



**A JOURNEY**  
With the  
**HOLY FAMILY**

CLINIC ADVENT GUIDE 2024

# Introduction

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Dear friend,

The season of Advent is upon us again – a special period in the Christian calendar marked by the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Amid the noise and tumult of an election year, ongoing wars and climate disruption, worry and concern over the future for immigrant families, and more, it is easy to miss the invitation that Advent offers – an invitation to remember the deeper meaning of our lives and to recommit to living the truth in love as we prepare to celebrate Christmas.

For Christians, our lives are defined by the joyful knowledge that we are children of God – beloved sons and daughters of our God who is Love itself. At Christmas, we celebrate that Jesus came into the world as a child, God incarnate, born into a human family, the Holy Family. We believe that by his coming he brought us into the family of God, making us God's children and brothers and sisters to one another in faith.

This Advent, we would like to invite you to reflect with us on the Holy Family – on how our migrant brothers and sisters reflect the image of the Holy Family, how we can bear their image as well as we welcome Christ in our neighbor, and how the work of immigration justice strengthens and stabilizes families.

In these four weeks of Advent, we will highlight four Affiliate partners who are doing the hard and holy work of supporting immigrant families through providing immigration legal services. We have invited them to reflect with us on their work in support of immigrant families in light of the example and image of the Holy Family.

We hope you will find these reflections fruitful in your own Advent preparations. How are you called to imitate the Holy Family by welcoming Christ in your neighbor? Do you see our migrant brothers and sisters as part of God's family? How can you bring Christ into the world this Advent?

In peace,



**Anna Marie Gallagher**  
CLINIC Executive Director



**WEEK 1**

# Saying a Courageous Yes

# Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

LUKE 1: 38

In this first week of Advent, we invite you to reflect with us on the Holy Family’s beginning — the moment when Mary, who is engaged to Joseph, is told by an angel that she will bear Jesus. In the Catholic tradition this moment is known as the Annunciation.

The Christian journey begins with this moment — with Mary’s courageous “yes” to welcome Jesus into the world, possibly at great cost to her. She does not know where it will lead, but she has faith. In our work, we too follow in the footsteps of Mary and Joseph by courageously welcoming Christ in the stranger.

Erica de Klerk is the director of St. James Cathedral’s Immigrant Assistance program in Seattle, Washington, a CLINIC Affiliate. The Cathedral’s immigration program includes legal services, provided by two Department of Justice accredited representatives<sup>1</sup>, as well as English language programs, citizenship preparation support, and a welcome program for newly arrived immigrant and refugee families.

For de Klerk, much of her day-to-day work is about saying “yes” to newcomers, trusting that God will provide what the Cathedral team needs to support them.

“Over the last few years, we have received new groups of migrants while building the services to welcome them – first Afghan refugees, then Ukrainian refugees, and most recently families arriving from the southern border,” said de Klerk. “As we work diligently to respond to their unique needs, and to create a structure of support, we are inspired by faith that God will send the resources and skills that are needed, such as volunteers who speak the appropriate languages, social support systems, funding, and so on. We welcome, we act, and we trust God to help us make it work.”

She explained how she sees the seeds of the Annunciation story in her work.

“Mary and Joseph joyfully received the news of Jesus’ coming, this big life changing event for them — but it didn’t just affect or involve them. It also affected their community and ultimately changed the whole world. For us, we see how our work to welcome and accompany our immigrant neighbors is a whole-community effort and has whole-family effects. We may help one immigrant with legal services, but the effects are felt far beyond just them. One naturalization, for example, can change the course of a whole family’s life.”

De Klerk emphasized the great joy in this work.

“Getting to know our clients, receive their stories and walk with them is such an honor,” she said. “We welcomed an Afghan family and shared meals with them, sitting on their beautiful carpet and receiving their incredible hospitality.

“Over time they got to know me as well, and always ask me about my family, my loved ones. Once they said to me, ‘You are our family,’...When I imagine how much they would love to be sharing this meal with their family members ...I feel humbled to do this work and to walk with them along their journey.”

## Reflect

How have you said a courageous “yes” to where God is calling you? What is one action you can take this week to embody welcome of neighbor or stranger?

## Suggested Action

Does your local faith community have a ministry to welcome immigrants and refugees, like St. James Cathedral does? Look up local ministries and check out how you could get involved.

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1 Through the Department of Justice’s Recognition and Accreditation program, non-attorneys working at recognized nonprofits can gain accreditation through to practice certain forms of immigration law. If you are interested in learning more about this program, click [here](#).



**WEEK 2**

In Our Challenges,  
God Walks  
With Us

**While they were [in Bethlehem], the time came for [Mary] to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**

LUKE 2: 6-7

**I**n the second week of Advent, we invite you to reflect on the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem. A long, painstaking journey, particularly for the heavily pregnant Mary, taken out of necessity. A journey which ends with being told there is no room for them in Bethlehem, their final destination, until a compassionate stranger offers them refuge in a stable.

It is here that God comes into the world – among people who were at first unwelcomed, humble enough to accept animal housing as shelter. What does this say to us about where God is to be found among us? How can we take part in welcoming Christ in our vulnerable neighbors?

Maricruz Azuara works at ARISE Adelante, an immigrant-serving organization in South Texas. At ARISE she is what is known as an animadora, an animator or community organizer.

“Our primary mission is education and empowerment of the immigrant communities,” she explained. “Many of our people come from backgrounds and neighborhoods with few resources. We provide things like English classes, legal services, citizenship preparation, early childhood education...but our overall mission is to help the community learn and advocate for themselves. For example, if a community lacks proper sewers or infrastructure because the city overlooks them, we teach them how to go to the city council meeting and speak for themselves. We are here to empower.”

Azuara's dream is to be a legal services practitioner herself, and she has taken the coursework to become a Department of Justice accredited legal representative, but she is unable to apply due to her lack of immigration status.

“I am a DACA recipient,” she explained. “I am the daughter of farmworkers who are still working in the fields at 73 and 83 years of age. I am from a community

that lives in fear of being stopped by the police and deported after 15, 30 years of hard work in this country. I want to pursue legal work to help my community, to address this injustice – but I, too, am stuck without permanent legal status.”

When she had to drop out of school at a young age, ARISE Adelante helped her learn English and gave her a job. “I am so grateful for all that ARISE has given me – and now I give back.”

**“When my community is afraid, I will tell them to remember that God himself was a foreigner, and that we are all foreigners in this life. We are crossing through this life together, and at the end God is there, and he is with us now.”**

MARICRUZ AZUARA,  
ARISE ADELANTE, SOUTH TEXAS

CLINIC asked Azuara how she sees the Holy Family's journey in her story, and how this inspires her work.

“When my community is afraid, I will tell them to remember that God himself was a foreigner, and that we are all foreigners in this life,” she said. “We are crossing through this life together, and at the end God is there, and he is with us now.”

“In spite of all the challenges I face, I know that everything is in God's hands,” she continued. “My community is always saying, ‘*Si Dios quiere* (God willing), or ‘*Primeramente Dios*’ (God first). We get our strength from faith, and we keep moving forward.”

## Reflect

When have you felt welcomed in a time of need? When have you been a face of welcome to others? Where have you felt God's presence with you in your life's journey?

## Suggested Action

How well do you know your town or city? Do you know where the “overlooked” neighborhoods are? Where do vulnerable people or newcomers tend to live – near you, or far away? This week, take a drive around an unknown neighborhood. Take one action to interact with someone whose life is very different from yours.



**WEEK 3**

Sharing the  
Good News

**So [the shepherds] went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds.**

LUKE 2: 16-18

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> week in Advent, we are reflecting on the visit of the shepherds to the Nativity scene – the moment when the joy that the Holy Family has experienced in welcoming Jesus is shared with others, and then, through the shepherds, is passed on to the whole world.

As organizations serving migrants and refugees, we see every day how our clients are resilient, hopeful, faithful, and remarkable people. Amid constant dehumanizing rhetoric about immigrants, members of the CLINIC network witness the ways in which immigrants enrich our communities through their faith, hard work, and so much else. Like the shepherds sharing the good news they encountered, we are called to share the joy, beauty, and meaning in our work, and how we see God in our immigrant neighbors.

At Catholic Charities Maine, the staff at the Refugee and Immigration Services program are brimming with stories about their clients' faith, hope, and resilience.

"Independent of what religious background they come from, our clients are constantly sharing with us about their faith in God and how God has seen them through the worst. They are sustained by their faith, and by sharing it with us, they sustain ours," said Eliana Trenam, immigration legal services manager at Catholic Charities Maine and a DOJ-accredited representative.

She explained that the call to serve our neighbor from her own Jewish faith is put into practice and reinforced through her work at Catholic Charities. "We hear over and over again from our clients, 'If God wills it, it will happen,' or 'It's in God's hands.' If they can have faith despite all that they've gone through, it makes us think, why can't we?"

Trenam had numerous stories to share about her clients' faith. "I had one refugee client share with me that when she was living in a refugee camp, experiencing a mental health crisis, in desperation one day she prayed to 'any God who would hear her' to help her...and the following day got an interview with the U.S. resettlement agency... She is now a devout Christian. I had another client who jumped up and said, 'Praise Jesus!' after she passed her naturalization interview... My clients are constantly

teaching me about God's goodness and reinforcing my belief that every person bears God's image."

Tracy Moore, director of the Refugee and Immigration Services program at Catholic Charities Maine, agreed. "I just think that this work is a lot of holding hope for people when they are hopeless...and then at times when we are hopeless, they spur us on as well. The family separation cases we take on in particular are so long, and it is so easy to get caught up in the minutiae of cases and bureaucracy and lose sight of the meaning and impact. But our clients bring us back through their steadfast faith."

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TRACY MOORE,  
CATHOLIC CHARITIES MAINE

Trenam emphasized the deeper meaning of their day-to-day work. "These are not just jobs that we do here – These are acts of faith and service to help 'repair the world,' or make the world a better place. That knowledge is sustaining for us when we're dealing with very long processes and outcomes; we have to have faith that we played our part to help. There is inherent value in everything that a person is able to contribute. Everybody has a part to play in the

divine story, and whatever aspect of a person's path you touch can help shape it for the better."

In a way, they are like the shepherds – who played a significant part in the divine story by simply sharing the beautiful sight they had seen.

"We need to look for more ways to share the stories of our clients and the hope they bring," said Moore. "It's powerful. We should recommit to looking for any opportunity we can find to speak about it."

## Reflect

Who has been a witness for you of faith and hope in times of challenge?

## Suggested Action

If you have had an experience that has changed your mind or heart about newcomers, or welcoming the stranger, take time this week to talk about it with someone new.





**WEEK 4**

# Welcoming the Stranger as Christ

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.

MATTHEW 2: 13-14

In the fourth and final week of Advent, as we approach Christmas, we invite you to reflect on the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt.

In this post-Nativity scene, the Holy Family are told in a dream to flee to Egypt in secret, by night, due to the threat against the infant Jesus’ life by a jealous King Herod.

This is the episode that prompts us now, today, to think of the Holy Family as refugees themselves – people who fled for their lives to an unknown and faraway place, where they must have relied on the kindness of strangers for survival and to make a home where they could live in safety. Each person along their journey who helped them, welcomed them, both on the journey and in their new life in Egypt, unknowingly played a key part in Jesus’ life and God’s plan.

In the CLINIC network, we, too, in our everyday, often bureaucratic legal work with migrant families, play a small role in extending God’s providence and care to vulnerable families on the move.

Judith Romero is a partially accredited representative at Catholic Charities in San Bernardino, California. A Mexican immigrant herself, she helps families apply for citizenship, adjust status, get work permits, and much more. Her own experience as a client of Catholic Charities has inspired her to work there since 2016.

“My former supervisor was the one who helped my husband and me apply for citizenship,” Romero explained. “She saw that I was a Spanish speaker, and that I was interested in helping others, so she invited me to first volunteer, and then work at Catholic Charities. Over time I took the CLINIC Comprehensive Overview of Immigration Law course, got trained, and finally applied for DOJ accreditation. Now I help families like I was helped.

“Our experience as immigrants was easier than most, because we came through my husband’s work visa, but still, the adjustment to a new life, far away from family, was very difficult, especially for my oldest daughter who was four at the time. It was a totally new language – a new world – for her.”

She reflected on how her clients remind her of the Holy Family and inspire her with their faith.

“Like Joseph and Mary, many of my clients are truly desperate. They come to us with absolutely nothing – no place to live, no job, no food – nothing. One Honduran family I saw recently came with three children and a wife about to give birth. They had a long, hard journey through Mexico. When I see them, I think, ‘How on earth did you get here?’ And I then I do believe that God must have been guiding them.

“My clients are always praying – they rely on God for everything, and many of them, once they’ve received help from us, come and ask how they can volunteer and give back. They are people of faith.”

She emphasized how the whole work of immigration legal services requires walking by faith.

“When I fill out an application with a client, I say a prayer that the government officer reviewing it will treat them kindly and fairly. We are just one step in a long process – we see the families for a moment and then have to trust that God will walk with them and be there in the kindness of others receiving them next.”

Like those who generously received the Holy Family their moment of great need, we pray that we can play our part, however small, in the work of building God’s kingdom by welcoming our neighbors as Christ.

## Reflect

Have you ever had an experience where one kind or good action, however small, ended up being very meaningful? Where do you see God’s hand in that experience?

## Suggested Action

You can explore [CLINIC’s website here](#). We invite you to prayerfully consider supporting our mission to provide quality, affordable immigration legal services to immigrants in need, whether through making a [financial donation](#) or through prayer for our network’s staff and the clients they serve.

**“My clients are always praying - they rely on God for everything, and many of them, once they’ve received help from us, come and ask how they can volunteer and give back. They are people of faith.”**

JUDITH ROMERO, CATHOLIC CHARITIES SAN BERNARDINO AND RIVERSIDE COUNTIES



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[cliniclegal.org](http://cliniclegal.org)