



In all things to love and to serve

Irish Jesuit Mission Office Newsletter

Issue 11 – Spring 2014

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Vision

A just and humane world based on Gospel values and Ignatian Spirituality.

Mission

The Irish Jesuit Mission Office supports Jesuit works in the service of poor and marginalised people, particularly in Africa and Asia.

To learn more about our missions or to make a donation, please contact:

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For more information on the issues in this newsletter, visit:
www.jesuitmissions.ie



Fr. Frans Van der Lugt SJ: A Jesuit martyr for peace.
Fr. Van der Lugt was assassinated in Homs, Syria on Monday 8 April 2014.
RIP

What Future for Syrian Children?



Noelle Fitzpatrick has worked for JRS Eastern Africa and Majis during the last 12 years. She is currently with

Trocaire on the Syria desk.

A medical student in Aleppo

Mirella will shortly turn 18. She is a student and volunteer with Caritas Syria, bringing emergency support to people in need. She is from Aleppo, Syria's most populated city, the industrial heartland before the war. She continues to study medicine in the University there although there is only two hours of electricity supply a day, and many of her lecturers have fled to the safety of other countries. Mirella lives in the part of Aleppo that is controlled by government forces. To continue her studies abroad is a possibility but she does not want

to abandon her parents to the war. She volunteers with Caritas and that gives Mirella a sense of purpose and hope.

Children talking politics and guns

Another young volunteer in Aleppo talks about life for the children there. 'What children' she asks. 'There are no 'children' left in Aleppo....now, they all talk politics, they identify one type of gun from another, they play war games. Some go to school if it is safe and their school is not being used as shelter for the hundreds of families displaced from rural Aleppo into the city'. Despite the situation, people still have dreams. 'They can take everything else but they can't take our dreams'.

Across Syria it is estimated that at least 3 million children are suffering because of the war – victims of direct and indirect violence, shot by snipers,

A Word from the Director



Happy Easter to all our readers and may the gift of Easter joy be with you. In the words of Pope Francis, the root of our joy is in Jesus Christ – the Risen One: “Ours is not a joy of having possessions but from having encountered a Person, Jesus, in our midst: it is born from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult times, even when our life’s journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable – and there are so many of them!”

Our Easter newsletter voices the suffering of so many divided and hurt by war and conflict in our world – people who seem to have insurmountable problems. The people of Syria, South Sudan and many corners of our world cry out this Easter time for healing, peace and joy. Many Jesuits are on the frontiers of this suffering because the mission of the Jesuits is to be bridge builders in a broken world. The early documents of the Society of Jesus speak of the work of the Jesuits as “to reconcile the estranged”. This is indeed God’s work and gift and the Jesuits are blessed to be part of this ministry.

The stories in the newsletter also speak of hope, ways of forgiveness and peace. The peace process in the North of Ireland and the end of apartheid in South Africa are resurrection stories. The presence of many of our brothers and sisters in conflict situations is a real sign of the love of the resurrected Christ with people in their struggles. They keep hope alive in each other and by their presence amongst the suffering they show that God has not forgotten and they are not alone.

During this Easter time I invite each one of us to pray for this gift of peace for all peoples and for our friends who work for peace in different parts of the world.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission and our works and may you be blessed in a special way this Easter.

Fr. John K. Guiney SJ



starved in cities under siege, kidnapped for ransom by one side or another. Many of Syria’s children, including the estimated 1.1 million children who have sought refuge in neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, have not been to school in over two years.

Education through Arabic, French and English

Last week I visited the town of Zahle in the Lebanon, 30 kms from the Syrian border. The Jesuit Refugee Service, in agreement with the local community, have converted a Mosque into a school for refugee children so that they can access the Lebanese public school system. To do so, they must have some level of French and English. This is very difficult for many Syrian children used only to education through Arabic.

In Zahle I spoke with the headmaster of another school. Of the 420 students now enrolled, a third is Syrian. Here, the Syrians and Lebanese students are taught together. Some Syrians do very well; others struggle – academically and in the play ground. He says it is clear there are those who are traumatised: they remain apart from the others.

Early marriage is a coping strategy

Outside the town is a small tented settlement where 113 families are living in 100 tents. Amongst them was a family of four headed by a 16 yr old girl. Her father disappeared and her mother was arrested in Syria. The leader of the camp explained that as the eldest her priority now will be to marry so that her family can be properly taken care of. It’s a coping strategy for their survival.

The answer is in our hands

So, what future for Syrian children? Is a whole generation to be lost, radicalised by this war? The answer is in our hands. Concerted political and diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict – including sustained pressure by the Irish government – increased financial and humanitarian support by individuals and communities around the world, a commitment to prayer, solidarity and an outrage that will raise the profile and awareness of the suffering of children in the Syrian conflict.

All these can play their part in saving this generation of children from the abyss.

For more information on Syria’s children, visit www.jesuitmissions.ie.

Christian Responses to Conflict



Brian Lennon, SJ has worked for over 30 years with people affected by conflict in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

Silence was also adopted until recently by most people in Spain about their own Civil War.

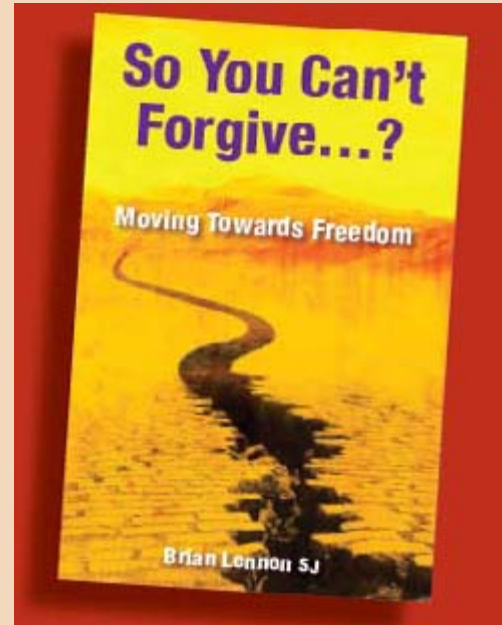
South Africa followed a different approach. It organised a Truth Commission and offered amnesty to those who told the truth. There were examples of real reconciliation. But there were also questions. After a week-long questioning of Winnie Mandela about her alleged involvement in the murder of 14 year old Stompie Moeketsi, Archbishop Tutu invited Stompie's mother to embrace Winnie, which she did. Was this reconciliation? Or was it a well-intentioned but misguided imposition of a particular viewpoint on one individual?

Reconciliation or another way forward?

The aim was to reach reconciliation through the truth. But while many want the truth, how does it help me to be reconciled to you, if I find out that it was you who killed my loved one? It is hard to see how truth without repentance can help. Yet, in South Africa and elsewhere what many want is simply the truth.

Reconciliation seems to include right and wrong, repenting and forgiving. But it tends to work only when both sides accept that wrong was done. Here in Northern Ireland one side sees our conflict as a just struggle for freedom: the other as terrorists murdering legitimate security forces and civilians. We are unlikely to agree about this. So, should we talk about reconciliation? Or should we find some other way forward?

Not long after World War II, Jean Monnet, a Frenchman and a founder of the EU, was approached by a German who wanted to join his work



for the future of Europe. Monnet was happy to accept him. But then the German said that he had taken part in the occupation of Paris. He did not apologise because, as he saw it, he was doing his patriotic duty. Monnet said that he was still welcome as long as they could agree on the future.

A future in which all parties can find space

Different approaches work in different contexts. For myself I prefer a more low-key approach: one that focuses less on right and wrong, that recognises we are all capable of the most terrible evil, that we need to build political, social, cultural and religious structures to prevent conflict, and that after conflicts we need to create a future in which all parties can find space.

As Jesuits we are ideally placed to help this kind of work and it is great to see the Jesuit Refugee Service responding to the needs of refugees. But should we not also work more often on conflict mediation and dialogue to end the conflicts that cause so many people to flee their countries?

Omagh, Northern Ireland

31 people died in the Omagh bomb on 15 August 1998, including two unborn twins. 10 years later, with two others, I was asked to help resolve disagreements among the bereaved about the wording for a memorial to those killed. It was heartrending to listen to their stories: people hearing the bomb, trying to make contact with loved ones, going to the hospital, waiting as one by one the dead were identified, and then being called forward to make the formal identification. Then there were the funerals, including a long drive back to Donegal with the bodies of two children aged 12, with the dark roads lined with people holding candles.

Long after bombs people have to deal with the empty chair, the anger, trauma, loneliness and financial issues. Each bomb today continues to rip bodies, minds, hearts and communities apart. After violence some bereaved want justice, others truth, others money. Still others let go the past and find peace.

Dealing with the past

Societies also deal with the past, but in different ways. In Southern Ireland the Republic did it by silence. Politically the country divided over the 1921 Treaty. But most, though vehemently opposed to the other side, did not afterwards mention the Civil War atrocities.

Africa Rising – Slowly, Steadily, Hopefully

Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orabator SJ is a theologian and lecturer. He currently serves as the Provincial of the Eastern African Province of the Society of Jesus – a Province that includes six countries.

In 2000, an edition of *The Economist* appeared with the cover title “Africa:

Hopeless Continent”. 11 years later, the same magazine declared Africa a “hopeful continent” with a cover title “Africa Rising”. It’s not easy to assess the predicament and condition of the continent of Africa with its 54 countries populated by an incredible variety of peoples and cultures. From Cape to Cairo, Dar es Salaam to Dakar, the continent is a place of contrasts and ironies. Signs of hope compete with tales of despair.

Wars, violence, conflicts, and yet...

For many, Africa’s history unfolds in waves of violent conflicts and wars – from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Central Africa Republic, South Sudan to Egypt. Memories of bloody conflicts are still fresh in Mali, Libya, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. Nigeria is caught in the throes of a deadly militant sectarianism that is sowing mayhem in the north of the country. The cycles of violence traumatising millions of Africans make daily headline news on the international media.

Yet wars and violence do not define the continent and its peoples. Africans have a passion for life. Despite challenges of violence and conflict, African women, men and children celebrate life with confidence and joy. In the words of a renowned African theologian, Africa’s treasure is its “moral tradition of abundant life.” Africans don’t give up on life. This tradition serves as a bulwark against the forces of evil and it is on the basis of this tradition that Africans strive to overcome the conflicts and crises besetting their continent.

Trading at a disadvantage

Since colonial times, Africa has been pulled deeper and deeper into the cultural, economic and political vortex of globalisation with mixed results. Presently, Africa is reputed to be the place with the fastest growing middleclass – a sign that the continent’s economy is on an upward swing. The contrast is frightening, judging by masses of impoverished people, by products or collateral damage of a relentless neo-liberal capitalist economy.

Africa trades with the world from a position of



disadvantage. What Africa has to sell are its primary commodities – agricultural, natural and mineral resources. The trade in these commodities has not produced the expected transformation of the lot of Africans. The struggle to obtain and control these resources creates and aggravates tension and violence. A famous movie, *Blood Diamond*, vividly dramatised how the rush for Africa’s natural and mineral resources remains a pivotal factor in the continent’s internecine conflicts. Lately land is becoming an item of foreign trade, as countries like China, South Korea, India and Brazil buy up vast swathes of arable African lands to grow and supply food to their populations. This creates further competition for land and generates more conflict.

Africa is not doomed to failure

Contrary to popular perception, Africa is not doomed to failure. The continent can be free of conflict, but it cannot do it alone. The fortunes of Africa do not lie entirely in its hands, nor do they depend exclusively on outside economic institutions, factors and agents. It is a combination of both. The path towards progress would entail greater economic justice that promotes fair trade and dismantles regressive trade barriers.

Another path would be genuine solidarity and mutually beneficial partnerships, regionally and internationally. Africa must also take responsibility for achieving greater accountability and transparency of public officials and politicians for the continent’s resources. When there is greater practice of justice and equality and the strengthening of the institutions of governance, hope will spring anew in Africa.

Africa is not a hopeless case. The intensity and passion, energy and entrepreneurship, creativity and courage of its young people show that the past history of conflict has not mortgaged the continent’s future. Africa is rising – slowly, steadily, hopefully.

Internally Displaced People



Richard O'Dwyer SJ is Director of Multi-educational and Agricultural Jesuit Institute of South Sudan (MAJIS)

Trouble in Juba

When I first heard that trouble had broken out in Juba on the night of 14/15 December 2013, I was in Nairobi, Kenya at a distance of over 1,000 kilometres from South Sudan. From initial reports it seemed as if some kind of minor dispute had arisen at the military barracks housing the Presidential guard. However, within 24 hours it became clear that what had taken place had triggered a bloodbath between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups. Within a few days well-armed rebels were attacking the towns of Bor in Jonglei State, Bentiu in Unity State and Malakal in Upper Nile State. The majority of the Dinka population backed the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir and many Nuer backed the sacked vice-President Riek Machar and dissident rebel groups.

Fleeing the violence

Towards the end of February 2014 the UN estimated that at least 10,000 people died as a result of clashes between Nuer and Dinka. The UN put the number of Internally Displaced People at 900,000 who fled from their homes to other safer areas of South Sudan. In addition, at least 100,000 fled across South Sudan's international borders in Kenya and Uganda to flee the violence in South Sudan. Most people who fled to UN compounds literally left everything



Displaced South Sudanese

behind them and many people's homes were set on fire. In the towns of Malakal and Bentiu virtually every building was burnt to the ground. An eyewitness account says the emeritus Catholic Bishop of Malakal appealed to the rebel commanders to intervene and stop their soldiers looting and burning the town. The Bishop was told he would be summarily executed if he interfered any further.

UN compounds at their worst

As one might imagine, the conditions inside UN compounds which are designed for hundreds of occupants deteriorate rapidly as thousands seek refuge. Very quickly water and sanitation facilities become completely overwhelmed due to the numbers of people using them. In particular, mothers with babies and young children are particularly vulnerable in overcrowded conditions and the numbers suffering from malaria, typhoid and acute diarrhoea can quickly multiply. Within UN compounds, Dinka and Nuer had to be segregated to avoid ethnic violence. Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of the UN peacekeepers,

even among those Dinka and Nuer seeking refuge in UN compounds, murders and rapes were perpetrated. Besides those seeking refuge in UN compounds, many other people were forced to seek safety by fleeing to the bush where they had to somehow survive on almost no food or water.

A massive effort needed to bring healing and reconciliation

This latest tragedy to affect the long suffering people of South Sudan is all the more tragic because it is the result of South Sudanese seeking to kill their fellow countrymen and women because of ethnic difference. It would seem that the Gospel commandment for fellow Christians to love one another has fallen on deaf ears with lethal consequences. A massive effort to bring healing and reconciliation will be required if the country is to realise the dream voiced at its birth only just over 2 years ago of being a peaceful and united country respecting the rights and dignity of all of its citizens.

The Irish Jesuit Mission Office supports the MAJIS project in South Sudan in the training and upskilling of men and women farmers.

Mission News

Bríd Dunne is the newest member of the team at the Irish Jesuit Mission Office. Bríd is Development Education Coordinator working with Jesuit Secondary schools to build upon best practice towards a formal development education programme for the network. She is contactable at 01 836 6509 or at bdunne@jesuit.ie.



Photo taken in Harare, Zimbabwe

Una Leedom, our friend and colleague, passed away recently. Una worked as a volunteer in the Jesuit Mission Office going back for many years and was a wonderful friend to the missionaries who visited. She also regularly visited Cherryfield Nursing Home, where she always received a great welcome. We were sad to say goodbye but she received a lovely ‘send off’ from her new home in Carrickmacross and her old home in Dublin 1.

The Irish Jesuit Mission Office held a **Mass of Thanksgiving** for supporters and friends in Galway and the West of Ireland on the 29 March in St. Ignatius Church, Galway. Friends and family members joined in the celebration and enjoyed refreshments together in the Community House after Mass. The next Thanksgiving Mass will be held at the Dromantine Retreat Centre outside Newry, on Saturday 20 September. All are welcome.



We would like to **thank our brothers and sisters** for all of the support received in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. With your help, we have raised €152,024 for the relief effort. The recovery is ongoing. However, there is still much to be done to restore what was lost.

Please pass this Newsletter to a friend and if you do not wish to receive it call 01 836 6509



5.5 million Syrian children in need



Easter Appeal 2014

Help us to bring hope to people suffering in conflict and poverty. Every donation makes a real difference to their lives.

Please make cheques payable to: Irish Jesuit Missions and post to Irish Jesuit Missions, 28 Upper Sherrard Street, Dublin 1, Tel. 01 836 6509

For donations online log on to: www.jesuitmissions.ie

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Are you eligible for PAYE Tax Relief for donations? Yes ☐ No ☐

Thank you for your continued support!