

Message from the Director

On 14 November we commemorated 30 years of JRS. Born on this day in 1980, JRS began as a humanitarian and practical response to the needs of refugees, most notably the Vietnamese boat people. Working today in over 50 countries, the scope of JRS' services—education, emergency assistance, healthcare, pastoral support, human rights protection and advocacy—has increased dramatically, serving close to half a million people in all corners of the world. In his reflection marking this day, our JRS International Director, Fr Peter Balleis SJ said: 'Accompaniment is the heart of [our] approach. Our place is close to refugees, being touched by their reality: in refugee camps, conflict zones, detention centres, on the margins of society. This closeness teaches us how best to serve and advocate on behalf of refugees and promote justice and reconciliation'.

Sr Joan Kelleher, a Mercy sister who has been providing pastoral care to asylum seekers on Christmas Island since the end of March, provides just one of the many wonderful examples of what this accompaniment means. You can read more about her experience in this edition of Link.

In our commitment to accompany the people we serve we share in their suffering, their struggles, but also in their joys and hopes. Recently I visited Kakuma Refugee Camp in



Fr Chris Jenkins SJ, the coordinator for JRS' educational programs in Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya

Northern Kenya, where JRS has been providing services since 1994. Among the 76,000 refugees currently there, I met John (not his real name), who has been working with JRS in its educational programs in Kakuma for the past ten years and is now involved in JRS' tertiary education programs as administrative assistant in its distance learning centre.

Last September something extraordinary happened in John's life. He discovered that his father, whom he had thought long dead, was still alive. Back in 1993, when one of John's acquaintances left the camp to go back to their home country, John asked him to find his father as he handed over a letter for him. Being sick at the time, John does not remember having done this, but the man did not forget his promise: he found John's father, and, moreover, kept watch over the elderly man all these years. A few weeks ago, John

received an email message from this man, who asked for John's phone number. John was skeptical but decided to take a risk and sent it to him. Next day, John received a call from his father, the first time he had heard his voice in 23 years.

The stories of refugees are about many things: suffering, resilience, leaving everything behind, trying to make a life in a new country. They are, of course, also stories of family separation. Many people live in the hope that someday they will find their relatives and will be able to embrace their loved ones once again. John does not know whether he will ever see his father again, but now has reason to keep that hope alive.

And keeping hope alive is what we do too as we celebrate this special time of the year, Christmas—the advent of God into the world, Emmanuel, God with us. The hope that this gift of God's love to the world will be able to transform it and transform each one of us, so that God's kingdom will become a reality in the here and now.

As we commemorate 30 years of JRS, we celebrate the resilience, courage and hope of the millions of refugees and forcibly displaced people who have touched our lives and blessed them so richly. And we also say thank you to all of you for your generosity and wonderful support to our work throughout these many years.

Fr Sacha Bermudez-Goldman SJ

Thirty years of JRS



Fr Peter Balleis SJ with Thomas Morgan of St Aloysius' College, Milson's Point, one of the winners of the 2010 JRS Youth Award.

The Director of JRS International, Fr Peter Balleis SJ, has visited Australia to commemorate JRS' 30th anniversary. The milestone, he said, was not something to be celebrated. 'It would be better if JRS didn't exist. But it is an occasion to say thank-you and to recall the beginnings, and to maintain that initial inspiration. It's a moment to recall the depth of our mission but to respond with new creativity.'

Refugee numbers have increased dramatically since 14 November 1980, when Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ established JRS in response to the large numbers of refugees fleeing Vietnam and Cambodia. Today, the organisation faces a new set of challenges: increasing xenophobia, the blurring of boundaries between refugees and migrants, increasing humanitarian disasters and the urbanisation of the refugee population. Fr Balleis said JRS is particularly well-placed to deal with the latter:

'We accompany people, so we go outside of our office – we don't sit there and wait for people to come to us. We are also able to make use of local parish and school infrastructure. For example, in Nairobi the parish provides a room where we can have food distribution, where people can meet and feel protected. Church space is protected space.'

Shelter Project

We are thrilled to announce that a long standing friend of JRS has been granted citizenship. JRS first met Mr Tan in 2007 when he was living in a house owned by St Canice's Parish and was awaiting a decision on whether he could remain in Australia permanently. A humanitarian visa was eventually granted and finally, after many years of waiting, he has now become a very proud Australian citizen! Despite the fact that he is not a man for ceremony, Mr Tan donned a suit and presented at the Town Hall to receive



his Citizenship Certificate from the Lord Mayor, with a swing in his step and a smile on his face. At the age of 61 he will finally be able to apply for a passport. This document holds particular significance for Mr Tan, as it represents tangible proof that he is free to come and go with the promise of always belonging here in Australia. This is a huge milestone for him, having worked for years here as a kitchen hand and cook with no security about his future. Now he knows that Australia is truly his home. Congratulations Mr Tan! We are immensely proud of you and all that you have achieved.

Louise Stack

JRS opens new shelter in Manly

For the first time ever, Jesuit Refugee Service Australia will be able to accommodate entire refugee families after opening its latest shelter, a former boarding house in the Sydney beachside suburb of Manly. JRS recently held a housewarming party for the 13 residents – including a tiny baby - who will call the shelter home until their asylum applications are processed and they are able to get back on their feet. 'It's a real mix of couples, single men and women, and we'll hopefully have some families in there soon,' says JRS Project Coordinator Louise Stack. 'Apart from one small apartment we had for women, we couldn't house these people before. It's really difficult to find crisis accommodation for women.'

Advocacy in Melbourne

JRS has been working for thirty years advocating and supporting some of the most vulnerable people in Australia. Recently, with the assistance of the Xavier Social Justice Network, a committee of young people has been brought together to support the work of JRS and to raise awareness amongst our peers in Victoria of the challenges faced by asylum seekers. We want to do this by enabling people to come together, to encounter asylum seekers and to find ways in which they can become advocates for the just treatment of vulnerable people. The committee includes students from Melbourne and Monash Universities, as well as people from a range of different professions, from teaching to medicine.

In October 2010 the committee organised its first event, a film night and question and answer session with 2005 Young Australian of the Year, film director Khoa Do. Khoa's film, *Mother Fish*, told of the journey of a group of Vietnamese asylum seekers on a small boat, tortured by thirst, plagued by pirates, sickness and despair. It was a dramatic film, which gave everyone in the cinema a jolt in the stomach judging by the silence when the credits went up.

At the moment the committee is planning and preparing for the inaugural Melbourne JRS Fundraising Ball in June 2011. The proceeds from this event will go towards sustaining JRS' commitment to asylum seekers both in Australia and in the Mai-Aini Eritrean Refugee Camp in Northern Ethiopia. Over the coming weeks and months, the JRS Advocacy Committee will think about ways in which we can engage people on university campuses, in our work places and elsewhere with a simple message: that the most vulnerable amongst us must be treated with justice and with empathy; that 'none of us are free until we all are free.'

Ben Coleridge

Displacement today

How do we reconceptualise the definition of a refugee, and ascertain what services are needed in a world reconfigured by conflict and environmental degradation? These are some of the questions explored by the Associate Director of Jesuit Refugee Service, Sr Maryanne Loughry, in chapters she has authored for two books on the subject of refugees. In the first, *Driven from Home: Protecting the rights of forced migrants*, Sr Loughry examines the way in which Iraqi refugees are challenging the international refugee regime. 'More than half of the world's refugees now live in urban settings, and the Iraqi numbers have tipped that statistic,' she says. 'My article highlights the crisis, and how we need to reconceptualise who refugees are and what services they need. The second book, *Climate change and displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, draws on insights obtained by Sr Loughry while travelling to Kiribati and Tuvalu in 2009 on a trip funded by the Psychiatry Department at the University of NSW. Her chapter, titled *Climate change, human movement and the promotion of mental health: What have we learnt from earlier global stressors?* examines the mental health challenges caused by climate change and human movement. For more information on these books, and where to order them, go to www.jrs.org.au



Melbourne Cup Luncheon

JRS celebrated Melbourne Cup day with another successful luncheon, raising around \$16,000 for the Shelter Project.

The guest speaker at the annual event was a Sri Lankan asylum seeker who spent a year in detention on Christmas Island and at Villawood Immigration Residential Housing with his wife. Their first child, a son named Risen, was born in detention.

'While in detention, every Thursday we would look forward to the visit of the JRS volunteers,' he said. 'The facilities at Villawood are nice and comfortable and the officers were kind, but we didn't have freedom and were also worried about our future. Having JRS come to visit us gave us hope and made us feel welcome in your country.'

Fr Sacha Bermudez-Goldman SJ, thanked staff for their great work and guests for their ongoing support.

Letter from **Christmas Island**

As JRS is the only visible religious presence here, requests come from other faith traditions to provide prayer service at different times. We are often called by the Hindus to provide services for anniversaries. On the Feast of All Saints, we were asked by the Department of Immigration to provide a service in the church for twenty Hindus, who wanted to celebrate the first anniversary of the death of twelve of their boat members who drowned in the Indian Ocean. Part of the ritual was to light candles, place wreaths on the altar, and to light incense sticks, and this took place during the parish Communion service. The Parish actually put together a little booklet and incorporated the ritual for the Hindus in the service. One of their members shared a beautiful eulogy and concluded by saying, "We will never forget our people. Every day and night we see them and they are shouting "Please help us!" But we cannot help them. They loved their families, but died seeking freedom from oppression. Their smiles would light up a room and I can tell you all, they have died, but they are right here in our hearts and in the hearts of their dear families and friends.'

Another way the Pastoral team has assisted to relieve the tension in people is by requesting to take them outside the Detention Centre for a few hours usually on the weekend. This involves some paperwork for every request but it is worth the effort, when one can see their mental state change and relax. Usually we provide a barbecue or we purchase food and they cook their own here in this small unit. Our aim has been to take out the people who have been longest in detention. Usually we drive around the island to different tourist attractions and sometimes have a swim in the small beach area. At the end of a particular outing, one of the detainees said 'Today, I felt my heart has been set free again'. What a privilege it was to share that moment!

As the demands for pastoral care are great, sharing this ministry with a priest on the team has been a very enriching experience. I would like to acknowledge the spirit and vision of the Jesuit Refugee Service for initiating this pastoral programme on Christmas Island.

Sr Joan Kelleher, a Mercy sister, provides pastoral care to asylum seekers on Christmas Island.

Notes from the field

- Daniel Street, one of the founders of the JRS Winter Solstice Ball, and longtime supporter of JRS, has been appointed by Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd as a key adviser on Australia's multibillion-dollar foreign aid budget. Daniel recently completed a master's degree in development studies at Cambridge University and received an award for volunteer charity work with homeless people in Kings Cross in 2008. He was formerly a political reporter for the Nine Network.
- JRS is saying farewell to Dagmar De Oliva, who has offered her accounting skills to JRS for four years. We thank Dagmar for her generosity and expertise, and wish her well.
- JRS, through Mercy Sister Jackie Ford, began providing pastoral services at Curtin Immigration Centre in WA in October; after a short break she will be joined by Sr Anne McDonald and together will continue this service from early December.

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