



In all things to love and serve

# Irish Jesuit Missions Newsletter

Issue 22 – Winter 2017

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## Vision

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

## Mission

To support Jesuit works in the service of people who are marginalised, disadvantaged and living in poverty.

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## Ecology in Daily Life: The Experience of Malawi

Photo: Over 2,000 households enjoy the economic, health and environmental benefits of the low-carbon-emitting energy-efficient stoves produced and distributed by JCED.

Pope Francis invites us “to acknowledge our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation”. In other words, what is needed is not only the change of some countries or some people but the change of the whole of humanity. Each of us, at a personal level, is responsible for the global ecological crisis. Consequently, each person has to change his or her habits in order to preserve “our common home”.

One could wonder how the peasants and poor inhabitants of the largely rural country of Malawi have contributed to the destruction of “our common home” and what form of change they need to embrace in order to contribute to its healing?

The following examples show how people living in rural areas of the country have participated in the destruction of the ecosystem. Deforestation is one of the major ecological destructions on the

landscape of Malawi. Because just a paltry 10% of its nearly 17 million people is connected to the national grid of electricity, and natural gas is nearly non-existent, biomass energy, mainly wood, is the major source of energy. Domestically, most women in villages and rural areas of Malawi use the traditional three-stone fire to cook or boil water. Regrettably, this fire has a very high rate of energy loss and uses a lot of firewood.

Obviously this has far-reaching repercussions for the limited forests of Malawi as people cut down trees for their energy needs. Tobacco curing and the construction industry, which largely depend on bricks that are baked in wood-fired kilns, are the other major drivers of deforestation in Malawi. Farmers have equally contributed to the ecological crisis through mono cropping - the growing of the same crop - and the wanton use of chemical fertilisers and herbicides, which contributes to the depletion of the soil.

## A Word from the Director



Christmastime is a time of bright lights, which illuminates the darkness of Winter in the Northern Hemisphere. This is the message of the Bible readings during the Christmas season. *‘The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in*

*a land of deep shadow a light has shone. You have made their gladness greater; you have made their joy increase’.* Light and joy are the blessings God shares with us this Christmas as we remember the birth of Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace. As we contemplate our world this Christmas we recognise our urgent need for God’s peace and joy.

We recognise through the articles in our Christmas newsletter how we and our Jesuit companions are bearers of this joy and light to so many people. In our work amongst the lepers in China we give new dignity to a marginalised group of people. In Malawi our friends are enabling women to live in a healthy environment through tree-planting and looking after the earth which bears food and fruit. Sustainable livelihoods is given to so many families. We often say education is the key to development and peace and it is so in our new Jesuit school of Ocer Campion in Gulu, northern Uganda. Is a region that was ravaged by war for 25 years and our school is now giving a new future to girls and boys by giving them the opportunity through education.

Thank you, as friends of our mission for enabling this great work to take place. Together we are making a real difference. Christmas is a time to celebrate that purpose and recognise that through our persistent efforts God changes the world to make it a better place. We bring a little of Heaven to Earth. Let us rejoice and be glad in doing that.

I wish you and your loved ones a very Happy Christmas.

Fr John K. Guiney SJ  
Director



Ironically, most examples of ways in which Malawians contribute to the ecological crisis constitute their only livelihoods. This points to the reality of the nexus of poverty and environmental degradation that many scholars have highlighted as self-reinforcing realities. Therefore, it is important to ask how poor people in Malawi, most of whom are smallholder farmers, can take care of their families without damaging “our common home”.

The Jesuit Centre of Ecology and Development (JCED) in Malawi, focuses on this question and tries to find an adequate answer. Inspired by Pope Francis’ seminal encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’*, JCED’s approach is ecological in nature as it seeks to respond to both of the needs of the poor and the of the environment. According to Pope Francis, “we have to realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.”

***“Ironically, most examples of ways in which Malawians contribute to the ecological crisis constitute their only livelihoods.”***

One of the examples of JCED’s practical interventions is its Environment and Food Security project (EFS) in the rural district of Kasungu. The project, funded by Misesan Cara, ultimately seeks to build the capacity of the vulnerable smallholder farmers to produce sufficient food for their households while taking care of the environment. To achieve this goal, JCED promotes conservation agriculture, a system of farming that, among other agro-ecological practices, encourages the use of organic manures as opposed to artificial fertilisers that are not only too expensive for the poor farmers but also highly degrading to the soils.

JCED has also been promoting reforestation and the adoption of ceramic energy-efficient stoves in all its projects. For instance, in its EFS project over 23,000 agroforestry tree seedlings have been distributed to smallholder farmers and planted. And over 2,000 households are now enjoying the economic, health and environmental benefits of the low-carbon-emitting energy-efficient stoves, which were produced and distributed by JCED. Women and children are particularly pleased with the stoves because of their reduced exposure to noxious fumes and consequent respiratory diseases, which are often associated with the use of the high carbon-emitting traditional fire.

*Fr Adrian Makasa Cikwamo SJ, Director of JCED*





A group of teachers from the Jesuit schools in Ireland took part in a formation trip to Uganda during the autumn midterm break. The journey was developed as part of an immersion programme for the group, so they could learn about a different culture by spending time in a Jesuit school in the north of the country and observing the dynamic between the staff and pupils in a very different environment. The experience is intended to enrich the teachers and help them to develop concrete strategies to foster Education for Justice in their schools.

## From Galway to Gulu

Photo: Irish teachers with Ocer Campion Jesuit College staff and students

Rian Carney, a dynamic and committed music teacher from Coláiste Iognaid in Galway was a lively and engaging presence on the trip, whose passion for her subject is clear. She brought her love of music with her, entertaining all wherever she went - from playing the tin whistle and teaching a class at Ocer Campion Jesuit College to sing Frère Jacques, to leading a singalong for a class of children in a refugee settlement in Adjumani!

Here she shares her thoughts about the trip and the long-term effect it will have in her own classroom:

“I wasn’t in the door five minutes when one of the students stopped me to ask how my trip to Africa went. I simply didn’t know where to start, which is very unlike me. Where should I begin? Should I tell her about Ocer Campion Jesuit College or about either of the schools in Adjumani or maybe the incredible work being carried out by the men and women working at the Jesuit Refugee Service in Kampala?

I knew there and then that I had to be very mindful about how I relayed my experience in Uganda to my students. In all of the classes I had over the next few days, they were very keen to hear about the time I had spent there. As the days passed, I realised that for many of them, it was the first time they were hearing a first-hand account of how difficult life can be for so many people. They listened intently and their desire to help was so heartfelt, it reaffirmed my commitment to hold a school fundraiser.

I am proud of the number of students who are getting involved, and who are so happy to raise some money for teenagers who are less fortunate than themselves. I have also been successful in involving the Ethos and Justice transition year group to help with organising the event.

I also feel that bringing the images and videos of our trip into the classroom serve to make it more real for them – it is not just a story about someone who went somewhere far away once. The images offer a tangible connection the fundraising efforts. They have been made aware of the great work being done by the Jesuits and as such, they know where the money they are raising will go, which acts as a further incentive for them to give something back and to realise just how lucky they truly are.

As a music teacher I have incorporated the area of social justice into the Junior Certificate curriculum over the past few years. My trip to Uganda has validated my desire to delve further into that area. From now on, I will encourage my students to research music that speaks directly to them about the issues that highlight the plight of so many in the world today. In sharing my experiences of the formation trip I am convinced that students don’t want to be preached to.

***“My trip to Uganda has validated my desire to delve further into that area. From now on, I will encourage my students to research music that speaks directly to them about the issues that highlight the plight of so many in the world today.”***

My students are already displaying a genuine interest and concern upon hearing anecdotes of my journey. I feel it helps them to relate to those who are less privileged. My goal is to provide them with the safe space where they can question and explore the role social justice plays in the world outside of their immediate perspective. All they need is a facilitator can direct them while questioning them about their points of view regarding why the world works the way it does and how their generation might challenge the status quo.”



## Cura Personalis at Ocer Campion

*The recent trip to Uganda for Irish teachers which was led by staff from the missions office, centred on a visit to Ocer Campion Jesuit College in Gulu, in the north of the country. The college, which is supported by Irish Jesuit Missions, is a coeducational boarding school which is currently home to more than 800 pupils.*

The name of the school is meaningful, as the word ‘ocer’ means ‘he is risen’ in the Acholi language. The Acholi people are the dominant tribe in the northern region where the school is situated, and have been decimated by the years of a civil war which resulted in many people being killed, kidnapped or forcibly displaced, meaning that children who attend the school grew up in internally displaced persons camps. The name reflects the wish that these people will also rise again, through the opportunities offered by education.

The college also has pupils from the more peaceful and prosperous southern region of Uganda and aims to cultivate a unity among the children, in the hope that this will lead to harmony among future generations.

The school also relies on the dedication of its teachers, who are also mentors to the children and whose role is broader than that of providing a formal education. On the recent trip, several teachers shared what makes their work meaningful to them and their students.

### *‘Ocer is in my heart’*

Francis Benley was a live-in patron for boys for three years at the school, who came to be on first-name terms with all of the boys at the school. He participated in helping students with their study and carried out added afterschool duties, staying on site 24 hours a day. He passed this role on earlier this year, but is still on the staff as a teacher of English and Literature, who is focusing on African writers to enable the children to take pride in their heritage. He gets satisfaction from having made an added contribution to the school, as he is keenly aware of the harsh background that some of the children have emerged from and wants to help them to advance. Ocer Campion is in his heart, and he says that working

there has been one of the most positive experiences of his life.

### *‘If I can do it, they can do it’*

Susan Abalo has been at the college for four years. She enjoys her job as a Physics and Mathematics teacher, and describes the children as jolly, good students who are keen to learn more about sciences. It is still very unusual in Uganda for a woman to teach science subjects, and she has found that children can sometimes have a negative attitude about it. However, this is changing. She is assured that when the girls she teaches see her, that they gain confidence in their ability, because they know that they can also make it in sciences. It makes her happy to be able to inspire them in this way.

### *‘I want to help them to become men and women for others’*

English and Literature teacher, Agatha Isidi, loves her subject because it touches all aspects of life, and enables her pupils to discuss things that affect their own lives. When the Irish teachers’ visit Ocer Campion, Agatha is teaching her class a poem which talks about dowries and the price of a bride, and allows her students to freely debate whether African tradition or the concept of true love is more important. She says teaching has always been her dream job, and likes. Agatha works hard to prepare her students to flourish in the Jesuit tradition, and become men and women for others.

What is striking about the teachers’ stories is how invested they are in the wellbeing of the students at the school. The staff embody the Jesuit ethos of ‘cura personalis’ – care for the whole person.

**Photo: (L - R ) Susan Abalo, Agatha Isidi, Francis Benley**



# 30 Years Serving at the Frontiers of Humanity



Even in his infirmity, 83-year-old Fr Luis Ruiz visited a leprosy center in Mile, Yunnan Province in 1996. Photo: Mr Tan Hong

*Thirty years ago, Fr Luis Ruiz, had his first encounter with a community of persons affected by leprosy in Taikam island, Guangdong Province China. Moved by their terrible situation, he decided to work together with local governments and church communities to change the conditions of leprosy patients. This was the beginning of Ricci Social Services, a Jesuit network created by him to bring relief, dignity and social justice to the poor and marginalised people in Mainland China and Macau.*

*Since then, Ricci Social Services, which is supported by Irish Jesuit Missions, has started a very long journey that has brought us to the most remote places in China, to be with and serve persons and communities in need of solidarity, healing, friendship and support so that they can develop themselves according to their potential.*

“The people who opened the door of China to us were not business persons, the powerful or the learnt, but the persons affected by leprosy and those living with HIV/AIDS. Because of them, more than 50 local governments from over 10 provinces invited Ricci Social Services to go their places, to serve them in their needs. Today, we collaborate in more than 40 programs distributed in 10 different provinces that serve around 5,000 people in China, including adults and children affected by leprosy or living with HIV/AIDS, women at risk (e.g. sex workers), or people dying without support at the hospitals.

These programs are organised as a network of “communities of solidarity”. These are communities where people learn how to overcome discrimination; where physical, psychological and social wounds are healed, where dignity is affirmed, and where communion is restored and re-created among individuals, their communities and their relationships with their natural environments. In these communities, more than 80 religious sisters and volunteers live together with patients or people who suffer discrimination, serving them in their needs, joining them in their daily struggles, and learning from them.

This has been a journey to our personal limits as well, far away from our comfort zones. In many places, we suffered from a lack of understanding and discrimination from the local people; lack of water, electricity or roads; all kinds of tests and sicknesses, and even death, for example Sr Xue, who died in an accident while serving her leprosy-affected patients in 2008. But our reward has been far bigger than all the efforts we have made during these 30 years. A reward that only those who love can understand. Because love transforms everybody and everything. Due to love, receivers become givers, and givers become also receivers.

Today, the same impulse of love has brought us to more new frontiers, serving either women at risk, children living with HIV/AIDS or poor and dying patients at public hospitals, or to help almost twenty-five different local social service communities to build their capacities to serve more and better. This same love has also pushed us to do more in terms of ecological justice in China, trying to help people to change their ways of living, consuming and producing, to do justice to nature and our future generations.

But love is also and always an invitation to others to collaborate and be part of it. We are not doing all of this work alone. This is the fruit of working together with thousands of benefactors, hundreds of Sisters, volunteers and staff workers, government officials, partners, etc. We are the beneficiaries of all their love and support.

This has been the daily experience of Ricci Social Services throughout our 30-year journey in China. The experience of a love that is incarnated, shared and that has transformed and continues transforming thousands of persons and ourselves.”

*Fr Fernando Azpiroz SJ, Director of Ricci Social Services*

# Mission News

## ● Thanks to Mable Chilenga

We say goodbye to a popular member of staff from the missions office who has moved on to pursue a new career. Mable Chilenga worked in the reception of the missions office for more than two years, and has left to study for a social work degree in UCD. We wish her all the best in her studies.

## ● Fr Liam Browne SJ RIP

Fr Liam Browne SJ died peacefully at Cherryfield Lodge nursing home, Dublin on 26 October 2017, aged 88 years. His funeral mass was held on 31 October at Milltown Park, Ranelagh with a homily by Fr John K. Guiney SJ. Fr Browne, who was from Dublin, spent much of his early priestly life on missions in Zambia, before returning home to work in locations throughout Ireland in 1974.

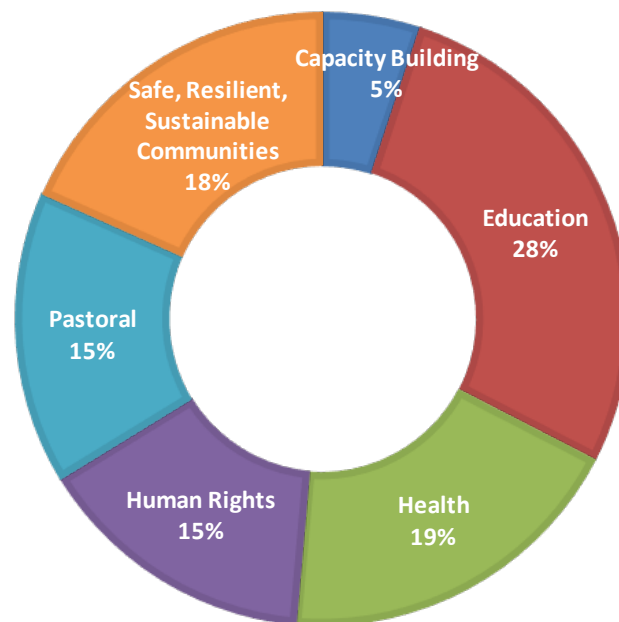
## ● Education for Justice and Reconciliation

*Responding to Injustice* is the latest module in our Education for Justice series, and is available for download from our website [www.jesuitmissions.ie/education-for-justice](http://www.jesuitmissions.ie/education-for-justice). To find out more about this module and our justice education programme please contact coordinator, Krizan Vekic at [justiceeducation@jesuit.ie](mailto:justiceeducation@jesuit.ie)

## ● Annual Report 2016

In keeping with our commitment to charity codes of transparency and good practice, our most recent Annual Report is now online [www.jesuitmissions.ie/](http://www.jesuitmissions.ie/). The report includes information about the allocation of funding and details about the projects and programmes we have supported for the past year.

Irish Jesuit Missions  
Funding Year 2016



## South Sudan Emergency Appeal

**We urgently need your help to provide food, clean water and support to malnourished and distressed people who are victims of the ongoing conflict in one of the poorest countries in the world.**

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For donations online log onto: **[www.jesuitmissions.ie](http://www.jesuitmissions.ie)**

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