



— 2023 —

ADVENT GUIDE



[cliniclegal.org](https://www.cliniclegal.org)

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends,

As we enter the season of Advent, the four weeks of joyful preparation leading up to Christmas, I am sure that you, like all of us at CLINIC, feel the weight of the many tragic events happening in our world. What with the new outbreak of violence in the Middle East, the continued war in Ukraine, natural and climate-related disasters forcing people to flee — there are many ways in which it feels like the world is shrouded in darkness.

In Advent, however, we are invited to take up the powerful practice of looking for the seeds of light sown around us: small but powerful instances of compassion, the victory of love over hatred, light in darkness, life amid death.

Christians believe that the birth of the Christ child — an obscure moment in time — changed all of history. That is why during the season of Advent we practice turning inward, quieting our souls, and training our gaze to look for the small but mighty ways our world is being transformed in our midst by God's work and our acts of love, peace, and justice. It is the most hopeful exercise we can undertake, and it always bears fruit in terms of helping us grow in our ability to reflect courageous compassion for those in need, particularly our immigrant brothers and sisters.

This year, we have invited the CLINIC team to reflect on their work in light of the Advent themes of hope, love, peace, and joy. Many Christian communities focus on one of those themes during each of the four weeks of Advent, starting with hope and ending with love the final week before Christmas. Four of our team members agreed to consider how their work “upholding the dignity and protecting the rights” of immigrants reflects one of these themes. I find their reflections powerful, and I hope you will too. I hope it will prompt you to reflect on these themes: where have you had true experiences of hope, peace, joy, and love, even despite the many challenges facing our world?

Thank you for your support of CLINIC.



A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Anna Gallagher". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a dark background.

Anna Gallagher
Executive Director

— WEEK 1 —

HOPE



“Give us new life, and we will call upon your name.” – Psalm 80: 18-19



In this first week of the season of Advent, we focus on the theme of hope. Christians around the world reflect on the hope signified by the coming Christ-child. Elizabeth Carlson, a supervising senior attorney, reflects on an experience of hope in her work at CLINIC and how this particular asylum case can be a source of hope for others.

Elena,* a K'iche-speaking Indigenous woman from Guatemala, traveled to the United States with her children in 2015, fleeing years of domestic violence inflicted by her children's father. Elena was originally assisted by CLINIC's Motions to Reopen project when she missed an immigration court hearing in 2019, which caused orders of removal to be issued against her and her children. After my colleagues successfully reopened her case, I took over Elena's asylum case in immigration court. The case presented a number of legal complications. In addition, reliving her past suffering was extremely painful to Elena. Elena would often say to me, "my life has not really been a life," describing all the suffering she endured. On the day of her hearing, Elena prayed for a better life for her and her children — and her prayers were answered. She cried as the immigration judge said, "Congratulations and welcome to the United States"— granting her and her children the permanent protection they so richly deserved.

The grant of asylum does not erase the years of trauma that Elena endured. But it gives her hope —hope that her life can be filled with dignity instead of suffering and that her children can live in safety. It also gives me hope. I hope that, in addition, Elena's story will reverberate

beyond her own case. CLINIC's new Mentorship Project, which aims to support our Affiliates more robustly in their most complex and challenging cases, plans to use aspects of Elena's case as a teaching and training tool for others. In that way, Elena's hope can be passed on to others.

Take Action

How can you support immigrants like Elena in your community? Explore the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Welcome Circles initiative, a program to help parishes and communities form support networks for newly-arrived immigrants. A Welcome Circle is a group of 5-20 people who come together to provide wrap around support for a family: housing, time-bound income support, basic necessities, job search advice, orientation to the community, and more. Learn more by watching this [short video link](#).

**Name has been changed*

— WEEK 2 —

PEACE



“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.”

– Isaiah 40:1

In the second week of Advent, many Christians focus on the theme of peace. Rebekah Niblock, a supervising senior attorney, reflects on her client’s search for peace in the midst of heartbreaking circumstances.



As Aadan* shook the man’s hand to affirm the deal, he felt a sense of hope. As a member of an ethnic minority in his country that had experienced generations of violence and discrimination, he longed for peace and justice for himself and his family. He had spent years peacefully protesting in his country to no avail, and now this stranger was offering him a better life and an opportunity to travel to and live in the United States.

Aadan took the man up on his offer — but, tragically, Aadan became the victim of a brutal human trafficking scheme. He spent several years in Cuba and Haiti, where he was forced to perform backbreaking work at the fishing docks, and was sexually abused and nearly starved. Eventually, Aadan was trafficked into the United States.

Aadan felt afraid despite being in one of the most powerful and safe countries in the world. After threatening and even murdering several members of Aadan’s family, his captors forced Aadan to perform illegal work, which landed him in U.S. prisons. Aadan completed his sentence and eventually met with me, his attorney. The U.S. government reviewed and granted his application for the T visa, a special visa granted to survivors of human trafficking.

When I first met with Aadan and learned his story, I thought that this man must be angry, want revenge for the murders of his family members, and feel a huge sense of injustice for all he has gone through. He was searching for a new life but only found hurt, both physically, mentally, and spiritually.

However, Aadan came to me with a huge smile on his face. He is a kind, generous, and grateful person. While he is not a Christian, he practices his own faith, where he finds comfort and solace. Some might think that Aadan has only now finally found peace and fulfilled the hope he longed

for at that first handshake with his soon-to-be trafficker. He, however, was also able to find peace throughout this treacherous journey despite all the pain and suffering, through his meditations and belief in a higher consciousness or power.

Aadan’s journey is ongoing, as is all of ours. He and I are still seeking a good conclusion in his immigration case as he is currently in removal proceedings despite having an approved T visa application. We are hopeful the government will terminate his case so that he can continue with his life and eventually become a U.S. citizen.

As we prepare for Advent, the coming of Christ, and reflect on the theme of peace, Jesus tells us in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” The Hebrew term for peace is “shalom,” a common greeting by Jewish people that does not mean the absence of troubles or worries, but instead refers to the deep sense of wholeness or wellness. Throughout the world today, there is much chaos, violence, and suffering, as Aadan experienced in his life. However, it is possible to find a sense of peace, or shalom, in the midst of chaos, and remarkable people like Aadan remind us of this every day.

Take Action

Learn more about options for immigrant survivors of human trafficking by reading this [news article](#) or this [information](#) on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website. The more informed we are, the more we can help those suffering whom we encounter.

*Name has been changed

— WEEK 3 —

JOY



“I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul.”

– *Isaiah 61:10*



In the third week of Advent, Christian communities focus on the theme of joy, as we grow closer to the joyful celebration of the birth of Christ. Aldair Campos, paralegal at CLINIC, reflects on how his work and his clients bring joy.

Advent, a season of profound significance in the Catholic tradition, embodies the principles of hope, peace, love, and joy. Among these, joy stands as a powerful emotion, an enduring anticipation of the birth of Christ. This joy connects deeply with the work that CLINIC does daily, by aiding the facilitation of religious workers' arrivals to the United States.

Although this work is challenging and demanding, it is incredibly rewarding. We are always ecstatic when we receive visa approval notices for our clients, who include priests, brothers, nuns, sisters, and other religious workers. We not only celebrate our wins on behalf of our clients, but we also celebrate our clients themselves. The essence of joy is truly embodied by our clients, who courageously leave their nations of origin to become beacons of hope and faith in our communities here, a long way away from their homes.

Religious workers embarking on the journey to the United States are responding to a divine calling. The Church's support in this migration process embodies the joy of enabling individuals to fulfill their spiritual vocations and share their gifts with those in need.

The arrival of religious workers enriches communities of faith in the United States. Their diverse backgrounds and traditions create a vibrant tapestry of faith experiences, fostering joy and strengthening a collective bond through worship.

Religious workers play a pivotal role in nurturing the spiritual growth and well-being of their parishioners. CLINIC's assistance in their

migration actively contributes to the flourishing of faith, generating profound joy and fulfillment to worshippers around the country.

Supporting the migration of religious workers underscores the Church's commitment to upholding religious freedom, a cornerstone of human rights. This advocacy reflects the joy of ensuring that individuals can practice their faith freely and contribute to the rich Catholic tradition in the United States.

In the convergence of Advent joy and the mission to guide religious workers to the United States, religious workers embody the true spirit of the season. Our clients serve as beacons of hope, peace, and love, demonstrating that joy is found in acts of compassion, support, and the pursuit of one's divine calling.

Take Action

- Read CLINIC's "[Religious Workers Are Essential Toolkit](#)" to learn more about how you can advocate on behalf of foreign-born religious workers who may be stuck in visa backlogs which threaten their vital work in the United States.
- Recite this [prayer for vocations](#)

— WEEK 4 —

LOVE



“Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.”

– Psalm 89:1

In the fourth week of Advent, Christians focus on the theme of love – God’s love for humanity in sending his son, who teaches us to share this love in all that we do. Pedro Alemán Perfecto, a policy advocate at CLINIC, reflects how love of others motivates his work.



Pope Francis once said, “Love is always at the service of others. Because love is seen in actions, not words.” As a proud son of immigrant parents, a fronterizo, and zealous immigration advocate, this quote has always resonated with me. I am passionate about working alongside impacted individuals, listening to stories, and advocating to create humane immigration policies. The love I have for the work we do at CLINIC is inspired by not just my background and personal experience, but because the actions we take in this field are impactful, meaningful, and leave a legacy for so many immigrant families. Our work is based on the story of the Gospel on the migration of the Holy Family – who reflect the dignity of all migrant families – and the need to act on our call to love our neighbors and advocate for justice.

While I have only been working at CLINIC a short 9 months, I have experienced being surrounded by passionate and diverse individuals and organizations who not only contribute to my growth as a person, employee, and leader, but who teach me that an advocate is known by their action, not words, which is the essence of Pope Francis’ quote. Just recently, I reflected upon this in my work advocating for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a special status to protect people living in the United States who face dangerous conditions in their homelands.

Working with various organizations, CLINIC recently led a campaign to call on the Biden administration to designate TPS for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a country facing violent

conflict, widespread displacement, and humanitarian crisis. This long campaign was made possible with the collaboration of various teams at CLINIC and partner organizations, culminating in a 100+ multi-faith-based letter asking the administration to designate TPS for the DRC. It was so meaningful to advocate for a change in policy that would truly protect the lives of many Congolese migrants. This campaign became an incredible accomplishment, memory, and the work of staunch advocates. At the center of my work on this campaign has been the love I have for the impacted individuals involved, and that I have for my work in the immigration field, where action speaks louder than words.

Take Action

- Support CLINIC’s work through making a donation or spreading the word about our network and its services. Scan the QR code to donate now!
- Explore [CLINIC’s website](#) to learn more about our work upholding the dignity and protecting the rights of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

