

# Cannonball Moments

Testimonies of Conversion



*To See All Things New in Christ*

Editor:  
Xavier Jeyaraj, SJ



Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat



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# Editorial

## The battle of Pamplona!

Boom! After six hours of bombardment, a cannonball shattered the legs of a Basque soldier, Iñigo López of Loyola, on 20 May 1521. Not only Inigo's legs but also his dreams and ambitions got shattered - an utter failure from the human estimate. But, there began the moment of conversion for a young Iñigo, who later founded the Society of Jesus.

As Fr. General Arturo Sosa said, "The wound Ignatius suffered in Pamplona was not so much a happy ending, but rather a happy beginning. Conversion consists sometimes of great moments of change, but it is also a never-ending process. This process is a pilgrimage along winding roads, up and down, sometimes having to retrace our steps, sometimes feeling lost. But meeting people along the road who indicate the way and reach out their hands to us." They change the trajectory of our lives.

Moments of personal conversion are unique and beautiful, often impossible to describe in words. It is an experience of receiving unasked grace from God. No two conversion processes are similar. A cannonball moment for one may be an everyday routine experience for another. For Ignatius, it began at the battle of Pamplona 502 years ago. Each of us goes through experiences of change, conversion and transformation. As Arturo says, it is a 'never-ending process'. Every new moment is an invitation to test the spark that began at some point in life.

Real-life stories, narratives or testimonies can move people's hearts, as happened to St. Ignatius. During his convalescence, St. Ignatius had no option but to read the book on the life of Jesus and a collection of stories of saints' lives, which started the conversion process in St. Ignatius. Recognising the power of personal stories that transform the readers or listeners, the Secretariat began publishing one narrative a month (now called Testimonies) in April 2009. Till December 2022, the Secretariat has hosted around 150 testimonies. The 25 testimonies published in this Cannonball Moments are from the collection of those 150 testimonies. They



are selected by a team of members from the Conference social delegates and SJES Advisory Committee.

These testimonies are also stories of their own conversion. They tell us how an inner experience became a passion for working with people in vulnerable situations in different parts of the world. The testimonies describe ‘why they do, what they do?’, ‘Their involvement in social ministries brings them hope, joy and a sense of mission. They can see God present in the people and situations they serve’.

We began this project of publishing the testimonies as a book during the Ignatian Jubilee year. I am delighted that we got it done in a year and I guess sharing testimonies is never too late. I am deeply grateful to all 25 contributors who reviewed their stories, rewrote and permitted publication in the current format. While editing, I have tried to maintain the style of the author as much as possible. I take this opportunity to thank all our SJES staff, past and present, who have supported this venture greatly. A special word of thanks to Fr. Paul Béré for his Foreword, giving us a theological perspective of the testimonies.

(Original: English)



**Xavier Jeyaraj, SJ**  
Secretary, SJES



# Foreword

*“Put your finger here and put it in my side” (John 20:27)*

On the occasion of the jubilee of St. Ignatius’ conversion, the collaborators in the mission of the suffering Christ who attend to the marginalized (cf. Luke 10:30-37) have compiled their mission experiences. Just as Ignatius’ woundedness gave birth to the saint through a long journey of conversion, the social apostolate collaborators bear witness to the transformations that have occurred through their mission work. In other words, their journey of conversion was sparked by their personal mystical experiences with human suffering, either through their own personal suffering or through empathy (in the sense of suffering with...). To grow in faith is to relive the experience of the apostle Thomas, who said: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and put my finger in the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). This “unbelief” is a natural instinct for believers when faced with an overwhelming mystery. To express our amazement, do we not say, “This is incredible!” Through each of the stories in this book, the Risen One seems to be telling us again: “Put your finger here and look at my hands; put your hand out and stick it in my side; stop being unbelieving and become a person of faith” (John 20:27).

Human suffering is repugnant. It provokes revulsion and can inspire hatred and violence in those with pure and wounded hearts who are outraged by all suffering. But the testimonies in this book confirm the transformative power of believers who see people in distress, crushed by life, lonely and helpless, imprisoned by society’s indifferent gaze, and hindered by hatred and injustice. Each story illustrates the words of the eternal King: “For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me; in prison and you came to me” (Matt. 25:35-36). This inspires feelings of joy, compassion, love, and more. We feel the grace at work when it makes fruitful efforts that can be as small as

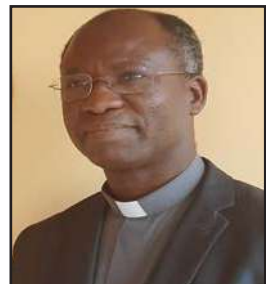


five loaves of bread to feed five thousand people or a drop of water in an ocean. Yet God uses it to transform and leaven the human dough.

What is also moving about these testimonies is the diversity of views and paths, initiatives, and activities. Even more touching is the transformation that takes place in those who take on the suffering of their brothers and sisters in humanity, as they are moved by personal experiences of violence. From their “cannonball moment,” they grow. We see their eyes transform, their hearts fill with compassion, their hands tenderly anoint and love the visible and invisible wounds of migrants, marginalized and lonely people, and their feet journey with the exiled and the crucified towards the Risen One. The transformative power of their call to be with Christ gradually leads the reader of this book to the figure of the Jesuit saint, Alberto Hurtado, a model of social commitment who was “salt of the earth” among the poor and, as a saint, became the “light of the world” on faces that are invisible because they are darkened and disfigured by the violence of life and structural injustices. Each witness in this book appears to me as a “Hurtado” in the making, and their accounts inspire me to start again from my “cannonball experience!”

(Original: French)

**Paul Béré, SJ** is a Jesuit from Burkina Faso. He is on a teaching mission at the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Rome), after a first mission at the Institute of Theology of the Society of Jesus (ITCJ) in Abidjan (Ivory Coast).







# JESUITAS

CONFERENCIA DE PROVINCIALES EN  
AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE - CPAL







## A Migrant Accompanying Migrants

*Arturo Estrada Acosta, SJ*

From the moment I was assigned to study theology in Brazil, I knew that it was going to be a challenge: a new culture, a new language, a new way of being a Jesuit. And I was not wrong. The first months were unsettling and hard, and I often wondered — What am I doing here? In other moments I delighted in being immersed in a new and fascinating culture. However, in the midst of it all, I was quite certain of one thing: living with Jesuits from all over Latin America set my heart afire. This led me to a personal and community search, in which I was accompanied by the clear understanding that the Lord was asking more of me. He was inviting me to go beyond my prejudices, to let myself be surprised by reality and, at the same time, he was calling me to dream of a Society in companionship with others.

It was in this context that a fellow Jesuit invited me to accompany him to visit a group of Haitians who had just arrived in the city. He had “found” them by examining a photo in a local newspaper in which he was able to identify their location. The journey there took about two hours by public transport and obviously I had tasks and theological exercises to do, as I was on my first mission. However, although we barely knew each other, my intuition told me that this was going to be something that would fill my heart, that was going to give reason to everything.

And so it was, after a few visits and as my intuitions began to be confirmed, the same Jesuit companion suggested that I teach Portuguese to the new migrants for two hours a week. My first reaction was one of astonishment. A foreigner teaching a language that is not their mother





tongue to other foreigners! How absurd, I thought. However, I accepted the challenge, perhaps because deep down I believed that I had something to share. Beyond what I might know about the Portuguese language or the student's language, I had an experience to transmit and, above all, a friendship to nourish.

Two hours a day became the whole weekend. I began to meet new friends who were struggling with the language, who were perplexed by the new culture, who experienced moments of happiness and moments of sadness, that is, they had an experience similar to mine. That's when I began to feel like a migrant among migrants. But I also discovered the differences between us, their stories, the dangerous paths they had to travel to get to Brazil. I learned of their sadness of being so far from their families, and how difficult it was to be accepted into a society that is not prepared to receive foreigners. In a simple way, I felt solidarity and a sense of fraternity alongside my companions (Jesuits and non-Jesuits, men and women of different nationalities) who also responded to this summons. This led us to provide ever-more appropriate and informed responses, culminating in the opening of a migrant care office.

From 15 November 2013, we began to give a more organized response, assisted by my companions, local and national institutions, the Society of Jesus (Province of Brazil), the Daughters of Jesus, Brazilian citizens, local and national institutions and, above all, many Haitians who have walked with us and many others who follow their path in other countries. Our first objective in this short to medium-term project was to offer accompaniment to allow our Haitian friends, and us as well, to become better integrated into Brazilian society and have the same opportunities as everyone else.

For me personally, two things were - and are - essential in this process. The first was having a team that could identify a reality that was being hidden from the eyes of most people. The reality of structural injustice is one that assumes that all are not equal and consequently establishes barriers based on economic indices. It is a reality that has been responsible for the impoverishment of countries. The second was to relate to Haitians as a friend. We didn't distribute food, we didn't hand out money, we didn't offer people work—we simply accompanied a journey that we had already made ourselves: language learning, dealing with the federal



police, developing relations with Brazilians, etc.

At no time during the three years I worked in the office did I talk about Jesus, the Kingdom or the Gospel, because the Haitian immigrants and the team I worked with were of different religious beliefs. But I always felt that I was following Jesus, that I was living tiny fragments of the Kingdom



and that the Gospel was embodied in my accompaniment of migrants. We dreamt of an inclusive society, a world where borders do not exist, where no human being is illegal. A world where differences of color and race are a cause for celebration and not violence.

I can say without fear or hesitation that my theological studies took on a new meaning. It was clear to me that studying was not a purely intellectual pursuit, but involved seeing with Jesus' eyes, applying theological tools to comprehend reality. During my studies I felt like a Jesuit in action, and not one waiting to be ordained before giving myself to the promotion of faith and justice. I believe in a Society that is increasingly Latin American and ever-closer to those who suffer most; not simply because we have taken this option, but because being with them makes us happy. When we deeply love those who suffer, we want the best for them.

Today, almost 10 years later, I realize that not only were my companions and I in the right place at the right time, but that we were also open



to being guided by the Spirit, which drove us to strive for the MAGIS, to leave behind our own desire and self-interest and go out and seek encounter. Maybe, and only maybe, it was something similar to what Ignatius experienced during his convalescence that led to his conversion and the decision to give himself up for others. In terms of social impact, this undertaking left a mark on our hearts. It was an experience of drawing closer to the other, sharing privileges, experience and life in a reciprocal way with fellow migrants who were in vulnerable situations, fleeing from unprecedented poverty. Undoubtedly, their migration was a challenging process, but we can be certain that their time in Brazil was made less complicated and more full of hospitality.

(Original: Spanish)



**Arturo Estrada Acosta, SJ** Arturo currently works for Plan International as a national monitoring, evaluation, research and learning officer in Mexico. He continues to be linked to the migrant experience, but now from the south of his country. He also collaborates with the Loyola Institute of Spirituality in Orange, CA, as an instructor of Ignatian discernment, from where he accompanies pastoral agents who accompany migrants of life.



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## The Birth of Something New

*Carmen Rosa de los Ríos Baertl*

I have been asked to update this text after two years of life in times of pandemic, uncertainty, darkness and pain caused by the death and impoverishment of so many people. In Peru, 212,891 people have died from COVID, one of the highest rates among the Andean countries. Many are now orphans. Many are now unemployed and living in poverty. Many young people feel hopeless. All of this takes place in the midst of a political crisis with no end in sight.

While the figures are high, it only takes a moment to read them out, whereas each face and name on the list reveals a person who has died, entire families who have suffered and continue to suffer. Their hardship results not just from Covid, but from unjust structures that have become readily apparent and more embedded.

The pandemic has revealed the enormous structural gaps that exist in our society, which have worsened as a result of decades of corruption at the highest levels of government. Several of our presidents are facing criminal prosecution for this very reason. The people used to say, “It doesn’t matter if they steal, so long as they get stuff done”. Today we realize that it does matter, that illegal profiteering causes thousands of deaths. Healthcare and education saw little improvement and today we see the consequences: a precarious healthcare system that collapsed in the capital and in the regions, and an education system that does not reach everyone, once again widening the gaps between Peruvians. Thousands lost their precarious work. Underemployment was disguised as employment.

The façade of development portraying Peru as having emerged from poverty was starkly uncovered: a third of the population has no refrigerator and has to leave the house to buy food every day, most are in informal working arrangements, earning their daily bread – literally – by the sweat of their brow: “If you don’t work, you won’t eat”. Therefore, when the lockdown was brought into force, more than 100,000 people set out on foot



to try to return to their regions. They headed back to the rural areas that they had once abandoned for the promise of a better life in the capital city, which had now thrown them out in the midst of a pandemic. People even said, “I’d rather die of COVID than of starvation”. They risked contracting COVID by going out in full lockdown, walking to rural areas where they had a better chance of finding food rather than staying in Lima without work.



In Peru, as in so many other countries in Latin America (and the world), suffering comes not only in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also as injustice, corruption, and the lack of pursuit of the common good. The poor, women, children, migrants, prisoners—the sectors that have always faced exclusion—are the ones who suffer most from this situation.

What does God want to tell us in all this? We hear His voice in the cry of the poor and in the cry of nature. We hear His voice in the prophetic leadership of Pope Francis: “We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick”. We firmly believe that the Gospel is God’s power of salvation, “sown” by Jesus in the heart of the world and in the hearts of all people. In the midst of the pandemic we also find kindness, generosity, love, solidarity. In many of us, lockdown has revived our desire to live as humans, to cherish the most valuable things in life:



sharing as a family, friendship, the simple life, caring for nature, peace. It has even awakened our desire for a more profound experience, to seek the transcendental, to give life a new meaning beyond aimlessly consuming or working while neglecting the essential.

At first, I saw the pandemic as a time of darkness and bewilderment. In this Ignatian year, when we are invited to “see all things new in Christ”, I have been able to perceive God’s presence in everything that is happening. I perceive Him in terrible things: I see the extent to which the human being can lose its humanity, even profiteering from the suffering of the poor, and I think of the passion of Christ who was nailed to the cross with contempt and injustice. I also especially see His presence in the signs of hope, because His resurrection steers us away from pessimism and resignation. The transformative energy of the Gospel is working in humanity to return us to God’s dream, to goodness, to beauty, to truth, to equity, to friendship and fraternity, and to caring for nature. Therefore, the thirst for justice and love continues to grow. We sense a changing of the times is underway, and therefore it is more urgent to continue addressing the causes of injustice and promoting the common good. In doing so we can support this change in a constructive way.

I can see many signs of hope in my country. Firstly, the works of the Society of Jesus have transformed their projects to be closer to vulnerable sectors, initially providing them with healthcare and sanitary products, food, accompaniment, dignified burials, among others. Secondly, we have created and strengthened advocacy networks between civil society and the State to improve the distribution of vaccines and food, so that they really reach the most vulnerable and are not waylaid by corrupt officials. During this crisis, people have died from the lack of access to oxygen support. In addition to dismantling the oxygen monopoly which has led to a few actors profiteering by extortionate pricing, several of the Society of Jesus’ works have managed to harness solidarity from various strata of society, allowing oxygen plants to be opened in their regions. This set a good example for others and was a hope-inspiring action.

Several of the social works and the Vicariate of Jaén, which is entrusted to the Society of Jesus, were integrated into the initiative *¡Resucita Perú*



*ahora!* [Resurrect Peru Now!]. This is an initiative of the Catholic Church (Episcopal Conference) led by Monsignor Pedro Barreto, a Jesuit cardinal, who led the way on this path of hope, seeking “to resurrect with the Risen One, raising awareness in society of all inequalities in health, work, and education (...) so that everyone can lead a life of dignity”. The initiative is inspired by the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* and Pope Francis’ Message to the Popular Movements, among others.

With the initiative *¡Resucita Perú, ahora!*, individual people, politicians from across the political spectrum, social organizations, institutions, companies, scientists, universities, professional associations, faith communities, among others, were summoned to join forces for the benefit of the most vulnerable sectors of society. The initiative was launched in the country’s 46 ecclesiastical jurisdictions to kick-start a process of national coordination. More than 1,500 parishes were mobilized on the coast,



in the mountains and in the jungle. They were organized into various commissions: health, food, collaborative governance, social organizations, the environment with a focus on the issue of water, among others. Several social works of the Society of Jesus were incorporated into this initiative: CANAT and CIPCA in Piura, The Loyola Ayacucho Center, CEOP ILO in Moquegua, and CCAIJO in Cusco. The representative of the Society of Jesus’ social sector in Peru assumed the leadership of the Commission of Social Organizations and Community Strategy with many initiatives linking-up the Church, State and civil society.



*!Resucita Perú ahora!* developed and continues to implement several programs: “Denles ustedes de comer” (soup kitchens and neighborhood food support initiatives), “*Respira Perú*” (oxygen plants) and other initiatives. Workshops and mental health spaces were also organized for public school teachers who were overwhelmed by the task at hand. This was organized as part of *¡Resucita Perú, ahora!* by Teaching Teams Peru (a christian community of primary school teachers). I was able to participate in some of their workshops and accompaniment spaces, thanks be to God! It has been a reassuring experience in the midst of such tragedy.

The group *¡Resucita Perú, ahora!* remains active after the pandemic. The group facilitated the provision of organized and coordinated care to poor sectors, as well as making some government procedures more efficient and impactful. On top of this, it has become a space of community discernment to seek paths of fraternity and ‘social friendship’ in the medium and long term. At the moment it is seeking a legitimate space of dialogue between the general population and the government to find a pathway through the multidimensional crisis in which we find ourselves.

We can’t go on as if nothing has happened. The task at hand is to heal our sick world.

(Original: Spanish)



**Carmen Rosa de los Ríos Baertl** has been part of the apostolic body of the Jesuit province of Peru for more than four decades. She served for several years as director of the Moquegua and Ayacucho social centers, as well as executive secretary of the Ignatian Education Consortium of Peru – Centa. She is currently the social apostolate delegate to the Conference of Jesuit Provincials of Latin America and the Caribbean (CPAL).



## How to Nourish our Social Apostolate with Hope

*Ismael Moreno, SJ*

Whenever I talk about my life as a Jesuit over the 42 years I have served, I always return to the mission of faith and justice, and to my friendships with Jesuits from my province, from the Mexican province and from many other provinces, with whom I have shared this life's journey filled with gifts of God and encounter with the poor through the social apostolate. No other life could have been more beautiful than this one gifted to me, defending the human rights of the most helpless and oppressed people, and doing so in God's name and from my fragility as a Jesuit. So many experiences of friendship come to my mind with many people, their faces rugged and weathered by the sun and the anguish of carrying on with a life of considerable adversity.

I come from a country that, in the eyes of the media, but also in the eyes of various influential sectors in the world, including the Church, is practically non-existent. It is not just a discarded country, as the Pope would say, but a non-existent one. I call it the 'et cetera' country because it is not only difficult to find it on a map, but even those aware of its remote existence do not even bother to name it. For this very reason, I thank the organizers who give me this microphone to talk about my experience of Faith and Justice, because in this way I can name Honduras, a country that needs to be seen, heard, approached, accompanied, protected and defended. And along with it, the millions of voices that struggle between a thankless death and the will to live. That is why they flee their homeland, to anywhere they can, because they cling on to a life that has been denied them in their own country.

Many people ask me, where do you find hope in the midst of this poor and downtrodden country, non-existent and left to survive from scraps falling from the tables of the wealthy, remittances from abroad and the government of the United States? Without hesitation I say that this very reality of my country and Central America is what nourishes my hope;



The more anguish and closed paths that I find in the struggle to defend the life and rights of the poor, the more I need to drink from the well of my faith in the God of Life. Surrounded by violence and death, even threats, is where I receive the most life, and I have the most faith in my reality as messenger of the Lord of the Dawn, who makes the sun rise just when the path is at its darkest and the shadowy gloom that I encounter along the way closes in. The more thankless reality is, the more I crave for God.

But I also nourish my hope in the memory of the martyrs. And many they are. In these 42 years as a Jesuit, I have met and been friends with dozens of women and men, simple and hardworking, thinkers and activists, believers and non-believers, academics and above all social, political and environmental campaigners, who were killed for their convictions, for



their love and commitment to justice. With several of them I broke bread, I embraced, I shared words and views; with several of them I debated and fought, and several of them questioned me, they called out my timidity in my ideas and my insecurities. And they were murdered. I could mention many names; 30 years ago today, six of our Jesuit companions and two lay colleagues were ripped to shreds by machine gun fire. Look no further than Berta Cáceres. The night of her murder I could have been with her, but I got held up, and I rebuked her for summoning me at such an inconvenient



time. “I have too much on my plate to come over to you,” I said bluntly. And they killed her. She pushed me, questioned me, respected me and encouraged me in times of despair. The martyrs are familiar faces to me, I know them in their fragility, as imperfect human beings. But I know them as people prepared to give up their lives. Their memory stays ever with me, they nourish my dreams and my days, and they remind me of Jesus of Nazareth.

My hope is also nourished by the generosity of communities; they are very much the owners of their poverty. We visit the families that comprise these communities, and even if we come just once, they are joyful and nourished in their lives. If necessary, they will even go without food to enjoy watching us eat their food, brimming with simplicity and at the same time with love and generosity. More than once have I arrived at someone’s home and the family has given me their best bed. For them an uncomfortable night becomes a blessing, and they rest happy in the knowledge that their guests are comfortable and can rest easily. This generosity cannot be bought or sold, it is priceless, and I will never find it on the market. And it sheds light directly and critically on the culture of hospitality in our communities. I was extremely embarrassed when one of these families who had treated me so generously arrived in my community and was met with the frown of fellow Jesuits, for whom the mere presence of “unfamiliar people” interrupts on their daily comforts. The coldness of our community, in contrast to the generosity of poor families, goes against the generosity to which our vow of poverty and our historical mission of faith and justice calls us.

My hope finds nourishment in my work team, comprised of a large number of lay people, inspired by the spirituality of the Society of Jesus. They have dedicated their entire lives and risked all comforts and conveniences for their work. All this for a job that is not always understood even by the Jesuits themselves, and for a salary which never make them a fortune. And yet they do so with enthusiasm and joy. They strive day by day to examine the dynamics that produce inequality and violence. They transform their learnings rooted in the perspective of the poor as an alternative model to the neoliberal system. Without fail, in the midst of threats and lurking dangers, a guitar is pulled out, or a bachata,



merengue, either cumbia or salsa music starts up: relief to pain comes though the tropical rhythm. And after this relief, they return to the task of an apostolate that daily brings both love and challenge together.

The Jesuit community, in the often bleak environments it finds itself in, continues to be a source of hope when I think about how, in these specific communities, a mission is embodied in men of flesh and blood, with austere lives and quiet spirituality giving testament to the bitter sweet taste of reality. In these conditions, a moment arises to confess the faith that nourishes hope amid the hopeless realities of aging men, hardened, burdened and embittered through years of service. In our communities' sober and resilient daily spirituality, which so greatly need fresh air, new horizons, the embrace and dreams of the laity, we hope to discover what was described in GC-34: communities of solidarity. It is the friendship of a community that expresses itself in a specific place, but is not restricted to it, because the Jesuit community is first and foremost a community of friends in the Lord, scattered throughout various territories and countries. And in the end it is a community fully open to sharing life and quest with the many women and men who are of the same mission.

I must not neglect to mention that falling in love with this apostolate - inserted in the turbulent realities of the common people - makes you a target for much criticism from well-to-do corners of society, from





within the Church and also from within the Society of Jesus itself. The social apostolate, in general, draws a suspicious gaze from institutional hierarchies, not only from the very well established powers of this world, but from those within the Society of Jesus itself. As one goes deeper into this apostolic mission, you will taste a strong dose of the marginalisation that our people experience when they are side-lined from decision-making spaces and positions. Usually we Jesuits are suspected of heterodoxy, imprudence, political and religious incorrectness. A faint echo, albeit undeserving, of Jesus of Nazareth, who was looked down upon and rejected by the established powers of the time. The suspicion towards who we are and what we do should never be lacking in our mission. It characterizes our life and our contribution to the Jesuits and to society.

Living and celebrating life and the struggle for the Kingdom arouses suspicion due to friendship with the poor. Drawing the suspicious eye of the world's well-to-do will always be an unequivocal sign that we are in the right place. God, the Lord of Dawn, continues to invite us sinners to pursue the cause of Jesus of Nazareth, and to fight with Him, for the Poor of the Earth.

(Original: Spanish)



**Ismael Moreno, SJ** is a Jesuit from the Central American Province (CAM). He has been working in the Social Apostolate for 43 years. Currently, he is the Director of *Radio Progreso* in Honduras.



## An Unlikely Export: Saint Alberto Hurtado

*José Fco. Yuraszeck Krebs, SJ*

These days it's quite common that most of our clothes are made in various parts of the world, far from where we live. Have a look at the label on your shirt: I'm sure it says 'Made in China', or Vietnam, or Bangladesh, even if you had bought it in a shop which has been in your country for years and, in times gone-by made clothes in their own workshop. The same goes for almost everything we use daily. I am from Chile, and in various moments of my life I have been overjoyed to discover an unlikely export from Chile, in the figure of Saint Alberto Hurtado.

On 18 August 2015, I was fortunate to celebrate his death anniversary in Scampia, Naples. The Jesuits run a center there, which bears the name of Father Hurtado. It is under the auspices of the parish in collaboration with many others. Scampia is one of the toughest neighborhoods in Naples, where we were told, the Camorra completely took control of the area to the extent that the police didn't dare enter. They call it the drug super-



market. Only years later were peace and order partly restored, following a considerable interventions, simultaneous to the construction of one of Europe's largest prisons nearby. Among the many programs that are offered, in Alberto Hurtado Centre in Scampia, men and women of various ages learn handicrafts, manufacture notebooks and exercise copies, hats



and t-shirts with the brand 'Made in Scampia'. It is an attempt to show that Scampia is not just about drugs, conflict and violence, but it is also about strength, resilience and community.

I have come across the name of Alberto Hurtado on so many occasions



in my life. First was in the lead up to his beatification in the year 1994, when the story of his vocation and his life given in service to the Kingdom of God was shown on television. A little later I became more familiar with Infocap - The Workers University in Santiago de Chile - inspired by the figure of Father Hurtado, who spoke of the immorality of a society which doesn't have its workers at its heart. In this institution a volunteer project was founded which invited young students to experience the reality of families living in informal settlements. Over the years "*Un Techo para Chile*" [A Roof for Chile] took shape, now simply "*Techo*", which is active in 19 countries in Latin America. During this time and through getting to know the richness of Ignatian Spirituality, I was awakened to my calling to the Society of Jesus, which was confirmed to me after a period volunteering in the Father Hurtado hospice, *Hogar de Cristo* [Home of Christ].

As a Jesuit I was blessed to be able to work for two years in the Jesús Obrero parish, close to Father Hurtado's great project, *Hogar de Cristo*, and the shrine where his remains lie. I returned to work with Techo the year following Father Hurtado's canonisation in 2005, the celebration awoke in some of us the need to inspire Christian communities within the slums



and the neighborhoods where we were working, and we collaborated with families and leaders to build their houses and to dream of a better country. I was in the Jusús Obrero parish when I celebrated my first Mass as a priest, now nearly four years later, together with many people that are so dear to me, and the following three years I worked with the Ignatian University Center in the University of... Alberto Hurtado!

When I wrote the first version of this text I was in Rome, studying Moral Theology at the Gregorian University. Then I discovered that there is a Center for Faith and Culture bearing Hurtado's name. Indeed, all over the world Jesuits and other Christian communities of different spiritual traditions have adopted his name, his inspiration and his intercession to baptize communities and initiatives that are most diverse in nature. The *Grande Hogar de Cristo* Family in Argentina bears particular mention, which has taken Father Hurtado as its patron. They have a liberating presence in villages and neighborhoods, reweaving the social fabric, forming welcoming and inclusive communities, and offering treatment for alcohol and drug abusers. Not one more kid lost to drugs! *Hogar de Cristo* in Ecuador is also well-known for its work focusing on the enormous need for housing, but also on other aspects of life in society: microcredit, nutrition, migrant reception and community development.

Now that I am rereading this article, trying to update it, I realize that it has been four years since I started as General Chaplain with *Hogar de Cristo* in Chile, and that I have also had roles in other works inspired by the legacy of Father Hurtado, such as TECHO, *Fundación Vivienda* and INFOCAP. In recent years I have been able to witness how relevant the spiritual proposal and social and political activities of Father Hurtado are. I have witnessed that by centering on the human being we are able to launch collaborative initiatives full of diversity. This is what we did with the initiative *Chile Comparte* [Chile Share] when the pandemic was at its toughest: We brought heating, food, internet access, health care, and above all hope and a sense of community to people who were suffering the ravages of the pandemic. Likewise we ran the *Círculos Territoriales*, conversation spaces to share hope and suffering, particularly for those who are often sidelined when it comes to designing and proposing public policy. Citizens' voices, especially those living on the margins,



need to be amplified. On the deliberative journey towards drafting a new constitution for our country, Chile, we collaborated in drafting a proposal called Constitution and Poverty. It was submitted to the board of directors of the constitutional convention.

We have been celebrating the Ignatian year, the 500th anniversary of Saint Ignatius' conversion. The cannonball that changed the life and plans of Iñigo de Loyola opened the space for a deep spirituality to blossom, one which is still alive today. It has manifested in various forms, in the lives of very real men and women, in diverse places around the world. Many of these testimonies can be seen on the You Tube channel *Jesuitas Global*.

Father Hurtado lived in the first half of the 20th century. He was a passionate follower of Jesus, his senses were attuned to the active presence of God in the world and in history. He had his "cannonball" moment when he encountered a beggar who was burning with fever on a rainy night in Santiago de Chile. From that transformative experience he summoned others to service, to academic and intellectual work, to community and union organizing, to making the world a more welcoming, fraternal, and solidarity-filled place. This took place in very diverse ways: lending a hand, a plate of food, a roof to sleep under, or offering a space for education or training. This also meant promoting integral development initiatives deeply rooted in the essence of Christianity, in harmony with what the Vatican Council II confirmed a few decades later and what the Society of Jesus declared as its present mission: the service of Faith and the promotion of Justice which this faith requires. *Hogar de Cristo* in Chile celebrated 78 years of service in October 2022: the inspiration of Father Hurtado is still alive and well among all the people who collaborate here.

(Original: Spanish)



**José Fco. Yuraszeck Krebs, SJ** is a Jesuit from the Chilean province. After his ordination, he went to Italy where he obtained a master's degree in moral theology. For the past five years he is the general chaplain of the *Hogar de Cristo*, a social institution founded in Chile by St. Alberto Hurtado in 1944, spread throughout the world in the Jesuit social apostolate.





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Conference of Africa and Madagascar  
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Conferência dos Jesuítas de África e Madagáscar

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## Transformation through the Young

Alain Nzadi, SJ

I first started with CEPAS (Centre of Study for Social Action) to work on their *Congo-Afrique* journal, the centre's organ of communication which publishes articles on topics such as; the economy, politics, and social and cultural life. As such, my work with CEPAS had always been limited to the journal, and I had little to no direct involvement in "social engagement" besides editing articles sent for publication. However, in September 2015, when the Father Provincial of the Jesuits of Central Africa appointed me Director of CEPAS, the level of my social engagement took an unexpected turn, one I would never have imagined when I first arrived at the centre. From then on, I no longer defined myself by my work with the *Congo-Afrique* journal, but by my relationship with CEPAS as an institution, and I became engaged on a number of "social fronts": *accompanying young people, lobbying political decision-makers, reflecting on societal issues (justice, democracy, citizen participation, etc.) by organising Social Days, etc.*

What impact has this social engagement had on my Christian faith in general, and on my ministerial priesthood in particular? Social engagement from then on became part of my ministerial vocation and simply the way I live my faith. Within this social engagement, I profoundly experience my vocation as a priest of the Lord at the service of the many brothers and sisters I encounter in my ministerial priesthood.

I revisit all these transformative experiences I have had with the many





young people who visit our centre. I am amazed by the potential they show. At the same time, I share the concerns of many young people whose future is still caged by the bleak socio-political and economic situation in my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. I see in their eyes a permanent look of anxiety that verges on disorientation. When they leave university, they have the impression that their future is one of closed doors and that society has left them by the wayside. As far as possible, I hold them in my prayers and in everything I can do to contribute to social change.



Seeing this mass of young people whose future is constantly foggy, I feel summoned in my ministerial priesthood to become, each day more, an agent of change and a follower of Christ capable of contributing to the liberation of those to whom God's mission sends me. Working in such a disheartening socio-political environment for young people, I ask the Lord to help me each day to practice my ministerial priesthood differently, not only by trying to find the words of liberation, but by becoming, in my daily choices, an agent of change and liberation. Working in this socio-political environment capable of shattering the hopes of so many young people, I ask the Lord every day to help me live my priestly ministry in a different way, trying not only to find the words that liberate, but above all to become, through my daily choices, an agent of change and a source of



hope for the young people who cross my path. That is why Christ came to us; that is why I became a priest.

I pray that the Lord will make me grow in the conviction that he is at the heart of my social commitment and that it is there that I am called to live my priestly vocation and my Christian faith.

(Original: French)



**Alain NZADI, SJ** is a Congolese Jesuit, ordained as a priest on 14th July 2013. In September 2014, he began his mission at the Research Centre for Social Action (CEPAS), a Jesuit centre founded in January 1965 in Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo).



## Happy to be Part of the Effort

*Charles B. Chilufya, SJ*

For many years as I grew up, I lived by the conviction that my destiny was to develop myself in the engineering career. I grew up in a mining town, Mufulira, in Zambia and seeing the prospering lives of engineers of all kinds who worked for the mines, I felt attracted to the good life that those engineers led. At the same time, I grew up in a very Catholic family and so from very early on I had a strong desire to become a priest. So, for the first three decades of my life, my vision of life oscillated between serving my own personal career goals and the deeper goals of serving God and humanity.

Three things were to change my life toward the service of God and humanity. First, I had a strong attraction toward silent prayer and from early on in my childhood, I used to spend a lot of time in quiet prayer and reading the scriptures. Second, because of my love for personal reflection and for the daily Eucharist, I discovered that my life was meant to be broken like the body of Christ and be shared by all. This image of my life became so vivid that I could not run away from it. In addition, this discovery of the relationship between my life and the Eucharist, set me on the path toward the search for what that really meant.

So thirdly, much later in my school life, while I was at university in my final year, I served as an intern for the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) in Lusaka, Zambia. At JCTR, I began to discover what 'breaking and sharing my life' could mean, to work for the promotion of a faith that does justice. During those three months at JCTR, through engaging work, reading and following the work of the Centre and other related groups, I became more and more aware of the brokenness of our world and was now convinced that I was called to be part of the solution to bring healing and justice to a broken world. I further became convinced that I had the Jesuit vocation and that this vocation was about the promotion of a faith that does justice.



To complete the turnaround, my undergraduate studies in Urban and Regional Planning and in development economics at the University and my experience at JCTR gave me new eyes of looking at the world. The injustice and suffering both in my country and the world at large became so starkly clear. I knew from early on that I was to do something about the injustice I was beginning to discover in our world. So later on, when I joined the Jesuits, as part of the Jesuit formation, I had encounters with refugees, the poor and hungry and suffering. These encounters gave me a new energy to confront injustice and suffering. I became convinced my life was meant to stand by the marginalised, speak for them or simply be with them and accompany them in their struggles. I could not afford to be silent or to stay away. I realised, there is immense silent agony in the



world, and the task of any human person is to be a voice for the plundered poor, to prevent the desecration of the soul and the violation of our dream of honesty.

Furthermore, when I studied theology and the Bible, my exposure to the prophets in the Bible and in our contemporary world intensified my desire to be committed to the fight for justice. The more deeply immersed I became in the thinking of the prophets, the more powerfully it became clear to me what the lives of the prophets sought to convey: that there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings. It also became clear to me that in regard to cruelties committed in the name of a



free society, some are guilty, while all are responsible. I did not feel guilty as an individual African for the injustice and suffering in my country, in Africa and in the world at large, but I felt deeply responsible. “Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour” (Leviticus 19:15) is not a recommendation but an imperative, a supreme commandment.

Hence, I decided to change my mode of living and to become active in the cause of justice and peace in Africa and in the world. As we commemorate the Ignatian Year focused on the conversion of St. Ignatius, I too feel called to onward conversion to orient my life toward the promotion of a faith that does justice. One thing that is very clear to me is that all the changes toward more authentic living and toward a life given the service of others that I make is not a theory I learnt in the classroom. It was the work of the Spirit of God in me as the Spirit helped me to look at the world with new eyes, as I study and reflect and as I meet those who suffer injustice. I really feel I am indeed my brothers’ and sisters’ keeper and therefore happy to be part of the effort to promote the Jesuit social ministry in Africa and the world over.

Being “my brother’s and sister’s keeper” and standing by those who suffer has been quite real for me over the years especially the last two years of the global pandemic. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the entire world decimating both lives of people and economies. In Africa, the economic shock of the pandemic upended livelihoods sending million into extreme poverty. In the wake of the pandemic, at the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network – Africa (JENA), where I serve we realigned our work and engaged work that directly responded to the suffering of people as they lost jobs, businesses and their livelihoods in general. We started to engage work that was not only directed to alleviating immediate suffering, but also to usher forth the transformation of hearts, minds, and structures toward a new model of development that prepares a better future for all.

In responding to the various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is one particular impact of the pandemic that got my attention. It was the impact of the pandemic on girls. The introduction of confinement measures to contain the disease did not only disrupt livelihoods but also the education of boys and girls as schools closed for prolonged periods in an effort to contain the spread of the virus. The closure of schools



had implications for girls who became more vulnerable to abuse as they stayed home without the protection they enjoyed while at school. Many experienced sexual abuse resulting in an upsurge of teen pregnancies. As girls stayed home many girls were given to early marriage or to gainful work so that they could support their families, especially in rural areas and in urban informal settlements where girl vulnerability is high. All this resulted in many girls falling out of school, a situation that has reversed gains made over the last three decades to increase girl enrolment.



I could not stand idly by the suffering of the girls, my neighbours, (Cf. Leviticus 19:15) watching lives being robbed of their future. I joined with others that are concerned about this outcome and so together with religious sisters in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia we mooted the Bakhita Partnership for Education (BPE) to respond to the situation of girls. The project is assisting girls to come back to school and to promote a type of education that empowers girls. The project is also about advocating for the protection of vulnerable girls and for establishment of friendly schools and communities where girls feel safe and protected.

There are several examples I can give but this for me is a classic one



with regard to how I feel my faith is moved to action. The grace I recognise is the compassion that God places in my heart to do all I can to respond to those who suffer especially those that I come into contact with. The motion that I feel that makes me stop what I am doing and decide to act for justice is God's compassion that he places in my heart so that I am able to somehow feel the suffering of others and be moved to make a difference.

(Original: English)



**Charles B. Chilufya, SJ** is a Jesuit from Zambia. He is now the current director of the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network Africa. He is also the social apostolate delegate for the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM).



## Giving back the Pulse, the Joy and the Taste for Life to Children

*Stanislas Kimpeye Mundibi, SJ*

As we celebrate the Ignatian Year under the theme of “seeing all things new in Christ”, I would like to humbly acknowledge the presence of the Lord in our mission of accompanying children and families in street situations in the city of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. This mission helps us to embody the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus. We recommit ourselves to the call to conversion in our way of :

- Walking alongside the poor, the dignified, the excluded and those whom society considers worthless, in a mission of reconciliation and justice.
- To walk with young people, accompanying them in the creation of a future full of hope.

Appointed on 31 July 2015 as director of the Centre Monseigneur





Munzehirwa (C.M.M), I and my team are assigned the specific mission of “giving back the pulse, the joy and the taste for life to children and families in street situations in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo”.

Indeed, Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, has approximately 30,000 children and young people living on the streets. The phenomenon of “street children” is constantly growing in Kinshasa. Now, one can already find entire families on the street: “dad, mum and the so-called street children”.

Faced with this social phenomenon, the Centre Monseigneur Munzehirwa, a social centre of the Jesuits of the Province of Central Africa, has been trying to accompany about a hundred street children and young people and their families every year since 1995 with a view to reconciliation and family reunification. The objective of the CMM is the “family, school and socio-professional reintegration of street children in Kinshasa”. To achieve its specific mission of “giving back the pulse, joy and taste for life to children and families in street situations in Kinshasa”, I work with a dynamic team of social educators whose mission is to welcome, listen to, accompany, provide temporary accommodation (about nine months), reconciliation, advocate for the dignity and well-being of children in street situations, reintegration, family reunification, accompany the families of so-called street children, and provide post-reunification follow-up.

Thanks to the financial support of Misereor, subsidies from the Jesuits and donations from people of good will, CMM tries to respond to the immediate or urgent needs of children and families in street situations in Kinshasa. Thus, about sixty children “taken from the street” are enrolled in 11 primary and secondary schools in Kinshasa, two young people (former street children) are enrolled in two universities in Kinshasa (University of Kinshasa (Faculty of Economics) and Loyola University of Congo (Faculty of Agronomic and Veterinary Sciences) and about forty benefit from vocational training at the Monseigneur Munzehirwa Centre. The CMM trains in carpentry, welding, sewing, plastic arts, agriculture and animal husbandry, driving and motorbike mechanics. Thanks to its two shelters in Matonge, its vocational training centre in Cogelos and its home farm in Kimwenza, the CMM is able to effectively supervise and train ‘so-called street children’, giving them back the pulse, taste and joy of life.



In concrete terms, in the field, enormous difficulties are encountered in taking in, welcoming, listening to, accompanying, housing, schooling and professionalising 'so-called street children'. Indeed, there are various reasons that push children into the street. The main reason is social: the poverty and misery of families. Also, the prophetic message of the revivalist churches accusing children of being "sorcerers" also destabilises many families. As a result, some children are thrown out of their homes and end up on the streets. Once the child's problem has been identified and his or her particular situation analysed, I and my dynamic team of social educators work to mediate between the street child and his or her family. Reconciliation and family reunification is a difficult task for the



CMM team. However, the successful cases of family reunification have taught the CMM team that the families of the children to be reunited also need to be accompanied before and after the family reunification.

Our joy is immense during family reunification. I was strongly struck by the professional integration of a young man who had been excluded from his family since his youth. Having been taken in by the Monseigneur Munzihirwa Centre, the young man benefited from primary and secondary schooling, and then had the opportunity to embark on the first cycle of university studies in agronomy at the Loyola University of



Congo. At the end of his studies in agronomy, he was reconciled with his family, who welcomed him back. The testimony of this young man shows that accompanying children, young people and families in difficulty or in street situations can take time and requires patience, perseverance and resources, both spiritual, material and financial. The call to conversion and 'to see all things new in Christ' is realised when we walk with the excluded, helping them to connect to the values, gifts and talents buried within them. Once connected to these values and talents, young people grow and are fulfilled and valued.

"Giving back the pulse, the joy and the taste for life to children and families in street situations" is only achievable if one remains consistent and attentive to each child. My desire is to make street children and young people aware that the street does not bring children into the world, that life remains sacred, that the family remains the basic unit of any society and that each person has a unique value in the eyes of God. May Bishop Munzihirwa intercede for the centre that bears his name so that we can effectively give back the impetus, the joy and the taste for life to children and families living on the streets in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

(Original: French)



**Stanislas Kimpeye Mundibi, SJ** is the Director of the Centre Monseigneur Munzihirwa, Centre de Réinsertion des Enfants en Situation de Rue (Centre for the Reinsertion of Children in Street Situations) in Kinshasa, is also Mathematics teacher at the Loyola University of the Congo (DRC), Accompanist and director of Spiritual Exercises.





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## Hanging in with the Exiled

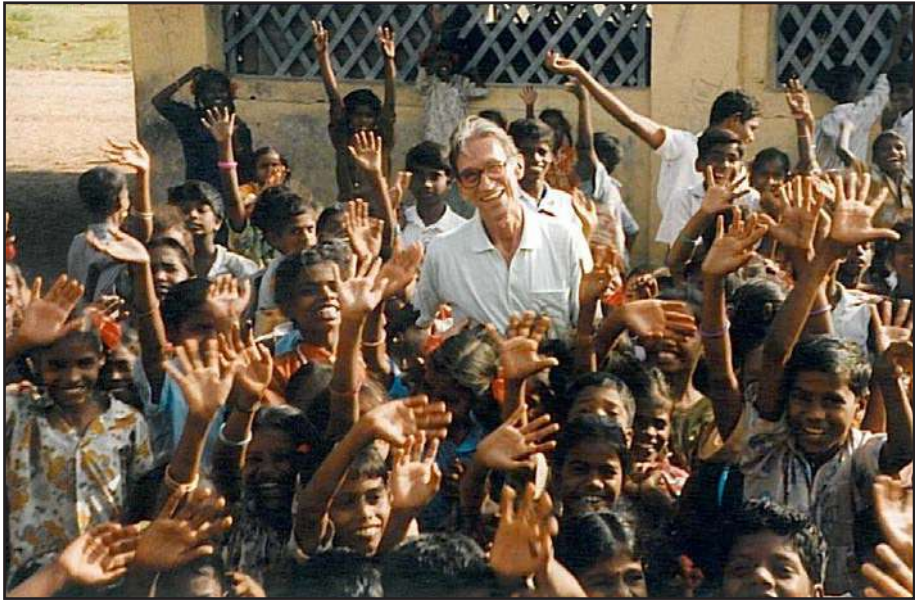
*Andrew Hamilton, SJ*

In the social justice nest, I am a cuckoo that leaves its egg and flies away. My ministry has been to teach theology and, more lately, to write for Jesuit publications and Jesuit Social Services. For the last thirty years, though, I have given much of my spare time and thought to people who have sought protection from persecution. Three summers I spent in Cambodian camps at the Thai border in the early days of the Jesuit Refugee Service affected me deeply. I now see my decision to go there to be guided by the Spirit. My own Spirit was a little jaded at the time, and there I found renewal. I went there thinking that ideas mattered and that those good ideas would solve people's problems. There I recognised that people matter and that sharing their lives with all their problems might help them take possession of their lives.

Refugee camps were quiet by day and hell-holes by night. But I was struck less by the refugees' misery than by their resilience. For example, young medical nurses with white shirts and creased trousers work on red dirt floors. Or the man who, after a simple rice lunch, would brush together the crumbs from the table and take them outside the hut, or the mother of six children who brought together young women to train them as social workers. All spoke of courage and hope. I went to the camps to give my wisdom. I received far more than I gave — both from the refugees and the generous young volunteers who served them.

The educational and social programs in the camp were of great value. They addressed the most significant concern of the Khmer refugees: their children. However, the Jesuit initiatives that struck me most were about personal accompaniment. Fr Pierre Ceyrac gave himself heart and soul to the people, his grief and love for them expressed on his face as he rushed into the camp in his battered ute when shells were falling and other workers were withdrawing. The experience of such love and fidelity after the Pol Pot years of cruelty and betrayal helped restore people's faith in humanity.





They also made me value constancy. Several people, myself included, came and went from their lives, but they were constrained to live for many years within the camps. So when I returned to Australia, I wanted to be constant. I have been privileged to be a chaplain to the Cambodian and Laotian Catholic communities since that time. I have also been able to reflect on refugee issues in my writing. I learned the value of hospitality from the refugee communities, and I was always delighted when newly arrived people made friends with the Jesuits and the wider Australian community.

I am still a part-time chaplain in an immigration detention centre where many asylum seekers are held. I find that work privileged but hard, constantly recognising new levels of incompetence in myself. I struggle for the right word, the right silence, and the right name. People arrive full of vitality and energy after the most significant decision and the most dangerous journey they have ever made. After six months, their eyes glaze over, and they stay awake all night to ward off their fear, their shame at being unable to help their families, and their traumatic memories.

At a deeper level, this work is hard because I am there both as



representative of the church to welcome them and the Australian people who lock them up and want to send them away. I once worked there with a friend who was the Protestant chaplain. Our practise was not to baptise people while in detention. Because they could not make a free decision while detained. But the Spirit sometimes overrides prudential rules. We made an exception for an Iranian man facing repatriation and were sure that he would be tortured or killed for becoming a Christian. My inner conflict was reflected in lines from a poem about baptism.

*Called to draw you into life, from out of water,  
priest and jailer, I despatch you over water.*

In my writing and speaking about refugees, I have tried to show people the human reality of refugee lives and invite their compassion. Unfortunately, I have to admit failure. Although individuals will be moved by the faces and experiences of people seeking protection, the public attitude toward them had become more hostile than when I first wrote.

Australia now faces an election, and the major parties compete to treat



asylum seekers more brutally. One party wants to call in the navy to push back boats to Indonesia; the other transports them to camps and tents in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Among them will be young men, women



and children like those whom I have come to know. We have already seen how this treatment destroys people.

Brutality works electorally because it is popular. On Lampedusa, Pope Francis spoke of the 'globalisation of indifference. Indifference and hostility grow out of fear that sweeps all, including people's lives, before it.

The challenge I feel at this time is personal: how to deal with my outrage, sadness, shame and helplessness at seeing the lives of people I care for clean felled, without turning my face away or blaming it all on our political leaders. It is about the solidarity of the heart that holds close the excluded and the people who exclude them.

That is where prayer is important. The Cambodian camps were, for me, a school of prayer. Returning from the camp in the late afternoon gave space to remember the camp's stories, faces and smells and the feelings they aroused. The Advent readings, particularly Isaiah's evocation of the exiles' return, were echoed in the beauty of rice fields, green and tranquil in the light of the declining sun. From childhood, the Spirit has always spoken to me through the natural world, whether through walking in the bush, strolling by the rice fields after the day's work in the refugee camp, or cycling along a creek valley after visiting the Detention Centre. It is a time of gift, of discernment and of allowing the compass of the heart to be reset. So in the Refugee Camp, it was natural to thank God for the people I met and to recall their faces, and to thank God for the gift of being alive in such a lovely world, to grieve with those whose lives had been so tortured, and to pray that they too might find a verdant end to their exile.

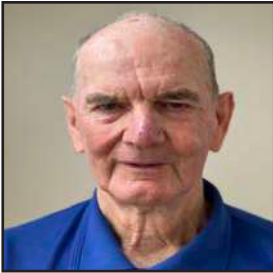
Making space to draw people and their pain into a prayer of thanksgiving for the love God has for us and the loveliness of the world he has made and promised us is the only way to hold together outrage, sadness, compassion and the reality of God's world. Cycling back from the Detention Centre along the river bank as the sun is low in the sky, I sometimes hold the faces I have seen and the stories I have heard before God. Plus, the shame of belonging to a people that offer the desperate only a camp confined by barbed wire instead of compassion. And I can sometimes be thankful for the gift of sharing life with the people and in



the world that God loves with such constancy.'

Reflecting from this Ignatian year on the experience that I described in this article, I can see both the need for conversion that we Jesuits are called to in the Ignatian Year and some small and flawed responses in my own life to the call. I experienced conversion as a gift rather than as an action of my own. My time in the refugee camp turned me to find the face of Christ in suffering people. I was also turned back to seek and find God in the beauty of nature.

(Original: English)



**Andrew Hamilton, SJ** is a writer in residence at Jesuit Communications and at Jesuit Social Services. He continues to be an occasional chaplain at an Immigration Detention Centre and writes on refugee issues.



## The Joy of Service

*Erik John J. Gerilla, SJ*

I entered the Novitiate in Manila in 2003. At that time, I didn't have any inclination on what ministry I would be in other than hoping to become a priest someday and end up in a parish. Little did I know that the apostolate assignments I was given as a Jesuit novice and scholastic would shape my interest and desire to engage in the social apostolate for most of my Jesuit life. The Philippine Jesuits have a vast menu of the social apostolate. In addition, the Catholic Social Teachings and other tools I learned in formation informed my desire to explore this often complex ministry more deeply, an apostolate mixed with joys and pains.

As soon as I was ordained priest, my first assignment was in the field of work I have learned to love. I was sent to Timor Leste, where I had previously spent some good years of regency. For this new mission, I was appointed director of a fledgling group, the newly established Jesuit Social Service – Timor Leste. When I came on board, the group started some small projects and identified key priority areas. Since the group had already gone through planning and discussions on various social issues that beset the communities they serve, it was relatively easy for me to convene the team's strategic planning. The process led our team to continue with what had already been started but focused on four strategic issues and a more nuanced mandate as a social ministry.

Our primary concern as Jesuit Social Service is the welfare of the communities we serve in Timor Leste. It may come too easy to keep that in mind. Still, we have learned that as we organize communities and mobilize all the resources our hands can get hold of, we often miss this critical consideration of respecting where the people are and what they can realistically start with. So I tried to apply what I know about the Asset-Based Community Development approach. Still, it is too tricky and not easy in the context of Timor Leste, where almost everything is rudimentary. But affirming that they have both tangible and intangible



resources is essential. Seeing their glass of water as “half full rather than half empty” is key in winning their trust and making our work more effective rather than aiming too hard at shifting targets.

Our water projects are our starting point in organizing communities for an integrated community development plan. In areas where access to clean water is so poor, we construct sustainable water systems by boring holes for water pumps tapping the underground sources or just tapping on spring water sources. Because water is a vital resource for survival, it is relatively easy to organize and solicit communal action. The impact of these projects across all communities varies from one community to another. The changes these water facilities have brought to people’s lives may

have a common feature across all communities, but each impact quality is interestingly distinct. For example, one community provided more secure bathrooms for women in the communities to get rid of taking baths in public by the riverside. On another community, they improved on addressing children’s health issues on skin diseases with more regular hygiene. Also, several public schools provided access to clean water. And another community expanded agricultural



activities as water became accessible to farmlands. Readily available clean and safe water most impacted women’s and children’s health. Moreover, schoolchildren found more time to attend school instead of having to fetch water in distant places. Seeing these changes, big or small, boosted our team’s morale to carry on the mission and reach out to more communities in need.



The greatest challenge of sustaining these communities' collective action for the common good lies in expanding their vision and drawing out their shared aspirations; despite the tremendous odds that discourage them. It is often challenging to help them dream of what they would like to see in five to ten years and generate ideas for achieving them. Frequently we engage people who are rather short-sighted in their vision, given their constant struggle and prolonged experience of deprivation. Prospects for a brighter future are often hard for them to imagine. I often find myself in a dilemma when faced with a complex web of issues where quick solutions are not addressing core issues. In this, a proper discernment-in-common



is crucial.

What truly helps is providing them with a spiritual base so they may be able to see with the eyes of faith. It helps to help them appreciate how God continually creates, sustains and transforms all of creation; this helps regain their trust in God's seemingly slow but palpable intervention in their life history. I, too, find myself discerning and listening to the movements of the Spirit. I have often doubted if our team can move people's hearts from indifference, selfish motives and poor regard for the common good. But God keeps inspiring us to hope despite the many obstacles that made



people nearly numb because of the protracted inaccessibility of clean water.

In my few years of engagement in the social apostolate, especially in the context of Timor Leste, I have learned that one can only plant seeds and nurse the seedlings in one's lifetime; future generations will reap the harvest in due course. Therefore, we are called to be more patient with this somewhat slow-moving ministry. Patience can bring out the worst or the best in us. Great trust in the slow pace of transformation of communities may offer us a broader and deeper appreciation of our efforts. As we celebrate the gift of Ignatius' conversion on this Ignatian Year, I can't help but recall years of waiting and quietly journeying with suffering people; the time when we had no hint that we were just about to attain our targeted impact indicators. There is no quick fix to complex social issues. Our best effort to encompass all possible impacts of giving the community access to clean water will always fall short of the immense possibilities for individual lives.

There's much joy in serving those who suffer. The smile on their faces and their enthusiasm is so moving that it makes us more passionate about our work. We commit mistakes but bounce back because new learning opens doors and makes us even more excited to bring hope. It comes with the confidence that we have done something, no matter how seemingly insignificant. What we learn and continue to hold on to is that the future holds promise when we serve today with joyful hearts. Of course, there are struggles and daunting challenges to face, but the joy of helping these people weighs a lot more, even when we have doubts.

(Original: English)



**Erik John J. Gerilla, SJ** entered the Society of Jesus in 2003. When he was ordained in 2014 he was sent to Timor Leste and was entrusted the mission of Jesuit Social Service - Timor Leste as Executive Director. He also became the Treasurer of the Region of Timor-Leste and presently serving as the parish priest in a remote village of Railaco.



## The Power to Make Good Choices

*Gabriel Lamug-Nañawa, SJ*

The Ecology Program of Jesuit Service Cambodia began in January 2013, and our very first project was to build a nursery to raise native hardwood trees. It was our direct response to widespread deforestation and the decline of keystone tree species in Cambodia. We sought out partners and together planted and cared for native trees in public schools, Buddhist pagodas, Catholic Church grounds, and within protected areas. Working with local communities to enhance their forests had several benefits, including doing our small share in addressing the climate crisis, as healthy forest ecosystems also draw down carbon and keep them sequestered. However, we began to realize that as we were working to capture carbon, on the one hand, we were, on the other hand, also contributing to the deposit of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. We felt that how we accessed energy, such as electricity in our office, contradicted our efforts in forest conservation and carbon capture. We felt compelled to make a change.

Thus, in March 2015, we installed in our office in Phnom Penh a solar power system to provide for the electrical requirements of the whole office. With only three computers, one printer, three fans, a couple of lights for working at night, and the periodic charging of phones and other devices, it wasn't a huge office. Nevertheless, we decided to disconnect the electrical line of our office from the main building and to try, from then on, to be wholly dependent on the sun's radiation.

After two years of relying on the sun for our electricity needs, in March 2017, we reported that it had been a very positive experience for us. Here are some lessons that we learned along the way. First, we grew more conscious of the energy situation of the country and the primary sources of electricity we use. We learned that the capital city of Phnom Penh consumes around 90% of the total electricity in Cambodia, leaving 10% to be shared by the rest of the country. This distribution is undoubtedly skewed, given that approximately 80% of the total population of 16 million live in rural areas.



Currently, Cambodia's primary energy sources are derived from fossil fuels. Until 2011, 90% of the electricity was produced by diesel generators, an inefficient process which deposits the greenhouse gases of carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide into the atmosphere. As the economic development of recent years meant greater energy demands, hydropower and coal became part of the energy source mix. Thus, in 2015, diesel generators provided only 5% of Cambodia's total electricity consumption, the primary sources now being hydroelectric dams (43%) and coal (51%). However, the increased use of coal meant even greater CO<sub>2</sub> emissions than diesel generators.

Furthermore, since Cambodia also depends highly on imported fuels, the resulting electricity price, at around 0.21 US\$/kWh in Phnom Penh, is one of the highest in the region and the world. By comparison, the cost of electricity is 0.10 US\$/kWh in the US, 0.15 US\$/kWh in the UK, and 0.19 US\$/kWh in Germany. Knowing where our energy comes from and how it is produced makes us all the more informed and empowered to respond more appropriately to the situation.

The second lesson we learned was discovering which appliances in the office consumed less energy and which ones consumed more. For example, we realized that laptops generally use less energy than desktops. Using a





14 to 15-inch laptop typically requires 60 watts and 20 watts when idle, compared to the average desktop, which needs 200 to 300 watts while in use and 60 watts while idle. Laptops need around 80% less electricity than desktop computers.

Regarding light fixtures, the most efficient and durable choice these days are LED (light-emitting diode) bulbs. For instance, given the same lumens (i.e., the total quantity of light emitted by a source) of 800 lm, an incandescent lamp would need 60 watts and will last for 750 hours, a CFL (compact fluorescent lamp) 14 watts for 10,000 hours, and an LED 12 watts for 50,000+ hours. Thus, LEDs last the longest while consuming the least amount of energy. Also, CFLs are quite dangerous as their tubes contain toxic mercury vapour, which is released when the lamps break.

In addition, we also decided to give up our hot and cold water dispenser, which alone required 550 watts to run. Although this meant no easy access to cold drinks and hot tea at the office, we were quite happy to make this small sacrifice to keep using solar power and reduce the carbon we dump into the atmosphere. Becoming more aware of the different energy demands of the devices and appliances we all use means that we can better control the total amount of energy we use. Unfortunately, we cannot manage what we cannot measure.

The third lesson of relying on solar power and not being connected to the national grid, aside from not contributing more greenhouse gases, was that we felt we were able to make a new step towards having the right relations with creation. Our work of forest restoration and environmental education, or in essence, our work for creation, was being powered by creation itself, sans the destructive waste from carbon emissions. This cycle made us feel more integrated with all other beings, embraced and included in the intricate web of dependencies that all beings share. The energy source for our activities was benign, and it felt satisfying not to be contributing to the climate crisis and more harm to the earth.

We also believed that there was prophetic value in our reliance on the sun and that somehow it shed light on other possibilities. In fact, fairly recently, we were happy to hear that the whole Banteay Prieb, the Jesuit vocational school in Cambodia for people with a disability, also decided



to shift to solar energy.

We understand that solar energy may not be everyone's choice. But there are countless other ways that we as individuals and institutions can do to care for creation. St Ignatius' *magis* beckons us that there is always a better option before us, a more respectful and loving choice that can carry us towards greater harmony and reconciliation with all our neighbours, human and otherwise. This is a power that is ours, given by God. May it not go to waste.

There have been many changes in the Ecology Program and Cambodia



since 2017. Although the office has been moved to another location, it continues to be solar-powered, just as our work in supporting local communities, especially indigenous minorities in forest protection, has not ceased. The principles of *Laudato Si'* continue to provide guidance and inspiration.

During this Ignatian Year, the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific has launched its flagship project, *Caring for Communities and Creation*, to facilitate ecological conversion in addressing issues of poverty and ecology. This project has three approaches: Energy, Youth and Spirituality, and Local Communities. The energy approach aims to decarbonize, that is, to shift away from a carbon-based economy, mainly by reducing fossil



fuel consumption by 50% by 2030, achieved through shifting to cleaner energy sources and reducing energy use. This is important given that the Asia Pacific region contributed about half of the global CO2 emissions from energy use in 2019 and is expected to account for almost two-thirds of global energy demand growth over the next two decades, as the International Energy Agency reported in its 2020 World Energy Outlook.

As the climate crisis unfolds, we are called to greater care for God's creation, including all our sisters and brothers, in this generation and those still to come. Decarbonizing and reducing our energy usage are interventions all our communities and institutions can commit to. It is an urgent call, a cry of the earth and the poor, begging for a generous response from all of us.

(Original: English)

**Gabriel Lamug-Nañawa, SJ** is a Jesuit priest from the Philippine province. Before his current mission as Province Assistant for Ecological Justice, he worked in social apostolate as Coordinator of Reconciliation With Creation - JCAP, Country Coordinator of the Jesuit Service Cambodia (JSC) and Coordinator of the Ecology Program, JSC.





## Being 'Universal' and a Compassionate Face of God to All His Peoples

*Girish Santiago, SJ*

As I begin writing my testimony, I feel a strong sense of 'universality'. Although I joined the Jesuit Province of Gujarat in India many years ago, I am now part of the dependent Region of Myanmar (MYN) within the Philippines Province. For 19 years as a priest, I immersed myself in the socio-pastoral services in Gujarat, India. All these years, I was fully engaged in the pastoral and social ministries, especially in the inclusive educational services for persons with disabilities of all types and categories. 'To enable the disabled' has been my motto. The poor, orphans, widows, pregnant women, disadvantaged and disabled were part of my caring and compassionate mission in the staunch Hindutva land of Gujarat, India. This was my way of the new evangelisation, imitating Jesus, and being the Person of the anawim!

I opted to go to Myanmar as a 'missionary' from Gujarat in 2016. In fact, Myanmar was not an alien land to me. Probably, it was a homecoming. My parents were born here in Pyapon, lower Myanmar. They were baptised, married and had three children. Due to political unrest and a





disturbing situation in then Burma, they left the country in 1964. Some of our relatives remained here, but my family left for an unknown land, Tamil Nadu, India, where my younger brother and I were born. We were displaced. After 49 years, I encountered many of my relatives in Yangon and was delighted to be reunited. What a joy to have such an experience of reunion!

For four years, I served as Associate Director at St. Luke's College, a socio-pastoral formation Center in Myitkyina, Kachin State, upper Myanmar. It is one of our socio-pastoral initiatives that trains young men and women to be frontier lay socio-pastoral ministers and community leaders in their respective northern Myanmar Dioceses. We have a Jesuit college to give catechetical formation to community leaders. Here we also offer training to young students, men and women from various Church denominations and faith-based groups, with life skills to help them become men and women for others as part of the nation-building exercise. In all I do, I



endeavour to be a person for others. Besides classroom activities, the staff and students are motivated and directed to accompany the marginalised persons of our society, especially the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)



who have suffered a lot in various camps since 2011 due to internal war. War continues even now. Dictatorship has snatched the political power of democracy. Protest against such a regime continues right now. So, due to this, peace is at stake. In this context, our interventions are a movement towards reconciliation and peace!

As a pioneer missionary in the upper Myanmar region, I play an important role in witnessing, actualising and spreading the socio-pastoral aspect of the Spiritual Exercises among the youth, excluded, clergy and religious. Honestly, it is worth being part of such a mission to encounter the Joy of the Gospel! With greater discernment, we have made an Apostolic Plan for 2020 – 2030. From now on, time will reveal our initiatives, interventions and involvements in our Myanmar context. With greater zeal, we have planned to continue and extend in accompanying the rural and urban persons like the IDPs (displaced), poor, marginalised and excluded (disadvantaged), and disabled through various concrete participatory programs at this time of Covid-19 and coup crises!

I want to highlight two significant experiences where and how I felt God's presence, support and love in my journey in the social apostolate and when I felt some desolation.

First, after my ordination in 1997, I regularly visited villages for my pastoral ministry for four days a week. During one of these visits in 1998, I encountered a group of disabled persons who, though found it challenging to walk, were crawling to meet me. I was moved from deep within and felt the call of God to do something for them, a call within the call of my pastoral ministry. I felt God asking me to accompany all His people. This realisation completely changed my pastoral approach. The mere presence of the poor challenged me to be poor and to walk with the poor and needy. In all these encounters, I strongly felt the presence of God. I felt the need to accompany everyone in the way Jesus of Nazareth accompanied the anawim of his time! Because of this outlook in my ministry, the Church, Jesuit Province, State and Central government of India very much supported our socio-pastoral involvements. All could see our approach as Care with Compassion for the Nation.



My second experience was in Myitkyina, Myanmar. The painful life situation of the persons in the IDP camps shook me in Myitkyina, Kachin State, upper Myanmar. On a particular Sunday, while I was celebrating the Eucharist for the people, I choked when I greeted them – “The Lord be with you.” I felt, ‘do I believe that the Lord is with them?’ At the end of the Eucharist, I noticed that despite my disbelief, the Lord was indeed with them when I saw how generous they had been with their offerings. I asked myself, “What made them so generous, despite their hardships in the camps?” I felt moved to do something for the poor and IDP children in our neighbourhood. I strongly felt that God was calling me not to remain within the college campus but to accompany the persons in need outside of our campus as well. So, today besides serving within the college, we render services to the poor outside, to the IDPs, widows, orphans and persons with disabilities. The participants were generous with their offerings.

In both places, my desolation has been to experience much criticism from a few stagnated clergy and religious. When people fail to see the dynamic works of God for His people, I do experience desolation and ask fundamental questions like, “Why God is this way? Finally, I am ever grateful to God for one thing. He has made me realise that I am God’s caring and compassionate face for all His peoples at all times and places.

(Original: English)

**Girish Santiago, SJ** is a Jesuit from Gujarat’s Province in India. After 19 years as a Priest immersed in the socio-pastoral services in India, he opted to go to Myanmar as a missionary from Gujarat in 2016. For four years, he served as an Associate Director at St. Luke’s College. He is a pioneer missionary in the upper Myanmar region.





## A Grace-Filled Night of Confluence

*Jojo M. Fung, SJ*

It was Saturday night, a night for Peace Prayer Outreach. We were on a prayerful night walk through the lanes where migrants and trafficked women awaited customers at Geylang, Singapore. The night walk was an initiative of the Franciscan Missionary of Mary, endorsed by the Association of Major Superiors of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, to respond to the burning issues of migration and illegal human trafficking, a modern form of slavery.

The evening began with a para-liturgy when we experienced a confluence of minds and hearts infused with God's grace. A group of 16 of us - young and more experienced professionals, nuns, brothers, and priests were drawn from the Franciscan Missionary of Mary, Good Shepherd, the Order of Franciscan Friars, and the Jesuits - was comfortably seated around a table. We paused to ponder over the introductory prayer and individual sharing.

Mal's sharing particularly resonated well with many of us. She is a young professional from the Ministry of Society and Family (MSF). "Most of my friends would be out clubbing and partying on a Saturday night like tonight," she chuckled, "and they exhorted me to enjoy life," she added. "But my parents are supportive of me. And I have a life too, and I want to enjoy giving and sharing the unconditional love of God with those girls on the streets of Geylang," she concluded. She shared her experiences urging her friends to see the wounded sides of these girls in the sex industry. Her wish is that more young people would come and witness and be 'lured' by God into such a walk, filled as it is with consolation, delight, and, above all, surprises.

Others too, shared their thoughts. "Since joining the Peace Prayer Outreach a year ago, I have stayed with the questions and the inner search, and I find myself consistently growing in an understanding that has enriched my life as a Franciscan." "Ever since my congregation invited us



to translate the proximity to the poor into weekend ministry, I feel urged to return to the margin, to encounter God in these girls coerced into this exploitative industry." "I came because I was invited, and I feel moved and would like to have another experience."

As we began the peace walk, I sensed an affective ambivalence inside me: a certain resonance with such scenes at the margin due to long years of immersion yet a total dissonance with scenes of pimps and the young scantily clad women commercialising themselves. We walked in small contingents of 3 women with a man. At times, we paused to have a conversation with a few ladies. Handshakes and hugs were exchanged, with offers of candies, sandwiches and a drink packet. A calling card would be slipped into their hands in case they wished to call Peace-walk members for assistance.



The sudden swoop of the anti-vice squads stirred an air of panic in the alleys at the latter part of our walk. The ladies parading the streets abruptly hurried away into the houses, and the pimps quickly locked the front gates. The ladies were treated like 'commoditised and financialised' goods in a stall, only to be displayed for a show and hidden from sight during the raid. It is demeaning and dehumanising, an agonising sight that fills my heart with pain.



Arising from the goodness of his heart, an elderly pimp of Chinese origin from Singapore shared his thoughts: "This is beyond the call of doing good. We have to do whatever we can to alleviate their suffering. Poverty in their countries has driven them to this. They earned very little that even a bottle of water had to be shared among 4-6. Their lives are utterly miserable."

On the other hand, the night was dotted with two striking moments of God's "breaking forth", which has become my "cannonball experience" as both incidences changed my perspective of God's incarnate presence as a Cosmic Spirit.

Upon receiving the packet of goodies with deep gratitude, a Singaporean lady of Indian origin rose from her chair, gently held two of us by the hands and uttered a fervent prayer of blessing, "Bless all the Christian sisters and brothers who bring the Holy Spirit to us. Holy Spirit, fill their hearts, bless them as they go around and offer the gifts of love tonight." The 'mission-to-the-ladies' has become a mission-in-reverse. She claimed her dignity and right as a Hindu to shower God's blessings upon us. She told us that she had read the entire Bible except for the book of Revelation. Honestly, God surprised me through this lady who reciprocated in full measure the generosity of the 'outreachers' of PEACE PRAYER. The givers of gifts now become the recipients of blessings from those at the margin of society. The moment became 'theophanic', for God has appeared in this unsolicited encounter at the margin and opened my heart to experience the surging power of the Holy Spirit from the interstitial spaces of society through the blessings of a Hindu lady. Indeed, God is a Cosmic Spirit and is fully alive in everyone outside the confines of Christianity and more so in every authentic prayer inspired by God's Spirit. God is indeed alive and active in everything in the cosmos and no less in the world of glittering neon lights amidst the dark alleys in which women became financialised commodities sold in the marketplace of hedonism.

In another street where the ladies were from China, one of them requested a second packet. When she was given one, she asked, "Can I offer you a cold drink?" We said, "Yes", and she beamed with joy as she passed the bottle to us. Indeed, there was a confluence, a flow of joy



among us. The women unlocked a latent capacity to fully reciprocate with delight in our hearts through this personal encounter. They engaged us in a brief conversation that ended with reassuring embraces for the ladies of PEACE PRAYER. This gesture affirmed their inherent worth as women who endured both social stigma and the violence of the systemic evil of illegal human trafficking. This is yet another “theophanic moment”. On that same night, I realised how God had assured me that He was ‘breaking forth’ through the trafficked women. Amidst the bestial and hedonistic conditions of ‘human commodification’ on the streets of Singapore’s modern yet hideous underside, these women asserted their inalienable human dignity with a deep sense of grace. They revealed their inherent capacity to reciprocate God’s Cosmic Spirit that sustains them and the creation.

This regular social ministry has great potential. Many have come and seen; a few have stayed, and some have left. Geylang has been a privileged space for me, where the ‘outreachers’ periodically experienced God, the one who incarnated himself in a manger and grew to be an adult, only to be rejected later by the society for his radical boundary-shattering message of the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom of God was nothing but human compassion, justice and mercy, a loving way of life rooted in the love of God and neighbour. The streets of Geylang are part of the “cosmic theatre”. I find my God on these streets. Jesus, who once reached out to those at the margins, continues to reach out to the vulnerable humans even today. In this cosmic theatre, I find God hearing their cries for justice, which are integral to the cries of the wounded earth, constituting as much the stardust of the cosmos as the earth-dust of our Oikos.

(Original: English)



**Jojo M. Fung, SJ** is a Jesuit from Malaysia Singapore region. He is an assistant professor of systematic theology at Loyola School of Theology Philippines.



## 'To See All Things New in Christ'

*Ms. Vilaiwan Phokthavi*

The 500th anniversary of the Conversion of St. Ignatius under the theme 'to see all things new in Christ'. The Ignatian Jubilee allows us to look into the cannonball moments of our lives with gratitude. I remember my first visit to the KlongPrem Prison Hospital with Father Olivier in April 2009 (two months before I started full-time Prison Ministry that June). We approached each prisoner patient and gave each a few things such as toiletry articles and cookies. I thought we were going too fast and wondered how we could do better.

Then I saw a very sick man who looked awful, his stomach so ugly, like a giant balloon that might explode any minute. I turned away immediately. I walked away fast, pretended that I hadn't seen him, and tried to avoid his bed in this large ward by going to another bed that did not look so bad.





While at the other bed, I saw Father Olivier make a special stop near that very ill patient. He touched him in a very kind way; then, he called me to join him. Ummm...I hesitated to go there, but I had to. When I reached that bed, Father Olivier took my hand firmly; he wanted me to be there with them. As I started to look attentively at the man, I slowly saw him with the eyes of my heart. I saw tears drop from his eyes. At that moment, I understood how valuable these few minutes were for me: Father Olivier, the sick prisoner and me, we were one in God's love- HE was there too!

Fr. Olivier walked to another bed, but I stayed with this man a little longer. I touched him, and I knew I loved him. In silence, I asked his pardon for my fear. Now he didn't look ugly; instead, I saw a great man. Fr. Olivier was leaving this mission, and I was to continue.

This experience happened at the beginning of my commitment to work for the Prison Ministry. It is an extraordinary calling.... "Be not afraid; I'm with you" .... "COME FOLLOW ME"...The experience confirmed that I will and can do this work with full confidence.

My testimony above was from more than ten years ago, at the Klong Perm Prison Hospital, when I was about to replace Fr. Olivier Morin, S.J for prison ministry. That was a cannonball experience that taught me not to be afraid, "COME FOLLOW ME"; "don't be afraid" !! We can overcome all the difficulties with great joy. This gives me courage, being brave....In





Christ, we trust.

I now work and live at Emmaus Farm in Chiang Mai province, Thailand. Emmaus Farm is a working farm and home for the Emmaus Farm community and the office of the Jesuit Prison Ministry in Chiang Mai Province. It is where ex-prisoners, youth and other visitors can recognise “God with us” through caring for and being nurtured by each other and the earth, our common home.

To welcome ex-prisoners to live with us in our home needs courage!! And we can make it. I accepted to be the guarantor for a prisoner on parole, and also, we welcome ex-prisoners to stay in our place, and we can share our lives. After we cross the fear barrier, the opportunity is that it turns out to be a real gift to us all. We have a great time with amazing friends.

The Holy Spirit provides the FIRE; the fire in me gives the power inside and generates more simple ideas with the energy to act (not only in the dreams). Plus, the Way Jesus teaches us how to love, care for others, listen to the CALL, and respect all creation. This becomes very exciting, and I feel proud and happy to be part of God’s mission, Our Creator.

I want to listen to God’s invitations in whatever project/program as time goes by in my life. The guidance that comes in different ways can be fascinating and fun too. My experience of how Fr. Olivier called and caught my hand firmly to make sure I looked at the sick prisoner was one of the ways the Holy Spirit used! Yes! That gave me the notion of how the Spirit communicates little by little. When I share time in silence to listen, I can gain so much joyful life with our Lord, who grants unconditional love.

Then what follows is whatever comes, being prudent to identify and accept the mission with happiness. “To see all things new in Christ”..... this phrase is powerful when we look and can see !! St.Ignatius shared with us his great experience when we see things in the eyes of Christ!

When I recall my earlier testimony, my own eyes couldn’t see the prisoner’s beauty, worse ...what I saw was disgusting. Only when Fr. Olivier, who guided me a little, even with my hesitation, helped to open my eyes to see things new in Christ. I saw the prisoner as a lovely person and another of my brothers! This experience made me alert and sensitive to



noticing everything with an open heart so I will not miss the opportunity to feel and touch the wonder of God.

(Original: English)



**Miss Vilaiwan Phokthavi** is a lay collaborator of Jesuits in Thailand and is currently working at Emmaus Farm in Chiang Mai Province. She served 13 years with Jesuit Foundation-Prison Ministry Thailand and 20 years with the Jesuit Refugee Services Asia Pacific.





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Canada and the United States







## Walking with the Crucified

*Brian Christopher, SJ*

Deon used to come to mass almost daily with his wild eyes beaming and flashing a big, toothy grin. He especially loves coming into the church in the middle of my homily and calling out at the top of his voice, “Hi, FATHER!” Unfortunately, he was suffering from some form of mental illness, and there were numerous stories about its cause. Some said he had a breakdown after his mother died earlier that year. Others said that a teenager’s machete chop to the head left permanent damage. Regardless of how Deon was, we all squirmed uncomfortably when he was around, thinking him a “loose cannon” and never being quite sure what he would do when he walked in.

In the ten years I have lived at St. Martin de Porres Parish in Belize City, I have seen our parishioners and priests create a welcoming space (sometimes begrudgingly, as in the case of Deon) for many of our most broken sisters and brothers. They wander the streets without family and





access to healthcare. Deon was a constant reminder to us of the great paradox at the heart of Belize: in a country filled with so much beauty, there is, at the same time, profound brokenness and a haunting sense of our powerlessness to fix it.

Perhaps that is why Deon drove me crazy: he reminded me too much of my brokenness and powerlessness. Most days, I wanted to throw him out, but I knew at my core that either the church doors must open to everybody or they should remain closed. Yet none of us knew how to care for him nor how we could control him. Sadly, I know I could say the same thing about my brokenness. Again, I want to throw it out most days, but the invitation to compassion, not exclusion, keeps coming back.

Then at one morning mass during Lent, the Lord spoke unmistakably. Deon came in his usual fashion and walked straight up to the altar decorated for the season with a purple cloak and a crown of thorns. Sitting on the floor in front of the altar, Deon placed the crown of thorns on his head and beamed with mischievous delight for all to see! I continued with mass as though nothing was unusual, but the message was plain as day: here was Jesus, broken and powerless, distracting and mischievous, in the guise of Deon.

Matthew 25:34-46 is one of the most striking passages in the Gospels. Jesus identifies himself with the sick, the imprisoned, the broken, and the poor. When you did it for one of the least of my brothers or sisters, you did it for me. But Jesus exhausts me! Sometimes he can be so distracting with his demands for attention or assistance! Sometimes he is loud, and sometimes he stinks of cheap rum! Sometimes I am so busy being a priest that I do not have the time or energy to respond! Deon reminds us of the paradox at the heart of our faith: amid brokenness and powerlessness, both ours and the world, the Crucified One calls us out.

When I met Deon, I ran a small non-governmental organization called the Centre for Community Resource Development. We provided job training and placement for young men and women who dropped out of school. Since then, our Jesuit community in Belize has begun ministries with incarcerated men and migrants in Belize City. We started a project to help primary school students to heal from trauma, which is rampant, and



we have begun feeding programs to help support families who could not make ends meet during the pandemic. Yet, no matter what programs or projects we engage in to help our marginalized sisters and brothers, the call I receive remains the same: to encounter the face of the crucified Christ in their reality and to allow that same Christ to disturb me and disrupt all my Big Plans!

For me, this sacramental encounter captures the conversion the Society of Jesus has called us to during the current Ignatian year. More important than our bold ideas and grandiose programs, and fundamental to them, is the invitation to recognize the presence of Christ and to welcome him however he chooses to approach us.

I have not seen Deon since the early months of the pandemic, but I think of him often. I heard his extended family took him back to his family's village because he kept getting in trouble with the police for curfew violations. So much of our work in Belize places us at the foot of the cross, with all its discomfort and powerlessness. So many days, it feels like we take two steps forward and three steps back. My inexperience and inadequacy in my role are continually before me. Despair and fear are frequent temptations in the face of violence and suffering. Yet there are moments when I can see Deon with the crown of thorns on his head, and I am reminded, as I so often need to be, that this is Jesus' kingdom, Jesus' work, and Jesus' people. And then my heart fills with gratitude for all the ways that Jesus, with his





mischievous grin, always seems to find ways to call me beyond myself into the light of day to see all things new.

(Original: English)

**Brian Christopher, SJ** is the Superior of the Jesuit Community in Belize. Originally from St. Louis, Missouri (USA), he has served in Belize from 2009-2014 and from 2017-present. Though a small community, the Jesuits of Belize support two parishes, a high school and a college, a prison outreach, an outreach to migrants, and a spiritual formation program.





## Life Changing Ministry

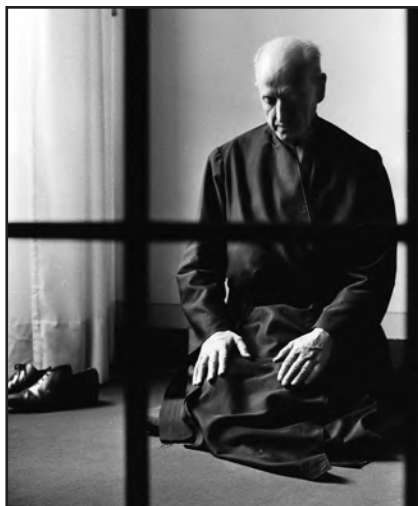
*John Baumann, SJ*

My life as a Jesuit followed the usual pattern of most Jesuits in California who entered in the mid-1950s. For the first ten years, my formation fostered in me a perspective of “seeing God in all things”. It was focused on the immediate, personal interactions within a largely homogeneous Catholic environment - living in a Jesuit community and teaching/coaching in a Jesuit High School.

If life in the Jesuits changed little for me during those ten years, the same was not true for the rest of the world. This was the age of reform and revolution in the country and the Church. The civil rights movement, anti-war protests, and free speech dominated the headlines. Vatican II, which closed in 1965, quickly influenced our understanding of how the Church should interact with contemporary society. The following year the Society of Jesus concluded its 31st General Congregation and promulgated its declarations on social action in collaboration with the laity. This document unleashed the imaginations of many Jesuits, including me.

In 1967 Jesuit Father General Pedro Arrupe wrote a letter entitled “Race Relations in the U.S.” and encouraged Jesuits to respond to the crisis in that area, saying, “Jesuits cannot, must not stand aloof.” Encouraged by the Province’s commitment to social ministry and challenged by Vatican II and our General Congregation, I took the opportunity to explore a social ministries apostolate.

Before my second year of Theology studies in the summer of 1967, I headed off to Chicago to attend the Urban Training Center. UTC was





created in the 1960s with the mission of training clergy and laity to connect their churches to the critical needs of inner cities. We were introduced to community organizing and received practical, hands-on training through field placement. That summer in Chicago became the life-changing first step toward the adventure that has been the rest of my life.

When I returned to Theology for my 2nd year, my studies came alive. Theology was no longer an abstraction; it became concrete and personal. My faith had been transformed, and theology gave me a way to think about my summer experience - putting gospel values into action. I deepened my appreciation of the Ignatian principle that God is present in our world and active in our lives. If we genuinely believe that God is among us, how can we allow divisions based on race, ethnicity or religion to create animosity, injustice, or violence? I began to understand my vocation as a Jesuit to be a life of service to others by working for justice and the common good, a concept that stems from the dignity, unity, and equality of all people. The Spirit was at work within me to seek a ministry that empowers everyday people to have a better quality of life.

After ordination in 1969, I returned to Chicago for more training in community organizing. In late 1972 I returned to the province. With the province's support, I co-founded Faith in Action (formerly People Improving Communities through Organizing - PICO), an international network of faith-based community organizations.

Faith in Action's (FIA) model is transformative. At its center is a belief in the potential for transformation – of people, institutions, and our larger culture.

FIA's organizing model is faith-based. There are many paths to a more just world, and value-based and value-driven organizing is one of them. Other paths include direct service, in which people respond to the immediate needs of others. Another path is advocacy, where people act and speak on behalf of others suffering from great injustices and social ills. FIA's path to building a more just world teaches people of faith how to develop their own power to address the root causes of the problems they face.

FIA presently works in 26 states with more than 3,000 local religious



congregations representing 34 denominations and traditions. Our organizing plan in the United States is the nation's largest grassroots organizing network addressing the most critical issues of our time, including economic equity, gun violence, health care, immigrant justice, mass incarceration and voting rights. Internationally, FIA-affiliated organizations are in Sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and Haiti. These organizations engage in life and death struggles as they fight to reclaim democracy and provide for basic human needs, including food and water, safety, health care, and employment.

Guadalupe Santos, an organizer in our Faith in Action affiliate organization in El Salvador, Communities of Faith Organizing for Action



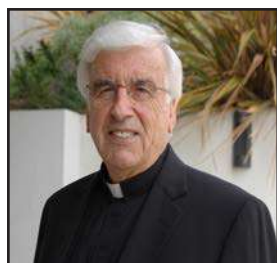
(COFOA), said: “At my previous organization, the staff decided on the project and who the beneficiaries would be, unlike COFOA, where the projects, issues, and solutions arise from the community.” Salvadoran citizens have been fighting for their land for over two decades but were unable to get government support to hold private developers accountable. Land rights didn’t reach the top of the public agenda in El Salvador until two dozen grassroots leaders began working with COFOA in 2018. They



began organizing their local communities, and their success in gaining title to their land in four developments garnered attention from people who had also been defrauded across El Salvador. In summer 2020, during the height of the pandemic, they came together as members of COFOA to launch a national campaign known as RENACER, a Spanish acronym meaning “National Network in Action with Hope and Resistance.” Their goal was to win land titles for 350,000 families by passing and implementing a permanent Law of Notifications and Subdivisions for Housing and obtain public investment for water systems, electricity, paved streets, green spaces, schools, and health clinics in these subdivisions. By 2022, teams of grassroots leaders in 58 developments, home to more than 7,500 families, were actively participating in RENACER. They had gained national media attention and begun negotiating with national officials to obtain land titles worth more than one billion dollars.

This year the Society of Jesus has been celebrating the 500th anniversary of the conversion of St. Ignatius. The Ignatian Jubilee also gives me an opportunity to celebrate the cannonball moment of my life – a life-changing ministry in the social apostolate. Also, this summer, 2022, Faith in Action and I celebrate FIA’s 50th birthday. FIA has trained generations of leaders and organizers to “unlock the power of people” and organize for better communities. In John’s Gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Spirit allows us to be born again. Starting FIA was also a kind of birthday or “born again” experience for me. FIA has opened my eyes to a faith that recognizes how the Spirit is at work when people organize to address society’s most complex challenges.

(Original: English)



**John Baumann, SJ** is a Jesuit from USA West Province. He is the Founder of Faith in Action and Director of Special Projects which includes Director of Faith in Action International.



## **“The Gift of Listening to the Poor and Excluded”**

*Mary Baudouin*

In one of his letters invoking the Ignatian Year, Fr. General Sosa said that this year would be *“a privileged occasion to hear the cry of the poor, the excluded, and those whose dignity has not been respected [...] It is a listening which moves our hearts and compels us to draw closer to the poor, to walk with them in seeking justice and reconciliation.”* My own journey in the social apostolate has been one of learning to listen to those cries – and the surprising call of the Holy Spirit to let those voices be the ones that guide my heart and my ministry.

Growing up in a Catholic working-class family in an all-white suburb of New Orleans in the 1960s and 70’s, I would never have imagined that I would spend my entire adult life working in the social apostolate of the Catholic Church. Although I studied at Catholic grammar and high schools, attended Mass regularly, and went on retreats, I do not recall ever being introduced to a connection between my faith and the works of mercy or social justice. When I decided to be a social worker, I’m not sure I knew what that entailed, and I certainly did not make a connection between my faith and my career aspirations.

I attended Loyola University New Orleans to study for a Bachelor of Social Work degree. During my freshman year at Loyola, I was required to take theology classes, including several that focused on Catholic Social Teaching taught by young Jesuits who are today my colleagues in ministry. Suddenly, I found my faith calling me not just to “practice” the Catholicism of my youth but to practice mercy and justice as a way of living out my faith. This was an evident gift from the Holy Spirit, a time of conversion that has indelibly formed me. My newfound understanding of faith led me to uncomfortable new places as a student social worker in the emergency room of a hospital for indigent people, in prison, and in a shelter for homeless people. In my own inadequate way, I accompanied people who suffered from illness, homelessness and unfair sentencing to



prison but who were also victims of unjust policies and practices that kept them poor and sick and imprisoned. I found myself bonding my heart to theirs. I also realized that while I could tend to their needs as a direct practice social worker, perhaps I was being called to work at the systemic level to address injustice.

I continued my social work studies at Washington University in St. Louis, specializing in community development and community organizing. I knew then that I wanted to do organizing in the Church, but I didn't even know if a career like that was possible. But soon, I was hired by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans to organize their Parish Social Ministry Program. Five other organizers and I worked with parishes for seven years to develop social ministry and social justice projects. We were all young and naive, which was both a blessing and an obstacle – a blessing because we were willing to try anything to onboard pastors and parishes to the social apostolate, and an obstacle because we were not necessarily strategic in our efforts. But it was an exciting time to work in the social justice arena in the Church in the United States. The US Bishops had promulgated prophetic pastoral letters on peace and economic justice, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development was funding grassroots efforts of low-income community organizations, and priests, women religious, and lay people allied themselves with the people in Central America for the victims of torture and murders by the US-backed military.





After the US bishops released their pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, they established an office to assist dioceses, parishes, and lay organizations to implement the letter. I became the director of that office. Our office developed resources to help make the pastoral “practical”, some of which were well-received and others which were rejected by the bishops when they realized that it meant that the Church also had to take a hard look at their own practice of economic justice, such as whether Church institutions should allow unions and pay just wages.

After that office was closed, I returned to the Catholic Charities New Orleans, where I was first the Mission and Legislative Coordinator and then the director of the grassroots organization of low-income elderly people - Seniors with Power United for Rights (SPUR). My time at SPUR was both humbling and formative, another moment of conversion. I began that job thinking I would teach SPUR members about organizing for their rights to affordable transportation, energy, housing and food. Instead, they taught me how to speak truth to power with love, which they did to CEOs, elected officials, and government policymakers. And they taught me that accompanying the poor often involves deep listening and stepping aside to let them be the leaders in their own liberation.

In 2003, I was invited by then provincial Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ, to join the Jesuits of the New Orleans Province staff as the Provincial Assistant for Social Ministries. The province had run out of Jesuits willing to take on this job. Working with the Jesuits has been a homecoming for me, bringing me back to the roots of the faith that does justice that started as a tiny seed at Loyola University.

Throughout my long journey in the social apostolate, I have experienced God in many surprising ways. When I started my journey, I thought I would have a career in social work; instead, I have found a vocation. While my vocation has not been a call to religious life (the vow of obedience would be difficult for me), it has been a persistent call to a ministry deeply rooted in my faith. On this vocational journey, I have known God through the love and faith of many people, especially those who, despite so many obstacles on the road to a more just world, remain hopeful and joyful and never give up. My family has been blessed to belong to a small Christian community that has met regularly for over 30 years. My three children



grew up with our community members as their s/heroes. Our community includes civil rights attorneys, prison chaplains, teachers, peace activists, social workers, community organizers, and environmental advocates. This is one of my greatest blessings. As my children prayed and reflected with our community, albeit sometimes begrudgingly, they have chosen career paths committed to working directly with poor and marginalized people.

But I have experienced God most profoundly in my ministry through accompanying poor and marginalized people, hearing their stories of sadness and courage, and accompanying them in whatever meagre ways I can. They are how I know Jesus, which became apparent when I was making the 19th Annotation Retreat. My spiritual director had asked me to imagine Jesus walking with a “crown of glory” during my prayer. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t conjure up that image of Jesus. Instead, I kept getting visions of a homeless person on a street corner who I passed every day with a beautiful golden crown, an inmate I’d met at a state prison crowned with flowers, and a little migrant child with a tiny crown. When I told my director that I’d failed at the exercise and who I saw “crowned in glory”, he teared up and said to me with the assurance that it was a gift that this was how I see Jesus. This gift from God is one that I hold most dear.

Over the years, there have been many ways that I have felt desolation, but I have never felt despair. I am frustrated by years of working with other organizations to change laws and policies that oppress poor and marginalized people. I rarely see success – or even worse, seeing things get worse. But I am not discouraged enough to exit this struggle. I am deeply troubled by the increasing polarization between the Catholic Church and my country. But I am not troubled or angry enough to stop trying to build bridges. And I am so sad that while women can exercise leadership in almost every other aspect of society, we continue to be excluded from leadership in the Catholic Church. So many of my incredibly competent and committed sisters in ministry have not just hit a glass ceiling in the Church; they have slammed into a concrete wall. But, unlike many of them, I am not sad enough to leave the Church that I am happy to call my spiritual home. I am greatly heartened by the recent establishment of a Women’s Commission for the Society of Jesus and a Women’s Advisory



Committee in our own UCS province.

I pray that as Fr. General Arturo Sosa urged, together with my colleagues in the Society of Jesus, we can continue beyond this year to *“listening to the poor and excluded” in a profound way that will “move our hearts and compel us to draw closer to the poor, to walk with them in seeking justice and reconciliation.”*

(Original: English)



**Mary Baudouin** is the Provincial Assistant for Justice and Ecology for the Jesuits of the US Central and Southern Province, a position she has held for the past 20 years. She has spent her entire adult life in the social apostolate of the Catholic Church, including with Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.



## Invitation to Remain With: Humanising Relationships in God's Mission

*Matthew Ippel, SJ*

"That khawaja, he's the pilot." A Sudanese refugee uttered these words in Arabic as she passed me, a khawaja or a foreigner, in a refugee camp in northeastern South Sudan. I had recently arrived in Maban to work with the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), and these words caught my attention. The temptation to flee, to pilot in and out of harsh realities ridden with suffering and injustice, is real. Her words remind me of one of the graces I have received among the poor and oppressed in places like South Sudan, Honduras, Peru, Paris (France), and Chicago (USA): the challenge to remain (*permanecer* in Spanish) with the people. I am here to accompany and serve. The grace to remain (*permanecer*) with the world's crucified people, to be accompanying them, leads to friendship. Collaboration humanizes endeavors, laboring for a more just, peaceful world.

My exposure to the social apostolate of the Society of Jesus began in high school. Through immersion trips to Honduras and El Salvador, I encountered some of the poorest and most vulnerable and the incredible witness of women and men who have stood with those on the margins. However, June 28, 2009, was a memorable day. I had recently returned from Honduras with deeper convictions, profoundly affected by the people's





cries for the end of violence and marginalization in their country. I was consoled by their resilient commitment to struggle onward, often against those determined to further their oppression. That day, however, marked the U.S. and Canadian-sponsored coup that ousted the democratically elected president, sending Honduras into over ten years of political, social, and economic instability. A decade's worth of corruption, impunity, and state-sponsored violence. And a decade of collective mobilizing among grassroots organizations nonviolently resisting the destructive forces at play.

My journey in the social apostolate was kindled and rekindled through profound, personal transformation. Exposure to the structural causes of many global issues was intertwined with my work, study, and accompaniment in Central America for significant parts of my undergraduate years at Georgetown University. Before entering the Jesuits, I worked in the Office of Justice and Ecology for the Jesuit Conference in Washington, D.C., focusing primarily on Honduras, which led to forming a relationship with Radio Progreso and the Reflection, Research and Communication Team (ERIC), especially with their director, Fr. Ismael Moreno, SJ, known as Padre Melo, who has become a dear friend and mentor. Over the years, I have accompanied Padre Melo and his team, collaborating in various advocacy efforts. During my philosophy studies in Peru, I worked with Servicios Educativos El Agustino, a Jesuit social center, in a marginalized periphery of Lima, supporting local youth organizations to strengthen their participation in the district. And before starting my theology studies at Centre Sèvres in Paris, France, I worked for three years with JRS in Maban, South Sudan, accompanying Sudanese refugees in the largest refugee camp in the area.

Alongside my theology studies, I am currently serving as an accompanier for asylum seekers in the JRS Welcome program in Paris that offers them temporary accommodation within a network of families and religious communities. While the person changes families every four to six weeks, I remain a fixed point of reference for the individual in the face of many transitions and uncertainties about their migratory status. As an accompanier, I have the unique vantage point of watching how an asylum seeker in JRS Welcome endeavors down a path of discovery. While there



are many practical benefits associated with the program, like learning French and participating in different psychosocial activities, by living with different families, asylum seekers experience a diversity of ways of living together, learning to navigate relationships, and negotiating numerous cultural differences. With increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric and actions in our societies, asylum seekers and those who welcome them in their homes through 'JRS Welcome' build a bridge of dialogue, of socio-cultural negotiation that continually connects us with one another. In this space built on reciprocity and dialogue, I watch in awe as the Spirit moves us, regardless of our immigration status, toward deeper self-awareness and greater mutual trust while weaving more firmly bonds of solidarity and friendship.

Our choice to remain with the excluded is deeply incarnational. Jesus did not pilot out of the poignant realities; he landed the plane and remained grounded. He chose to stay with us, in the thick of the struggle and in the depths of our pursuits for a more just world. Jesus invites us – in our diverse works and settings – to “go and do likewise,” to explicitly stand with the forsaken, oppressed, and outcast. And to commit ourselves to their struggles. People honoring that commitment, struggling to fulfill it, and giving themselves to the victims of the world and their causes, are clear signs of God’s presence and support in our efforts.

Desolation, however, can creep in subtly or enter like rushing floods. Injustices and indifference permeate social and political structures. Hardened hearts can overwhelm the desired outcomes of our actions. The task at hand can seem insurmountable. And God can appear absent. Then I am tempted to do it alone: to bear the burdens of those I am journeying with and attempt to alleviate their suffering on my own. It can lead to a feeling of insufficiency, defeat, and despair.

In the Eastern African Jesuit province assembly after the killing of Fr. Victor-Luke Odhiambo in Cueibet, South Sudan, several Jesuits commented on our mission in South Sudan. One companion proclaimed boldly, honestly, and humbly that we are the Jesuits of South Sudan... on the ‘frontlines,’ referencing the letter addressed by the GC36 delegates to Jesuit and lay companions serving in hostile and challenging milieus. During my first months in Maban, we witnessed violence between ethnic



groups, food shortages, and floods destroying homes and livelihoods. The high levels of violence and insecurity are not only alarming, but they are also desolating. They run contrary to the liberation that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel, crippling human flourishing and ripping apart the bonds of solidarity we share. Yet, the embers of the Spirit, however dim they might seem in those difficult moments, it is precisely this mission on the frontlines that so aptly describes my experience in the socio-ecological apostolate. It aptly reflects our insertion in the Mabans of this world, where misery and hope meet, where life and death come face to face. On the frontlines, we strive to offer words and actions that console, reconcile,



and transform. Furthermore, through the voices of countless individuals and communities excluded and forgotten, we hear more clearly the Spirit at work, denouncing the barbarities occurring in our world and forging a more just and gentler world.

When asked how I maintain a positive, passionate attitude in this mission of faith and justice, I would say that three elements sustain me in my partnership with God and fill me with gratitude.

First, there is a profound grace of *permaneciendo* with the poor and marginalized, of making our home in Jesus, in the people he has entrusted to us and those we have been entrusted to.



Second, structural and personal transformation is a collaborative endeavor strengthened by our individual and collective commitments. As Jesuit and lay collaborators in God's mission, we journey onward with countless religious organizations, civil society, social movements, etc., working toward a society where the virtues of justice and solidarity reign.

Third, the past and the present cloud of witnesses inspire our ongoing efforts. Witnesses who manifest God's tenderness and the preferential option for the forgotten and oppressed by standing and laboring tirelessly with them. Women and men who exercise the Christian commandment, as there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

In this Ignatian Year, we have been invited to see all things new in Christ. Like Ignatius, we have been invited not necessarily to take on new or more endeavors but to understand our history and present in a new way. As I reflect on the socio-ecological apostolate and my small contribution to God's mission, I see the resurrected Jesus through our imperfect and generous efforts and especially through the lives of those with whom we walk. Through commemorating the Ignatian Year, I am grateful to see things in a wildly different way... Christ resurrected and resurrecting amid the injustices and inequalities, the violence and vicious rhetoric. The conversion I initially felt called to as a student in a Jesuit high school on an immersion experience continues to form me and carry me to places, peoples, and experiences I never would have imagined. And God's invitation remains clear. "Remain in me as I remain in you," Jesus says. Permanecer with Jesus is to deepen our accompaniment, service, research, and advocacy to transform our societies and our common home. I pray that you and I continue to respond joyfully, creatively, and magnanimously to Jesus' summon to "go and do likewise."

(Original: English)

**Matthew Ippel, SJ** is a Jesuit scholastic of the USA Midwest (UMI) province. After working with the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Maban, South Sudan, he studies theology at Centre Sèvres in Paris, France, and works with JRS France.





## Growing in Faith, Called to Listen in Humility

*Ted Penton, SJ*



My moment of spiritual awakening occurred in 1997 at Wat Suan Mokkh, a Buddhist monastery in Thailand. I was 22 years old and agnostic but had a considerable interest in world religions. At the suggestion of someone I'd met travelling, I signed up for a 10-day introductory meditation retreat. The retreat was challenging—after being woken up by a gong at 4:30 am and spending numerous sessions in silent meditation with only two small meals of brown rice and steamed vegetables, by the early evening, most of my meditation centred on food. But God broke through my hunger, and on the seventh day, I had a brief, sudden sense

of overwhelming peace, love and joy, far beyond anything I'd experienced before. That moment contained the seed of the rest of my life since then. Born then were, among other things, a desire to follow a spiritual path, a desire to work for justice with those on the margins, and the knowledge that my own spiritual home is in the Roman Catholic Church, in which I had been raised, but which I had left several years earlier.

A couple of months following my retreat, I began graduate studies in philosophy. More importantly, I started regularly attending Mass and working with the campus Pax Christi chapter. Over the next two years, while I enjoyed my classes, I increasingly found more life and energy in my volunteer work, notably in visits to a Franciscan soup kitchen or a Catholic Worker house. Something mysteriously attractive about this closeness to people experiencing material poverty spoke more directly to my heart than my philosophy studies.



I left my graduate studies behind to pursue full-time volunteer work through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. My work placement was with Legal Aid of North Carolina, a special unit offering legal services to migrant farmworkers. Most of our clients were Mexican nationals in the United States on seasonal work visas. The nature of the visa program, which does not allow them to choose to work for a different employer, leaves them open to many abuses. Many of the men I met with assumed that, as foreigners, they simply had no rights in the United States, at least none that could be upheld. Our outreach efforts aimed to let them know that they did have rights here, that they could, e.g. file a complaint if pesticides were being sprayed while they were working in the fields or if they weren't receiving their total wages. Generally, people were very reluctant to act, and understandably so, given the concerns over employer retaliation.



However, in those cases where people had the courage to stand up for their rights, it was a real blessing to witness the awakening of a greater sense of dignity.

The Jesuit Volunteer Corps also introduced me to Ignatian spirituality. Ignatius's way of bringing together his mysticism with a pragmatic approach to engaging with the world resonated deeply with me. Thoughts



of a religious vocation started to surface. I only began to pursue them several years later, after I'd gone to law school and worked for a few years as a lawyer.

I entered the English Canada province in 2009, drawn to the Society in particular by Ignatian spirituality and the Jesuit commitment to living out a faith that does justice. These aspects of my life have been deepened considerably throughout my years as a Jesuit, notably in my formation in spiritual direction and the three years I spent working with the Ignatian Spirituality Project (ISP). ISP offers weekend retreats for men and women experiencing homelessness and in recovery from addiction. The retreats draw on the wisdom of Ignatian Spirituality and the Twelve Steps traditions, which complement each other well. As on a more 'typical' Ignatian retreat, it was always a tremendous joy and blessing to walk with people on ISP retreats as they came to a more profound awareness of the depths of God's love for them, a love that is manifested so uniquely with each individual.

In 2018 I was named Secretary of the Office of Justice and Ecology of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States. It has been a privilege to work with the inspiring people leading Jesuit social ministries and advocacy efforts across the two countries and partners worldwide. While so much of that work is focused on improving current policies and conditions, the area I've worked most closely on myself has been responding to the work of our forebears.

The United States as a country is beginning to look at its history of running boarding schools for Indigenous students. For many decades federal policies forced attendance at schools where children were kept away from their families and prohibited from speaking their language or practising their culture, all to assimilate them into the newly dominant white American culture. Some countries, notably Canada, have been addressing similar histories for several years, but the issue is only now gaining more attention in the US. The Jesuits administered many of these schools in this country, and we have recently begun examining this dark part of our past. However ashamed we may be of some aspects of that history, the only way forward is squarely to face the truth.



Most of the Jesuits and partners who worked in these mission schools seemed to have had good intentions, or at least those deemed laudable by their contemporaries. Certainly, they didn't do it for any material reward, and life on these missions entailed much hardship. But they suffered from the same moral blind spots prevalent in the broader society at the time, blind spots that devalued Indigenous cultures and people. This raises the difficult question of how well-intentioned Jesuits could participate in work that, in retrospect, looks so wrong, work that has had such devastating consequences for so many people, consequences with profound repercussions that continue today as intergenerational trauma, as well as loss of language and culture.

Acknowledging and sharing that past is vital, and we have begun that work. But what can we learn from these failings? What are our moral blind spots today? Are there ways that some of our current works and ministries are causing significant harm that we fail to see, all in the guise of serving our neighbour? We can't know for sure—they wouldn't be blind spots if we could see them—but we can be alert to the possibility. We can be reflective and discerning in our practice. A hallmark of the boarding school era in the US was an overwhelming arrogance in the unexamined assumption that we—as Jesuits, as Catholics, as inheritors of European





culture—knew what was best for the Indigenous people of this land. There was little listening and little humility. Only through listening and humility can we hear God’s voice and can we hope to avoid similarly grave mistakes.

As we move forward, I’m encouraged by the Universal Apostolic Preferences, which guide this Ignatian year. They call us repeatedly to listening and humility—to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth, to walk with the excluded, to journey with youth. We are called to show the way to God through discernment, not to impose a way on others. In living these Preferences, I take as a model the many Jesuits and partners whose work for justice is deeply grounded in relationships with those on the margins of our society. I also take as a model those Buddhist monks in Thailand who briefly walked with me as a youth, showing me their way to religious life, which led me back to my own Catholic faith. And I pray for the grace of ongoing conversion for myself, the Society of Jesus, the Church, and our world.

(Original: English)



**Ted Penton, SJ** following a brief career with the Human Rights Law Section of the Department of Justice in Ottawa, Penton entered the Society of Jesus in Canada in 2009. After completing his first two years of theology studies, he worked for three years for the Ignatian Spirituality Project, a network of volunteers who offer retreats across the United States and Canada for men and women experiencing homelessness and in recovery from addiction.















## Spirituality as a Lever to Take up Today's Challenges

*Claire Brandeleer*

Since 2010 I have been working at the *Centre Avec*, one of the two social analysis centres in the French-speaking Western Europe province (EOF). Our mission is to raise awareness of local and global social issues and empower citizens to act for a more just society. We dedicate a significant part of our work to reflection and analysis. Another aspect is promoting ideas and courses of action for greater responsibility in humanising the world to which every human being is called - work that we do through our quarterly magazine *En Question* or the organisation of conferences, sessions and training courses. I particularly appreciate the *Centre Avec*'s possibility of linking social issues with spirituality.

The situations and people I am particularly touched by are those suffering from various crises we are going through and who live in situations of exclusion. Also, in the West, many people live comfortably but struggle to find meaning in their lives. Individualism is a logic that only reinforces itself. Our relationship with temporality (*rapidación*, as Pope Francis puts it) is no longer adjusted to a good life that makes sense, nor to the ecological situation. Another situation that revolts me is the inequality of economic conditions (on a national level, but also on an international level, between countries) which is only increasing. I have the





impression that this generates a fear of the other: we are afraid of the other who might revolt, but we are also fearful because we have the feeling that the inequalities are not tenable and that we will be forced to live with less. Consumerism is so pervasive that it requires a fundamental change of culture, a change that is of the order of spiritual conversion. Hence, I think spirituality offers a real lever to take up today's challenges: it is to be understood as a space of inner freedom where human beings direct their desire that is deeply linked to a commitment to change the structures of society. In this sense, all citizen action is spiritual.

In these crises, what gives me hope and great joy is the multitude of initiatives from civil society that are inventing a more united, socially just and ecologically sustainable world. Many women and men of good will give a face to the slogan "Another world is possible". Many are discovering that there is joy in living frugally. The discovery of this abundance of



alternatives to the dominant neoliberal system has changed my vision of life, and I try to orient my choices by taking inspiration from them. I recognise God present and at work in this crowd of people who work for the Kingdom of God by espousing their responsibilities without putting these words on their commitment.

Since I have been working at the *Centre Avec*, I have discovered the richness of Ignatian spirituality. I find it support for my work because of the call to human freedom and responsibility on which it is based. Also, the Ignatian network, through the community it creates, is a precious support for me. This feeling of belonging to something more significant than the "small" *Centre Avec* carries me and gives me the courage and hope to continue my commitment to the service of society



and the world, of the Church and the Ignatian family.

Since 2015 and the publication of *Laudato si'*, a large part of my work consists in making this social encyclical and its call to ecological conversion known and proposing places and moments where people from different backgrounds can dialogue with others about the questions that run through *Laudato si'*. It is essential to dialogue about things that matter: the Earth, its inhabitants, the climate, and inequalities. Our fears, our anger, our motivations, our hope. The meaning we give to our lives. I see that *Laudato si'* offers many resources and is a treasure from which everyone can draw to give meaning to their commitment and make integral ecology a way of being in the world. In this sense, *Laudato si'* is a significant contribution to entering, with others, into a process of shared discernment about the future of our common home, the Earth.

This work on *Laudato si'*, and more broadly my commitment to the *Centre Avec*, helps me to stand in the tension between a feeling of powerlessness on the one hand and a feeling of omnipotence on the other: between the two, there is the patient work, to be carried out with others, to bring about the Kingdom of God, which is “already here, but not yet...”. A work that I am called to do where I am anchored, to constantly take up with care, gentleness and respect for others, but also vigilance, determination and generosity. It is a path of conversion in my daily life to see all things new in Christ.

(Original: French)



**Claire Brandeleer** has been working at *Centre Avec* since 2010. She is the author of the short guide “Dialoguer autour de *Laudato si'*. Pour donner du sens à notre engagement”, 2019, published by *Centre Avec*. She is married and has two daughters.



## The Social Sector: Discovery and Permanent Conversion

*Filipe Martins, SJ*

God leads and shapes our lives in ever curious ways. In my case, after discovering the Jesuits and the mature faith that they promote in their University Pastoral Centers, I felt called to spend a year volunteering in Mozambique following my graduation from an engineering degree. I went back to Lisbon and worked in the field of engineering for a few months but I eventually joined the Society, excited by the possibility of helping others “discover” the same God I had discovered. During my formation, in Portugal and abroad, my apostolic assignments were always in pastoral care. And so it came as no surprise when, on my return to the Province after my ordination, I was instructed to continue working in the field of university pastoral care and vocation promotion.

A few years later, I was sent to Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in Morocco, for my tertianship ministries. There I came to know the many real faces and stories of the harsh reality of African immigration to Europe. These stories are in one sense so close to us, while simultaneously being so very distant from the “normal” reality of our Western world. Upon returning to my country, I was once again assigned to university pastoral care, but I was also given the secondary task of running a migrant reception center in





Porto, the São Cyril Community Center. This role gave me an opportunity to maintain contact with this reality to which my eyes had recently been opened. But little by little, as usually happens in the Society, the secondary task became the main one, as the reality of the context required. I was then made responsible for the coordination of the Province's social sector, and I worked in collaboration with several other social institutions (reception centers for refugees, minors and people in abusive family situations, homeless people). Since then I have almost always been in touch with the social reality of the most disadvantaged in society.

These external changes to my mission were also causing changes within me. As someone once told me, many times we approach social work thinking that we know what's best for people facing situations of exclusion, and not the people themselves. Changing one's attitude is a slow process that doesn't happen automatically. This is a prerequisite to truly listening, to being close in a real and transparent way, to walking alongside and not ahead of the excluded. In social work we often encounter our need to feel needed, or for people to thank us or at least acknowledge our efforts. But in Porto I was able to discover that "helping" and "enabling" require generosity and discernment, and that empowering someone means helping them discover beauty and gratitude in life. The objective isn't that they feel grateful towards me, rather towards life itself (and to the God behind it all). This is the gratitude that puts each person on the path to becoming a builder of justice and peace. In the Porto Center we used to celebrate each "independence" as a team, with the person who was setting out again on their walk of life. We were delighted when they came back for a visit with tales of the joys (and also challenges) of their journey, how they were taking care of others, with some even asking to get involved in the Center. "To help others," said one person with a broad smile, "the same way you helped me."

Since those years, Portugal's social sector has undergone a beautiful change. For a long time it has been a sector filled with good and dedicated people, but everyone has been working somewhat in isolation. With this in mind, we (directors and Jesuits in charge of works, parishioners and volunteer groups) have started out on a beautiful path of work and shared formation, partly inspired by what is happening in other provinces. We



began to hold a “Social Assembly” once a year, bringing together almost a hundred people from various works. Modules in Ignatian formation were launched, and “friendship in the mission” bonds were formed between the teams. We also held “social spiritual exercises”, where many discovered, for the first time, the joyful experience of being close to the Lord. The joy and the encouragement that comes with belonging to a large and universal body such as the Society, working with others to build a better world, are some of the great gifts of this journey, which is still underway in the Portuguese social sector.

After spending two years at a school, last summer I came to Brussels where I have been working with the current European social delegate, while



also being involved with the various projects of the Jesuit European Social Centre (JESC). I would be lying if I said that I don't miss the “fieldwork”, the day-to-day contact with the most disadvantaged people and the daily lessons on simplicity and welcoming (and resilience). At the same time, coordinating and working in the “rearguard” is also fundamental to the social mission, and it is work that someone has to take on. I am glad to say that I am still trying to put what I learned into practice: in every context and with all people I particularly try to “truly listen”, in a transparent and open way, and really walk side-by-side – the “synodality in action” of which Pope Francis has spoken so much lately. As the saying goes, “If you



want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.”

We are now in the Ignatian Year, with its challenge to “see all things new in Christ”. I don’t know yet if I will have a conversion specific to this year. What I do know is that in life I continually feel called to this “permanent conversion”, reviewing everything I experience with God, valuing the good things I have received and have done, and learning from my errors in my behavior and actions. I am already so grateful for the enriching growth that the social sector has brought me—a “kickback” of a mission shared with others and close to people in difficult situations. I feel certain that by trying to be open and attentive to God and to others, in particular to the poorest (“friendship with the poor makes us friends of God”, said Ignatius), is a sure guarantee that conversion and growth will continue to take place throughout life.

(Original: Portuguese)



**Filipe Martins, SJ** is a Jesuit from Portugal Province. He joined the Society after graduating in engineering. During his formation and his first mission he worked in the social apostolate and became responsible for the coordination of the social sector of the Province. In Summer 2022, he was appointed Social Delegate of European Jesuit Conference.



## In Love with a Displaced God

*Pau Vidal Sas, SJ*

*“Paradoxically, it is among those who most intimately know the power of death that we find the most stubborn faith in the power of life and, therefore, in the power of the God who is the source of life.”*

- Roberto Goizueta

I hail from Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain. I joined the Society of Jesus in 2000 with a deep desire to serve the poor. This initial impulse has been refined and purified from just serving to something deeper and more reciprocal, which today takes the shape of journeying with those at the margins of history and society and resonates with the Universal Apostolic Preference: “to walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated...”. On the occasion of the 500 years of the conversion of Ignatius of Loyola, I recall what he wrote on 7th August 1547 to the Jesuits in Padova: “so great are the poor in the divine presence that it was primarily for them that Jesus Christ was sent on earth... Friendship with the poor makes us friends of the Eternal King.” Ignatius cultivated deep friendships with the outcast wherever his life of a pilgrim, as he called himself, took him: Montserrat, Manresa, Barcelona, Alcalá, Salamanca, París, Venice, Rome, etc.

I have been blessed and privileged to work with JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service) for eight years in several locations. First in Liberia (2005-2007), later briefly in Nogales (USA-México border), between 2012 and 2014 in Kakuma refugee camp (Kenya) and between 2014 and 2018 in Maban and Juba (South Sudan). In 2019, I returned to my hometown, Barcelona, where I continue ministering to refugees and undocumented migrants in one of our social centres, which is part of the Jesuit Migrant Service (SJM in its Spanish acronym) in Spain.

Sharing with forcibly displaced people in refugee camps, I realised that what drains their energy is the memory of the brutality of what they



had to go through, the loss of their beloved ones and most of all, the uncertainty of when their too long exile will finally end. The longing for their homeland is an open wound in their hearts and souls. I remember while in Kakuma refugee camp trying to offer some solace to a Congolese couple who had to bury their four-year-old daughter in a foreign land. At that time, they could only raise a profound and desperate plea to God: “Why is this happening to us?” I could only offer my presence and silence.



Today in Barcelona, accompanying the migration journey of those forced to live as undocumented, I am upset and outraged with the European Fortress with its profoundly unjust and racist legal, economic and social system that impedes them from flourishing and pushes them to the margins of society. Thus, in a real sense, as a fellow Jesuit once said, journeying with the forcibly displaced persons means touching the failure of humanity in its most radical expression.

However, in Liberia, Nogales, Kakuma, Maban, Juba and now in Barcelona, I have witnessed that the lives of the forcibly displaced are not only cramped by sorrow, wretchedness, violence and suffering but also punctuated by joy, celebration, healing, transformation and beauty. With the refugees and undocumented migrants, I have experienced time and time again that mysterious human capacity to celebrate life amid violence, persecution and even death.



In my current ministry in Barcelona, we support refugees and undocumented migrants looking for families who are willing and dare open their homes, their most intimate space, for some months to host one of them. Some of these homes are Jesuit communities and other religious congregations, while the majority are families with children. The project tries to foster hospitality in welcoming the perceived stranger in our homes and families to deconstruct and counteract mainstream narratives of hostility toward the other. It also becomes an opportunity to build a more open, diverse and multicultural society in very concrete ways, offering not just a place to stay to somebody who needs it but opening up and sharing our everyday joys and sorrows.

Throughout the years since the project started, host and hosted acknowledge that sharing the day-to-day tasks of cooking, evening meal, weekends, and times and spaces with the perceived “other” has become a transformative experience for both. Hospitality makes real the evangelical values which ultimately convert our prejudices and stereotypes: surprisingly, the host becomes the guest, and the guest becomes the host, as the Gospel of Matthew poignantly recounts in his narrative of the final judgment in chapter 25.

As a matter of fact, in most religious traditions welcoming the stranger





and hosting the other is not only seen as an act of charity, a moral imperative or an ethical norm, but rather more radically as a deep spiritual practice, that is, as an act of piety, devotion and worship. For monotheistic traditions, God is the ultimate host, who paradoxically will only reveal himself/herself if we are willing to welcome him/her in the stranger, in the one who comes from afar crossing borders.

Some years ago, while in South Sudan, as I was meditating this beautiful prayer attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, the founder of JRS:

*"Nothing is more practical than finding God,  
Than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with,  
What seizes your imagination will affect everything.  
It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
What you do with your evenings,  
How you spend your weekends,  
What you read, whom you know,  
What breaks your heart,  
And what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
Fall in Love, stay in love,  
And it will decide everything."*

It dawned on me: Indeed, I have found God in the forcibly displaced persons; I am really in Love in a quite absolute and final way.

My imagination is full of faces – joyful and sad – of displaced people. I get out of bed because of the displaced, and in the evenings, I prepare things desiring to be a better companion to them the following day.

Over the weekends, I celebrate mass with them, I read about them, and I know so many of them by their names; it breaks my heart when I witness once more women and children having to run away from home; I wonder in amazement at the joy and hope they share with me.

Yes, I think I am madly in love, and I shall stay in love with God, a displaced God. It has decided everything in my life.

Looking back on all these years, I am deeply grateful to the Society of Jesus, and in particular to JRS and SJM, for allowing me to journey with



the forcibly displaced, for gifting me with some deep friendships and for ushering me to discover God with and in them. For St. Ignatius, it was the cannonball; for me, it seems to be the forcibly displaced, which is pivotal to my conversion journey.

(Original: Spanish)



**Pau Vidal Sas, SJ** is a Jesuit architect and theologian. He has worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Liberia, Kakuma refugee camp (Kenya) and South Sudan. He currently works in Barcelona at Migra Studium Foundation (part of SJM-Jesuit Migrant Service), coordinating a project hosting refugees and migrants ([www.hospitalaris.org/](http://www.hospitalaris.org/)). He also collaborates with the social centre *Cristianisme i Justícia*, where he coordinates the Ignatian School of Spirituality (EIDES).











## Accompanying Distressed Migrant Workers

*Martin Puthussery, SJ*

My first experience with migrant workers was when I was a 23-year-old scholastic. In an emergency, I was travelling by train from Calcutta to Kerala, my home state, in an unreserved coach. The coach was overcrowded with young Bengali men travelling over 2500 kilometres south searching for work. During the 45-hour train journey, some young men, who were also my age, shared with me about their families, their work in their villages, reasons for migration, types of work they were going to do, their aspirations, etc. One of them even offered me a cup of tea.

That first encounter had an impact later in 2011 on my volunteer work among migrant workers in Kerala. I visited migrant workers in the labour camps in the evenings and built rapport with them. Gradually I began to get involved in their issues such as wage theft or non-payment of wages, police cases, imprisonments, accidents, sickness, deaths, physical assaults, harassment, cheating, exploitations, discrimination by the locals, etc. Thus, with over 500 workers, the Jeevika - Migrant Workers Movement was formed.

One of the most risky yet most fulfilling involvements among the



migrants in my life was the case of Dipen Konra, a tribal migrant worker in Kerala from West Bengal. I found Dipen lying in a general hospital,





with plaster from neck to feet with both the legs tied together and guarded by two police officers. Later I learned that he had been travelling to work in a suffocated general compartment at a construction site in Kerala. At the Aluva railway station, Dipen got down to fetch water and could not get back into the over-crowded general bogey to reach Kollam, his destination. Not knowing what to do and unable to speak Malayalam, the poorly dressed Dipen began to walk. In the late evening, he was found by the Police, tired and dirty, and questioned in Malayalam. Since he could not answer and appeared to be a stranger, he was taken to the Police Station. In the early hours, with a mere desire to escape, he ran away and mistakenly entered the adjacent airport compound. Suspecting Dipen to be a Maoist or a terrorist, he was beaten so severely that his legs and hands were broken, and he became unconscious. Since he was in police custody, he was soon transferred to jail. I visited him in prison and took up his case in the courts. I also functioned as a translator for him in the courts.

Meanwhile, I approached the State Human Rights Commission, and with the Commission's intervention, he was transferred to the hospital for



further treatment. Nine months after the assault, Dipen was released from jail, and on an Easter Sunday, he boarded a train to reach back home. Later I visited him in his home in West Bengal.

Involvement in the case of Dipen made me realise that several migrant workers are languishing in jails for crimes not committed by them. After that, I visited several other prisons in Kerala, and with people's support, I helped some get out of prison. In some cases, it was to free the migrants from implication in false police cases.

I also encountered a shocking number of accidental deaths of migrants. With the help of others, including the government and employers, we sent over 100 dead bodies to their home States for the last rights. In about twenty cases, we had to provide proper burial or cremation in the presence of friends near the work sites.

During the Ignatian month in Tertianship, I was deeply affected by the meditation on the Flight of the Holy Family to Egypt. That further compelled me to continue working among the migrants. After Tertianship,



I volunteered to start the Labour Migration Unit at Indian Social Institute (ISI), Bangalore.

In Bangalore, with the Archbishop, I took the initiative to start the Commission for Migrants to look after the pastoral care and other needs of migrants, including African nationals. I prepared a

presentation on "Jesus the Migrant and Our Response", narrating five mysteries of Jesus the Migrant, the Sojourner and the Outcast for Catholic Religious of India (CRI).

My involvement in releasing Dipen from jail was also a cannonball moment in my desire to continue accompanying distressed migrant



workers. This incident inspired me to visit migrants languishing in different jails in Kerala, Chennai and Bangalore and to take up some of their cases. This incident also became the base for choosing and doing my doctoral research on the areas of exclusion and vulnerabilities of distressed migrant workers.

Pope Francis has been a great inspiration to my accompanying distressed migrant workers in India. The annual messages of Pope Francis on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees are a great source and inspiration for my work with migrants. "Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees" is the title of Pope Francis' message for the year 2022. In his message, Pope Francis says, "God's plan is essentially inclusive and gives priority to those living on the existential peripheries. Among them are many migrants and refugees, displaced persons, and victims of trafficking. The Kingdom of God is to be built with them, for without them it would not be the Kingdom that God wants."

In India, migration has been a survival mechanism and a refuge from turmoil for millions of people. Landless farmers, agricultural labourers and marginal farmers who lost their livelihood due to globalised farming practices form the bulk of these distressed migrants. The Covid-19 national lockdown in India displayed not just a migration but an exodus of over 10 million distressed internal migrants. The Coronavirus brought several new forms of discrimination, affecting primarily the lives and livelihoods of migrants, increasing xenophobic prejudices among the local population and the local employers towards the migrants. The pandemic has increased the levels of alienation, loneliness, social exclusion, fear, emotional deprivation, stress, anxiety and depression of the migrants.

The commemoration of the Ignatian Year and the call to conversion harmonise well with my personal encounters with migrants in distress situations and the rich experiences of accompanying distressed migrant workers since 2011. Thus, I am delighted to share what I wrote some years ago with a little more sharpening of my reflections.

Ignatian Year invites us Jesuits and collaborators 'to see all things new in Christ' in order to recommit ourselves to be contemplatives in action, to pay attention to how God is moving in our lives, and to respond to the



needs of the world. Launching the Migrant Assistance and Information Network (MAIN) in JCSA is a concrete manifestation of this Jesuit recommitment. It is a collaborative venture initiated by the Jesuits of India based on the perceived need for a coordinated, collective, and innovative response to reach out to the distressed migrant workers, internal and interstate. A national helpline will be set up to accompany, serve and advocate for distressed migrants. It will bring multifold positive outcomes in improving the quality of life of the distressed migrants. I am happy to be part of this new venture in the Ignatian year for better accompanying distressed migrant workers.

(Original: English)

**Martin Puthuserry, SJ** is the Director of Migrant Assistance and Information Network (MAIN) and Coordinator of GIAN Migration for the Jesuit Conference of South Asia (JCSA).





## Agnipuri – A Village Marching Toward Liberation

*Peter Daniel, SJ*

**Seed of Social Justice:** When I was a novice (1977-79) in Beschi College, Dindigul, our novice master Fr. Donatus Jeyaraj, asked us to translate the documents of GC 32 into Tamil. I got the opportunity to translate Decree 4 (Service of faith and the promotion of Justice) of GC 32. This work made an indelible mark on me to walk the path of Jesus by the inspiration given by our former Superior General, Fr. Pedro Arrupe. This aspect of living with and sharing the life of the poor in their struggle as promoted by the Society of Jesus gripped me very much. This experience gave me the courage to work among the cyclone victims in the Deviseema area of Andhra Pradesh in 1978 while I was a novice. Thus I landed in Andhra in 1980 to commit my life to service forever. But as I proceeded in my formation, I got attracted to our huge institutions and dreamt of working there teaching Mathematics.

**Cannonball Experience:** When I was getting ready to go for my theological studies in 1986, my father, Daniel, died of a heart attack while praying The Way of the Cross in my village church on 7 March 1986, the third Friday of Lent. I rushed home (Tamil Nadu) from Andhra

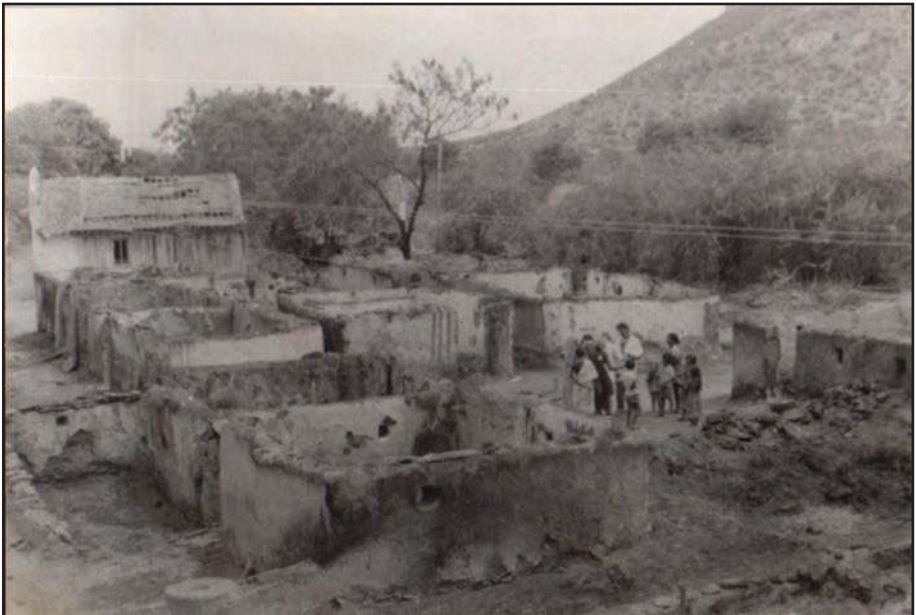




Pradesh for the funeral. After the funeral, I stayed home for a week to complete formalities. During that time, the poor people of my village shared about my father's help to them. I was pleasantly surprised to hear about the charitable acts of my father, a middle-class farmer. These stories challenged me while I was doing my theology in Pune, "When my father could do so much to the poor, why can't I". I had within my reach a great Jesuit, Fr. George Soares Prabhu, who guided me to decide on my future mission to be among the poorest of the poor, leaving behind my mathematical teaching career. The then provincial listened to my heart's desire and appointed me as a parish priest of Darsi, which had seven Dalit communities to work with.

**Location:** Darsi is a small town in the Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh, India. I will share with you the faith journey of the Dalit community of Agnipuri that fought for justice.

**Background:** Erraobanapalli village, one of the substations, consisted of 65 high caste families and 250 Dalit families. The Dalit community had Catholics, Protestants and Muslims. Since independence, this village had only the high caste people as the village president and never a Dalit. The local body election (*Panchayat*) was announced during my stay in Darsi.





Since I had been visiting this village every week to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, I knew the village's situation very well. Hence a desire dawned on me, "Why don't I motivate the Dalit community to stand for the local body election?"

**Seed Sown:** During a Sunday Mass, I had the gospel reading on the parable of the sower. Having read the gospel, I was inspired to sow the seed in the people's hearts to stand for the local body election. Hence I boldly announced in the sermon that the Lord is asking me to sow the seed in your hearts today to plan and elect a president among you during the next local body election.

**Seed Growing:** I did not talk to the people about the election subsequently. After a few months, an old man asked me, "you told us to stand for the election, but you never talked about it afterwards?" Then I felt that the seed of inspiration was growing in the village. I began the conversation with the older man and encouraged him to gather ten youth around him for my next visit. As instructed, he gathered ten youth, and I talked to them about the upcoming election. But they expressed tremendous fear, saying the land-lords would kill them. But I encouraged them, saying that I would be with them whatever would happen and motivated them to gather a few more youths for the next meeting. I could gather the entire village in two months. With constant motivation, I could strengthen the villagers and unite them to stand together to vote for one person among them as president. It was June 1995.

**Election:** Finally, they nominated a candidate to stand as the president and others as ward members. On the day of the election, the people voted boldly for their candidates and created history by electing a Dalit as the village President. But alas, the joy of winning the election did not last long because the landlords burned down their huts within minutes of the announcement of the election results.

**Homeless People and the Dream:** People with their children and what they wore ran into the nearby forest and took shelter there. Hearing the news, I collected food from the hotel, went to the forest in a van, and fed them. When I went to bed, I asked God to give me a sign that He was with me/us at this time of crisis. During my short sleep, I dreamt that I was



driving a bus, and all the villagers were with me on the bus. As I was going, the bus slipped into a pond full of water, but I did not stop the bus and waded through the water and reached the other side of the bund. Having reached the shore, I got up from the driver's seat and checked everyone by pressing their stomach. No one drank water, and all were alive. With that dream, I woke up fully rejuvenated. The following morning we marched towards the Mandal headquarters, Darsi, and started the demonstration sitting in front of the Mandal Revenue office. We sat for seven days till the government agreed to our demands of providing 250 house sites in a new place, of constructing all the houses with power supply, water supply and road facility.



The Sub-Collector of the district came and listened to our demands and agreed to do all that we asked for except the house construction for 250 families, saying that only 77 huts were burned down and not all the 250. The government surveyed the 77 four-walled houses, but not the number of families in those 77 houses. Hence I presented the survey of the 250 families and requested him to build all the 250 houses. But he stood his ground, saying they would make only 77 houses. Having experienced God's assuring presence with us in my dream, I boldly requested the government official to give house sites for 250 families and to build only



77 houses. I assured him that I would make the rest of the houses. Then we signed the MoU with the government.

**March towards the new Land:** I took the people to the new land, which is 5 kilometres from the old Erraobanapalli village, and it was like Moses leading the Israelites from Egypt to the land of Israel. The government officials arrived in the new land and surveyed the land, and handed over to each family 2180 square feet (5cents). There they put up the temporary huts with the support from the Provincial of the Andhra Jesuit Province.

**The Angel from above:** Having agreed to build the remaining houses, I looked for support. Fortunately, Dr. Robert Wychera of Entwicklungshilfeclub from Vienna, Austria, happened to be in Guntur at that time with Fr. Windey. Hence, Fr. A.X.J. Bosco, the then Provincial, asked me to show him the village. Having seen the village, Dr. Robert agreed to build the remaining houses (173). I realised that the Lord had proved His steadfastness that He had shown in my dream through this generous act of Robert.

**Agnipuri:** Agnipuri (A village of Fire) came into existence by the people's hard work in January 1997. When we were building the houses, we motivated the village youth to learn masonry from the masons and thus, we could train around 200 youth as masons by the time we completed the housing programme. The people's victorious march to liberation was well celebrated that day. It was also the day of reconciliation with the landlords who attended the inauguration of the new village, 'Agnipuri' and made peace with the Dalits. The reconciliation with the land-lords doubled the joy of us all.

**Conclusion:** It is so fitting to write the success story of the people during the Silver Jubilee year of establishing Agnipuri village (1997-2022) and during the commemoration of Ignatian year. Peace without justice is not a reality. When they go hand in hand, we achieve true peace. Enabling the poor towards liberation is the true path to Peace.

(Original: English)





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## “Father, You are God, *na*?”

*Trevor Miranda, SJ*

This question was posed to me by a young boy from a slum along the railway tracks in Jogeshwari, suburban Mumbai, years ago. I vividly remember walking towards the slum on the railway tracks, and suddenly, as if from nowhere, this little boy came up in front of me and said, “Father, *aap bhagwaan hai, na*” (Father, you are God *na*?)

That question hit me real hard. And it was the turning point in my life and work. It was, for me, a ‘cannonball moment’. It defined and shaped my life and confirmed my dream and vision.

I had just started my non-formal education work in the late 1990s among out-of-school children, those living on the streets, slums and remote rural areas. REAP was in its infancy stage. We were setting up literacy centres along the Western Railway slums and other areas. It was not an easy task.





We were faced with many problems, such as getting in children who were not interested and their parents wouldn't care less. The second; a place for the class. The slum was packed like a can of sardines! Education was not their priority. They were more interested in their survival; education was a luxury they could ill afford. The third; demolitions. The railways would once in a way, to assert their right, bulldoze the shanties. There was no permanence. People living in insecurity and survival modes are not quickly thinking of education.

It was a gigantic task to convince the parents to send their children at least for a few hours to 'school'. We were met with resentment everywhere. It took several rounds of meetings with parents and local 'leaders' to ingrain the importance of education. The parents were reluctant to send their children far for fear of being run over by trains and the threat of demolitions loomed like a Damocles' sword, bringing to nought all the efforts to enter the children's minds.

It was frustrating. I had expected people to welcome me and my efforts to bring education to their doorstep. I could only see hurdles and difficulties. I was even contemplating closing this non-formal education work. It was too difficult, unrewarding. The thought of opening an 'English medium school' even crossed my mind and I began toying with the idea. In this school, people would flock to me and even be willing to pay fees to admit their children.

These thoughts circulated in my mind that day as I walked along the tracks. It was something like the disciples walking downcast and dejected on the way to Emmaus. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, this little boy sprang up and asked me whether I was God. I was dumbstruck; I almost froze; I had no words. I stood in the middle of the railway tracks, oblivious of the trains passing. I looked at the boy from one of my classes. He was grinning from ear to ear.

Questions began to hit me, was he an angel from God, was he God's messenger? I was thinking of closing down this non-formal education work because I was feeling frustrated, and here was this boy calling me God!! He felt I was doing him good. Who am I to let this boy down? That was the defining moment in my life and work, the 'Cannonball moment';



it was like my own conversion experience, and it confirmed my dream of taking education to the doorstep of the poor whatever the obstacles and frustrations, convinced this is what St. Ignatius would want. I never looked back from that moment. That moment changed the whole course of my work. It gave me renewed passion and energy. I expanded the literacy network to cover the Central and Harbour line slums and far-flung rural areas bringing education to tens of thousands of children through about 450 'roadside' schools. My friends nicknamed it 'Footpath University'



and me, the vice chancellor!!

To support this whole network, REAP established and invested in teacher training. Three teacher training centres were set up to offer six-month teacher training programmes. This was the best investment. The results were manifold. Simple village and slum girls now became 'teachers' overnight and walked through the slum with their heads high; they were now teachers. It gave them dignity and self-respect. It is said, no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. This investment in our barefoot teachers paid dividends.

There was no looking back. REAP began to grow in 'reaps' and bounds.



We added a boarding in Dolkhamb, a remote village for tribal girls, to enable them to complete high school. The underlining reason was, of course, to prevent them from being given away in child marriage. It was our joy to see many girls now going to college, some doing nursing and some teacher training. They, in turn, became role models for other girls in the villages.

Women are the potent force for any social change. 'You educate a woman; you educate a family. Recognising this, we formed 300 women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for the empowerment of women. Savings, adult literacy, and awareness were the focus of these groups. Thousands of women became entrepreneurs.

That one Cannonball moment made a limping man, St. Ignatius, become a seeker. He inspired another limping man like me to go beyond the peripheries in search of the 'lost sheep'! REAP began to be recognised as one of the most pioneering works of the province. Management institutes sent their interns to study the management model of this large-scale non-formal educational movement. The efforts were crowned when REAP was awarded the one-million-dollar Opus Prize from the US, and Fr. Trevor, the founder/director, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate for his immense contribution to the cause of mass literacy. On that day, 5th November 2005, when I received the award, I dedicated it to that boy who caused a reverse swing in my life and work.

(Original: English)



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## I am Not Alone!

*Xavier Jeyaraj, SJ*

“Will anyone volunteer to go to Bombay to help in an action research study on the eviction of pavement and slum dwellers conducted by a Social Work College?” My Rector asked when I was doing my first year of Philosophy in 1985 in Pune. Many people who lived in these slums or pavements were migrants from Tamilnadu, who spoke my mother tongue Tamil and needed some people who could speak their language and help in their research. As a young scholastic, least interested in any research work against eviction during the Puja (Autumn festival) vacation but more interested in seeing Bombay city in its festivity, I volunteered to go along with a few friends. God’s ways are strange, and S/He works in and through our human desires.

During this visit, I never expected to receive a lifetime transformation. On the first day, we were introduced to the research study. The next day, we went to a slum where the Tamil migrants lived to begin the survey. When we arrived, I was shocked to witness the shanty houses bulldozed a few hours before, their utensils and clothes were strewn everywhere, and children crying while trying to gather whatever they could salvage





from the rubbles. I returned a bit disturbed to the Jesuit house where we stayed. I did not sleep well that night as I was tormented by those images of destruction and the cries of children. Someone in the slum told us that the demolition squad typically comes at night, not during the day. So a few of us were urged to see what happens at night. And so three of us decided to spend a night on the pavements of Bombay. Nothing happened that night, and we slept on the pavement in solidarity with those despoised. But I was moved to witness the camaraderie they enjoyed among themselves – a sense of belonging and companionship amidst insecurity in their life. This fascinating contrast in life was amply visible. Many questions arose, but I received no answer. I kept pondering and felt called to respond. One side – cry and wailing, and on the other side, love, joy and hope!

That was the beginning of my inner search and a genuine passion for working for justice. Since then, my love for social ministry has not diminished or wavered till today. Instead, it has become sharper and intense, interwoven with a deep sense of faith in the person of Jesus. Not just the historical person Jesus, murdered by the political and religious system that existed 2000 years ago, but Jesus, who continues to be crucified in the poor and yet keeps rising daily with love, humanity and sacrifice through many persons, irrespective of their faith.

Bombay's "eviction moment" remained a foundational experience for my insertion into the social justice ministry. I cannot claim or imagine that to be a one-time conversion experience like St. Paul. Whenever I witnessed a similar or a much worse human rights violation, human-made calamities, and abuse of human lives in the name of development or progress, I began to feel the call to challenge my personal life, lifestyle, and commitment despite my vulnerabilities.

I often feel desolate, wanting to give up, seeing more failures than successes despite the efforts of many good intending people. Hostile and undemocratic forces seem to thrive while every effort to build a peaceful, caring society fails. I ask myself, 'what is the use of my work?' But the poor give me hope and courage. The smile on the faces of children living on the pavements of Kolkata and the hospitality of the indigenous people in Jharkhand who accommodated me in their houses take away all the pain and desolation that I experienced. I ask myself, "What am I complaining



about if they can live amidst their numerous suffering and difficulties?"

After completing my philosophy studies and regency, I decided to return to the same College in Mumbai to pursue a Master's in Social Work (MSW) to equip myself to continue working with the poor. I must acknowledge that God provided innumerable opportunities to see, hear and witness the sufferings of the poor due to injustices meted out to them through a corrupt socio-political and economic system. The cry of the poor was loud and clear. While in the University, I was privileged - instead, I chose - to work in Narmada valley with Ms Medha Patkar, a well-known social activist in India against the Narmada dam. I will never forget her simple life and commitment to defending the rights of tribals. She has remained a significant challenge to my own religious life and commitment.

My first assignment as a priest was to teach Sociology at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. I accepted it, though unwillingly. While teaching, I continued my passion for working among the underprivileged, especially the slum and pavement dwellers. To provide education to disadvantaged children, I motivated some of the College students, through its social service wing, to bring the children together in one of the classrooms of the College and teach them in the evening. This initiative was named "TITLI", meaning butterflies, and was incorporated as a parallel school within St. Xavier's Collegiate School.





After four years of work at the College, I decided to leave teaching and engage fully in social ministry to start a social centre called 'Udayani Social Action Forum' with an emphasis on empowering the most deprived Santhal tribals and urban poor through education, empowerment and conscientisation. My social justice journey, which began in Kolkata in 1998, has taken many turns over the years, but always with incredible experiences of complexity worldwide. I firmly believe the struggle is not over. Instead, it is getting more challenging every day, requiring collective discernment and deep faith in God and God's plan. The feeling that I am not alone in this effort and there is someone behind gives me hope!

(Original: English)

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## Jesuit Social Centres

