



In all things to love and to serve
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Irish Jesuit Mission Office

Newsletter

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Contents

- Irish Jesuit working in South Sudan
- A Word from the Editor
- Hope Beyond Borders
- Mission as Friendship and Personal Presence
- Mission News

Vision

Our Vision is a just and humane world based on Gospel values and Ignatian Spirituality

Core Values

Inspired by the Gospel and sent on mission to the new frontiers of our time, Irish Jesuits and their collaborators are called to:

- Become instruments of reconciliation in a divided world.
- Build a new world of right relationships with God, with other human beings and with all creation.
- See the world from the perspective of the poor and marginalised.
- Make the lives of people better in the poorest parts of the world.

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

Jesuit Mission Office,
 28 Upper Sherrard St.,
 Dublin 1,
 Ireland.

Tel: (+ 353-1) 8366509
 Fax: (+353-1) 8366510
 Email: mission@jesuit.ie
 www.jesuitmissions.ie

Director: Fr. John K Guiney SJ

Irish Jesuit working in South Sudan

Richard O'Dwyer SJ



I arrived in mid January 2009 in Lobone, South Sudan. I was appalled at the level of poverty that I found here. With the

exception of 2 or 3 families everyone here lives in mud huts covered with grass roofs that are so low that one has to bend completely at the waist to enter the doorways. Lobone has a heavy annual rainfall and every dwelling suffers from rising damp.

On my first Sunday I found myself standing in a Church with a mud floor and logs for seating. The structure was a long narrow building with no sacristy and not even a small table, apart from the altar, on which to place my mass bag. The local catechist was under the impression that Lent had already begun because he did not even have any kind of Liturgical Calendar in his possession. The walls of the church were bamboo which allowed the wind and rain to pass through. The roof was covered in grass and badly in need of repair with numerous holes which allowed the rain to drip down on the congregation. It is a far cry from the beautiful churches of Dublin, such as the Jesuit church in Gardiner Street.

However, all the congregation presented themselves in beautifully coloured, clean and pressed clothing in stark contrast to muddy floor and

surroundings. All clothes have to be washed by hand and pressed with irons that are hollow cast iron to hold hot charcoal and I am sure are only to be found in museums in Europe and North America. There is no electricity available to people here except in the Jesuit Refugee Service compound and 2 or 3 local "pubs" which is generated by solar power or diesel generators. There is no phone network in the mountains of South Sudan. Here in Lobone there is no running water, no paved roads, no medical or veterinary services and almost no shops apart from one or two which only stock basics like soap, matches, paraffin, soft drinks, beer and bottled water. Most people bathe in the local rivers and many do not even have pit latrines.



Fr. Richard celebrating Mass in Lobone

The lack of proper roads makes travel and commerce of any kind very difficult and in the rainy season, hazardous and even quite dangerous. In fact in the Lobone area, the "roads" have been created only by the passage of military vehicles during the civil war and were never subject to even basic civil engineering principles, such as a drainage ditch at the side of the road surface or any kind of grading or cambering to throw water off to the road surface to the side of the road. As a result roads are subject to severe water erosion where the

A Word from the Editor



Greetings to you all during this Holy Season.

Christmas and New Year is a time of celebration and being together. It is the deep desire of every parent to have their family gathered together around the table in joy and conversation, deepening their love and celebrating life.

Our newsletter this season highlights the millions of people who have no home. In the past year we have heard of so many in Ireland moving abroad to seek work. Losing one's house and one's job and seeking a home elsewhere is daily news during these difficult times of recession.

Being forced from one's home because of conflict, war and violence is another kind of experience. It is the story of nearly 40 million people in our world today. Two of our younger Irish Jesuit missionaries, Richard O'Dwyer and Gerry Clarke, tell their stories of working with Jesuit Refugee Service in Africa. Blessings Mtetwa—a refugee herself, shares her moving story of fleeing Zimbabwe and seeking refuge in Ireland.

It is our privilege as the Irish Mission Office to support the work of Jesuit missionaries who work with refugees and displaced people in our world today.

Christmas is also a time of thanksgiving. All of us at the Mission Office are touched and humbled by the kindness and generosity of so many people who continue to support our mission works during this time of recession. Your consideration and remembrance of the poorest in Africa and Asia makes such a difference and gives so many a chance not only to survive but to live a life of hope and dignity.

As we enter the New Year of 2011, I wish you on behalf of all of us at the Mission Office, every blessing and peace which is expressed lovingly in the Irish blessing:

“May God grant you always- a sunbeam to warm you, a moonbeam to charm you, a sheltering Angel so nothing can harm you. Laughter to cheer you. Faithful friends near you. And whenever you pray, Heaven to hear you.”

water carves out trenches as it traces its own path due to gravity. Think of how the Grand Canyon must have started to cut through the earth in miniature and you have the idea!



Workshop delivered by JRS personnel in Torit, South Sudan

Initial Impressions

I found the people friendly and delighted to have me celebrate mass with them, sometimes, as in the case of the village of Lomarati, for the first time in about 20 years. When I came here first, with the exception of Lobone, the local church building was usually a mango tree whose dense foliage shielded everyone from the Sunday morning sunshine.

The most challenging aspect for me was that most people assumed I had the financial resources of Bill Gates! People tend to assume that all white people come from the US. Many people do not seem to know of Europe. People think that all whites are extremely wealthy and that their money is sitting in a bank in New York just awaiting transfer, withdrawal and dispersal from a bank in Uganda (there are almost no banks operating in South Sudan). Fr Joe Okumu, a priest anthropologist based in Gulu in northern Uganda explained to me that life in Refugee camps destroys virtually all vestiges of people's self-reliance and accustoms them to UN type handouts for food, clothes, schoolbooks, all other basic necessities and the perception that one does not need to work to live and provide for one's family.

This may take a long time to change.

Fr. Richard O'Dwyer is the Pastoral Coordinator of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Lobone, South Sudan.

Hope Beyond Borders

Blessings came from Zimbabwe after the slaughter of her parents. She is being supported by Jesuit Refugee Service while she lives in a hostel in Galway awaiting the outcome of her asylum process.

Ms. Blessings Mtetwa



It was two days before Christmas and a month and four days after we had buried our parents; we all seemed to be adapting to the fact that we would never see them again. Like any other family we had planned to have a quiet Christmas. I was in the bedroom with my sisters; my brother was sitting alone in the dining room busy on one of his books. We heard a loud knock followed by a loud bang on the door. I had never been so scared in my life. We all ran out of the room to where my brother was.

A group of men marched in and pulled him from the chair throwing him on the ground, one of them kicked him in the face. I ran towards the man trying to pull him away from my brother but he turned around and hit me with the back of his open hand which gave me a heavy nose bleed. Holding my brother's shirt collar and pressing him down he kept saying "you are one of them, you bastard, you are a sell-out just like your stupid father". My brother kept pleading with them and telling them he knew nothing of what they were talking about.

His cries made me feel useless and really pierced my heart in an indescribable way. I thought they were not going to stop until he was dead. I dropped on my knees and begged them to stop and cried for mercy but it seemed to fall on deaf ears. Then one of the men said "that's enough, I think they understood our message, we will be back and if we find them here we will kill them. And, by the way, we are the police if they try anything stupid" and they walked out. I quickly pushed myself up and knelt next to my brother, his lip was badly cut and his face was badly swollen. There was nothing we could do except take refuge in the church.

We were forced to escape from our country and seek asylum in another part of the world.

We were packed into an overcrowded van on a 6 hour journey with no space to sit but only room to squat. As promised the trafficker was there on arrival wearing a cap to hide his eyes. He told us we had a 4 hour walk ahead

of us. We were ordered to remain silent because of border patrol.

We arrived at the river bank and more than 200 people were sitting under the trees. We were told that they had been there for a couple of days and we were going to stay for some time because the river was too full to cross. I was tired so I took off my shoes and found a spot with the group that I had come with. I didn't know it was going to be seven days of hell with no clean water, sanitation, shelter or proper food. My body was aching, I had blisters on my feet, no proper sleep, I was dehydrated and weak.

Our group leader told us we were going to cross the crocodile river in the middle of the night, we were told to take off our clothes and anyone who was too weak was told the journey was over for them, and those who had open wounds or were bleeding had to be left behind. The water was freezing, and we were strictly told to make no sound. I was scared.



The pickup van was waiting for us approximately three and a half hours from the river and we were on our way to South Africa. On arrival I was given a new name and was told to use it until I arrived at a safer destination.

I arrived in Ireland without proper documentation and was taken to a female prison. I stayed there for almost 5 weeks. The most terrible thing I experienced was going to court almost every week. The cold court cell made me think that God was turning a blind eye although I always prayed that I would be released. When I was released I was sent to a hostel in Dublin where I had to try and adapt to new surroundings. I was then sent to a hostel in Galway.

Although it's hard not to have my family and friends around I hope there will be a change in my life.

Mission as Friendship and Personal Presence

Gerard J. Clarke, SJ



“Friendship and personal presence are two very deep values in Rwandan culture” advised Fabienne, a French Canadian sister soon to retire from her missionary work. Being present to somebody, the greeting and the farewell, are all deeply important for Rwandans and probably all Africans. That’s why being late for meetings is perfectly understandable here in Byumba, at the heart of rural Rwanda, an hour north of the capital Kigali. As Richard, Tanzanian chair of the “partners” coordination meeting said: “thank you to all who arrived early and also to those who arrived not-so-early.” People wait and eventually things go ahead. The important thing is that we’re all there and everybody is introduced. And so the Jesuit Refugee Service, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the Government Ministry for Disaster Management and Refugees and other NGO partners sit down to tackle our common challenges at Gihembe refugee camp close to the town of Byumba.

Following a year at JRS in North Kivu I was posted eastwards to Rwanda and the town of Byumba which at 3,200m above sea-level reaches high into the clouds and mists of the East-African sky. On a clear day from the camp we can see the volcanoes of the Ruhengeri on the border with North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It’s around about here that the waters divide, those flowing west to feed the Congo Basin and therefore the Atlantic Ocean, and those flowing east which feed the Nile and therefore the Mediterranean. Mid September marks the start of the rainy season so the dust clouds are dispersed and the view is crystal clear to east and to west.

Gihembe Camp is one of three camps for Congolese refugees found here in Rwanda. Two years after the 1994 Rwandan genocide a deepening crisis in eastern Congo, forced the flight of thousands of

people eastwards back into Rwanda. These refugees are Congolese citizens but they used to live in Rwanda before the colonial powers displaced them West in order to solve population pressure. Then in 1996 they became the target of ethnic violence and they have been here for nearly 14 years now. That is a long time to live under plastic sheeting, use communal latrines and eat beans, rice or sorghum. It’s what the UNHCR calls a “protracted problem” and JRS is at the heart of it in two of the three Rwandan refugee camps.

Both at Gihembe and at Kiziba JRS does practically the same thing. We co-fund and run the nursery, primary and secondary education, offer a special support service to the people classified as “vulnerable”, organise cultural and sporting activities, offer basic vocational training to young people and provide pastoral services to catholic refugees. It’s a comprehensive offering which the Society of Jesus and its collaborators can do quite well given our experience and understanding of marginalised people. But it depends, of course, on our funding, much of which comes from Europeans.



JRS Primary School, Gihembe Refugee Camp, Rwanda

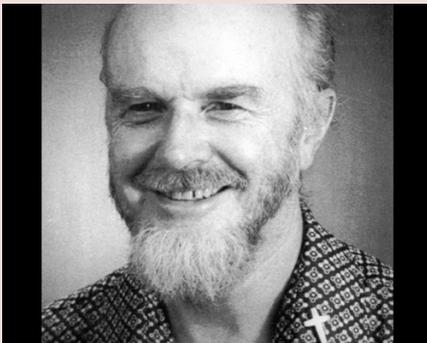
Returning Home?

There is talk of a “return” next year because a tripartite agreement has been signed involving the UNHCR and the governments of Rwanda and the DR Congo. But violence and instability continues in Eastern Congo so our refugees are sitting tight until they can be absolutely sure that their fields and houses are waiting for them on their return. And JRS too hopes for a return. Our teams in Eastern Congo will continue the service to these returnees, rebuilding schools, training teachers and making a return to normal life more than just a wish. Perhaps that will be the moment when JRS, like Sister Fabienne, will be able to retire from this area of Africa and focus its energies on new problems with new staff and new inspiration.

Fr. Gerry Clarke is the National Director of Jesuit Refugee Service in Rwanda.

Mission News

- Fr. Bill Johnston SJ who died in Tokyo on 12 October 2010 had a good send-off, reflecting the remarkable impact of this diffident Belfast-born Jesuit. It included this message from President Mary McAleese 'I'm so sorry to hear of Father Johnston's death, though glad for him that his suffering is over and he has reached life's best destination. May he be enjoying a heavenly welcome.' The Archbishop of Tokyo (whom Bill had baptised) led the funeral Mass in St. Ignatius' Church, accompanied by the Irish Ambassador, some thirty priests and Archbishop Pittau SJ. The Irish Times published an obituary . A Month's Mind Mass for Fr. Bill was celebrated in Milltown Park on Friday 12 November. May he rest in peace.



Fr. Bill Johnston SJ

- The Irish Jesuit Mission Office is collaborating with VMM in the recruitment of volunteers to work abroad. Two volunteers have been sent to Africa - Shane Burke as Project Officer to the development office in the Province of Eastern Africa and Jim Cahill as Farm Manager and Administrator in the Raphaelites Project of the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. This project is a center of rehabilitation for people suffering addictions. The Center was founded by a Jesuit. Both positions are for 2 years.
- The Annual Memorial Mass for deceased missionaries took place on Nov 14 at Milltown Park Chapel where friends and relatives gathered to pray and remember their loved ones.
- Congratulations to Jesuit Refugee Service as they celebrate 30 years of service to refugees and displaced people around the world.

Loyola Jesuit Secondary School Project Update, Malawi

Work moves forward bit by bit on the new Loyola Secondary School in Kasungu, Malawi. The school plot for our school has now been made secure by a 900 meter long wall fence. The Malawi Electrical Company will soon be bringing in the power lines. We hope soon to find funds to sink two deep boreholes to provide a stable alternative source of water both for during construction time and later for the smooth running of the school.

There is great excitement at Kasungu about the upcoming new school. The children at the new parish primary school are constantly reminding us that we should have the school ready for them sooner rather than later. When asked where they want to learn after they complete St. Joseph's (our new parish primary school), they all called out with resounding voice: "LO-YO-LA! LO-YO-LA!"

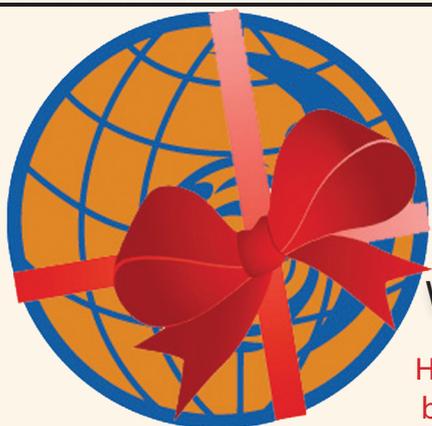
We pray for benefactors who will make this possible – sooner rather than later!

Alojz Podgrajsek, S.J. - Project Manager



Proposed Loyola Secondary School, Malawi

A sincere Thank You to readers of The Sacred Heart Messenger Magazine for donations and prayers which we received following recent Mission articles published in the October edition, these can be read on www.jesuitmissions.ie



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