



Irish Jesuit Mission Office Newsletter

In all things to love and to serve

Issue 13 – Winter 2014

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Vision

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

Mission

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

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Do they know it's Christmas in Maban? by John K. Guiney SJ

Christmas is coming and Dublin is brimming with bling and decoration. I am just back from Maban, a refugee camp in South Sudan where two Spanish Jesuits, Pau and Alvaro, lead the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) team there. Their work is supported by the Irish Jesuit Missions along with other Mission offices in Europe.

Some of the greatest challenges in Maban, South Sudan

Maban is a tent city of 140,000 refugees fleeing the Blue Nile area conflict in Sudan and 60,000 returnees from different camps in Eastern Africa. There have been two evacuations of JRS and other humanitarian staff in the past year because of insecurity. All NGO staff except essential support staff was advised to move.

However JRS and some humanitarian workers returned in September. To say the work there is challenging is an understatement and the work of JRS and others is heroic under very difficult circumstances. Many have been living in tents in 40c heat in the past year.

70 to 80 per cent of the population of the camps and the local community — who were living there before the refugees arrived — are women and children. They are the most vulnerable people in war zones. Less than 20 per cent of the children have access to primary school education due to lack of facilities, teachers and basic teaching materials.

It is an isolated area and inaccessible at present because of rebel movements in the area. Basic supplies are not easy

A Word from the Director



“Everthing’s a changing” our village storyteller would often announce and so right he was. Life is about changing and to live is to change often. At this time of the year we notice the changes in a very real way. We are all a year older. One year is ending and another

about to begin. We remember people who were with us this time last year and have gone to God. The Christmas story marks the biggest change in our life’s journey — *the Word became flesh and lived amongst us.*

Celebrating Christmas is a source of hope as we remember the great things God has done for us. He came down to us to be with us and lift us up.

The faith and joy I have experienced in celebrating Christmas Mass with refugees in camps over the years has relayed in stereo this powerful message. He came to raise up the lowly and set the downtrodden free. This is experienced in the lived faith of so many victims of conflict and violence today.

This year has witnessed a broken humanity in need of healing and reconciliation from Ukraine to Syria, from the Central African Republic to South Sudan. Powerless people hunger for peace and reconciliation. When we join in this mission to build reconciliation and a new humanity, every day is Christmas Day in our world. St. Ignatius taught that love is expressed more in giving than receiving, in actions rather than just words. When we reach out, listen and are kind to one another, Jesus is born in the stable of each other’s hearts.

We remember our missionaries in different parts of the world and their work of bringing the good news of consolation to the people they serve.

All of us in the Mission Office thank you for all your support over the years, without which our mission work could not continue.

Have a blessed Christmas and peaceful New Year.

to acquire locally and everything has to come in by plane, especially in the wet season, which is slow and expensive. On 13th November, the Sudan Government (north of the border) bombed Maban county. This is the first time crossborder bombing took place in this area since Independence in 2011 and casualties were brought to the hospital in Bunj town on the day of my arrival.

Security is fragile and its maintenance depends on so many factors such as the peace talks in Addis, the behaviour of local militias, their commanders and developments in Blue Nile area.

A capital of goodwill

JRS’ efforts in Maban have had a short and interrupted year but have made real connections to the refugee community, local host community and other stakeholders. There is a capital of goodwill amongst all the actors in the environment. Many people mentioned spontaneously that the JRS’ presence in the area makes such a difference. This is great credit to the present team.

They know it’s Christmas in Maban

The JRS’ presence in Maban is indeed ensuring Christmas is there in the truest sense, not only for Christians but also for the thousands of Muslims in the camps. Their dedicated service in education, psychosocial work and pastoral outreach to all refugees is a real sign that God has not forgotten them but has come to be amongst them.

Christmas comes to us all not by the size and quantity of our presents to one another but by the quality of our presence to each other. The personal, compassionate and listening presence of JRS amongst the most vulnerable in Maban is a sure sign that Christmas is coming and indeed has already arrived in this — the most isolated refugee camp in the world.



Goodwill brings smiles even through the challenges

Christmas Joy Resounds in Cambodia

Fr. Ashley Evans SJ is the newly appointed Director of the Jesuit New School Project, in Sisophon, Cambodia.

Who was evangelizing whom?

The students at the Catholic Church Student Centre in Phnom Penh prepare a Christmas crib under the trees in front of the building each year. It is perhaps the only such crib in the city as the vast majority of the population is Buddhist.

Sometimes the local kids come into our grounds to play in the grass and bushes until the students chase them out again. One Saturday afternoon a group of noisy kids was playing around. As no students appeared to chase them away, I emerged from my office: that served as a signal for them to flee.



A Christmas gathering in Phnom Penh at the Catholic Church Student Centre

However one small fellow refused to budge. I descended the steps in a suitably angry manner but still the little fellow stayed resting on his hunkers in front of the crib. I was about to let out a roar when he looked up and said “Uncle who is that?” pointing at the baby Jesus in the manger. So I got down on my hunkers explaining “He is the baby Jesus who has just been born poor to come and save the world”. “And who is that”, he asked pointing at the Virgin Mary. “That’s his mother, Queen Mary” (that’s how the Khmer translation works). “She is taking care of him now”. “Thanks” he said and ran off.

As I walked back up the steps to the Centre, I noticed that my anger had dissipated and been replaced by a quiet joy. Later, I had time to wonder about who was evangelizing whom that day.

Education with displaced people and landmine victims

This year I will spend Christmas at a small parish community in the remote town of Sisophon in the north west of Cambodia, near the Thai border. After twenty years teaching university students in Phnom Penh, the Jesuit superior Fr. Indon Oh, from Korea, has asked me to take charge of our new educational project in a poor area outside Sisophon that is situated in the Battambang prefecture. Fr. Rajat Purti, an Indian Jesuit, is in charge of the parish there.

The Jesuits have planned an education project in Cambodia for a long time. In 2013, we reached a consensus about the project that was approved by Fr. Nicolas, our Superior General in Rome. We chose this remote area because our programs there for landmine victims and displaced people have been appreciated by the local people and government authorities for many years.

Our project will start as a Community Learning and Teacher Resource Centre with a kindergarten school but will eventually grow into a Jesuit primary and secondary school in the service of the poor young people of Sisophon. However, we are proceeding slowly so that the local people can be involved in the process each step of the way. During July and August, we ran a summer school program for 180 Grade 6 students from four primary schools to help them make the transition to the local middle school. We have to run our education project so that all benefit in a win win situation — students, teachers, parents and teacher trainers.

Celebrations in Sisophon

The Catholic community in Sisophon is tiny but young and fervent. Christmas is a really happy time for the small community. The students will put on a Nativity play during midnight Mass and we will have a big party after Christmas morning Mass. Then the play will be repeated as many young people from outside the Church come to learn more about Christmas (all they learn from media is giving and receiving presents). Even though the number of Christians in this town is small, the small Catholic and Protestant communities ensure Christmas joy resounds.

May all of our Mission supporters in Ireland receive the grace of Christmas joy and peace even in the midst of so much social upheaval and change in our modern world!



Christmas Bouyancy in the African Spirit

“I served nearly all of my priestly life in the Province of Zambia/Malawi”

Fr. Joe Keeney SJ is Assistant Parish Priest in Lusaka.

Zambian independence in action

On 24th October 2014 Zambia celebrated 50 years of independence. On that same day I handed over the parish of St Ignatius in Lusaka to Fr John Mwelwa SJ. John becomes the first Zambian Jesuit to be in charge of this church.

For years I had assumed the duties and responsibilities at this busy parish without a bother. In earlier years I had the help of good older men: notably Fr Des O’Loghlen and Fr Bob Kelly. In later years I was blessed to be assisted by energetic younger Zambian and Malawian Jesuits. Nearly three years ago I developed trouble with

the parish. These too have become more professional. Their purpose is to raise funds for charity and, as it’s December, they have a strong Christmas flavor.



Looking back to my first parish in Namwala

I served nearly all of my priestly life (ordination in 1978) in the Province of Zambia/Malawi, always working in a parish. My first appointment was as Parish Priest in Namwala, a remote area on the flood plain of the Kafue River. I loved it there. The nearest parish was about 80km away, across the river and accessible only during the dry season. The nearest town was 160km away down a bumpy, sandy road. I have great memories



Fr. Joe Keeney celebrates a well attended mass in Kitwe, Zambia.

my back: spontaneous collapse of a few vertebrae due to osteoporosis. While the fractures have healed, my back remains weak with the muscles protesting at the end of each day. Increasingly, I have been feeling that I am not up to the task of being Parish Priest and would gladly have handed over when the back trouble began. However, until Independence Day this year, no one was willing to take up the challenge.

Christmas at St. Ignatius

It would have been my 22nd Christmas as Parish Priest. Christmas is one of the many high points in the year at St Ignatius. Carols before Dec. 25th involve 80 children and teenagers from the families of the parish and each year it becomes more imaginative. It will be such a pleasure for me to stand back and just enjoy it this year. December is busy with concerts by the various choirs of

of crossing the river on a basic pontoon to minister to the small fishing communities. Holy Week and Easter always occurred when the water was high. Someone would be sent to fetch me in a dugout canoe: the journey took several hours in both directions.

Moving on to Kitwe and to Lusaka

In 1983 I was appointed to Kitwe, one of Zambia’s Copperbelt towns. In the suburb of Riverside was a 3rd level college called The Zambia Institute of Technology (later to become the Copperbelt University). Being about 8km from town and the nearest Catholic Church, the local resident Catholics attended the Sunday chaplaincy mass on the campus. They asked the Bishop of Ndola if they could have their own parish. After consultation with the Jesuit Provincial I was assigned as the first Parish Priest: my job was to establish and run the church.

I spent 10 very happy years in Our Lady of Africa Parish, Kitwe. To see it grow from nothing to becoming a vibrant Christian community was a unique experience. It was during these years I learned the value of allowing the laity to express and use their gifts. I worried about the bricks and mortar but it was the families together who built the Church, the People of God.

In 1993 the Provincial transferred me to Lusaka to become Parish Priest of St Ignatius. Little did I know then that my term of office would stretch to 21 years. I used my experience at Kitwe of depending on the people and consequently there has been wonderful participation at every level of parish life.

God is Blessing the Church in Hong Kong

Fr. Alfred Deignan SJ, an educationalist, works as Co-Chair of Wah Yan College, School Development Project, Hong Kong.

A Commercial Christmas

Walking down the main streets and shopping areas of this crowded city, you would think you were in a fairyland with the bright coloured lights and big “Merry Christmas” signs. They are for commercial purposes to tempt people to buy more gifts. They create a festive spirit but are obviously not religious as there are no Nativity scenes. In many homes you will find a lighted Christmas tree with gifts around it. Christmas dinner is enjoyed, not at home with the family, but in a restaurant or hotel with turkey, ham and pudding.

In general these are the Christmas trappings of the rich but for the majority of ordinary poor and non-Catholic Chinese people, the 25th December means just a holiday.

Christmas and the Chinese New Year in contrast

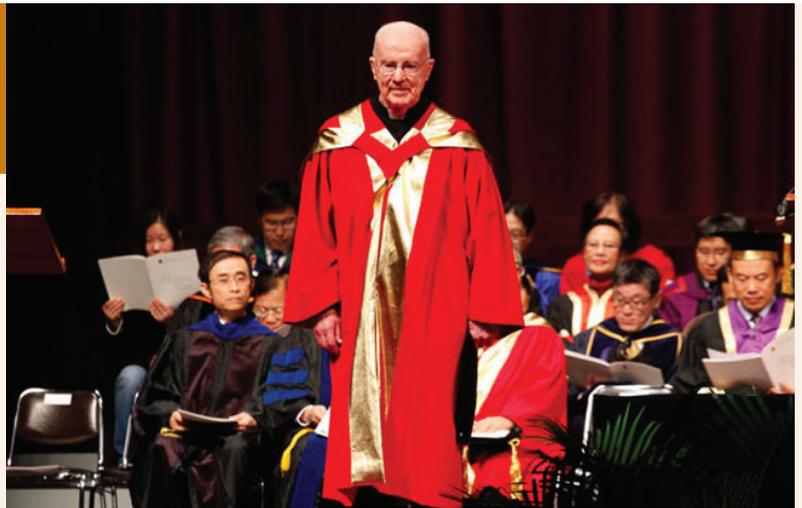
Looking at the more religious aspects of Christmas, many Church and school choirs are invited to sing carols in the shopping areas: the Nativity scene is found in every Catholic Church and they are packed with people for Christmas Masses, many of whom are non-Catholic who are attracted by the religious atmosphere created by the liturgy and carol singing. For all Catholics, Christmas is a joyous celebration of the Birth of Christ.

By contrast the Chinese New Year in spring, is a celebration for all Chinese people. Its focus is on the family and harmonious relationships and is considered the biggest festival of the year. During Chinese New Year the children wear new clothes, usually red which signifies joy, and are given red packets by adults, especially when

Joy, buoyancy and gratitude

As we approach Christmas I wish the Catholic Church in Ireland, where I grew up, even a small share of the joy that exists in the African Church. Even though we have many more pressing social and economic problems there is buoyancy in the spirit of the people here. They have a wonderful ability to celebrate life and have constantly lifted me up and away from doom and gloom.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to all of you who have made my life here possible. May Our Lord Jesus be born in your hearts and homes this Christmas just as surely as He is here in Africa.



they visit relatives and friends. So you see how different are these two celebrations. For Christmas the focus is religious; recalling the great love of God, sending His Son to live among us and be one like us. The focus of Chinese New Year is the family, unity, harmony and friendship.

Hopes for the future

Recently there has not been much harmony in evidence, people in general want the right to elect the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 2017. Thankfully protests have been mainly peaceful. My hope for the future is that this problem can be resolved soon and that the Hong Kong people can be more united under the limitations of living in a “one country, two systems” situation.

I hope and pray that the church will continue to grow. At present there are about 6,000 baptisms each year and this year there are 9,000 catechumens. Amazing! The harvest is great, the priest laborers are few but we have many very committed lay people.

I wish the many readers of the Newsletter a Happy Christmas and New Year. God bless you and keep you in His care. You too are part of our mission.

Mission News

● Irish Jesuit Missions on the move!

The Irish Jesuit Missions has moved to a new home at 20 Upper Gardiner Street. It's the house with the green door, right opposite Gardiner Street Church.

The telephone number remains the same +353 (0) 1836 6509.

● Memorial Mass at Milltown

The annual Memorial Mass for deceased missionaries and Jesuit volunteers was celebrated at Milltown Park Institute in Dublin on Sunday 30th November. Fr. Joe Hayes SJ, visiting from Zambia, gave the homily bringing an Africa flavour to the occasion. The get together was enjoyed by the friends and acquaintances of the Irish Jesuit Missions.

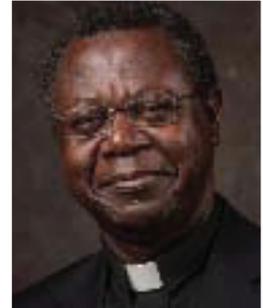
● Fr. Jimmy Hurley SJ returns to Ireland

Fr. Jimmy Hurley SJ celebrates 70 years with the Society of Jesus this year on the Feast of St. Stanislaus. Having served for 52 years in Hong Kong, he returned

in October to Ireland and is currently living at Milltown Park, Dublin.

● A new Provincial for East Africa

Fr. Joseph Oduor Afulo SJ has been appointed as the new Provincial for the Eastern Africa Province. It is comprised of Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Joseph has left his former post as Principle of Hekima College in Nairobi to take up his responsibilities.



His new role includes the spiritual care of the Jesuits and responsibility for the Jesuit works in the Province. He also relates with the other Provinces and the Curia in Rome.



Christmas Appeal 2014



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Merry Christmas from the team at the Irish Jesuit Missions