

# Irish Jesuit Missions Newsletter



In all things to love and to serve

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## It Takes the World to Raise Some Children

**Little baby Pia was born on a dark night into one of the poorest communities in the world. But there is hope for a brighter future for her, and for her family, says Tony O’Riordan SJ.**

It was dark, and I was about to take some rest at the end of a long day. My plan to rest was interrupted by one of our compound watchmen who came to tell me that John, one of our neighbours, had called asking for help.

John wanted to ask if we would be able to help to take his wife to the hospital because she had gone into labour. The translation challenges meant it took a few minutes for me to figure out what was going on. Once I realised that I was the only one in the compound who could drive I started the car and headed off with John, who acted as a guide.

As we drove into the darkness of Maban he gestured left and right as we drove among mud huts, avoiding pigs and dogs. Soon we had reached an open space where local youths play football at sunset. The headlamps of the car created a bright corridor of light, at the end of which I could make out a huddle of people.

It was John’s wife, the expectant mother, with some other women who were making their way on foot to the hospital. It was clear that she was in pain and needed the support of the other women to walk. There was no time to lose. So, as soon as she managed to get into the back of the car we headed straight for the hospital which was less than



*Fr Tony O’Riordan SJ chatting with the children of Doro Refugee Camp in Maban, South Sudan. Photo by Paul Jeffrey, 2018*

a 10-minute drive. I have done many courses and trainings as a Jesuit, but midwifery was not on the curriculum, so thankfully we arrived at the maternity unit before the baby was born.

The mobile phone network was (as is common) not working so it was early the following morning before John told me that his wife had given birth to a lovely baby girl. They have called

her Pia, after my assistant here in the project as a way of acknowledging the small role that the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) played in her coming into this world.

Like most babies born across the world each day, Baby Pia’s birth was welcomed with great joy and celebrations. But this little girl faces immense challenges for survival, for education and for opportunity.

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## It Takes the World to Raise Some Children

This has little to do with the natural abilities of this infant child or indeed her parents or family. It has everything to do with the place and time of her birth. She has been born in South Sudan, the youngest country in the world; a country where people have lived through decades of war.

Baby Pia has been born into Maban County, a remote part of this vast country where over 60% of the population comprises women and children and where three in four people are displaced from their homes because of war. They face hunger and poverty on a daily basis. This baby has been born into one of the poorest communities on the planet today.

It's already clear that this Baby Pia will benefit from the JRS presence in Maban. Her father John is one of the 500 young adults JRS is training to be teachers. Her aunt is one of several women who are training in tailoring skills. In time, it is hoped, little Pia will attend one of the local Early Childhood Development centres which are run with support from JRS. Her older sister is already a

pupil there. Perhaps by the time Pia attends, her father will be teaching her.

I am hopeful that Baby Pia will be helped to meet the immense challenges of the situation she has been born into. She will be supported by her immediate family who like so many other families in Maban rise to the daunting daily tasks of dealing with hunger, civil conflict and poverty.

Families here are resilient and resourceful.

I am hopeful for Pia too because she is part of the JRS family. This family is a concrete expression of the solidarity of all humanity. JRS is a channel for the compassion of so many people who respond to the needs of children such as Baby Pia. This channelled compassion often comes through the Irish Jesuit Mission office and it allows us to be present here in Maban. It enables us offer the support and training that is giving people here hope and a chance of a better life.

I hope one day I get to meet Baby Pia grown up as a strong and confident

***This family is a concrete expression of the solidarity of all humanity. JRS is a channel for the compassion of so many people who respond to the needs of children such as Baby Pia.***

young woman. I will rejoice that I was there not only on that dark night when she was born, but that with the support of so many others we have been able to bring light to this forgotten part of the world. Such light allows our little sisters and brothers to grow.

Many of you will be familiar with the saying 'it takes a village to raise a child'. In the case of baby Pia and other children in Maban, it takes concerned members of her worldwide family to raise her and her little friends. What a wonderful expression of the Gospel proclamation that we are all brothers and sisters. +

*Author: Fr Tony O'Riordan SJ is Project Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Maban, South Sudan*

## A Word from the Director

**The visit of Pope Francis to Ireland this August to celebrate the World Meeting of Families will bring joy to so many people.** There are many memories alive of John Paul II's visit in 1979. It is a different world and a different Ireland in 2018, however it is still one world where God is to be sought and found, something that Pope Francis inspires us all to do.

At the last World Meeting of Families in 2015 he said 'Perfect families do not exist. This must not discourage us. Quite the opposite. We know that mistakes, problems and conflicts are an opportunity to draw closer to others, to draw closer to God.'

Families around the world have their

own challenges and in countries like South Sudan they suffer because of war, famine and being forced to flee their homes. Trying to live a normal family life becomes a huge challenge.

The stories here show how our outreach offers an alternative, more positive future to families trapped by conflict or poverty. Stories of a baby born in a refugee camp in South Sudan and from a Jesuit school in Cambodia denote hope for the next generation. The story of a baker in Tongogara camp in Zimbabwe illustrates how the dignity of work empowered a father whose family lost everything because of war. Our tale from China gives an insight into why one man became part of the wider Ignatian family, and how it transformed his life.

Those who work with the Jesuits and are inspired by Ignatian spirituality and values are co-workers with Christ in making the world a more compassionate



place. We know that God is found everywhere and is active through us, bringing joy and hope to people around the world who bear heavy crosses.

**Thank you for being part of the Ignatian family and for your continual support and solidarity.** +

**Fr John K. Guiney SJ**  
Director



# Families in Exile in Zimbabwe

Rose and Daniel used the livelihood skills training provided by JRS to help themselves to survive and to keep their families together.

Tongogara Camp was established soon after Zimbabwe's independence in 1981, providing refuge to those fleeing the war in neighbouring Mozambique. It closed after the 1992 ceasefire there, only reopening in early 1998. The camp is located 550 kilometers southeast of the capital Harare and is currently home to over 9,000 refugees, most of whom are from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Irish Jesuit Missions and our partners Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Southern Africa built a Vocational Training Centre in the camp so that its inhabitants can learn skills that will give them the means to earn an income and provide for themselves and their families.

## Opening a Bakery

Daniel Tshimanga is a refugee from DRC who lives in Tongogara Camp with his wife and their five children. When he arrived in the camp as a refugee, he had no way to earn money, and his children were hungry. He joined a Vocational Skills Training course run by JRS to learn how to start and run a successful bakery business. Daniel is now well-known throughout the refugee community as a baker and his bakery produces 75 loaves of bread every day which he can sell to make an income.

## Role Model for Fatherhood

He credits JRS with helping him to find success from the bakery and tuck shop he runs with support from his family. Everyone is happy with the change in living standards that the bakery provides for his family, he says. The income from it means his children have books and pens for school, and new shoes on their feet. He likes the idea that that he is now a

role model for his children - they see him at work and learn that this is the way to behave, for success.

## Rose and the JRS Family

Rose is a mother of four children. When she first arrived in Tongogara camp she was forced to depend on UNCHR monthly food rations and it was impossible for her to manage.

She got a job with JRS in 2014 teaching on a programme that trains people from the refugee community as beauticians. Rose has described the experience of working for JRS within her community was like being part of a wonderful family.

With her income as a teacher she was able to open her own beauty shop and salon, where her former students often work giving manicures, pedicures and hair treatments. Many of them have now progressed to owning their own salons, something that makes her happy.

Getting a job at JRS and eventually owning her own salon were empowering for Rose. They gave her her confidence back, and also allowed her to take care of herself and her children which has been positive for them too. They can now attend school because she can now afford the fees.

## Easing the Refugee Experience for Families

Refugee camps are stressful environments, and it is difficult for people to keep their families together without the means to support them or the ability to inhabit their usual roles as mothers and fathers. JRS gives people the means to support their families; to feed them, to clothe them. It humanises the refugee experience which can be frightening and isolating for all members of a family. +

*Author: Sr Perpetua Gomba, is Project Director at the Tongogara Vocational Training Centre in Zimbabwe.*

*Daniel Tshimanga begins his workday at his bakery in Tongogara Camp, Zimbabwe*





*Students participate in a science class assisted by Irish teacher Aoife Jenkins*

## A Kite From a Plastic Bag and Two Sticks

**The simplicity and warmth of rural Cambodian life moves Aoife Jenkins, who would like to see an end to families being forced apart because of poverty, lack of education and parents who are forced to move abroad to find employment.**

Cambodia and South East Asia was an unfamiliar part of the world before I left Ireland for Sisophon, in the north west of Cambodia two years ago. It is in this poor region of Banteay Meanchey Province that Xavier Jesuit School where I teach is located.

### Family Life in Phnom Bak Village

Taking a walk through the villages that our school is nestled in gives an insight into the varied family units in our community. Many of our students here in Phnom Bak village are in the care of their elderly grandparents, aunts or uncles as their parents have had to make the decision to move to neighbouring Thailand to find employment so that they can support their children's education and their extended family.

Parents from the area understand that the opportunity of an education for their children can mean making the difficult decision to leave to find jobs in Thailand where the wages are higher, as the money will ultimately

go towards supporting the family. This is where the role of Xavier Jesuit School for the future of this community is of vital importance.

On my journey to and from school, my favourite sight is that of the children in the village playing together joyfully. I smile every time I see it because I know I am lucky to witness this simple and natural sight. A simple plastic bag, two sticks and some string makes a lively kite while a spinning top fashioned from the leg of an old wooden chair serves the fun-loving children with another modest delight. The toys and games are simple but made with the skill and dexterity that Cambodian children develop from a young age.

### Xavier Jesuit School Dreams of Future

The great work of the education team from the Jesuit Mission in Cambodia led by Fr Ashley Evans SJ meant that the people in the villages here were thrilled to have the school opening in their community. The message of hope is made very clear in the school

motto 'Dare to Dream of a Brighter Future', a dream that the school works hard to help the children fulfil. The opportunities the school offers to the children is a good education which will give them the skills to find employment at home, enabling the next generation of families the chance to stay together instead of being forced to leave for Thailand.

Our school timetable includes subjects such as art, agriculture, English, music, home economics and computer studies as well as the usual academic subjects. We offer these subjects to teach the children practical skills to help for their future. Having a good command of the English language opens many doors for students here in Cambodia where tourism to the magnificent Angkor Wat temples provides many people with employment, from tour guides to jobs in the hospitality services.

### Mutual Care of Cambodian Families

In Cambodia, children are expected to be independent and bear responsibility from a young age. They can be responsible for maintaining the household, taking care of the family run shop, selling food in the market after school or taking care of their younger family members. The Cambodian word for siblings is 'bong pah own' however it is often used to include cousins, brothers and sisters collectively, an indication of how close one family unit is. The distinction between cousin and sibling here is not so important, every child in their family community is seen as their brother or sister.

In a regular Cambodian village, families have very few modern appliances to make life easier such as the washing machine. Clothes are washed by hand daily.



## A Kite From a Plastic Bag and Two Sticks

No refrigerators means early morning trips to the market or to the river for fresh food and prepared on a fire bucket at home. From the neck down to the chicken's feet, almost every part of the animal is used in the meal, this also requires time and preparation.

Having been being lucky enough to be warmly welcomed into this society, I found this time-consuming

and laborious routine involving every member of the household, fosters the good-humoured spirit of a community working towards a common goal.

There is a special sense of unity as everyone does their bit towards the making of the meal. During this time, laughter and stories are shared, cooking skills are passed on from the old to the young and the

sense of purpose throughout the preparations as well as the sense of achievement at the end, shows the strength that these families have, in spite of these hardships. +

*Author: Aoife Jenkins began her time in Xavier Jesuit School as the secondary school teacher trainer and English teacher. She is currently the principal of the secondary school.*

## Finding my Ignatian Family Through the Xavier Youth Project

**Jian Ming Sun, his wife and children are a family unit, but they are also part of the global Ignatian family network.**

Jian Ming Sun is a young man who has come through the Jesuit Xavier Youth Project in China. He now works for a church charity that focuses on helping people in society who grapple with ill-health or poverty. His journey has led him from his family of origin to a family that he and his wife have created, and has seen them both welcomed into the wider family of the Jesuit community.

As a student, Jian Ming had different ideas for his life but things changed when he met his future wife, Jing, through the university's Catholic student group who encouraged him to take part in the Xavier Youth Programme, as she had. He credits

both with changing the course of his life.

### Xavier Youth Service

The Xavier Youth Service offers an intensive, four-month, full-time programme to four-year university students from all over China. Participants become core team members who on completion, either volunteer for two years in youth ministry or become facilitators for organising youth groups and activities in their parishes. To date, the programme has trained more than 200 young people who are now active in the church. The course has modules that cover the spiritual aspects of ministry, and also offers practical skills to life organising and facilitating youth activities and retreats and strategy planning.

Having completed the programme, they both worked as youth ministry volunteers for a year and it was then that they began to consider the possibilities for their future relationship. They prayed and went on retreat to reflect, and three years later decided to have a family while devoting their lives to family ministry. Jian Ming works in the charity institute (Jinde Charities) and also assists his wife Jing in her family ministry, where she offers helps to parents to improve their relationship with their children and married couples to relate to each other.



*Jian Ming Sun, Jing and their three daughters enjoying a day out*

### Family Togetherness

Jian Ming and Jing have a very happy relationship with each other and enjoy their life together with their daughters. They express their spirituality by doing the Ignatian Examen prayer before bed each day, hand-in-hand. In the prayer, they acknowledge God's presence and invitation in their life, give thanks for the blessings they have received and ask for strength. They have been working in the charity and family ministry for nearly five years and get a lot of spiritual benefits from their work.

### Family Estrangement

Unfortunately, everything has not always been so happy for them. Jian Ming's father and some of his extended family thought he and his wife were crazy to choose this path and stopped speaking to them for a time. The Catholic Church in China is under pressure from the

Government and they worried that he would not be able to get by on the low wages and donations that are necessary to be a layperson working in this area. He and his wife were deeply hurt by the family's failure to understand but now they find that their passion for their work is being recognised gradually and those relationships are being mended.

### The Jesuit Family

The Suns are grateful to the Xavier Youth Program for building their faith and trust in God and encouraging them to pursue their vocations. Jian Ming and Jing are sure they are undertaking God's call for us and will continue to do their work with faith and trust. They feel part of the Ignatian, or Jesuit family which is a global community.

### Jinde Charities

The organisation Jing Ming Sun works for is Jinde Charities, which was founded in 1997 as the first domestic Catholic NGO in China. Its initiatives include disaster relief, education and scholarships, HIV/AIDS prevention, care for the elderly, and anti-trafficking projects. +

*Author: Jian Ming Sun works as Youth Ministry Volunteer at the Jinde Charities*

## Mission News

### Thanksgiving Masses

Thanks to everyone who attended our annual celebratory mass of thanksgiving in Dromantine Retreat Centre, Newry on Saturday, 26 June.

- Our Galway mass is in St Ignatius Church, on Saturday 22 September at 2:30 PM.
- The date of our **Annual Memorial Mass for Deceased Missionaries and Volunteers** is on 4 November

2018 at 3:00 PM. Please note that the mass is in a new venue this year – the **Chapel of Gonzaga College, Dublin 6**. All are welcome.

### Visiting Missionaries

Several Irish missionaries were back home to visit recently. Fr Eddie Murphy SJ, Fr Charlie Searson SJ and Br Gabriel McKinney were all home from Zambia and called into the office to share their news with the team. Fr Tadeusz Swiderski, SJ, Development Officer of the Zambia Jesuit Province is visiting Ireland on 12 August.

Irish Jesuit, Fr Ashley Evans SJ has been on sabbatical in Ireland and France for the past few months and has just returned to Cambodia. He has set up a website to keep us abreast of news in the country, as well as his own personal blogs. You can find it at [www.gaudiummundi.com](http://www.gaudiummundi.com)

The new Provincial of the Chinese Jesuit Province, Fr Stephen Chow SJ visited Dublin last month on his way to Rome. Stephen has strong Irish links having been educated by Irish Jesuits in Hong Kong and spent part of his Jesuit formation in Ireland.

**Thank you for your continued support. Your contributions play a vital role in our missionary work in Africa and Asia.**

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