

irish jesuits international

News letter

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Honouring the past while looking towards the future

You will have noticed that this edition of the newsletter bears a new name. Irish Jesuit Missions has become Irish Jesuits International, with the tagline 'Men and Women for Others'. The reasons for the change are outlined in this article, by our communications officer Martina Madden.

History of Irish Jesuit Missions

When our office opened in 1945, our priorities were funding programmes run by Irish Jesuits in African and Asian countries and providing a support system for the men and their families in Ireland. 75 years later, there are only a few remaining Irish Jesuit missionaries overseas. The main objective of our organisation has changed. Supporting our missionaries remains a priority for us, but most of our funding these days goes towards the education and development programmes run by Jesuits and their lay colleagues who are from the countries in which those projects are based.

This change mirrors not just the change in Irish society - which has become increasingly less religious in the last few decades - but the success of the Irish Jesuits' mission. Those men travelled across the globe to go to communities on the margins and to provide them with the means to carry on the work themselves. Many of the African Jesuits who now run programmes in their own countries were educated by Irish Jesuits and led to their vocation by them.

Consultation and discernment process

Jesuits are widely respected across Ireland, however there is a negative perception among younger generations that 'the missions' is about the conversion of people in Africa and Asia to Christianity. Our old name was misleading in this sense. Although we are a faith-based organisation underpinned by the Jesuit ethos, it did not accurately reflect that we work with men and women of all religions (and none) in education, advocacy and building sustainable livelihoods and communities. Sadly, as the number of Irish Jesuit missionaries continues to decline in the years ahead, a name change was always inevitable.

We consulted with groups and individuals within the Irish and overseas Jesuit network over many months and discerned from the compiled responses the feeling in the wider community about the change. Overall, the feedback we received was extremely positive, including from the most important group - Irish missionaries themselves.

Future of the organisation

You, our supporters are the foundation of our organisation and the reason we are able to continue work in communities on the margins of society, across the world. Your loyalty is valued, and we are grateful for your ongoing generosity. We want to reassure you that we remain committed to the same values that were there in 1945 and to the support of our Irish missionaries overseas.

In order for us to sustain the organisation we need to build on this foundation by appealing to a wider audience. The historical network of people drawn to support us through awareness of missionary work, or by personal links to Irish Jesuit missionaries is dwindling as time goes by. We are hopeful that by updating our image we will be able to share news about our work with others who may not have previously had an interest in us. We ask for your continued support and welcome your feedback (good or bad!) about the change.



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A Word from the Director

Changing Times is the theme of this edition of our newsletter, and they have indeed altered beyond our comprehension because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to being unable to travel, I am getting to grips with the new way of being present with our overseas partners and international Jesuit communities, via the online video app Zoom!

All of us have been stopped in our tracks by this crisis, and made to wonder about the fragility of our own being in the world. We have been forced to ask serious questions about our lifestyle and our humanity.

We share our condolences with those of you who have been bereaved because of the virus, and empathise with you all as we collectively pass

through this era of profound upset and grief.

This period asks us to question how we can live with one another and with all Creation in a life-giving way. To return to the usual way of doing things is not an option. Three of the articles in newsletter illustrate how we give life to one another in times of crisis.

We summarise the response to communities most at risk from not just Covid-19 infection but hunger, by our partners in the Jesuit Refugee Service. There is an update on the situation in refugee camps in Lebanon, and an article from South Sudan from broadcaster Susan Cahill who visited just before the Covid-19 restricted travel.

As times change and present us with new challenges, so must we rise to meet them. It is this spirit of adaptation that led us to change our



name to Irish Jesuits International, after many months of consultation within our Jesuit networks. An article by our communications officer Martina Madden explains why a change was needed and how our priorities as an organisation have shifted since we began in 1945. [+](#)

Fr John K. Guiney SJ
Director

Walking with Basamat

Susan Cahill visited South Sudan early in 2020, just before global Covid-19 travel restrictions came into place and closed the borders. Since then, lockdown measures and the danger of infection from the virus have made the lives of refugees in the country even more challenging.

“I would like to go to Uganda”, says Basamat, a 22 year old Sudanese refugee from the Blue Nile. “It’s good in Uganda”.

Basamat Alnoor Jakolo is tall and proud. She has big dreams for the future.

It’s Sunday morning in late February and we are walking around the small market on Kaya refugee camp in Maban in South Sudan. It’s noisy; there are onions for sale, dried fish and not much else.



Basamat Alnoor Jakolo Sitting in her Tukul on Kaya Refugee Camp, Maban, South Sudan

Maban is on the north-east of South Sudan and is one of the most isolated regions in the world. This marginalised area is home to Africa's largest refugee crisis with over 160,000 refugees living across four UNHCR refugee camps – Doro, Batil, Kaya and Gendrassa. Basamat lives on Kaya refugee camp. Most of the refugees on Kaya do not have enough to eat and access to drinking water is very limited. Women and children make up most of the population.

The Jesuit Refugee Service in South Sudan

Since 2011, the Jesuit Refugee Service has been working in Maban providing much needed humanitarian services to host and refugee communities.

On Doro, the largest of the camps, the JRS runs a day care centre for disabled children, a counselling and psychosocial support clinic for women and youths and a range of home visits programmes for the disabled and elderly. Added to this, is an impressive teacher training centre close to the town of Bunj, the capital of Maban County.

Last February, I volunteered with Fr Tony O' Riordan SJ in Maban supported by Noelle Fitzpatrick, the JRS County Director in South Sudan.

As we walk through the market, Basamat introduces me to a few of her friends and then to her father Alnoor Jakolo, who runs a small stall. Alnoor greets me with a warm smile and tells me how proud he is of his daughter and the education she has received.

"There are very few female teachers on the refugee camp. My daughter is a role model for all the girls on the camp", he said.

Water shortages on Kaya Refugee Camp

It's hot and dusty on Kaya. We walk down to one of the camp's water pumps. All you can see are rows of empty jerry cans.

In 2018, Basamat completed a Certificate in Education with the Jesuit Refugee Service, blazing a trail for all the young women and girls in Maban.

"The problem here on Kaya is shortage of water. We have no water. We used to have water for two hours a day, but now with the water shortages women are buying water in the market. The women here on Kaya sometimes have to walk for over an hour with two jerry cans to get water".

Basamat is from the Ingessana tribe. In 2011, she fled her village in Sudan with her parents and siblings.

"We had to walk for over three months. It was very difficult" she said.

"There was no education on the camp or anything to do, so I started teaching some of the children songs and games," she said.

In 2018, Basamat completed a Certificate in Education with the Jesuit Refugee Service, blazing a trail for all the young women and girls in Maban.

"I am the only one in my family to go to my school. Some of my brothers went to school but they dropped out".

"Now that I am a teacher, I am respected by everybody in my community".

We walk down to Basamat's family compound on the corner of the refugee camp. Basamat points out her local Mosque in the distance. The mosque is made of mud and bamboo. I meet Basamat's local Imam. He quizzes me about life in Ireland. I can hear African reggae music in the background. I move my feet to the beat. Basamat laughs.

Climate Change in South Sudan

Basamat's home is a series of 5 mud huts known locally as 'tukuls' surrounded by a bamboo wall. We have sweet peppermint tea. There are lots of

children playing in the dust and sand. I meet Basamat's sisters and aunts. All the women are beautifully dressed in bright fabrics of green, yellow and red. I look down at my dirty feet and laugh. How do these women stay so clean? They are amazing!

"Since the JRS have come to Maban they have done a lot", says one of Basamat's aunts. "Before most of the women here could not read or write. Now some of us can."

"The climate is changing, last October the camp was completely flooded, we lost a lot. There was water everywhere. Some of our villagers had to move to higher ground," said Basamat.

"I don't know what we will do if we get more floods, it's very worrying."

My satellite phone beeps; it's Fr Tony O Riordan SJ. It's time to go.

I ask Basamat, will she return home to Sudan?

"I will not return to Sudan – it is not possible" she replies.

I leave Basamat and walk over to the jeep. I wonder about Basamat's future and all the challenges she faces. Basamat has so much going for her. She's smart, funny and ambitious. But despite all her abilities, she is vulnerable. Basamat is a refugee and like so many refugees around the world – not all of their dreams will come true. +

I wonder about Basamat's future and all the challenges she faces.

Lockdown Response in Lebanon

This article was written before the explosions of 4th August which wreaked devastation on Beirut and claimed the lives of so many people. May they rest in peace.

At the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), we believe that we can all #Do1Thing to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate refugees in their communities. This call has been our guide for the past few months.

Before October 2019 Lebanon's economy was stagnant and since the "Lebanon revolution" began, the economic crisis has resulted in the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira. On top of this, many economic activities came to a halt due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to a 70 per cent devaluation of the Lebanese currency, a loss of confidence in the banking sector, an increase in domestic and imported goods, and the imposition of (unofficial) capital controls by banks, affecting JRS's ability to procure essential items.

Thanks to Irish Jesuits International's (IJI) generous support, JRS was able to secure 988 Hygiene kits and distribute them among the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. Together we can fight this pandemic!

The collaboration with IJI during 2020 started with support for refugees after a Storm Karim hit Lebanon. The aim of the campaign was to distribute diesel within the informal tented settlement so that the people could heat their homes. But suddenly, the first case of Covid-19 in Lebanon was reported - on 21 February 2020. This meant we had to act to adjust our services and programmes to enable us to support and engage refugees while also providing the means to keep them protected from the virus.



JRS distributes hygiene kits to refugees in Maane Camp

Covid-19 added to the challenges facing refugees, who were already enduring worsening poverty. The Lebanon government took strict preventive measures to contain the virus, including a complete lockdown of the country, imposed car restrictions based on number plates, and in some municipalities, strict constraints on refugees' movements even within the camp. These extreme circumstances hindered the refugees from being able to get food and hygiene kits – the minimum requirements to stay well.

In response to these measures, JRS Lebanon decided after collaborating with UNICEF to distribute hygiene kits to refugees who now had no income due to Covid-19. We had to intervene to help to provide them with information about the virus and the need for strict sanitary measures to prevent its spread.

***"You can really be surprised with the number of needy people, you just need to know where to look, where no one else is looking"** – Mohamad Al Khalil (JRS Procurement Officer)*

Distribution of the kits took place in the Bekaa Valley, specifically in Baalbek and Bar Elias. In Baalbek we proceeded with the door-to-door distribution of 500 hygiene kits in Jalil Camp (which had the first case among refugees who tested positive) in cooperation with Shahd Association, 151 in Addous Camp, and 12 in the newly established Maane Camp. The hygiene kits included soap,

liquid bleach, surface cleaning cloths, washing powder, and a bucket with lid.

In Bar Elias, JRS team distributed 308 Hygiene Kits in Telyani School for five nearby informal tented settlements which surround the school. We also reached out to the most vulnerable Syrian families through our procurement officer and the Telyani School administrator who managed to identify 60 families. All the distribution happened while strictly abiding with JRS protocol and the Ministry of Health recommendations - keeping physical distancing, using hand sanitisers, keeping mask/face shield on, taking temperatures.

***"It is great that you considered not just camps but also families in houses, I live among them, and I can tell you that they are now having severe conditions, rarely taken into consideration these days as most of those who are helping are focusing on camps only"** – Telyani School Administrator*

Irish Jesuits International is as an important partner whose support helped in protecting refugees during the Covid-19 outbreak. Hygiene kits were not viewed as essential items by refugees since they were more immediately concerned about securing food parcels and rent supports. This saved many lives in Lebanon, where the capacity for site isolations, and respiratory machines is very limited. +

Author: Heba Al Basha, Country Director JRS Lebanon.



A Holistic Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

Overview

For people in many of the countries we work in, the most immediate threat posed by the Covid-19 pandemic was not the risk of infection, but hunger and a lack of income. For people who live day-to-day, lockdown meant they could not go out to earn money or gather at the market to buy food. Accommodation in refugee camps or in impoverished urban environments is not suitable for social distancing or even to contain all members of the household, other than for sleeping.

Our response and that of our partners the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) was holistic; providing people with food and other household basics as well as Covid-19 preventative healthcare supplies. Water stations with soap were installed in many locations, which previously had little or no access to running water. JRS also moved quickly to adapt new media to continue to deliver its education and healthcare programmes to refugee communities,

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wherever possible. Trainees from livelihoods courses were employed to make reusable face masks, using their skills in return for a small stipend.

Below are some examples of the emergency response to the Covid-19 crisis. Infection rates are still rising outside of Europe and we will continue to work to provide vital support to at-risk communities for as long as is necessary. Cura personalis – care for the whole person – remains at the core of our mission.

WhatsApp and Radio

JRS Ethiopia delivered an awareness-raising campaign to refugees about Covid-19 using telephone, SMS messages and social network platforms including WhatsApp. In Adjumani, JRS Uganda ensured that school

lessons were broadcast over radio for a population of more than 95,000 students (63,000 host community, 32,000 refugees) from 168 primary schools and 12,000 students (7,000 host community, 5,000 refugees) from 21 secondary schools in the district.

In Lebanon, WhatsApp was used for group distance learning for children and also for adult English and Arabic language classes. It was also used for weekly psychosocial support groups and to distribute information and videos about Covid-19 and mental health issues associated with isolation.

Facemask production by refugees

JRS India in Tamil Nadu provided raw materials (cloth, elastic, thread) for the production of 4,200 reusable face masks for the refugee community. The masks were stitched by women who have taken tailoring classes run by JRS Livelihood Skills Training. In the JRS Uganda urban refugee centre in Kampala, the fashion and design class teacher asked seven of her trainees to produce face masks.

The class produced more than 200 masks per day, which the team distributed to JRS staff and to refugees coming to the compound. JRS Ethiopia also employed the skills of refugee women to make masks. All were given a small incentive, to help provide for themselves and their families.

Food distribution to at-risk households

In the informal settlement of Kangemi, outside Nairobi, households who could no longer earn an income were given food essentials including maize and wheat flour, cooking oil and pulses such as beans and peas, to help them prevent malnourishment.

JRS Kenya gave staples including maize, vegetables and fruit to refugees in Kakuma Camp, in the north-western region of Kenya. JRS Ethiopia distributed basic food items including spaghetti, sugar and cooking oil to Chin and Afghan refugee households in Addis Ababa who are the guardians of 100 unaccompanied and separated refugee children – a particularly vulnerable group.



Food distribution in Kangemi, Nairobi.

Sanitation Supplies

Once people's basic needs have been taken care of, they can begin to focus on protecting themselves from Covid-19 infection. Because there is no running water in informal settlements and in many refugee camps, water tanks were installed, and hands-free washing stations and soap were provided so that people could keep their hands clean.

Additional Support

Families in slums like Kangemi who were unable to pay rent due to the loss of income were given subsidies to enable them to remain in their housing while the restrictions are in place, giving them a stable home until they were able to earn again.

JRS India gave blankets to 3,300 distressed Sri Lankan Tamil families living in cramped conditions with their elderly relatives in Tamil Nadu refugee camps, so that their elderly family members (the most vulnerable to

Covid-19) could socially distance and rest out in the open.

Personal Touch

JRS in South Sudan ensured community education and Covid-19 prevention messages were coupled with psychosocial support, especially for the most vulnerable. Whereas other NGOs in the country focused on the wider dispersion of prevention messages with mobile megaphone, the JRS approach was to observe social distancing but share this information in a personal, face-to-face way built on pre-existing relationships. This was appreciated by people in the refugee communities, who are often recovering from trauma and in need of support.

Thank you to all of you who have donated to our Covid-19 Emergency Appeal and helped to make the services above possible.

Please pass this newsletter on to your family and friends so we can share the positive impact of our work with them.

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