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Laudato Si Mural: Clongowes art students work with Syrian Artist

By Liam Simon-Fellowes

I first met the team at IJI while doing a Peter McVerry trust social placement, where we came into their offices to briefly meet them before attending a mass at the parish across the street. While I was there, they showed us the pretty backyard garden they have, however I couldn't help but notice a large blank wall which stood out disrupting the scenery.

Later in the year many students in TY were attending the Camino, however a group of my friends and I were staying in Dublin for the week and we wanted to find a bit of work experience we could do. After a bit of brainstorming, we came up with the idea to paint a mural on the wall on the Gardiner St IJI building.

Mr. O'Rourke has connections with the organization and with his aid we were able to set up the project. The next step was to

prepare for the week ahead of us, and in order to do that our group composed of Daniel, Cyril, Allen, Benedict, Alfonso, Javi, Eoin and myself started drawing possible ideas and concepts for the mural. The central idea we were basing the mural on was 'Laudato Si' and therefore we wanted a design which related to nature and culture.

After two weeks of preparation, we had a solid design as well as the majority of

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The mural project was one of the highlights of the year for me and I truly learnt a lot not just from painting but about teamwork and working in cooperation and making the whole piece come together to show one image. – Cyril

the paint we needed prepared and mixed for the right colours. Additionally joining the group was a woman called Manar, who is a Syrian refugee in Ireland who appeared in an Irish Times article. This article highlighted her struggles over the course of five months as her refugee status was put on hold and she was unable to get proper accommodation or work. Manar is an unbelievably sweet woman who was working on her master's art degree in Syria before fleeing from

war. I was able to contact her through Instagram which showcases some of her work. I was very impressed with her artwork and the mural project happened to be happening near the time we had corresponded. I asked her would she be interested in helping us out a few hours every day throughout the week.

Manar outlined an impressively accurate sketch of our design freehand! It was from this first moment we truly knew with her help we would take this mural to the next level.

On day two, we met Mr O'Rourke's uncle who came to visit us at IJI. He was a very nice older man who clearly had a passion for his work, and he clearly had an influence in Mr O'Rourke's life.

As you can see from the pictures as the week went on, we progressed quite well, working 6-7 hours per day in order to achieve the final result we wanted. Overall, it was the most enjoyable work experience I had done the entire year. Working on such a large-scale art project was new experience for me as well as almost all the members of my group. I definitely feel more confident in my artistic ability now and I'm glad I pushed myself out of my comfort zone. Additionally meeting Manar was great. She has an amazing heart, and the mural wouldn't be what it is today without her.

My time at the IJI was one I will remember as the beginning of my path toward impressionable artistic pieces in the following years. I have always had a passion for art, and I intend to maintain this hobby going into my adult life because, in my case, art serves as a portal for creativity and stress relief.

Even though it took lots of hard work to accomplish the 'Laudato Si' mural, the hospitality of the IJI Team, alongside working with the talented artist Manar had me looking forward to every day of it.

I'm incredibly thankful for the commitment and the contributions

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It was a great time. We all had so much fun. And I will cherish these moments my whole life. During this week I also could develop many skills in terms of painting and shading figures. I am grateful that we have been given the opportunity to paint the mural and hope that it will bring pleasure to the people. – Benedict

Manar was able to make, as we wouldn't have the mural you all see in the pictures without her. She displayed her talent through swift, detailed work and outstanding colour theory.

It's also important to mention the dedication and support of all my friends working on this project alongside me. The main factor which kept us all smiling and enjoying ourselves was

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Although we worked for six days, I didn't mind, because of how great the final piece turned out. This mural was undoubtedly the best work experience of the year, and I am very proud of our work. – Javier



the bond we shared, allowing us to work together efficiently while exchanging laughs and playing loud music.

All in all, I'm very proud of what Manar, Cyril, Javier, Eoin, Allen, Daniel, Alfonso, Benedict and I were able to accomplish in only six days. This experience was an opportunity for our whole group to grow and bond together and a way for us to spread a bit of positivity back to the local community. The feeling of making people's days with an art piece is truly indescribable, and I know that while this was my first mural, it definitely won't be my last.



Manar Al-Shouha, is an asylum seeker who fled her home due to the war in Damascus. She has an upcoming art exhibition called CITIZENS? 9 September – October 23 at Rathfarnham Castle and you can find her art on Instagram @manar_mervat.art.

A Word from the Director

Summertime is a time for many to get a break and relax and get a new perspective on life. The recent good weather has helped us to do just that and it brings a little joy into our lives.

The articles of this summer newsletter are full of joy and hope. The most joyous weeks we had in the IJI office recently were when the Clongowes Transition Year students joined with Manar, our Syrian refugee artist, in painting the mural of *Laudato Si* on our back wall. *Laudato Si* is the most profound and prophetic letter ever written by Pope Francis on our environment, *Our Common Home* as he calls it.

Joe's account below of his visit to Kenya and especially to the Jesuit parish in the slums of Nairobi is deeply moving. Joy amidst struggle is what people on the peripheries teach us.

Sam's article on his work in Malawi points to the international volunteering placements for past pupils of Irish Jesuit Schools. It is encouraged and

facilitated by IJI and when qualified in their profession they can add real value to the work of our partners in the field. Their vocation and generosity is a great source of consolation.

A real joyous day for the IJI Team with so many of our friends and partners was the launch of our strategic plan on the 10th August. We noted that our continuous work stands on the shoulders of those heroic men and women missionaries gone before us. The passion and vibrancy of the IJI team with partners in many parts of the globe - witnesses to a dream and a passion for building a better world for those on the margins.

Building a better world is not possible without our benefactors, generous friends who share their hard-earned money with those in need. It



is deeply moving to receive bequests from those who have passed away, RIP. Many give monthly contributions through direct debit. Those who come into our office to leave a donation and for those who send a donation in the post or to our bank account – we are deeply grateful to you all.

Together we make a better world and brings joy to so many we will never meet on this side of eternity.

In deep appreciation we keep all of you in our prayers and Masses.

Fr John K. Guiney
Director.

Upendo is all you need

By Joe Munnelly

I sit here wondering how I can express just how moving and inspiring our latest project visits were as Emer, our operations officer, and I visited Nairobi, Kenya in June.

As communications officer my role is to highlight the huge impact and difference your generosity and support can make to the lives of those who are the world's most marginalized and impoverished.

Upendo is the Swahili word for love and from my visit to Kenya – love it seems is the driving force of the various development projects located in its state capital.



Upendo is the name of an educational and rehabilitation programme based in Kangemi, a slum, home to more than 100,000 of Nairobi's poorest people. The programme's main objective is to rehabilitate, educate, and integrate orphaned and abandoned children and low-income families who face various abuses within the Kangemi district. Since 1995, the programme has

supported the education of vulnerable children. Our director, John Guiney SJ, founded Upendo after witnessing the hardship and suffering of the poor while based there for over a decade. Single mothers were often forced into the street to feed their children and HIV was rife, often leading to children losing their guardians and ending up on the street desperate and vulnerable to abuse.



John rallied the local community and gathered St Joseph's parish to identify Kangemi's most poor and vulnerable and outreach began to save the lives of children. The programme since then has grown immensely, through IJI support among other partners, to building livelihoods and brighter futures.

Life in Kangemi is extremely tough as poverty, substance abuse and mass over-crowding places children, and young girls especially, at great risk.

Through St Joseph's Parish, children suffering from abandonment, exploitation and abuse are supported in several ways: beyond education support involving providing school supplies such as books, uniforms and tuition fees. Children are supported through balanced school meals and medical care when needed. The Upendo programme also provides much-needed counselling and psychosocial support and continues to empower local youth, parents, and guardians through vocational skills training and seminars.

Not only does the Upendo programme support the transition of children from primary, secondary and even into third level institutions but the programme also focuses on livelihoods and up-skilling local communities through a number of courses from hairdressing and dressmaking to electrical work.

One moment during the visit that stuck with me the most was listening to Lucy, an instructor with the Upendo OVC educational programme, teaching a classroom of men to be

future electricians. She spoke with such passion about her career and the defiance to break away from the preconceived notions and imposed limitations of her sex. Lucy expressed wholeheartedly a vision for all to strive for their own passions, and to develop strengths and interests without being constrained by gender. Through the Upendo programme women like Lucy continue to grow and continue to inspire women and men alike to break the mould and work with passion.

Another project giving vital support to the most vulnerable in Nairobi, is St Joseph's dispensary, a health clinic which is mitigating the AIDS epidemic within Kangemi slum. Poverty is particularly severe within urban slums with an estimated 70% of the population living below the poverty line and disproportionately impacting women and girls. Most Kangemi residents rely on poor quality, informal and unregulated health facilities and the available private health facilities within slums are frequently unlicensed with no working guidelines or standard protocols for services – the dispensary is a lifeline for people.

Last year, we supported St Joseph's dispensary to cope with the COVID pandemic both within the facility and its targeted community, with an estimated 645 patients (120 men, 250 women & 275 children under the age of 5). IJI supported the community through the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for 17 St Joseph Dispensary staff (10 male, 7 female) to minimise the transfer of COVID19



as well as providing an isolation tent with 3 beds and oxygen concentrators erected for COVID19 positive patients and 35 Community Health Volunteers (12 male, 23 female) were trained and supported in home visit awareness raising sessions on COVID19 prevention to 1,740 people. Paired with the Upendo programme and the community of St Joseph's parish – these projects have been both lifesaving and life changing and it was a privilege to meet the children, parents, teachers and students and other members of St Joseph's parish who have been supported by the programme.

Meeting Br Magoba Ronald, the executive director of the St Joseph development programme (SJDP), was an absolute pleasure. His passion and the passion of his team to enrich and better the lives of those less fortunate is astounding and a project like Upendo has lasting impact because of this passion, dedication and support which will surely continue. At the end of the SJDP visit, after lunching with the children, Emer and I were gifted tracksuits including one for John to bring back home. The welcome we received won't be forgotten nor the strides in development to bettering the lives of others.

As their motto proclaims – 'love is enough' and I saw first-hand the triumphs and impact of that love.

For more stories and updates from our project visit and supported programmes please visit: www.iji.ie/news and our socials.



Working to protect our creation, Earth: Work Placement with JCED

By Sam Duff, former Belvedere Head Boy

Our collective responsibility to care for our home is becoming increasingly relevant. Yet, the impacts of climate change appear somewhat distant to us in Europe.

In Malawi the issue of climate change is real and already severely affecting livelihoods. This was abundantly clear during my 4-week placement with the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED). Their mission is to take a lead in advocacy for ecological justice and empower marginalised people to achieve an improvement in their livelihoods through sustainable agriculture. JCED envision a just, inclusive and sustainable society whereby the community promotes the environment and integrity and dignity for all. Their work to assist and amplify the voices of climate victims in Malawi is now more important than ever as the country faces the harsh effects of climate and biodiversity breakdown.

One of JCED's longest running and most impressive project is their reforestation campaign. This project has been implemented in two striking ways. Firstly, JCED has worked closely with farming communities to educate them on climate smart methods of agriculture, most notably agroforestry.

Secondly, JCED has bolstered the work of a women's group who manufacture clay stoves used for cooking. As these stoves are up to 60% more efficient at burning wood than open fires, it means these communities don't have to cut down as many trees. The production and sale of these stoves provides these women with a new stream of income as their agricultural capacity is limited due to climate change.

When I sat down and chatted with this community, they were emboldened to further their sales and marketing strategies for these stoves. Their entrepreneurial endeavour has empowered them both financially and socially. Deforestation has been a persistent problem for Malawi over the last few decades, as wood is the primary fuel source for people in the country. Deforestation is estimated to be responsible for the loss of 33,000 hectares per year, leading to soil erosion, fewer crops, flooding and water scarcity, as well as increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

In fact, Malawi is slightly larger than Ireland and Wales combined, yet is losing tree cover the equivalent to the area of Cork and Kerry each year.

Deforestation, in addition to many other factors, have facilitated and exacerbated the consequences of climate change in Malawi. Once food secure areas are now in precarious positions. The small nature of farms restricts the capacity to invest in irrigation, and in turn ensures that these farmers are at the mercy of rain fed production. 90% of the population are dependent on rain-fed agriculture, with 60% of them being food insecure on a year-round-basis. From my observations and discussions with various rural communities' food insecurity has been an issue they've tackled with for many years, however the new threat facing them is water insecurity. Not only does the lack of water amplify food insecurity, but it also has wider reaching consequences for communities in terms of drinking water, hygiene and livestock health.

Despite all the progress made through JCED's projects, the issue of water halts them making further progress. For instance, north of Malawi in the Horn of Africa, they are experiencing their worst drought in more than 40 years as the last 4 years offered below average rainfall.

JCED's work does not stop with empowering farmers and women. They have branched out into advocacy and youth engagement. Through research and storytelling, JCED form policy and advocacy positions which is brought forward to government, NGO's and climate conferences. They strive to connect voices at the bottom of society, with those at the top. During my time with JCED, they began preparations to bring forth research and stories to leaders at COP27, which will be held in Egypt this November.

Tadala, a member of JCED's climate justice champions youth movement, remarks that:

"[sustainable practices] will live on if people have a sense of belonging. So the first thing that I would do for my long-term plan



is to help people identify things that they can do as the owners of the environment so that they are not affecting with the effects of climate change".

It is vital that the stories of those on the frontlines of climate change are brought back to people in Europe. Our decisions and lifestyles are having a direct impact on the most disadvantaged communities in the global south. Climate change is a justice issue. It is

only a matter of time before the climate problems in Malawi become problems for us in Ireland.

The opportunity to work alongside JCED has been an experience I will forever cherish and has gifted me the chance to cast an eye onto the greatest challenge that our species has ever faced. I am incredibly grateful to all at IJI and JCED for facilitating this opportunity and I urge anyone reading this to look into the fantastic work that JCED are undertaking to protect our creation, earth.

Shared dream for a better world

The 10th August launched our Strategic Framework which outlines our future works and objectives from 2022 to 2027. It was a proud and exciting moment for all on the team and was a great opportunity to highlight the impact the development work has had for those in the most marginalised regions of the world.

Dearbhail Rossiter, a board member of IJI, kick-started proceedings. She spoke of how struck she was by the passion and commitment of the IJI staff and how they wanted to make a positive impact on the people they serve. She then introduced John, IJI Director, who welcomed the large international group of Jesuits and colleagues present for the launch from China, Zambia, Kenya,

Syria, Scotland, Italy, and Ireland. John spoke about how he and his team at IJI in Dublin were standing on the shoulders of the men and women who had gone before them encountering new cultures, countries, and situations.

John was followed by Joe Munnelly, IJI communications officer, who talked about his role in advocacy



and research, later announcing the new volunteering initiatives with Jesuit teachers and alumni. Padraig Swan, Director of Faith and Services Programmes in Belvedere and Elisabeth Clarke, Director of Ethos and Faith from Clongowes Wood College SJ, were invited to talk about the partnership between IJI and the Jesuit schools in Ireland.

Other speakers included Yanira Romero, Communications Coordinator and a long-time member of the IJI team who told those gathered that in 2021 the IJI was working with 30 partners in 16 countries on 46 development projects. Tim Flynn, M&E Officer spoke about his visits to various projects and the positive impact he sees first-hand in his work. Emer Kerrigan, Operations

Manager, spoke about IJI's work in Safeguarding as well as other life-saving projects. Irish Jesuit Tony O'Riordan SJ had returned from Syria for a summer break and he spoke movingly about the plight of the people there, especially in the cities of Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus. After a short Q&A session, Shane Daly SJ brought proceedings to a close by thanking all those present and

the IJI team. He said that IJI played a pivotal role in linking the Irish province with the important work of its Jesuit partners in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

You can see photos from the launch, including the summer BBQ, which followed the conference below:



Photos:

1. Joe Munnelly, Dearbhail Rossiter (IJI Board) and Yanira Romero
2. Fr John K Guiney SJ, Director of IJI
3. Fr Hector Mwale (Zambia) and Sr Angela (Holy Rosary Sisters)
4. Joe Munnelly, IJI Communications Officer.
5. Elisabeth Clarke (Clongowes College)
6. Pdraig Swan (Belvedere College)
7. Tim Flynn, IJI M&E Officer
8. Aideen Kinlan, Fr Tony O' Riordan SJ



Photos:

9. Fr Shane Daly SJ
10. Padraig Swan, Fr Myles O'Reilly and Jonathan Tiernan
11. IJI summer BBQ at the walled garden in Milltown Park
12. Amanda Bermingham, Ivan Schuster and Paddy White
13. John K Guiney (IJI), Lucy Gillingham (Jesuit Missions UK)
14. Emer Kerrigan, Shane Burke, Brian Cramer, Orla Duke, Dr Desire Mpange (UCD) and Joe Munnelly
15. Yanira Romero and Jim Allen
16. IJI Team



Mikono Christmas Cards

The Work of Many Hands Mikono Refugee Craft Shop sells high quality craft items to support people from a refugee background. Irish Jesuits International buys Christmas cards from the shop each year. Last year we had many compliments on the unique design of our cards, which were made by refugees living in Nairobi, Kenya. If you would like to order some handmade African Christmas cards for this year, please get in touch with reception@iji.ie or 01 836 6509

