa Rica. Father Mateo and Nubia worked closely with Sergio Rojas Ortiz, a leader of the Bribri indigenous people and land activist who was slain in March 2019.¹⁶ They erected a small memorial in his name. Father Mateo noted that their motto is peace, justice, and integrity of creation. They serve as the central office for the work, reporting to Rome. The day we met them, Father Mateo and Nubia had just completed a retreat with thirty leaders from various refugee communities in the country—leaders who originally hailed from Columbia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.



"Iglesia en la Temporada Verde"
San José, Costa Rica
Photo credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

In addition to structured leadership initiatives, they also house immigrants and refugees on an ongoing basis when they are new arrivals. While the federal government has an official office on immigration, they decided several years ago that the churches should take a large amount of responsibility and thus was born a network called, "Communities of Priority Accompaniment." Their focus is on severely marginalized and vulnerable communities, which is an enormous issue throughout the country.¹⁷ Father Mateo said, though, that while the evangelical churches have laid down roots in the poorest communities with small churches, the Catholic church has remained on the periphery, essentially abandoning the neediest, and this must change. It is on the margins of society that we should live out our faith and the idea of what it means to be a church, Father Mateo asserts. The margins should form the centerpiece of their work. Going to the most marginalized neighborhoods allows us to see with new eyes, he admonished. At one point, they had twelve parishes whose objective is to establish "communities of accompaniment," but this has dwindled due to lack of support from the church hierarchy. Even so, Iglesia San Francisco does maintain a strong relationship with one community called the Triangle of Solidarity, and a second neighborhood that the University of Costa Rica constructed, providing co-collaborative and co-constructed support for and with them. Human rights work is a dangerous undertaking in even the best of socio-political circumstances.¹⁸ The global pandemic unleashed unprecedented

crises worldwide, and Costa Rica has suffered in countless ways. In Costa Rica, indigenous people seeking to reclaim their lands, which by law is legal, must contend with a continual onslaught of violence, including "dozens of attacks and threats...over the past years (burning of homes, gun and machete attacks, leaving families fleeing for safety), and yet no perpetrator has been held responsible."¹⁹ Even though the United Nations has asserted and affirmed the indigenous people's rights, insisting on the intervention of the federal government, attacks continue.²⁰ While the United Nations has hundreds of activities connected to the UN Sustainable Development Goals,²¹ what appears in reports as progress belies the reality on the ground in the lives of the indigenous people.²² For example, the UN asserts "implementation of the first mechanism for dialogue with indigenous peoples [and] processes for the construction of public policies for historically excluded populations," but what, exactly, this means in practice is unknown.²³ Fully five years before Rojas Ortiz's murder, the United Nations Independent Expert identified "threats to environmental human rights defenders" as one of three critical human rights issues facing Costa Rica.²⁴ Much work remains to be done with structural issues facing Costa Rica's indigenous community and active engagement of the federal government in addressing policies and practices.²⁵



"The Word Became Flesh"
San José, Costa Rica
Photo credit: Katherine Brown

Perhaps one of the greatest take-aways from this visit was the power of common commitment to fundamental human rights via activism that ensures basic needs for all people, regardless of their countries of origin. When the government began to build a highway through the Triangle of Solidarity community, forcing the families to move, Father Mateo, Nubia, and their colleagues mobilized to ensure that all were re-homed appropriately and properly. Father Mateo remarked that critical to their work is an ecumenical approach where theological issues such as the Virgin birth, for example, are not relevant to people's needs but that working relationships with other faith traditions are essential. He says that what counts is life—accessing clean water, keeping drugs out of the barrio, and protecting women and children from sexual abuse. He challenges the Church to make this the center of its mission and for wealthier communities to stand in solidarity with the poor—to see with new eyes their fellow community members. Father Mateo sang us a hymn that was once sung by Nelson Mandela in South Africa: “Everyone will see that when we are forced off of our land we will take action together. Everyone will see.” Indeed, their focus on liberatory practices that affect lives in substantive ways is something everyone *can* see.

La Carpio: Harmonious, Dignified Living

Driving outside the San José civic center to the western edge of the capital city, you reach La Carpio, a community of over forty-two thousand souls living in corrugated tin houses, situated between two polluted rivers on the edge of a massive landfill.²⁶ The only way to reach La Carpio is by traveling past the up-to-seven hundred tons of garbage in trucks that make their way to the landfill daily, which was supposed to operate for a decade, but is still open over twenty years later.²⁷ While Costa Rica is considered globally a model for sustainability, the landfill adjacent people's homes is a poignant reminder of the amount of work to be done to achieve environmental justice with the poorest of poor.²⁸ Even so, the community has an engaged leadership for each of its nine sectors.



*“Autobús Rosado, Carretera Estrecha”
La Carpio, Costa Rica
Photo credit: Katherine Brown*

About half of the residents of La Carpio come from Nicaragua originally, but it is very diverse today. Costa Ricans, Hondurans, Salvadorans, some Chinese, and North Americans also live in the community. One of the community leaders, Humberto Mesa, invited us into his home, where while he talked, his wife, Alba, prepared for us a lunch of many Nicaraguan treats including fresh-fried breaded fish, flavorful gallo pinto, and warm tortillas. We invited him to share with us about his life and what we could learn from his activism. In 1993 when La Carpio was established, he arrived from Nicaragua as a founding member of the barrio. Even though the community members are very poor, people work in a variety of fields. The predominant professions are domestic services, hotel services, construction, and seasonal farm work, along with home-run businesses such as food sales. Alba makes her own tortillas, and throughout our visit, neighbors came by to purchase tall, fragrant stacks.



*“Orgullo de la Comunidad”
La Carpio, Costa Rica*

Photo credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

Humberto explained that when he arrived in the barrio, it had no basic services such as electricity, running water, telephone service, or public transportation. This has changed, but the landfill built in 2000 has perpetuated longstanding health problems in its residents and the Costa Rican Ministry of Health turns a blind eye towards the chronic maladies the residents face. Even though the landfill is scheduled to close as it has reached its capacity, the city continues to find creative ways to stall its closure. Health problems will not cease due to families’ proximity to the garbage. They do have public and private health clinics that serve all—those who qualify for social security services in the public clinic and the private clinic for everyone else. A visit to the private clinic will cost a little over three US dollars.

The leadership of the community is gender balanced, with half men and half women representing each of the sectors. Outside of the associations, there is also a development council which holds national legal status and to which the associations participate. One ongoing challenge is that La Carpio community members pay municipal taxes for services they do not receive and believe they are being robbed. One item on the list, for example, is street-sweeping, which they clearly do not receive, he said with a wry grin. A point of pride in La Carpio is their beautiful, new, and uniquely designed three-story primary

school that serves two thousand children. Costa Rica values education highly, and literacy rates approach 98 percent.²⁹ Unfortunately, children still need to leave the community to attend high school. Humberto reported that children may be able to qualify to attend university, and Alba and his daughter did. Typical of all individuals with whom we met in Costa Rica, Humberto directly addressed, unprompted, the significant xenophobia that Nicaraguans have faced in country over the years. It is a common story heard in many countries, including the United States—that the foreigners are coming to take jobs and services from citizens, particularly healthcare services. The key to dealing with this has been to organize as Nicaraguans and with Costa Ricans to build trust and combat common concerns and issues. Overall, Humberto described a community that is at peace, living dignified lives in harmony with Costa Ricans.

Longo Mai, Our Paradise

The village of Longo Mai, approximately 2,224 acres—half of which is protected rain forest—is a self-sufficient, self-administering community of Salvadoran refugees in Southern Costa Rica.³⁰ Established in 1979, the community of seven hundred was originally established for Nicaraguans fleeing their country’s conflict; over time they returned home and were replaced with refugees fleeing El Salvador. The community welcomes “project tourism,” where guests can live with the villagers while they carry out the proposed projects. Full room and board is approximately ten USD per day and nearly fifty families welcome guests. People from around the world visit or study in Longo Mai, and the community welcomes research investigations in disciplines ranging from agriculture to culture to political science.



"Mazorcas de Cacao"
Longo Mai, Costa Rica
Photo credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

During our day-long visit to Longo Mai, we met with a number of individuals from the community. The focal point was a visit with Doña Edith, a Salvadoran refugee who serves as a leader in and founder of the community. Edith described how in their early months, the priority was to become as self-sufficient and self-sustaining as quickly as possible, and they were able to accomplish this by establishing fast-growing crops such as beans and corn. Within her first three years, Doña Edith received the first guest, an English woman who was a vegan—similar to having a rabbit in the house, she said—since the guest challenged Doña Edith's cooking prowess. The year-long stay was such a success that they welcomed a second woman, a teacher from Austria, and thus established Longo Mai as project tourism community. The teacher taught the children during the day and the parents in the evening, focusing on literacy. Although the tourism provides much-needed income for the community, there can be months at a time with no visitors, which means that as farmers, they use their skills to expand their work beyond the community, seasonally picking coffee or other

crops to supplement. Some members always work outside the community in any case, since there is not work for all people.



"Mundos Interiores"
Longo Mai, Costa Rica
Photo credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

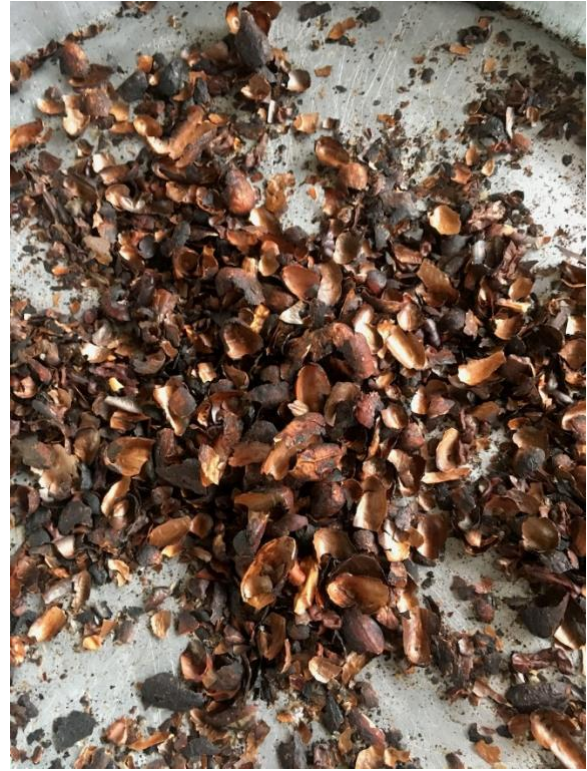
Because Longo Mai includes protected lands, some of the community members partner with non-governmental organizations to ensure their protection from illegal land use, hunting and poaching, infringement on natural resources, and so on. This emphasis is in keeping with Costa Rica's overall commitment in environmental protection. It is not without its controversies, however. Similar to the work of Iglesia de San Francisco, Longo Mai community members raise the issue of discrimination and ill treatment of refugees and in particular, of its indigenous people. Their community, however, seeks to treat all with dignity, particularly as they were once refugees themselves. Even so, the discrimination of indigenous people and environmental issues can be a combustible combination, leading them to face a variety of dangerous situations when engaged in eco-protection.³¹



"Tostando Cacao"
Longo Mai, Costa Rica
Photo credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

Costa Rica enjoys a strong commitment to education, providing free and compulsory education for all since 1869, and Longo Mai shares this commitment.³² Housing its own public elementary school, the children's teachers and principal are assigned by the federal government, which oversees primary and secondary education nationwide.³³ Its forty children are ages six to twelve years old, and they have one full-time teacher and one principal-teacher who instructs and provides administrative leadership. Approximately ninety-five percent of teachers hold university baccalaureate degrees—often in education sciences.³⁴ In its recent report, however, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommended that the federal government establish teaching standards so as to lower the likelihood of politicization and favoritism in appointments, and most importantly, to close the gap between teaching and learning outcomes.³⁵ The Longo Mai school adheres to the national curriculum with core subjects such as Spanish, mathematics, social science. Part-time teachers come in to teach specialty subjects such as art, English, music, religion, physical education, special education, and other subjects. Besides the oversight from the federal government, a local school council manages additional budgetary matters so they can provide the specialty subjects, a full-service cafeteria staffed by locals, and capital projects. Perhaps most impressive about education in Longo Mai is that as members of a community that welcome outsiders for project tourism, even the children become teachers to

visitors as they happily share their talents and lives with others.



"Cáscaras de Cacao"
Longo Mai, Costa Rica
Photo credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

Global Citizenship and Solidarity in a Post-pandemic World

The classroom sessions [during the trip] were important. They provided us with context and helped us to understand what we were seeing [during] our visits. But the visits themselves I will carry with me deep in my soul for the rest of my life.... They were the kind of experiences that you could never really explain to someone else unless they had had a similar experience.

The work of Mission and Ministry may be more about planting seeds, rather than harvesting fruit.... As [one of the fellows] and I entered La Carpio, we agreed, "This is going to be the intense part." What our eyes could see by the time we were on the way out was very different. That is the evidence of seeds being successfully planted.

—Excerpts from 2019 Fellows' Post-Trip Evaluations

While the citizens of the world have yet to re-imagine our planet post-pandemic, we are confident that faculty and staff will once again begin to engage in opportunities such as immersion study trips abroad. LMU's 2018 trip was canceled due to civil unrest in Nicaragua, and its 2020 trip likewise canceled due to the global pandemic. Tucked between these events, the LMU fellows had the opportunity to engage as global citizens in solidarity with Costa Ricans in their country. We now return to the questions that framed this pilgrimage and we offer some reflections on mission, education for the practitioner as pilgrim,³⁶ and *la mundialización*.³⁷ Reflection and outward sharing requires being vulnerable, and some fellows expressed that there were times throughout the trip when they did not speak, but they were listening and reflecting—and that this pilgrimage provided the space for thoughtful consideration apart from the pressure to perform.

In discussing “cognitive liberation and reason integrally considered,” Brackley described how the Jesuit university is principally a middle-class world.³⁸ He wrote, “I belong to a peculiar tribe, the middle-class tribe. We’re not bad people, just a minority under the illusion of most minorities that the universe revolves around us. The poor can free us from this illusion.”³⁹ One need not leave the United States to bear witness to extreme suffering; it is in our backyards in many forms continually. Uniquely characteristic of pilgrimage, however, is transporting oneself into a different context, which then permits us to revisit deprivation and inequity in a new light. It invites us to “call forth and heal those parts of ourselves that we had banished into unconscious exile.”⁴⁰ Costa Rican sociologist and professor at the Universidad de Costa Rica, Andrey Pineda, presented to the fellows on our first day in San José. He began his talk by saying he would present to us four themes about the country by unpacking the myths embroidered amidst the realities. The four themes he touched on were Costa Rica as a democracy, as egalitarian, as a peaceful or pacifist nation, and finally, as an eco-progressive nation. His stark admission straight away that we would confront difficult truths about the country we had only just entered set the tone for our time in Costa Rica, during which uncomfortable truths were a recurring theme with all with whom we met.⁴¹

Professor Pineda's time with us also served as an invitation to confront myths we tell ourselves as individuals, as a university, and as a nation that obscure the reality of our own circumstances. It was an invitation on one level from a distance to ask ourselves, “How did what we see elsewhere help us to see more clearly in our context?” Some of the striking parallels with our country included the treatment of undocumented immigrants, of indigenous persons, and of the economically-insecure, and allowed us to recognize ourselves in the mirroring of what we heard and saw in Costa Rica. In many ways our circumstances in the United States became clearer by seeing similar issues in another country. It allowed us to turn the spotlight on our own xenophobia as we heard about that of Costa Ricans. Stepping out of our own context allowed us some distance from our daily circumstances, and yet to see parallels that invited us to confront our unconscious biases more thoughtfully. We arrive at way stations through the experiences of the journey, helping us to take stock before the next destination.

We began this article with two key questions that guided the pilgrimage. The first was, “What relationship does LMU's mission as a Jesuit/Marymount university have to immersion experiences like the one we will undertake?” and the second, “How do you understand the difference between globalization and *la mundialización*, and how might your work at LMU contribute to forming world citizens?” We summarize here key take-aways based on our analyses and reflections as fellows in the immersion experience.

Relationship of Mission to Immersion Experiences

In considering the relationship of LMU's mission as a Jesuit/Marymount university to immersion experiences, we discerned themes of dignity, happiness and joy, humility, and service. While they are interconnected, the themes likewise stand alone as considerations for understanding both mission and pilgrimage, and in reflecting on our personal applications.

Dignity

We observed tremendous amounts of self-respect in the communities. Our hosts saw our visits as an opportunity to share with us their lives, not expecting us to solve their problems. They expressed gratitude. Rather than discontentment, we too should focus on gratitude as we experience our own lives. How do we think about life, challenges, and face them with dignity? Too often, we do not talk about dignity when we talk about what we characterize as disadvantaged individuals. We need to revisit this question: What exactly is disadvantaged?

Happiness and Joy

A recurring theme from our hosts was that we do not derive happiness from what we have, but from what we do with what we have. While from a Western North American perspective it would be easy to characterize many of the individuals we met as economically disadvantaged, this does not equate to lacking in other types of wealth. Their funds of wealth are far beyond our traditional conceptions of what brings happiness. Furthermore, fundamental forward-moving produces joy—hopeful, energizing, embracing, and motivating. We can recall this joy and embrace it.

Humility

We can cultivate cultural humility within oneself and with others. People's lives are hard, but they still manage to derive a sense of their own cultural traditions and their relationship to other traditions. They were not afraid to share struggles with us. We should ask ourselves, how can we have appreciation and gratitude with humility amidst the struggle? Furthermore, how can we appreciate our own cultural traditions while honoring those of others?

Service

When we visited Longo Mai, some of the children tried to teach some of us Spanish. We each have funds of knowledge regardless of our ages and position in civil society and gifts to bestow on others. Giving should come from exactly where one is in that moment. There is no need to wait to

achieve or accomplish a certain something before we give to others. We can serve others now, in the present tense, with what we have.

Globalization, La Mundialización, and Personal Commitments

With binaries such as globalization and *la mundialización*, the simplest analysis might result in a conclusion that one is the bad actor—globalization—and the other the good or idealized circumstance—*la mundialización*. In civil society, however, neither is wholly good or bad, per se, but rather encompassing different priorities. In considering the second question, “How do you understand the difference between globalization and *la mundialización*, and how might your work at LMU contribute to forming world citizens?”, three themes emerged: the struggle, inspiration, and generosity.

The Struggle

Action requires persistence even in the face of exhaustion. The face of God is in the margins, and in the margins there is opportunity for action. That is what we saw in the lives of many with whom we met. In La Carpio, for example, the garbage from the landfill was piling up at the entrance to the community only a week before we visited. Community members wrote a letter of complaint, and by the time we visited, it have been cleaned up. Relentless, tireless activism is evident among those with whom we met. Are we and how are we relentless activists?

Inspiration

Óscar Arnulfo Romero, who was the Archbishop of El Salvador until his assassination in 1980 and was canonized a saint in 2018, talked about the reality of life in El Salvador only two days before his assassination. When two teenagers who admired him asked how he was, he replied, “*Preocupado*—worried.”⁴² The reality of the world we live in can teach us about human nature and what the role of the church should be. Jesuit philosopher and theologian Ignacio Ellacuría described those in society unjustly affected as *el pueblo crucificado*, or the crucified people or a crucified community.⁴³ He discussed the reality of the crosses we see in society and admonished us

to look at our towns and neighborhoods and determine what individuals or groups are on the crosses. We should likewise examine ourselves to see if we have been complicit in building crosses either by our efforts or by our ennui. Our life's mission is to take down those individuals from the crosses and to pay attention to those crosses we allow to stand.

Generosity

Father Fernando Cardenal, a Jesuit liberation theologian, wrote that theology is shaped by time with the poor.⁴⁴ As individuals and as an institution, we must cultivate a critical consciousness of what it looks like to receive others and demonstrate *imago Dei*—seeing the face of God in others. How are we a receiving institution? How do we use liberation theology to center those who have been de-centered?⁴⁵ When we perceive our circumstances as bad, this should not serve as our time to retreat, but rather as our call to action.

We believe we have a moral imperative to be a part of the world and to likewise bring the world to the students we serve. During our time in Costa Rica, we witnessed soul-wrenching poverty and deprivation, but we also met amazing individuals who are the quiet heroes of their communities and who strive against all odds to lighten the burden of others. The pilgrimage was a series of teachable moments that placed many of the “first world problems” we experience in stark relief to the daily realities of others’ lives. The experience also served to impel us to strive to make a difference in others’ lives through education; thus, to continue to open doors for our students, we must be in the world. The immersion experience provided us with new insights into a part of the world in which we had previously spent little or no time and engendered deeper perspectives on and greater compassion for the grave social inequities that seem intractable. The only way to live our mission is to go forth as pilgrims.⁴⁶



“Flores de la Selva Tropical”

Costa Rica

Photo credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

***Post-Trip Activities: Eloquentia Perfecta*⁴⁷**

In their discussion of the Jesuit rhetorical tradition of *eloquentia perfecta*—perfect eloquence—Pace and Merys invite us as pilgrims to consider that this is far more than talk. They wrote,

[Eloquentia perfecta] calls us to use speech or communication that focuses on truth, accuracy, and comprehensiveness as a path into the world, especially used in order to stand for the silenced, excluded, or impoverished. We cannot forget Ignatius’s and the Jesuits’ preferential option for the poor.⁴⁸

It was in that spirit that we considered our path forward. From the time we arrived in Costa Rica, our hosts and presenters displayed sometimes brutal candor about the problems the country faces. As a stable, developed country amidst a great deal of geopolitical instability, Costa Rica has long served as a refuge for those fleeing hardship and persecution. Coupled with the chronic, overall antipathy many Costa Ricans feel toward its

indigenous people, the continual influx of displaced persons into the country amplifies the xenophobia. Confronting our beliefs about “the other” is a lifelong challenge and commitment, and the leaders of agencies with whom we met recognize this reality, but are not reduced to lamentations about their realities. At least two approaches support Costa Rica as a more inclusive society. The first is the federal government’s substantive actions aimed at protecting and promoting inclusion, and the second is the non-profit sector’s role in engaging everyday Costa Ricans in their efforts—in helping them to “see with new eyes,” in the words of Fr. Mateo. At this writing, humanity is far from a post-pandemic framing of the world, but unquestionably, challenges and opportunities will increase for Costa Rica.⁴⁹

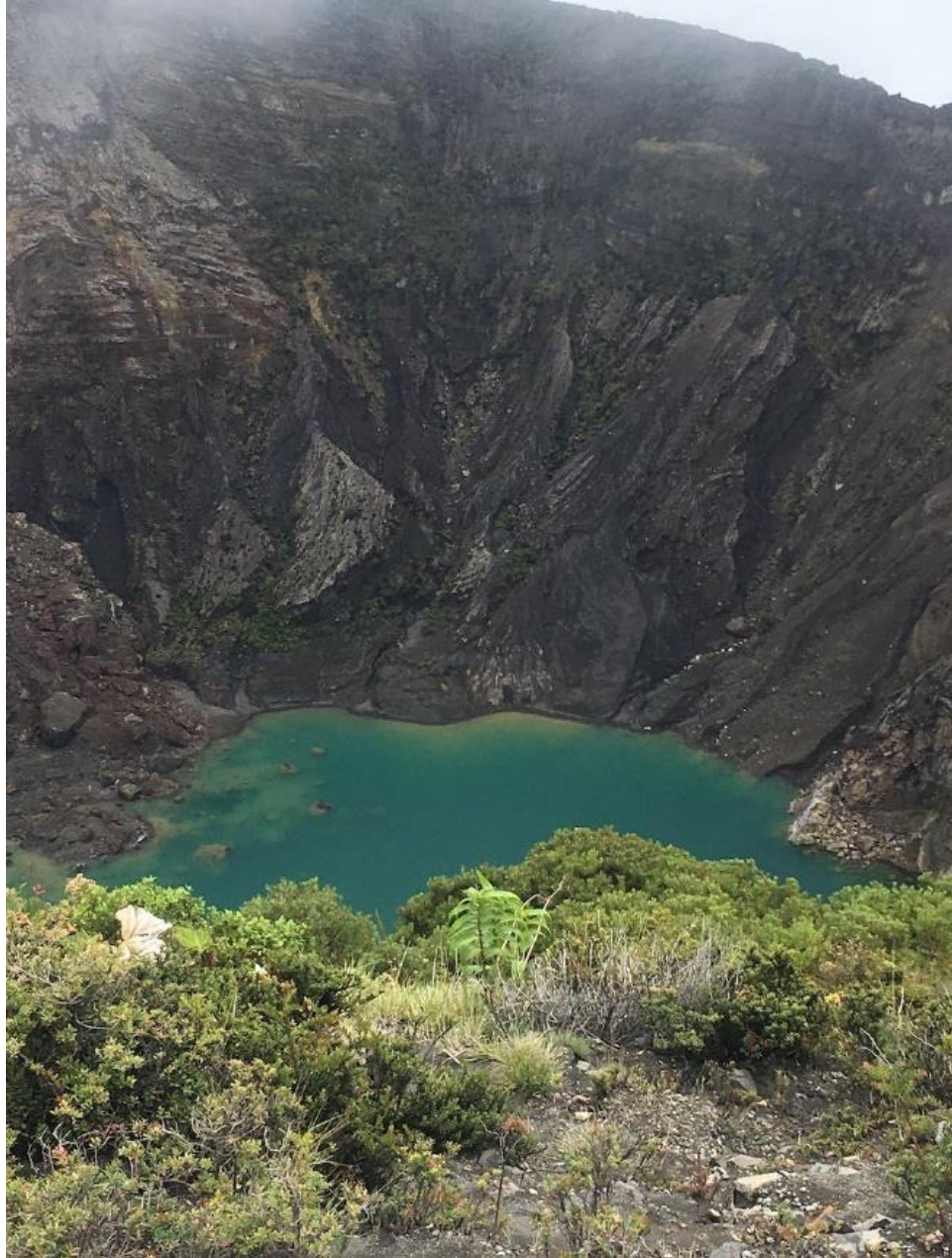
Far too frequently, study trips and other mission and identity activities become a one-off—an event with no continuity of follow-up. Acutely aware of this propensity and lost opportunity to deepen and extend learning—and to engage with the broader Jesuit community—Cathleen McGrath and Elizabeth C. Reilly assembled a special collection based on a previous program, the LMU President’s Institute. Entitled “Fides et Ratio: Pursuing Faith and Reason in the 21st Century Catholic University,” they worked with Institute fellows in the subsequent year to capture insights and reflections from a variety of perspectives.⁵⁰ In an effort to memorialize the rich experience of *Pura Vida*—the pure life in Costa Rica—we followed their lead and conceived of this special collection of articles focused on the theme of solidarity and global citizenship that we would work on following our return. This article and its companion pieces comprise the special collection, inviting a variety of voices from our university to share perspectives on the value of immersion experiences generally and of this experience in particular.

Of course, memorializing a pilgrimage in writing and publishing is but one way of extending fellows’ experiences, and we invite consideration of other opportunities. For example, in the spirit

of *magis*, follow-up conversations with fellows might consider deeper engagement in the communities in which they live and work daily.⁵¹ In a different application of *magis*, in this collection, Loyola Marymount University’s President Timothy Law Snyder addresses today’s students as embodying precepts of solidarity and global citizenship.⁵² Reilly and McGrath admonish, “This notion of greater need suggests that *magis* is a living precept which is realized through conversation in community with those who must determine who needs something and how it will be fulfilled.”⁵³ Instead of arriving at a destination, the journey with like-minded pilgrims continues.

De Civitate Dei as Pilgrimage

Augustine wrote in *The City of God* that there exist two cities: an earthly city and a heavenly city.⁵⁴ Love of self formed the earthly city, while love of God the heavenly city.⁵⁵ This bifurcation establishes his argument, then, about our work on earth. The pilgrimage of life, of our lives, is to make manifest the heavenly city to the degree to which we are able. Interestingly, Augustine used the term, “heavenly city,” as both a noun and a verb: “So long as this heavenly city is a pilgrim on earth, then, it calls forth citizens from all peoples and gathers together a pilgrim society of all languages.”⁵⁶ The heavenly city is both a place we seek and an action that we take. We apprehend this city by striving to establish earthly peace, which Augustine asserted is our fundamental task. To achieve earthly peace requires us to subordinate but not disregard or abolish “manners, laws, institutions by which earthly peace is achieved or maintained.”⁵⁷ During its pilgrimage, the heavenly city makes use of earthly peace to achieve its goal. We are then the manifestation of the heavenly city in striving for earthly peace. One way we can strive for peace is through the immersion trip. The opportunity places us squarely among others who are likeminded: seeking peace through liberation from love of self by engaging as a heavenly city in the love of God for our time on earth. HJE



"Cráter Esmeralda"
Parque Nacional Volcan Irazú, Costa Rica
Photo credit: Elizabeth C. Reilly

Notes

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⁵ John C. Olin, “The Idea of Pilgrimage,” 388.

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⁹ Ignatius of Loyola, 84.

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¹¹ Ignatius of Loyola, 81-82.

¹² Katherine Brown and Elizabeth C. Reilly, “Mission and *Mundialización*: Solidarity and Global Citizenship through Immersion Experiences,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 10, no. 2 (2021): 110-119.

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[Content&utm_content=5c9166b03ed3f00001633680&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-costarica-activist-idUSKCN1R02HI?utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_content=5c9166b03ed3f00001633680&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter).

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