



Joy and Transformation in Zambia-Malawi

Leonard Moloney SJ, Provincial of the Irish Jesuit Province, spent two weeks in Zambia and Malawi with IJM's John Guiney SJ this October. He was moved by the welcome he received...

John Guiney of the Irish Jesuit Mission Office, and I spent the first fortnight of October in Zambia-Malawi, a Province for which the Irish have always had a great love. I had looked forward to this trip since my appointment as Provincial of the Irish Jesuits in early 2017.

John the Baptist said of the Lord, *He must grow greater, I must grow less (John 3:30)*. This is relevant for Irish Jesuits in Zambia-Malawi. We have grown less; the Zambian and Malawian Jesuit has replaced us, fulfilling the dream. The Province is now thoroughly African, with its leadership team of Provincial, Socius and Treasurer all from the countries they work in. Thus, the work of the 136 Irish Jesuits which began back in the 1940s is almost complete. That is not to diminish in any way the rich contribution that the nine remaining Irish Jesuits continue to make. They are aging, yet they are so alive, and remain committed to their brothers and sisters in Zambia-Malawi.

The creation of sustainable livelihoods is a challenge in Zambia, and even more so in Malawi. Both countries have been affected by HIV/AIDS. Yet the people in both countries are wonderful - so friendly, so hospitable, and so joyous. That joy was never more evident than



Fr Leonard Moloney SJ visit to St Charles Lwanga College, Chikuni. (L to R) Mr Lewis Chulu, Fr Moloney SJ, Fr John K Guiney SJ and Fr Felix Mwewa SJ

when we concelebrated Sunday Mass at Matero, a township on the outskirts of Lusaka. It lasted two-and-a-half hours, and I (who would struggle with anything lasting beyond 45 minutes) did not notice the time passing. What I did notice was that this was a community drenched in faith and involvement. The large church was packed. As always, the key to good liturgy is the work done in advance, including the music, the planning for participation, and a well-prepared homily: we witnessed this in Matero.

John and I were showered with extraordinary hospitality by our brother Jesuits and their co-workers, from our arrival at Lusaka airport until our departures from Lilongwe almost two weeks later. To try to thank everyone who was so generous with their time and energy would be a mistake, for I would be sure to omit someone in error! Through the Provincial, Fr Leonard Chiti SJ, whom I have known since he did his Tertianship in Ireland over eight years ago, I just offer the deepest gratitude and respect to all the members of his

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province and to those who work with them.

I had been to Zambia once before, more than a decade ago. My sense is that the country is making progress, though the involvement of the Chinese, about which we hear so much in Africa, is very evident. The challenges are great. Two weeks seems like a long time but one day sticks in my mind and gives a flavour of the overall experience.

The visit to Kasungu in Malawi was a very special highlight. We were then briefed on those projects that are supported by Irish Jesuit Missions in some villages outside the city. These, in the main, were concerned about sound and ecological farming methods, the introduction of more efficient stoves for cooking in the village homes, and the growing of trees. We received a very special welcome in those villages later in the morning, with African singing and ululating, and later with detailed explanations on how the different elements of the various programmes were

I returned home to Ireland with a profound sense of having visited a province that is fully alive and vibrant.

working. The village elders gave the introductions, but it was mainly the women who told us how things were actually done. The women sustain the projects: it is they who till and sow, who collect the water from the well some 20 minutes away, and who cook and clean. They seem to have innate leadership quality.

In the afternoon, we went to visit the new school, Loyola, just outside the town. What a place! For boys and girls, fully boarding, and built following a huge fundraising effort over the last 10 years, it is a sure sign of hope for the future of Malawi. Its students, and they are just shy of 500 at present, will surely play a great part in the building up of their country in the decades to come. Interestingly, the Government selects 60% of the intake; the local Diocese the remainder. It seems a very happy and vibrant place, under the direction of a wonderfully dedicated

and young Jesuit Headmaster. We later visited a farm nearby, a farm dedicated to the support of Loyola, and brilliantly run by an old friend of mine (even though he is a strong ManU supporter!), known to all as 'Mambo'. We capped off what was a marvellous day by visiting the very dynamic Jesuit parish in town, and going on to visit Lake Malawi, the third largest lake in Africa.

Some day! Some journey!

I returned home to Ireland with a profound sense of having visited a Province that is fully alive and vibrant. The challenges are great. Through the refugee camp, the farms, the schools, the parishes, the communities, the communication centre, and all the other works and places we visited, I sense that we were witnessing the ongoing birth of something new in the risen Lord. May their journey forward be fruitful. We will not forget them. +

Author: Fr Leonard Moloney SJ is Provincial of the Irish Jesuit Province

A Word from the Director

Accompaniment is a word full of richness and imagery. To walk with, befriend and be a real companion with those who suffer is the call of every Christian. It is a key mission in the life of Jesuits around the world who work with people who flee war and violence and live on the margins. To walk alongside someone, not in front or behind them is real companionship and blessing.

It is a joy to share stories in this Christmas newsletter of people who walk with the poor in China, South Sudan, Zambia and Malawi. The presence of Jesuits and their co-workers to those who suffer is a consolation and it makes such a

difference. It transforms their lives.

The hope I witnessed in the eyes of the women farmers we support in Malawi when I visited them in their villages in October was touching. They were so happy that with our support they could produce more food for their children through improving their farming methods. Every day is like Christmas Day when we walk with one another in solidarity.

At Christmas we remember and celebrate that God has become man. He came to walk with us and accompany us on our life journey. He wants to fill us with hope and changes our mourning into joy and our tears into laughter.

Your friendship and support gives us hope and gives so many people we serve a new reason to live. In the Christmas readings we hear from the prophet Isaiah that "The people who



have walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined".

Thank you for being a light to so many as you accompany us in our service to people around the world.

Happy Christmas and every blessing for 2019. +

Fr John K. Guiney SJ | Director

Teach a Woman to Farm, and Feed a Village for a Lifetime

Jesuit Adrian Makasa's work with the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development, which teaches women the methods and benefits of conservation farming gives him hope, in the midst of the struggle of people in rural Malawi who are disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change even though they have done very little to cause it.

Kasungu, a rural area in Malawi, about two hours away from the capital Lilongwe, has a population of more than 40,000 people and a rapid growth rate of 5.6 percent. The main occupation in Kasungu is farming.

Much of the agriculture is subsistence farming with staple foods, like maize, being the main crop. Other produce such as peanuts, soya, beans, sunflowers and vegetables are also grown. Since 2016, the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) has been running a project in Kasungu district to protect the environment while promoting food security.

People living in rural areas of Malawi, like Kasungu, are heavily dependent on natural resources like firewood, water and the soil. But due to climate change and infertile soil the local communities face severe environmental problems and struggle in their efforts to achieve food security. Many of the households start to run out of food as early as October, while the harvest season starts in March. Their meals reduce from three a day, to two or even one a day for almost half the year. Families who struggle are forced to sell their limited livestock for low prices, take out food loans and look for piece work, working for food instead of money. Not surprisingly most of the health problems in the area are related to nutrition and sanitation, which are in turn strongly linked to food insecurity and poor resource management.

The aim of JCED's programme in Kasungu is to promote environmental friendly farming methods that do not compromise the agricultural yield. The project seeks to encourage sustainability so as to support communities in the long term. 91 percent of farmers in the area practice conventional agricultural methods, many of which have negative effects on the environment. Experience shows that such methods tend to undermine crop yield in future years and thus contribute to greater food insecurity.

Some of the areas that JCED teach and advocate in are soil cover, minimum tillage and the production and use of organic manure.

One of the positive stories of JCED's project in Kasungu is the story of Merina Banda, a widow who lives in Chiwira village. Merina grew maize on a half acre piece of land following the techniques of minimum soil tillage, soil

cover (mulching), organic manure application, improved seed variety, and Natural Forest Regeneration Management technologies. She is highly motivated in these conservation agriculture skills that she has learnt from JCED's Farmer Field School. Her maize crop looked so healthy when I visited her and she had projected an increased harvest of 1000 kilograms – more than double what she used to get from the same piece of land. In the words of Merina, "conservation farming is very beneficial in restoring the soil fertility; it is high yielding with lower cost and labour serving".

The JCED accompanies the poor smallholder farmers of Kasungu through Farmer Field Schools that it has set up in 30 different villages. The schools are basically demonstration plots where farmers come to learn about various agroecological practices from JCED staff and government agriculture extension officers. They learn how to make manure, prepare land, weed, do pest surveillance,



Women farmers in Kasungu use contour ridging as a soil and water conservation technique for their crops.

The priority of women is to ensure the health and welfare of their families. Suffice it to say, they are the lifeblood of Malawi as a whole.

harvest sustainably and reduce post harvest losses. Each school has at least ten members who are headed by a lead farmer. Most of the farmers in these clubs are women, as are many of the lead farmers. This is important to JCED because one of its main priorities is to empower women in the community. Women in Malawi are a particularly vulnerable section of society, having low literacy levels and reduced access to credit and to physical assets than men.

Promoting women farmers has great benefits for the whole community as well as for the women themselves. Men, for example, tend to focus on cash crops — like tobacco — while female farmers are interested in growing more nutrition-rich foods such as peanuts, beans and soya. The priority of women is to ensure

the health and welfare of their families. Suffice it to say, they are the lifeblood of Malawi as a whole.

Working for ecological integrity and the wellbeing of poor households of farmers in Kasungu has had a huge impact on me personally. The glaring levels of poverty among these poor farmers and the degraded landscapes of Kasungu, marked by forest degradation, soil degradation and biodiversity loss, constantly echo the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor that Pope Francis highlights in his seminal encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si'*. My work in Kasungu is a true experience of insertion in the community of people living on the margins who are often disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change even though they have done very little to cause it.

I find a lot of encouragement in the hope of the poor farmers themselves, in the hardworking staff of JCED, our development partners and in my rootedness in the Ignatian spirituality, which urges us to find God in all things.

Pope Francis, who strongly believes that human beings have the capacity to offset the global ecological crisis also encourages me. What could be more encouraging than these powerful words - "Here I want to recognise, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest." (*Laudato Si'* 13). +

Author: Fr Adrian Makasa Chikwamo SJ is Director of the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development in Malawi

A Legacy of Hope in South Sudan

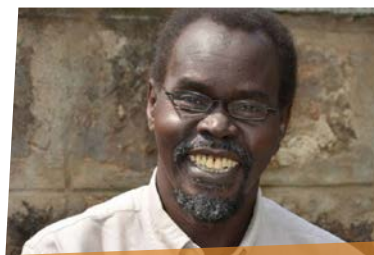
Dedicated to the life of Fr Victor-Luke Odhiambo SJ, RIP, 1956 – 2018

South Sudan is a beautiful country; intense, scarred and complex. I spent a month there in July - August 2018 for the Xavier Network, a global network of Jesuit Mission Offices and development initiatives which is supporting projects in the world's newest state. When I first drafted this article reflecting on my experiences there, I felt a deep conviction despite the pessimism of many commentators to write from a perspective of hope. In every brutal situation, without exception, there are always many good people and many positive dynamics at work. It is important to

honour the dignity of a country and its people and God in the midst of all by protecting and nourishing all and any signs of hope.

Having received the news that Fr Victor-Luke Odhiambo, SJ one of our Jesuit colleagues in Cueibet was murdered by unknown assailants in the early hours of 15 November, I am more determined than ever to write from a perspective of hope. To do so is to honour him, his courage, his integrity, his good humour. He dedicated long years of his life in service to the people of South Sudan and to the cause of peace.

He was the Principal of the small



Fr Victor-Luke Odhiambo SJ, RIP (1956-2018)

Teacher Training College in Cueibet, a part of South Sudan with a history of serious inter-clan conflict which impacts every facet of life. The teacher training college run by the Jesuits in collaboration with the Catholic Diocese of Rumbek since November 2014, has stubbornly remained open through years of conflict to represent an alternative and hopeful vision for the future. Statistics gathered from the Diocese of Rumbek Education

Secretariat in August 2018 revealed there are 39,189 students in schools across the diocese being taught by only 237 trained teachers and 762 untrained teachers. In many primary and secondary schools, the teachers themselves are not formally trained. The college was established to contribute to addressing the huge need for trained teachers, and, to contribute to social transformation in this hinterland area that has known so much pain and suffering.

Fr Odhiambo spoke Dinka fluently. It is the language of the local Dinka people and South Sudan's biggest ethnic group. Local people knew and respected him for that. He was dedicated to the safety, wellbeing and education of the students in the Teacher Training College. I remember going to the small outdoor market with him very early one morning as the mist was still rising, to buy vegetables for the students' lunch and evening meal. Everyone in the market knew and greeted him. We moved around the little wooden stalls relieving the women of their okra stocks. When the deals were done, each of the women, threw a few extra pieces of okra into our bags with a smile. This was the equivalent of an Irish luck penny! It was a simple gesture that spoke volumes.

Later that evening Fr Odhiambo pulled out the blueprints for the future development of the College which he was excited to chat about. It was in the early hours of the morning before we finished the conversation, having noted down all the priorities for the College he wanted to advance in 2019. Amongst these priorities was a new in-service teacher training programme for untrained teachers in the local schools. These were teachers who were keen to learn but could not dedicate themselves to the full time pre-service teacher training programme.

Transformation of hearts, mindsets and opportunities will take time and the contribution of many wise and patient people like Fr Odhiambo along the way.

He also wanted to establish a small hardship fund to help students dedicated to the full-time training programme but who struggled to meet their own basic needs. The man who was affectionately known as 'The Professor' inspired, encouraged and protected me during my short visit to Cueibet, as he had done countless others during his many years of service in South Sudan.

The slow work of social transformation

Much damage has been inflicted on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the people over many years. A lot of fear, anger and unprocessed grief remains. What is currently being experienced is a crisis of transition from one type of social order and governance to another. Traditional systems of authority have not yet been replaced by strong civil governance of a kind that must be underpinned by respect for human rights for all.

This must be home-grown in South Sudan; it cannot ever be imported.

The old ways still dominate but new ways are also suggesting themselves, especially to the young who, given an opportunity are working hard to educate themselves. They are less willing to accept the nepotism. They are proud of their tribal identity and inheritance but do not want to get caught up in destructive and dehumanising tribalism. The South Sudanese have a saying 'Even if a log lies in the water for a long time, it does not become a crocodile'. Transformation of hearts, mindsets and opportunities will take time and the contribution of many wise and patient people like Fr Odhiambo along the way. Those who know what it takes to deeply commit to people and place and the slow often dangerous work of social transformation. Fr Odhiambo brought hope to many. +

Author: Noelle Fitzpatrick is South Sudan Liaison Officer for the Xavier Network.

Learning the Meaning of Humanity

Irish Jesuits have been present in China for more than 90 years. The Irish Province sent 106 missionaries to China over the years and four Irish men still remain there.

In this article, Argentinian Jesuit Fr Fernando Azpiroz SJ, the Director of Casa Ricci Social Services tells of how working with people who are poor, ill or in precarious living circumstances has affected him.

"The Chinese character that expresses the idea of "humanity" is "Ren". This character caught the



attention of the first Jesuits who arrived in China, as it is at core of the Confucian

way of understanding what makes us become human. The character is formed by two parts. At its left side, a human person; at its right side, the number two. Confucianism states that

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we learn how to become human not alone but in relationships. I believe that the bigger the gap or difference between these two people, the deeper the impact of the relationship on our identity.

In my 13 years in China I am blessed to accompany and be in close relationships with people who are very different to me. People who are affected by leprosy, children living with HIV/AIDS, the Chinese Sisters serving them, women at risk (e.g. sex workers), Chinese government officials, etc. There were deep and wide gaps between their situations and identities, and mine. Many of them were sick, while I regarded myself as "healthy"; discriminated against, while I regarded myself as "accepted" by society; without faith or religion, while I regarded myself as a "religious" person; illiterate, while I regarded myself as somebody "with letters"; persons belonging to different minorities, while I regarded myself as belonging to a "majority".

Political differences, cultural differences, language differences, social differences, racial differences, religious differences... I believe I have tried my best to accompany them, help them and serve them in their needs. But what they have done and are doing for me greatly surpasses anything I have done for them. By inviting me to be part of their lives, my identity has been shaped and transformed by them and rediscovered through them. Many of these people became my friends. My life today would be difficult to understand without their presence. I accompany them, but they have also accompanied me.

In both the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, Saint Ignatius gave fundamental importance to the Spanish word *identificarse*, which means, to identify yourself with Christ - poor, humble and rejected. It means to build your

identity in Christ, by making concrete life choices in order to deepen one's identity in Him. For Ignatius, this is the only real identity that really matters in our lives. Life is for him a continuous process to become more "Him-centred" and less self-centred.

By opening their lives to me, they have certainly helped me to be closer to Christ, to learn His ways, to like His Ways. Each of them has done this in a different way. It would be unfair to choose one of their stories and leave aside the other ones. Because all of these people have taught me, in different ways, the meaning of humanity. How to be more human, how to be closer to Christ. I do hope I have done the same for them. +

Author: Fr Fernando Azpiroz SJ is the Director of Casa Ricci Social Services in Macau, China



Fr Fernando working the land together with friends in south Yunnan province (March 2018)



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