



A COLLECTION OF SPEECHES FROM OUR

80th ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

Foreword by the **President of Ireland**, Michael D. Higgins

Exploring New Pathways of Solidarity with the Global South & East: A celebration and reflection on our missionary and international development work, past & present, with our global partners, peers, supporters and friends.

May 2025



Cover photo:

Children in Kasungu, Malawi plant trees distributed by Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED).

CONTENTS

Foreword	
– Michael D Higgins.....	4
A Legacy of Service, Solidarity, and Hope	
– Shane Daly SJ	7
A New Mission of Solidarity and Human Development	
– John Guiney SJ.....	9
Irish Aid & Mísean Cara: Partners in Development	
– Nicola Brennan.....	15
New Models of Solidarity	
– Leonard Chiti SJ.....	20
Irish Jesuits in Hong Kong	
– Mrs Rose Goodstadt.....	24
Work in Crisis	
– Tony O’Riordan SJ	34
Climate Justice in Malawi	
– Martha Phiri	39

The 80th anniversary of Irish Jesuits International (IJI), formerly known as the Irish Jesuit Mission Office (IJMO), is **an occasion to give thanks to the hundreds of Irish Jesuits who went to the Far East, Africa and Latin America**. Their generosity, sacrifice and contribution to the lands they laboured endures forever. Their work in education, social justice, environmental projects, pastoral work in parishes, accompaniment and service to refugees and migrants, interreligious dialogue and reconciliation has been remarkable. The contribution they made to building up the local Church through teaching in seminaries and the formation of young Jesuits enabled the Church and the Society of Jesus to find roots in the cultures and communities in which they lived.

This 80th anniversary is also an occasion to reflect on how the fraternal relationships our missionaries formed with so many countries outside of Ireland can be sustained in a spirit of solidarity, mutuality and respect.

We chose the theme of our 80th anniversary conference, **“Exploring New Pathways of Solidarity with the Global South and East”**, in recognition of our common global challenges and the urgent need for shared solutions. These challenges such as climate change, global pandemics, economic inequality, and conflict cannot be solved in isolation.

So many of our missionaries lived and worked at the frontiers of economic poverty and saw the need for promoting justice and equality concerning fair trade, debt relief, access to education and healthcare.

Development and peace are inseparable.

We recognise the critical need for peace and stability. Conflict leads to displacement and mass migration, which in turn leads to xenophobia and division.

Inspired by the legacy of our missionaries, we are called to build dialogue, solidarity, and trust as we seek the well-being of all people on our planet.





FOREWORD – MICHAEL D. HIGGINS

May I extend my warmest congratulations to Irish Jesuits International as you mark eighty years of dedicated service and profound commitment to justice and human dignity. Traoslaím libh.

For the past eight decades, Irish Jesuits International has stood in compassionate solidarity with countless marginalised and disadvantaged communities across the globe, bringing a message of hope and mutual respect inspired by the enduring values of your Ignatian tradition. This, as I know, placed them on occasion as targets of State and non-State violence.

The themes of your 80th anniversary event, which is focused on your contemporary and projected work, focuses on such important issues as genderresponsive education, climate justice and sustainable livelihoods. They are a powerful reflection of your continued commitment to both the dignity of the person and the very future of our shared, vulnerable planet, and its sustainability of an ecologically

responsible way of life, with justice and an equality of participation in life-defining decisions.

In 2025 we are sadly living in an era when our interacting crises are casting a dark shadow over the world. In so many regions we are witnessing the devastating consequences of war and conflict, the scourge of hunger and famine, deepening inequality, while those least responsible for climate change are subjected to its most horrific effects.

On global hunger, the figures are alarming and worrying. 282 million members of our global family face acute hunger, while in Africa, the continent of the young, over 1 billion people struggle to afford a basic healthy diet, with 20 percent of the population undernourished.

Unfortunately, the values of equality, transformation for justice and inclusion are now under the greatest threat in decades. The recent disabling of aid to those most in need will push millions further into hunger, disease, and displacement, hitting the most vulnerable hardest.

However, the work of Irish Jesuits and other denominations who have worked with the poor is a testament to what can be achieved when people come together in the spirit of generosity, concern and global citizenship, in solidarity with members of our shared global family. Their contribution to projects of literacy, cooperation

and gender have been transformative. They are a profound exemplar of compassion in action and a powerful reminder of our shared humanity. It is work that has never been more vital.

It is work, too, that embodies that great ethical insight, an appeal to all humanity, which the late Pope Francis often spoke of, that 'too often we participate in the globalization of indifference. May we strive instead to live in global solidarity.'

In your education, advocacy, and humanitarian outreach, you have given expression to the values of justice, dignity, and hope, to that global solidarity that must lie at the heart of a truly global citizenship.

The work of Jesuits, I can personally attest, has been often distorted and that distortion made available as fuel for extreme examples defining as oligarchical experienced versions of power.

May I take this opportunity to recall those for whom I often recall as friends which was a great privilege, whose commitment to justice cost them their lives. I think particularly of the events of 16 November 1989 at the Universidad Centroamericana in El Salvador, when six Jesuits – Ignacio Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Juan Ramón Moreno Pardo, Amando López, and Joaquín López y López – alongside Julia Elba Ramos and her young daughter Celina, were brutally murdered,

targeted for their courageous advocacy for the poor and for daring to speak the truth, of human rights.

When visiting El Salvador in 1982, along with my friend, the late Sally O'Neill, I had the privilege of meeting Ignacio Ellacuría and Segundo Montes in San Salvador, along with their colleague Jon Sobrino, also one of Central America's best-known theologians.

The Jesuits of El Salvador held close links with Ireland. Ignacio Ellacuría undertook his tertianship and Joaquín López studied theology in Ireland. When Ellacuría and Sobrino visited Ireland in the mid-1980s, they spoke movingly of the deep injustices they witnessed daily in El Salvador, providing a detailed account of the grave human rights abuses and political situation in the country.

They will be long remembered for their deeply felt and passionately argued philosophy which contributed so much to the development of new paradigms for Latin America's poor, and their legacy remains an enduring inspiration for all those who seek to construct a better, more just world.

May I also take the opportunity of repeating my tribute to your late colleague, Fr. Donal Doyle, who sadly passed away recently. Fr. Doyle was a figure of great distinction and enduring influence within the Irish community in Japan, and indeed far beyond. His passing

will be keenly felt by all who had the privilege to have known him, to work alongside him, and to benefit from his wisdom, his enduring compassion, and his life-long commitment to the values of education, justice, and spiritual reflection.

On this, for you a milestone anniversary, may I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the members, past and present, of Irish Jesuits who have offered their selfless services over the past 80 years.

May I wish Irish Jesuits International success in your endeavours, and I wish you patience, endurance and success with the positive changes that are so necessary for the years to come. May you have every blessing with your efforts to create a more equitable, just, and fair future for all, built on fulfilment, in its most comprehensive, inclusive sense, and critically respectful of diversity.

Arís mo bhuíochas libh uilig agus guím gach rath oraibh don todhchaí.

Beir beannacht,



Michael D. Higgins, Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland



Bio: Shane Daly SJ was appointed Provincial of Ireland in 2023. He entered the Society of Jesus at the age of 35, in 2008. Before joining the Jesuits, he taught young offenders and vulnerable children. After his novitiate in Birmingham, he taught at Coláiste Iognáid in Galway before theology studies at Regis College and the University of Toronto (2013-2015). Post ordination ministries include schools and Province administration. In 2022 he did tertianship in Portland, Oregon.

A LEGACY OF SERVICE, SOLIDARITY, AND HOPE

– Shane Daly SJ

I would like to welcome you all to this celebration and to express a special word of welcome and gratitude to all our keynote speakers, who are going to reflect on and celebrate 80 years of work by the Mission Office and IJI for the Kingdom of God.

It is appropriate that the celebration should happen here in Milltown Park, where the Mission Office was created 80 years ago to serve and support the work and needs of the Jesuits rebuilding the Hong Kong mission after the Second World War and support the emerging mission in Northern Rhodesia as then was.

The generosity, commitment, resilience, and faith of our Jesuit missionaries and lay colleagues has borne much fruit building up the Kingdom. Long before showing the way to God, walking with the excluded, journeying with youth, and care for our common home were spoken of as Universal Apostolic preferences, they were at the heart of what our missionaries did.

Our gratitude and appreciation go to the men and women involved in these works of service both in the past and today. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis' encyclical on fraternity and social

friendship, he notes that we are called to *“a love without borders and for taking an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies.”*

Today, at a time when dark clouds of conflict gather over our world, which seems more intent on dividing peoples and nations, the generosity of those missionaries and the men and women who have taken up their cause, and continue their work, is more needed than ever; what they do and their generosity is a sign to our troubled world that a very different world built on fraternity and friendship is possible.

A special mention must be made of those who stayed at home who ran the raffles, cake sales,

and concerts organised across parishes and communities to raise monies for the work. It was less glamorous and adventurous but made so much possible. To that end we remember Fr Tom Martin the first “Mission procurator” from 1945 to 1972.

As I hand over to Fr John Guiney, the present IJI Director, I want to assure him and the team – Emer, Tim, Yanira, Joe, Amanda, Jim, and Rutsuko – remembering also Rosaleen who is now enjoying week three of retirement, and our missionaries of the Province’s prayers and support for your working building the just, livable, humane world that God desired, at the outset, for Creation.



*Kevin O'Rourke
SJ, who was IJI
Director from
1973 to 2008
and Rachel
McNeill, Nurse
Manager
Cherryfield Lodge*



Bio: John has been IJ1's Director for 17 years, and prior to this, he spent 25 years in East Africa - his last role there, being the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) East Africa Regional Director. John wears many hats, as do most religious – he also works with the Father General of the Society of Jesus on Promoting a Consistent Culture of Protection across the Society, a role he's been doing for the last 6 years.

A NEW MISSION OF SOLIDARITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

– John Guiney SJ

Today is a day of celebration and thanksgiving for the lives and work of hundreds of Irish Jesuit missionaries who have served in different continents and diverse cultures in our world. We also remember our lay partners from Ireland who were and are part of our mission in different corners of our world

It is, however, not only an occasion for giving thanks but it is a moment to ask what our relationship looks like to what we called in the old days 'mission territories'. In the words of the theme of the conference, how can we explore new pathways to being in solidarity with the global south? How do we read the signs of the times and discern together what this partnership is about? How can we be in greater solidarity?

We now recognize that mission is no longer 'from the West to the rest,' but increasingly 'from everywhere to everywhere.'

Can I suggest briefly 4 key points that should be part of this thinking and discernment.

1. Demographical shift

There has been an ecclesial demographic shift to a Global South Leadership in our Church in the past years. The centre of Christianity has shifted significantly to the Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America). We now recognize that mission is no longer “from the West to the rest,” but increasingly from everywhere to everywhere.

It is significant that international Church leadership for the past 14 years and indeed Jesuit leadership has come from the global south – Latin America. Our General comes from Venezuela, the late Pope Francis from Argentina, and Pope Leo was pastorally formed in Peru. One quarter of the approximate 15,000 Jesuits come from South Asia – India and surrounding countries. The country with the highest number of Jesuit vocations is Vietnam. The dynamism and youth and spirit of the church comes from outside Europe.

In the global south the gospel is being interpreted within specific, cultural, social and political contexts. There is a focus in incarnating the Gospel in ways that resonate with local contexts and cultures. Focus on following the Gospel call in pastoral challenges is preferable to mere compliance to doctrine.

2. Integral Mission / Holistic Mission

In 1975 Paul VI wrote a keynote encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which reflected and inspired the work of so many of our missionaries and it continues to be key in understanding partnership today. Integrating evangelisation with social justice, development, and community transformation is key to this evolving partnership.

This is rooted in a theology that sees God’s mission (*missio Dei*) as encompassing the whole of human life, not just spiritual salvation – saving souls. Integral human development refers to the comprehensive and holistic growth of a person, encompassing physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, social, cultural and moral aspects. It aims not just at spiritual progress or economic progress, but at the full well-being of individuals and communities, ensuring they can live in their cultures with dignity, freedom, and justice.

Key aspects of integral human development include:

- Physical well-being: Access to healthcare, nutrition, clean water, and safe living conditions.
- Education and knowledge: Promoting education to empower individuals morally, intellectually, and socially.
- Spiritual growth: Supporting religious, spiritual, or moral development.

- Social justice: Ensuring fairness, equality, and respect for human rights.
- Community participation: Encouraging active engagement in societal and civic life.
- Environmental sustainability: Caring for the environment for future generations.

The cry of the earth is also the cry of the poor. The concept underscores that true development must address all these areas simultaneously, respecting the dignity and inherent worth of every person.

3. Care of our common home

‘Care of Our Common Home’ calls us into a key partnership today. The phrase “care of our common home is a universal mission and call to action to protect our environment” that captures a powerful and timely message. It reflects the idea that protecting and nurturing the Earth is not just a responsibility for a few but a shared duty of all humanity—across cultures, religions, and nations.

The late Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, describes the Earth as our “common home” and urges everyone—individuals, communities,



John K Guiney SJ, IJI Director, Clive Dillon-Malone SJ, Former Lecturer at University of Zambia, Frank Sammon SJ, former JRS Ireland Director, and Leonard Chiti SJ, Southern Africa Provincial

and governments—to take action against environmental degradation and climate change. His message aligns with many global ethical, spiritual, and scientific perspectives that recognize the interconnectedness of all life and the urgent need for sustainable living.

The cry of the earth is also the cry of the poor, and Martha's input later sharing her work in JCED in Malawi shows how the people who hurt most are the people who are least responsible for the pollution of our planet. The cry of earth is indeed also the cry of the poor.

Responding to the late Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, JCED works with communities in restoring eco-systems, reforestation, small holder farmer training in climate smart agriculture and green business, producing eco-stoves and responding to natural disasters such as flash floods and cyclones which are becoming ever more prominent in Malawi.

Here's how the concept can be broken down:

Universal Mission: Everyone, regardless of background or belief, is called to participate in the stewardship of the Earth.

Common Home: The Earth belongs to all and must be protected for current and future generations.

Call to Action: It is not just a belief or sentiment, but a *call*—a directive to engage in concrete actions toward environmental and social justice.

4. A partnership in building reconciliation and peacebuilding and healing of memories from a colonial past

Facing the past with truth and penitential memory:

Pope Francis stressed the importance of acknowledging the truth about past wrongs, including our own sins and the actions of others, to avoid repeating past mistakes. He calls this a "penitential memory," which involves both sorrow for our own sins and a willingness to forgive.

Building bridges through dialogue and understanding:

Pope Francis emphasized the need for dialogue and listening to understand different perspectives, even those of former enemies, to find common ground and work towards the common good. We should build bridges not walls.

Forgiveness and reconciliation:

He highlights the power of forgiveness, not just as a personal virtue but also as a political necessity for healing past wounds and building a more just future.

Acting as agents of Christ's peace:

Pope Francis encourages Christians to embody the peace of Christ through their actions, showing love and compassion to all, especially the vulnerable and marginalized.

Addressing conflict through non-violence:

He promotes non-violent solutions to conflicts and encourages prayers for peace in conflict zones, emphasizing the commitment to dialogue and negotiation.

Promoting interreligious dialogue and mutual respect:

Pope Francis recognizes the importance of interreligious dialogue and mutual respect as pathways to peace, as seen in his historic meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Cultivating fraternity and social friendship:

He urges the cultivation of a new dream of fraternity and social friendship, moving beyond mere words to create a more united and supportive society, as he articulated in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

ii

ADVERTISEMENTS

JESUIT FOREIGN MISSIONS

ONE
HUNDRED
AND
FORTY
IRISH
JESUITS
WORK
IN
HONG-KONG,
MALAYA,
AND
NORTHERN
RHODESIA



THEY ASK YOUR PRAYERS AND GENEROUS HELP
PLEASE SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO
JESUIT FOREIGN MISSIONS
28 Upper Sherrard Street, Dublin (Phone 44633)

IJI's first fundraising appeal advert appeared in 1959 in the Clongownian, an annual journal of Clongowes Wood College, depicting this mother and daughter in Zambia [then Northern Rhodesia].

Acting quickly to address conflicts:

Pope Francis encourages addressing misunderstandings and anger promptly before they escalate, emphasizing reconciliation before the sun sets.

In essence, Pope Francis's vision for peace and reconciliation involves a multi-faceted approach that emphasizes truth, forgiveness, dialogue, and a commitment to the common

good, all inspired by the example of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Gospel.

All of us, North and South, East and West are called to be partners in building this peace. Let us continue to imagine new ways in building friendship, partnership and solidarity with one another in our planet because we are indeed one family – the family of God.



John K Guiney SJ and Mary Carroll, former volunteer teacher in Zambia



Bio: Nicola is Ireland's Ambassador to Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, the Seychelles and Comoros. She is also Ireland's representative to the East Africa Community. Prior to this role she was Ireland's Ambassador to Ethiopia, South Sudan and Djibouti, and Ireland's representative to the African Union, and the UN Economic Commission for Africa. Nicola has been many years with Department of Foreign Affairs, prior to her ambassador work. She has been instrumental in the development of Ireland's International Development Policy, A Better World. For 5 years, she led the Department's response to the AIDS pandemic. She worked closely with our fellow Jesuit, the late Michael J Kelly SJ, and we are most grateful to her for hosting so many of the annual Irish Aid Father Michael Kelly Lectures on HIV and AIDs.

IRISH AID & MISEAN CARA: PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT

– Nicola Brennan

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. It is an honour to be with you to join in the celebrations of your work, your vocation and your commitment. Congratulations on your 80th anniversary! You are 80 years old. Irish Aid is 50 years old. And I am almost 30 years old – that is 30 years working for the Department of Foreign Affairs as part of the Irish Aid team and programme.

I have just returned from Ireland where I attended our Global Ireland Summit and Ambassadors conference. I was very proud to listen to both the Taoiseach and Tanáiste expressing Ireland's deep commitment to its values; values that have been borne out of our own history – a history of struggle for our own independence as a nation, a history of poverty, a history of hunger, a history of emigration and a history of resilience.

This is what Irish Aid stands for and over the past 50 years Ireland's overseas development programme has grown – not only in money terms but also in its impact and relevance – and it is now central to Ireland's foreign policy and global engagement.

Irish Aid started out in 1973/74 at a time when Ireland was beginning to look more to the outside world and to see its role in a global context. At that time, we joined the European Economic Commission – EEC – now the European Union – and the Irish Aid programme was small – it mainly focused on multilateral contributions with some projects related to the provision of Irish technical assistance.

But while Ireland was looking outwards and fulfilling its international obligations it was Irish missionaries who paved the way for the Irish Aid programme.

Ronan Murphy – previous Director General of Irish Aid wrote a book on the history of Irish Aid. In it he said that the overwhelming view of those he interviewed for his book was that it was above all Irish missionaries we must thank for the interest in which Ireland takes in the developing world.

He said, ‘Ireland had a huge advantage when it started out, in that the missionary tradition had built up a real connection with Africa in particular, which resonated with the Irish public’.

Irish Missionary presence was also a factor that influenced where Ireland established its aid programme with Tanzania and Zambia being chosen as two countries with long standing Irish missionary presence. And we know that a number of our best NGOs – including Trócaire and Concern have their roots in the missionary movement also.

Part of the story of Irish Aid is one of growth.

When Irish Aid was established in 1973 it started with a modest budget of £1.5 million. It began to grow significantly from the 1990’s and today Ireland’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) is over €2 billion with €810 million allocated to Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – the highest ever allocation since the establishment of the aid programme in 1974, and the 9th consecutive year in which the government of Ireland have increased ODA.

Irish Aid has also grown in quality and professionalism over the 50 years of its existence and is considered a credible player internationally on development. Irish Aid is highly regarded by the OECD Development Assistance Committee who undertake a peer review of our aid programme every 5 years. We consistently rank among one of the best for our focus on poverty, on least developed countries, on effectiveness, on sustainability and on consistency and flexibility. We are also rated by the Brookings Institute and the Centre for global Development as one of the best donors in the world. We consistently provide grant aid rather than loans and our aid is not tied to the purchase of goods and services from Ireland.

We are also very fortunate to continue to have cross party-political support for development – and broad public support for development – we stand out in the EU as having a public and

a political system that continues to support Ireland's aid programme

I am very proud to work for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I started out nearly 30 years ago in our embassy in South Africa. I then moved to work in our Embassy in Uganda – following which I had about 9 years in Ireland as our Senior Adviser on HIV and AIDS. I then spent a short time in Zambia after which I had another 9 years at home in Ireland holding different portfolios – the most exciting being as our Director of International Development Policy where I led the development of Ireland's first whole of government development policy – A Better World. I was then very proud to be appointed Ireland's Ambassador to Ethiopia and now in Tanzania.

In each country I have worked in I have been consistently inspired by the Irish missionaries I have met. In fact, it was missionaries that initially inspired me to work in development and the developing world. I think the story of Irish missionaries helped me to relate to the outside world – to see beyond Ireland. As Mary McAleese said, '[missionaries helped us to be citizens of the world](#)'.

I have witnessed the amazing work of Irish missionaries – their vocation, their focus on those less fortunate, their commitment and passion for peace and justice. Irish Missionaries have often been pioneers – willing to go to the remotest of places, to endure hardships

and to try out new things. I understand that at their height there was 6,000 Irish Missionaries working and living overseas – and while numbers are falling – the influence of Irish Missionaries in Africa and elsewhere is still very much felt.

[Irish missionaries have often been pioneers – willing to go to the remotest of places, to endure hardships and to try out new things.](#)

No matter where you go in Africa Irish missionaries are very well known – the leaders of many countries were educated by the Irish including President Nyerere of Tanzania. I recall in 2003 meeting President Museveni of Uganda during a visit of our then Minister of Foreign Affairs David Andrews. Of course as good diplomats we briefed and prepared the Minister in advance of the meeting. President Museveni opened the meeting, thumped the table and stated that 'I have a problem with the Irish!' – we had no idea what was coming next and of course were very concerned about what we had missed. The head of the best girl's school in Uganda – an Irish nun – Sr Cephas – was due to retire and return to Ireland. He did not want that and requested Minister Andrews to intervene with her order back home to enable her to stay in Uganda and continue her work!

Others too have made huge contributions – from Dr Maura Lynch, Sr Ursula Sharpe, and Sr Dymphna Hannelly in Uganda; to Fr Michael Kelly in Zambia; to Fr Sean O Leary, Sr Aine

Hughes and Fr John Cleary in South Africa; to Fr Owen Lambert and Fr Paddy Moran in Ethiopia and now Fr Dan Noud, Sr Nora McCarthy and many others in Tanzania. There are so many who have contributed so much – too many to mention by name – but one in particular I must remember with deep admiration and affection is one of your own Fr Michael Kelly. I am sure you all knew Fr Michael and were also touched by the man he was.



Michael J Kelly SJ meets with Dr Kenneth Kaunda, first President of Zambia and last remaining founding father of the African Union. Michael's work on education and HIV advocacy brought him recognition worldwide. He was conferred with The Order of Distinguished Service by Zambian President Edgar Lungu, in Lusaka in October 2018 and the Irish Presidential Distinguished Services Award of the Irish Abroad in 2012.

I first met Michael in 2003 when I was appointed as Senior HIV Adviser in Irish Aid and Michael was working with us especially in advocating for education as a social vaccine against HIV.

In the words of another dear friend Kevin Carroll – Michael was the kindest and warmest of men, deeply spiritual and humble, and a great Irish missionary.

He spent 67 years of his life in Zambia as an academic, an advocate for the poor and in particular for those most excluded from society including women and girls. He played a major role in the global response to the AIDS pandemic – publishing many books and articles, advocating for those devastated by HIV and in particular giving voice to the voiceless. He became the dearest of friends – I was so grateful to have had him in my life and his dedication, compassion and goodness continue to inspire.

So, while the missionary movement influenced the work of Irish Aid in turn Irish Aid supported and continues to support to the work of Irish missionaries including funding for human rights and social justice, for education and health, for youth and community-based initiatives. Over the years this funding has been put on a more formal footing with the establishment of the Irish Missionary resource service which was later named Misean Cara.

The 50th anniversary of Irish Aid is an important moment to look to the future. Our world is

changing and those changes present both challenges and opportunities for our overseas development programme. We are at somewhat of a turning point right now – many countries including the US, UK, Netherlands and others are reducing their ODA funding and investing more in their own security, and their own prosperity.

I am proud of what I heard from our leaders a few weeks ago at our Global Ireland Summit. Their commitment to our values is strong, our aid programme is strong, but in the current geopolitical context it is clear that we will need to adapt to the rapidly changing situation.

I am confident though that whatever the changes, we will remain committed to reaching those furthest behind first in Africa and around

the world; we will remain committed to playing a meaningful role in resolving conflict; and we will remain committed to responding to humanitarian need and to assisting those affected by poverty. Commitments based on and informed by our fundamental values – values inspired by our history and the work of Irish missionaries over many years.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today, thank you for listening to me and again congratulations on your remarkable work – work that means so much to so many; you are creating an incredible legacy throughout the world.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh go léir.



*Tim Flynn, IJI
Monitoring Evaluation
and Learning Advisor,
John Moffett, Mísean
Cara CEO, and Émer
Kerrigan, IJI Deputy
Director*

NEW MODELS OF SOLIDARITY

– Leonard Chiti SJ

It gives me immense pleasure to speak at this important occasion marking eighty years of IJI's mission in modern-day Zambia.

IJI started off as the Jesuit Mission Office to support Jesuit missionaries around the world but has now expanded into a global development and funding agency. I should like to express my personal gratitude, but also that of the entire Province of Southern Africa, for the immense contribution that IJI has made to the development efforts in Zambia and Malawi, formerly known as Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland respectively.

Again, without going into any details, I want to single out the establishment of a new diocese in Southern Zambia, Monze; the growth of a Jesuit Province from Chikuni Mission into a Vice Province, and then the Province of Zambia and Malawi (ZAM) and now the newly formed and united greater Province of Southern Africa (SAP), which now has many more responsibilities beyond just Zambia and Malawi.

On a personal note, I am deeply indebted to the Irish Jesuits who introduced me to the Society of Jesus, and to the graces of the Spiritual Exercises.



Bio: Leonard Chiti SJ is the Provincial of the Jesuit Southern Africa Province – which covers 9 countries. This follows his role as Provincial for the Zambia Malawi Province. Prior to his two Provincial roles, Leonard was a SCIAF (Caritas Scotland) Committee Member, the Coordinator of GIAN (the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network) and also the Director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR). In his latter role at JCTR, Leonard became quite adept with Irish Aid and Misesan Cara, overseeing Misesan Cara grants which advocated for a Bill on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to be passed into law in Zambia. Leonard did his tertianship in Ireland at Manresa Retreat Centre and taught at Clongowes College.

Colm O’Riordan SJ was one of the first Jesuits to arrive in Northern Rhodesia in the late 1950s and was the first Jesuit I met when I was preparing to go to college and needed a retreat to prepare myself.

Des O’Brien SJ was like a father-figure to me when I was involved in youth programmes at college; and **John Dooley SJ** introduced me to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, in particular the Principle and Foundation, which remains a key meditation in my life even up to today.

Jerry O’Connell SJ is the one who actually helped me make up my mind about the joining the Jesuits, whilst **Michael J Kelly SJ** was a source of personal inspiration throughout the many years I knew him, both as a lecturer at the University of Zambia, and as a companion in community; and finally **Joe Dargan SJ** who was my tertian master right here at Manresa retreat house in Dublin.

John Guiney SJ and **Murt Curry SJ** held my hand when I assumed the role of Director at the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) by linking the JCTR to *Misean Cara*, who provided the much-needed financial support to grow the centre and enabled it to play a significant role in the development of Zambia. Finally, **Leonard Moloney SJ** journeyed with me as a fellow major superior, as we were both appointed in the same year. So, you can see the ties between us run deep.

As I look back over the last 80 years, it strikes me that one could characterise that time as a time when missions were opened (schools, parishes, retreat centres, development projects, etc), when missionaries arrived from Ireland to work selflessly. It was a time of new missions, new men and money – three key ingredients to successful evangelisation and development. 80 years later, however, the last Irishman to travel to Zambia arrived some twenty years ago – **Declan Murray SJ** – and has since returned to Ireland. The youngest Irish Jesuit in Zambia now is 79 years old.



Clive Dillon-Malone SJ, Irish Jesuit on mission & former Lecturer at the University of Zambia and Rosaleen Kenny, IJI Receptionist

But local men, well-formed by the Irish Jesuit missionaries, have since assumed the role played by these missionaries. But whilst we now have our own men, we still need your help with those other two ingredients.

It also strikes me that the relationship between the Irish Province and the former Chikuni Mission, which gave way to the Zambia-Malawi province, and now the Province of Southern Africa (SAP) was always asymmetrical.

Everything, including men, was coming from Europe and little, if any, was coming from Africa or the mission lands for that matter.

There were gaps that needed filling, and indeed the Irish missionaries successfully met those needs. We are grateful for everything that has been done, but times have changed, and this brings me to the topic of today. But this is not a one-sided appeal. I want to say that we want to be able to help ourselves, and we can help you



Caption: Colm Brophy, Former ZAM Jesuit Provincial, Mary Carroll, Former Volunteer teacher in Zambia and Joe Munnelly, IJI Communications & Research Officer

with what we have. In terms of vocations and men, we can offer ourselves. But we still need your help in constructing – and I would add, finally endowing local works – so that they can continue.

There will be new pathways of solidarity: strengthening and enhancing partnership between the Global North and South. Let me speak about these existing and new pathways I envisage.

Firstly, just a few weeks ago the college of cardinals elected the second Non-European Pope following the death of Pope Francis from Argentina. Our own superior general is a Venezuelan citizen. Quite a few Jesuits, and if I may add, other congregations as well, have their religious taking important responsibilities in the governance of church at global level from outside of Europe.

I just wonder whether a time will come when men and women from the South would be welcomed to come to Ireland to continue the work. I understand attendance at religious services has fallen and vocations are few here. Are we likely in the not-too-distant future to see a reverse movement of men and women, similar to what happened after the Second World War?

In light of us being in the midst of a jubilee year of hope, I think a meeting like we have just had evokes hope in me that our long and valued partnership will not end with the end of Irish Jesuits coming to my part of the world, but that this meeting and other initiatives will help us to turn a new page/chapter in our relationship.

The Irish have a proud history of migration and know—often from experience—what it means to be welcomed, or not, by their neighbours. You have made the world your neighbour through your generosity and willingness to help. For that, we thank you. Now let us stand with you. Let us help you and let us work together.

IRISH JESUITS IN HONG KONG

— Mrs Rose Goodstadt

I am sure you all have heard of Hong Kong (HK). It is a city with great natural beauty: high mountains, a deep harbour and dozens of small islands. It is a tourist destination, an international trading centre, and the world's third largest financial hub after New York and London.

But has HK always been like this over the past 80 years? Was this mission field dotted with 5-star hotels and luxury yachts? What were the conditions under which these Irish missionaries lived, worked, and died. [And to what extent had this city benefitted from these missionaries.](#)

In 1945, HK could not be more different from what it is now. It was the end of WWII, the end of four years of brutal Japanese occupation. The city was badly bombed, and a million people had fled or been deported. The remaining 600,000, traumatised, injured and starving, struggled to rebuild their lives, together with those returning from their exile. Their urgent task was to find food and shelter and to avoid epidemics like cholera. TB and polio were rampant, but even rudimentary medical care was lacking. [Social, financial and legal structures were destroyed during the war.](#)



Bio: Mrs. Rose Goodstadt and her family have supported Missionaries in China and Hong Kong for over 100 years. She studied Social Sciences & Public Administration in New York and Oxford. She returned to Hong Kong in 1961 and devoted her life to serving the community. Rose was Deputy Director of the Social Welfare Department and Head of the Hospital Services Department. She formulated social policies and provided welfare services across a wide field and was more of a trailblazer and social reformer than a typical civil servant. She has been heavily involved with NGOs serving people with disabilities, cancer and AIDs etc. She devised the local sign language for the deaf in 1972. She was a member of the Hospital Authority responsible for all Hong Kong's public hospitals. Rose is an authentic person, living out of the Ignatian ethos of 'men and women for others.'

Former British Government officers who had survived the four years of captivity in Japanese '*Prisoners of War*' camps, struggled to restart governing the city.

Unfortunately, the rebuilding efforts became much more difficult barely four years later. In 1949, the Communist Party became the legitimate ruler of China. This led to two million people flooding into HK. That was the situation the Irish Jesuits faced in their first 20 to 30 years.

I must mention three other challenges for these young Irishmen. The first was to master the local language. Chinese language does not use alphabets; each written word is represented by a unique pictogram. These young missionaries had to acquire a vocabulary of 4,000 to 6,000 words to enable them to teach in secondary schools and universities and hold discussions on religious topics. The spoken language – which in HK is Cantonese – is just as complicated if not more so. Each sound can refer to 20 different words, and a sound has up to 9 tones, each of these again can refer to another 10 different words. In brief, if you cannot distinguish the tones, any sound can mean up to 100 different things. Learning to speak and write Chinese well, even for a highly intelligent Jesuit, can be martyrdom.

The second challenge was the heat, the humidity and the teeming crowds that are everywhere. For large parts of the year, temperatures can be in the high 30s, with

humidity near 100%. There were people everywhere – pushing through crowds on the pavements, squeezing onto buses, battling for space with unlicensed hawkers. There were coolies with heavy cargos, women queuing for water at public water hydrants, and hundreds of children coming out the school gates as hundreds of other children were pushing in at the same time. Most schools in those days operated on a three-shift basis. When Government started to build resettlement housing in 1954, the standard space allotted to each adult was 24 square feet, or about the size of a double bed, with two children counted as one adult. The Government was pushed into launching a public housing programme only after a squatter fire on Christmas eve of 1953 swept through squatter huts that housed 68,000 people. In that one night, tens of thousands of families lost everything they had built up. I remember watching the whole sky turning red.

To understand just how crowded HK is, let us compare the population density with that in Ireland. Here, the density is 77 persons per square kilometre; in HK, it is 7,150.

So, these missionaries from the Emerald Isle found themselves in brutally hot & humid weather, squashed in on all sides by big pushing crowds, struggling to grasp one of the most difficult languages in the world.

The third challenge sounds rather odd but caused considerable difficulties. For many years, there was not enough water for the sudden influx of 2 million or more people. Water rationing was the normal condition and in the worst year, this was limited to four hours on every four days. My husband, a Welshman, joked that the first survival skill he had to learn was how to take a bath in a teacup!

For a large part of this period, I worked as a civil servant in the social and medical fields and

as a volunteer in many NGOs. I was privileged to be able to enjoy the friendships of many of these extraordinary Irish Missionaries and to be inspired by them. This morning, I only have time to mention a few, to show you the wide range of innovative services they provided to meet the unique situation in HK.

One of the very first Irish Jesuits I met in 1950 was **Fr John Collins** and some 30 years later, I served with his brother, **Fr Edward Collins** on the *HK Catholic Marriage Advisory Council*.



Lucy Franks of Lucy Franks Consulting and John K Guiney SJ, IJI Director

My vivid childhood memory was listening to Fr John Collins discussing Catholic doctrine with my father in perfect classical Chinese. My father was only willing to hear God's sacred words from him because he was impressed by Fr Collins's Chinese.

This attraction to Irishmen speaking perfect Chinese was not restricted to my father, but also in other 'conversion' stories. Their interest in Christianity, in this 'foreign God', often started with their admiration of the priests' linguistic skills. They were touched by these foreigners who so warmly embraced Chinese culture, in the same tradition as Matteo Ricci in Beijing in the 16th century and Castiglione in the 18th century.

In 1961, when I returned from my education in the US and England, this same Fr John Collins asked me to work in the organisation he had just founded, *The HK Society for Rehabilitation*. This was a bold and ambitious project for 1961. This Society quickly established the first modern residential centre for 80 victims of industrial accidents. Without this kind of intensive rehabilitation to help the severely injured return to work, their families would have starved, as a social security scheme was not set up until 10 years later. Another innovative service started by Fr Collins in 1961 was the credit union which prevented low-wage workers falling into the traps of loan sharks. He also successfully convinced the Government to bring in legislation for its operation and control.

His credit union became the model for others to follow. I understand it was around this time that credit unions were started in Dublin.

Such vision and bold initiatives were particularly evident in the first 30 years of the Jesuit Mission in HK. By 1961, the population had increased to 3.1 million, half of it were refugees from mainland China and most of them struggling for survival in slums and squatter huts.

According to the 1961 census, only 2% of people in Hong Kong had post-secondary education. There was a serious lack of qualified manpower to build up the city and establish good governance. The 50 or so young, talented, well-educated, and totally dedicated Irish Jesuits immediately filled this gap. They were eagerly sought after to serve on councils and boards, for family welfare, workers, fisherman, seamen, ex-prisoners, and even on wholesale markets and agriculture. Never was there a city where priests were so widely involved.

Fr Thomas Ryan, in 1946, was the first Jesuit to become the Government's Director of Marketing and, later, Superintendent of Agriculture and Botany. During the Japanese occupation, most trees were cut down for fuel. The Bishop of HK was forced to cut down wooden structures in the Cathedral for this purpose. The tree-bare hills posed serious landslide problems and Fr Ryan planted thousands of trees imported from Australia.

One of the first priorities for the Jesuits was to care for children without schooling, more than 100,000 of them. **Fr Joseph Howatson**, in 1952, founded the *Boys and Girls Clubs* to provide basic care and training for children not attending school. It was only in 1978, nearly 30 years after the refugees crowded into the city, that there were sufficient facilities to provide nine years of education for all children. Fr Howatson's clubs also eased the worries of their parents, most of whom worked till 9 or 10 p.m.



Ruth Douglas, Irish Jesuit Province Assistant Education Delegate, Elizabeth Clarke, Clongowes Wood College Ethos Director, Joe Munnelly, IJI Communications and Research Officer

My first duty in the Social Welfare Department at the time was in children and youth services. I was amazed at another of Fr Howatson's imaginative schemes, started in 1949, his 'shoe-shine boys', modelled on the 'Belvedere newsboys' of Dublin. Each boy aged 10 or 12, were provided with a small wood box containing shoe-shine materials and with a footrest on top. This scheme gave the boys a small income and a sense of usefulness.

The Jesuits are, of course, most famous for their excellent schools. Their first task after WWII was to reopen their secondary school, the Wah Yan College, followed quickly by building another equally impressive one where my two brothers and my son were educated. *At that time, it was harder to find a school place than it was to win the lottery.* My brother's successful admission showed the human touch of the Jesuits. On hearing him say that he had only one younger brother but five older sisters, **Fr Patrick Cunningham** exclaimed, 'Oh, you poor boy, we must take you in!'

Fr Cunningham was very keen on traffic safety and was instrumental in starting the road safety scheme for school children. It was a strange coincidence that he died on a plane explosion over Vietnam. His death, however, did not distress me too much for I could see him in my mind, quietly praying with his Breviary when the fatal accident occurred. As with my other Jesuit friends, including **Fr Matthew Brosnan**, he was a very prayerful man.

Fr Brosnan was specially gifted as a spiritual director and retreat master. He was aware that the HK Diocese had begun to flourish and mature, and it was crucial to train an informed laity. In 1969 HK had its first Chinese bishop. Fr Brosnan conducted regular prayer groups for young men and women, especially those struggling to bring up children in a highly competitive environment. He inspired them to develop a lively faith of prayers and meditations and cultivate detachment from worldly things. [The number of Catholics in Hong Kong has now reached 5% of the population, nourished by the Jesuit spirit.](#)

The Jesuits' educational endeavours extended to universities, particularly Ricci Hall in HK University. Over these 80 years, young refugees from China as well as several generations of post-war HK-born children, were able to receive the very best education, and were guided and cherished throughout their formative years. Life-long friendships developed. [The two Wah Yan Colleges and Ricci Hall produced many community leaders including high court judges, barristers, medical consultants, heads of Government Departments etc.](#) Three well-known Wah Yan graduates are Sir Donald Tsang, the first Chief Executive of HK after its sovereignty was returned to China; Archbishop Dominic Tang of Guangzhou and Cardinal Stephen Chow, the current Bishop of HK.

I will now tell you about **Fr Patrick McGovern** whose contribution was in an entirely different area: helping the Government to formulate policies and to enact laws. He had a great understanding of HK affairs and a wide range of social contacts. In 1976, he was appointed by the Governor to the Legislative Council, which is the city's law-making body. Its members were top government officials and heads of big businesses. Media interest in this appointment was huge, not only because it was the first time a priest was appointed, but also because of the colourful way he arrived at the Council, in his noisy motorcycle, amidst chauffeur-driven Bentleys!

Fr McGovern went on to be a member of the Executive Council, the city's top policy advisory body to the Governor. In these important capacities, Fr McGovern was instrumental in improving Hong Kong's laws and policies, on housing, worker's welfare, child protection, etc. He was able to guide Hong Kong to develop into a caring and enlightened community.

Ricci Hall's chaplains included **Fr Alfred Deignan** and **Fr John Russell**. When these two well-loved priests were in hospital during their final illnesses, the daily roster of visitors always included a *Riccian*, in addition to members of the *Catholic Women's Guild*, the *Serra Club*, the *Thomas More Society* for Catholic lawyers, *The Guild of St. Luke* for Catholic doctors, and staff from *Hospice Care*, of which Fr Russell was a founding member and board Director.



Mrs Rose Goodstadt, Joe Munnelly, IJI Communications and Research Officer and Rutsuko Matsumoto, IJI International Grants Officer

The most significant venture founded by Fr Deignan is the *HK International Institute of Education and Leadership* established in 1997 to promote basic human values. Fr Deignan was deeply concerned about young people growing up in a progressively secular society where there is no belief in objective truth, little respect for ethical standards and personal freedom is seen as being without constraints. Very often, young people must choose between profit and honesty. Teachers feel inadequate in finding ways to guide these confused students or to provide them with a moral framework.

Fr Deignan had reason to feel proud of this new Institute. It offers a certificate course for teachers providing 90 hours of formal training on moral issues. Teachers, parents and students are also able to discuss their worries through seminars and social activities. Fr Deignan was convinced that improvements in human behaviour and relationship are key to the future. For his contribution in the social and educational fields, **he was awarded a Badge of Honour by the Government and Honorary Doctorates by The HK University and The Chinese University.**

Fr John Russell was noted for his brilliant mind, logical and clear analysis, and great spiritually. He helped to formulate the Diocese's new approach after Vatican II and helped the bishop to solve controversies among priests and religious groups. His 30 years of work as Spiritual Director to Catholic lawyers and Catholic doctors ensured that these important professionals always discharge their duties with justice and Christian compassion. On every occasion when he met a lawyer friend, even when that person is in business law, he never failed to urge 'be merciful, be merciful.'

Despite his busy schedule, he never failed to comfort a dying friend with his prayerful presence, be it 5 a.m. or midnight. His death 18 months ago saddened me greatly for it marked the end of my 75 years of association with these wonderful men who had my great admiration and deep affection. There is now only one Irish Jesuit left in Hong Kong.

Most Irish Jesuits in HK chose to end their lives in their mission field, to 'leave their bones there' as Fr Russell said. A few came back to Ireland when independent living was no longer possible.

Fr Peter Brady returned to Dublin in 2002. In Ireland, he was very homesick for HK where he had spent 45 long years. My husband used to spend every Wednesday morning with him. They must have presented quite a spectacle: an Irishman and a Welshman speaking Cantonese all morning, discussing HK affairs.

Fr Brady's book on moral theology, written in Chinese, is still widely used in China.

Another of my Jesuit friends who came back to Dublin for health reasons was **Fr James Hurley**. He was gravely concerned about the plight of factory workers. Until the mid-1980s, HK was largely a manufacturing city. Working hours were from 9 to 10, seven days a week, with little legislative protection. Fr Hurley worked in a garment factory for a year and moved to live with the workers in cramped factory premises. He relentlessly used the media to publicise the plight of the workers. He also produced two books in Chinese. Here in *Milltown*, he regularly offered Mass in Cantonese for us ex-HK residents. I was moved to see his former parishioners visited him from the US and HK, including an ex-prisoner whom he had helped to rehabilitate and whose son won a scholarship to a British university.

I will tell you a little tale on an interesting connection between Ireland and Hong Kong.

In your 1916 Easter Uprising, the Commander of the Volunteer Forces in St. Stephen's Green was Commandant Michael Mallin. The night before he was executed, his pregnant wife visited him in jail together with his two-year-old son, Joseph.

This Irish hero said to the baby boy, 'Joseph, my little man, grow up and be a priest if you can.' He became **Fr Joseph Mallin** and a teacher and a supervisor in Wah Yan College where my son was a student for eight years. Fr Mallin also taught him to play the flute, and 30 years later, when he came to Dublin in 2016 for the Centenary Anniversary of the Easter Uprising, one of his first questions to me was, 'Does Leo still play the flute?' Fr Mallin lived till aged 104. Until the year before he died, he was at the school gate every afternoon, to ensure that all the boys boarded the school bus safely. Through him, generations of students and their parents experienced the tender love of Jesus.

Throughout the past 80 years, the anniversary of which we celebrate today, HK never ceased to struggle, first to survive, then to build and build: a new school completed every week, and some 20 new hospitals established, and public housing for 2.6 million people. HK people continuously aspire for stability, for prosperity and better opportunities.

At the same time, they are keenly aware of the political changes in Communist China just across the border. They remember the local riots in 1956 and 1967 when more than 100 died and about 1,400 injured. They knew the



John Punch and Fr Joseph Hao Wanhui SJ

change of sovereignty to China was inevitable and were concerned about their future. In their journey of uncertainty and changes, they were accompanied by the unwavering love and dedication of these missionaries who shared their hopes and fears and showed what was possible in the human spirit.

The Jesuits provided the first group of talents at the beginning of HK's success story and set up imaginative and innovative programmes to suit various conditions at various times, ranging from 'shoeshine boys' to policy advisers, from grammar schools to a teacher's training Institute. Their efforts helped Hong Kong with a refugee population in 1945 to grow into the modern, thriving financial hub it is today. This city is now the 8th wealthiest city in the world, with 156,000 millionaires. St Ignatius' salutations to his 'sons' was never so well fulfilled: 'Go forth and set the world on fire'.

But we must remember that these missionaries were not politicians or educationalists or social workers. They were first and foremost priests of God; they travelled 6,000 miles to the Orient in response to Christ's call, 'teach yee all nations, baptising them....' Their work was the means to bring the Good News to the city. They were the conduit of Divine Grace into a changing and complex society, in ways appropriate to the time and the unique situations. They were 'the light to the gentiles' reflecting Christ. Their motto is 'Honor of God, Salvation of Souls'

In these 80 years, many Wah Yan graduates, Ricci students and Jesuit friends were baptised and their Faith often extended to their families and friends. Those souls were not won by Irish talents and skills, but by these priests' heroic virtues and personal sanctity. Witnessing their total dedication to the people, for the greater glory of God, '*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*', and experiencing their compassion and spirituality, the Chinese came to believe that Christ is the Son of God and received Salvation through Him.

But conversions were not just the baptisms, they had to include the continued growth in Christian principles and moral values. The Jesuits' presence in HK has made positive impacts on the citizens' personal lives and provided the moral fabric for a secular society.

I like to think that a city, rich or poor, must have a moral framework to develop. I believe that the Irish Jesuits' 80 years of Christian education, promotion of human values, spiritual guidance, personal examples and long years of warm friendship gave the city its true value – its soul.

WORK IN CRISIS

— Tony O’Riordan SJ

Thank you for inviting me to IJI’s 80th birthday celebrations. It’s truly a joy to celebrate this milestone and reflect on the incredible journey of IJI. Recently, I discovered that another beloved institution is also celebrating 80 years this year—Thomas the Tank Engine. Like IJI, *Thomas the Tank* turns 80 in 2025. From his humble beginnings as a railway-themed children’s book, Thomas has become a global sensation on TV, teaching generations of children valuable lessons about friendship, responsibility, morality, perseverance, and resilience. He continues to captivate young minds, evolving through animation and social media to embark on new adventures.

What I find most enchanting about the story of *Thomas the Tank Engine* isn’t its corporate success or its dominance in the toy and merchandise markets. Rather, it’s the heartwarming origin story. It all began with a father caring for his sick son, who was bedridden with measles. To comfort his child, the father and son imagined an animated railway engine, creating this wonderful story long before it became marketable or monetised. It was a beautiful moment of a father’s love and a child’s imagination coming together.



Bio: Tony O’Riordan SJ is a Jesuit from the Irish Province. From 2018 to 2024, he was part of the Jesuit Refugee Service [JRS] teams in South Sudan and Syria. In South Sudan, Tony served as Project Director in Maban, one of the world’s most remote refugee camps, hosting 200,000 refugees from the Blue Nile region of Sudan. He also held the position of JRS Country Director in Syria, where he was present during the devastating earthquakes of February 2023. Both roles were with one of IJI’s main partner organizations. Tony continues his work with JRS Ireland, accompanying those seeking international protection in Ireland. He is a member of the Iona Jesuit Community in Portadown, Co Armagh.

The way we tell stories matters. If I were to recount the story of *Thomas the Tank Engine* by presenting spreadsheets of toy and merchandise sales, it would steer your imagination and emotions in a particular direction. However, when I share the story of a father's resourceful imagination in caring for his sick child, it evokes a different set of emotions and sparks your imagination in a unique way. Similarly, in our missionary and humanitarian work, our storytelling can quickly shift to metrics, figures, logical frameworks, and key performance targets. While insights and tools from the corporate world have their place, we must be mindful of when we are telling our story through those corporate lenses. The beauty

and challenges of human interactions, which are integral to the motivation and daily reality of missionary and humanitarian endeavours, can easily be overshadowed by more corporate language and imagination.

Currently, I'm part of a team of 12 at Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Ireland. Though JRS is still in its 40s, making it a junior sibling to IJI, it has a significant impact, in part due to its partnership with IJI. JRS Ireland seeks to accompany, serve, and advocate for over 33,000 children, women, and men who have come to Ireland seeking international protection, living in over 330 centres across the country.



Tony O'Riordan SJ, JRS Ireland and Emer Kerrigan, IJI Deputy Director

One of the young people I accompany in my work with JRS Ireland is a young man from Syria. He came as an unaccompanied minor, and we have formed a bond. Now over 18, he lives in adult accommodation, attends secondary school, and works hard despite his limited English, often relying on Google Translate in his classes. Like many teenagers, he is concerned about fitting in with his peers. He is particularly self-conscious about his teeth, which he feels need braces—a treatment he cannot afford.

Living on a weekly social welfare payment of €38.50 for personal items, he finds it challenging to keep up with his peers, especially when it comes to clothing. While his accommodation and food are covered, €38.50 is not much for an 18-year-old. Understanding his situation, I applied to the hardship fund of JRS Ireland and secured a €120 voucher for him. We went to the shopping centre, and I handed him the voucher, telling him he could spend it as he wished. To my surprise, he wanted to use some of it to treat me to food. His generosity was touching, especially given his circumstances.

This experience highlights the often-overlooked human side of migration. Public debates on migration frequently focus on numbers, costs, and slogans like “Ireland is full,” which dehumanise the individuals involved. These discussions miss the essential qualities of human dignity, worth, and the potential contributions of asylum seekers. The young

man I work with exemplifies generosity, moral character, and creativity—traits that enrich our society.

Focusing on human stories and interactions changes the narrative. When I share this story, it shifts the conversation from numbers and problems to the human dimension. Asylum seekers and refugees have immense potential to contribute positively to our communities. Instead of seeing Ireland as “full,” we should recognise how it is expanding in wonderful ways through the inclusion of diverse and talented individuals.

When it comes to sharing my stories from my time with JRS in Syria and South Sudan, I could tell you about the number of schools we built, the teachers we trained, and the targets we achieved. **But what truly stands out for me are the extraordinary ways in which ordinary people live their lives and the mutual enrichment that occurs when JRS and these communities encounter each other.**

I think of Miriam, our neighbour in the compound in Maban. Separated by a chicken wire fence, we could hear everything that happened in her crowded home, filled with children, pigs, and chickens. Miriam lived on a meagre income from JRS and tried to raise eight children. Despite the occasional boundary issues, we held her in high regard.



Fr Tony O'Riordan SJ stands among the rubble left by the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that struck Syria in February 2023, affecting tens of thousands of people in Homs, Al-Kafroun, Damascus, and Aleppo. In response, IJI's earthquake appeal delivered emergency aid and protection to thousands of families impacted by the disaster.

When Miriam's female cousin died, leaving six children, Miriam didn't hesitate to take them in. She could have found excuses to pass the responsibility to someone else, but for her, welcoming the orphans came first. [This extraordinary self-giving and open-heartedness was typical of the culture in South Sudan.](#) I often wondered who was evangelizing whom, as I had much to learn from these people. It was a two-way street, sometimes straightforward and beautiful, other times difficult and messy, but always rooted in human connection.

In Syria, I witnessed something similar. After the devastating earthquake in February 2023, which killed over 60,000 people, including 5,000 in Syria, the JRS team in Aleppo was deeply affected. Despite being displaced and having their homes damaged, their overwhelming impulse was to help those in greater need.

[One key member of our response team was Shafi. Although he had a Canadian passport and could have easily left Syria, he chose to stay and support his people through the crisis. His commitment was inspiring.](#)

Miriam and Shafi are central to my memories of South Sudan and Syria. They, along with many others, turned the tables on my role as a missionary and humanitarian. They witnessed to me, accompanied me, and made me a better person and missionary. While I hope I contributed to their growth, I know I returned enriched and perhaps a better human being and disciple.

When sharing the story of missionary movements, it's crucial to emphasise that IJI and similar organizations don't go as mere givers to passive recipients. We go to engage with people who are already valuable resources. While they often live in situations that threaten their existence and potential, we must approach them with openness to encounter and transformation, just as we aim to be changemakers in distant places. All good Christian missionaries and organizations should be receptive to the profound changes that come from interacting with people who live, love, and strive amid poverty, war, and displacement.

The final document of the Synod on Synodality reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist. At the beginning of my remarks, I mentioned the story of Thomas the Tank Engine, born from a father's loving care for his sick son. This image is worth reinforcing as it parallels the essence of missionary and humanitarian work. When we engage in these activities and when we tell our stories, it is good that we envision a caring God

tenderly watching over His suffering children. This God longs for just and right relationships among the human family, freeing millions from suffering.

Missionary activity from the wealthy Global North serves dual purposes: alleviating suffering and fostering conditions for human flourishing, while also challenging us to break free from our consumption-driven lifestyles that perpetuate global injustice. By focusing on and inviting others to recognise the presence and work of the loving Father, Son, and Spirit, who both send us on mission and send mission to us, we can contribute to the urgent transformation of hearts, minds, and wills needed in our time.

Happy Birthday IJI, may we continue to grow in God's love, wisdom and openness to encounter.



Bio: Martha Phiri is the Acting Deputy Director of JCED where climate justice and action go hand in hand. The work of JCED embodies Laudato Si – calling on all of us to hear the cry of the poor and the earth. Her work with JCED focuses on restoring eco-systems, reforestation, training smallholder farmers in climate smart agriculture and green business, producing eco-stoves and responding to natural disasters such as flash floods and cyclones which are becoming ever more prominent in Malawi. Martha plays a key role in advocacy at district and national level in Malawi. She is also a representative for Malawi at COP events – providing frontline experience of the effects of climate chaos on smallholder farmers. Martha is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Climate Change and Sustainable Development.

CLIMATE JUSTICE IN MALAWI

– Martha Phiri

The 80th anniversary of IJI marks not only a celebration of IJI's longevity but also an opportunity to reflect on the profound impact their work has had across the globe, particularly in Malawi.

The Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) in Malawi, is an organization that has had the privilege of working closely with IJI for over a decade. Being invited to speak at this event is a testament to the strong partnership between IJI and JCED, as well as to the incredible work we have accomplished together. It is also a recognition of the shared vision and values that unite us in our mission to serve the most vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Our work is not just about projects or programs – it is about people, their stories and their resilience in the face of adversity.

This invitation is deeply meaningful, not just for me personally, but for the communities in Malawi whose voices I bring with me today. It demonstrates IJI's commitment to amplifying the perspectives and experiences of those on the ground—the farmers, the families, and individuals whose lives have been transformed through our collaboration.

This commitment aligns profoundly with the Jesuit ethos of being “men and women for others,” a call to serve and uplift those in need, inspired by the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is also a living embodiment of our late Pope Francis’ powerful message in *Laudato Si’*, where we are reminded of the interconnectedness of all humanity and calls for a “preferential option for the poor.”

Our late Pope Francis urges us to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, emphasizing that true development must prioritize the dignity, stories, and struggles of the marginalized. This invitation reflects that very principle—it is a reminder that our work is not just about projects or programs; it is about people, their stories, and their resilience in the face of adversity.

This platform allows me to share not only the successes we have achieved together but also the hopes and aspirations of the communities we serve. It is an opportunity to celebrate the incredible work of IJI while also looking ahead to the future, where our continued partnership can bring even greater impact and transformation.

IJI’s commitment to supporting the most marginalized communities in Malawi has been both inspiring and transformative. Through our partnership, we have been able to address some of the most pressing challenges faced by vulnerable communities, particularly in

the areas of food security, environmental sustainability, and climate resilience.

One of the most visible impacts of IJI’s support is food security. In the Kasungu District where many families struggle to produce enough food to sustain themselves, IJI’s interventions have brought tangible change. The successful fundraising campaigns have enabled us to provide critical resources and training to farmers, helping them adopt sustainable agricultural practices that improve crop yields and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

JCED has also been able to establish ecological villages, which serve as models of sustainability and resilience. These villages are not just about survival; they are about thriving in harmony with nature. By promoting practices such as agroforestry, organic farming, and water conservation, these communities are now better equipped to adapt to the changing climate.

Another area where IJI has made a significant difference is in promoting sustainable cooking practices. In rural Malawi, where 91% of the population of rural communities relies on fuelwood for cooking, the environmental and social costs are immense. Deforestation, soil degradation, and health issues caused by indoor air pollution are just some of the challenges associated with traditional cooking methods.



Mary, a Champion Lead Farmer, waters her cabbages at Chimbulu, the village where the “Tasintha” eco-farmer project began in Malawi.

We have been able to introduce energy-efficient cookstoves to communities across Malawi. These stoves use less fuelwood, significantly reducing the pressure on our forests while improving the health and quality of life of rural families. This initiative is a perfect example of how small, practical solutions can have a ripple effect, creating benefits that extend far beyond their immediate context.

Farmers have been empowered to adopt innovative practices that harmonize with nature. Our partnership has strengthened the local economy and inspired neighboring communities to adopt similar sustainable practices. In Kasungu, our farmers, are embracing ecologically friendly businesses, also known as green businesses. These initiatives include apiculture, banana farming, Eco stove production and fish farming. Such initiatives are not only transforming the lives of our farmers but are also making a significant contribution to environmental sustainability.

The green businesses championed by IJI are providing our farmers with sustainable livelihoods. These initiatives exemplify IJI's commitment to creating a greener, more sustainable future for our community. Local farmers are being empowered to become agents of change within their communities. Through the provision of bicycles, champion lead farmers are now able to travel more easily to provide extension services to their peers.

This has improved knowledge-sharing and collaboration among farmers, fostering a sense of community and collective responsibility for sustainable development.

Additionally, IJI has opened doors for us to connect with new partners and expand our reach. For instance, through IJI's network, we have been able to collaborate with Dublin City University on a livelihood research project that is making a meaningful difference in the lives of marginalized communities. These partnerships are a testament to IJI's ability to bring people and organizations together to achieve common goals.

We have also successfully advanced key initiatives, including the establishment and promotion of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). Communities are empowered with business management skills and are provided with farm input. These initiatives have been instrumental in equipping and empowering communities affected by climate change to build resilience, expand economic opportunities, and secure a more sustainable future.



Martha Phiri, JCED Deputy Director, Aishowarza Malik, Promotion of a Consistent Culture of Protection (PCCP) Administrator and Philip McDonagh, Director of the Centre for Religion, Human Values & International Relations at Dublin City University (DCU)

Looking to the Future

As we reflect on the past 80 years of IJI's mission, it is also important to look to the future. The continued challenges we face today, climate change, poverty, inequality, require even greater collaboration and innovation. IJI has already laid a strong foundation, and I am confident that their work will continue to inspire and empower generations to come. In this spirit, I would like to propose a few areas for future collaboration and expansion:

Scaling Up Climate Resilience Projects

Given the growing threat of climate change, there is a need to scale up projects that enhance community resilience. This includes the need to expand our ecological village initiative to other districts and incorporate renewable energy solutions such as solar power.

Youth Empowerment Programs

Investing in the next generation is critical for sustainable development. We need resourcing in vocational training, entrepreneurship opportunities, and environmental education for young people in Malawi.

Advocacy and Policy Engagement

While grassroots initiatives are essential, there is also a need to engage with policymakers to create an enabling environment for sustainable development. We need to continue our key role and encourage other agents like Irish Aid to support advocacy efforts aimed at influencing policies on climate change, food security, and education.

To sum up, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Irish Jesuits International for their continuous support and commitment to making a difference in Malawi and beyond. Your work has not only transformed lives but has also inspired hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

As we celebrate this incredible milestone, let us also renew our commitment to working together to create a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. JCED looks forward to further collaborations and mutual plans that will continue to bring positive change to the lives of many.

Thank you! Zikomo!

**Scan the QR code to
watch our Conference
Highlights**





Irish Jesuits International

20 Upper Gardiner Street, Dublin 1

D01 E9F3

Tel. +353 1 836 6509

Email: reception@iji.ie

www.iji.ie



[IrishJesuitsInternational](https://www.facebook.com/IrishJesuitsInternational)



[@irishjesuitsint.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/irishjesuitsint.bsky.social)



[@irishjesuitsinternational](https://www.instagram.com/irishjesuitsinternational)



[Irish Jesuits International](https://www.youtube.com/IrishJesuitsInternational)



www.linkedin.com/company/irish-jesuits-international