



# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

Consolation in Action

*The Jesuit Refugee Service and  
the Ministry of Accompaniment*

KEVIN O'BRIEN, S.J.

O'NEILL LIBRARY  
BOSTON COLLEGE

BX3701 .S88x  
v.37:no.4(2005:winter)  
02/07/2006  
Current Periodicals

# THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

The Seminar is composed of a number of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

It concerns itself with topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially United States Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces through its publication, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence, the journal, while meant especially for American Jesuits, is not exclusively for them. Others who may find it helpful are cordially welcome to make use of it.

## CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE SEMINAR

James W. Bernauer, S.J., teaches philosophy at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass. (2004).

Richard A. Blake, S.J., is chairman of the Seminar and editor of *STUDIES*; he teaches film studies at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass. (2002).

Kevin Burke, S.J., teaches systematic theology at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Cambridge, Mass. (2003).

T. Frank Kennedy, S.J., teaches music and is director of the Jesuit Institute at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass. (2004).

Gerald L. McKeivitt, S.J., teaches history at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, Cal. (2005).

Dennis L. McNamara, S.J., teaches sociology at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. (2005)

William E. Reiser, S.J., teaches theology at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Mass. (2004).

Philip J. Rosato, S.J., teaches theology at St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia, Pa. (2005)

Thomas L. Schubeck, S.J., teaches social ethics at John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio (2004).

Dennis C. Smolarski, S.J., teaches mathematics and computer science at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, Cal. (2003).

The opinions expressed in *STUDIES* are those of the individual authors thereof. Parentheses designate year of entry as a Seminar member.

Copyright © 2005 and published by the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality

### Publication Office

Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits  
3601 Lindell Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63108  
Tel. 314-977-7257; soon 314-633-4622  
Fax 314-977-7263; soon 314-633-4623  
E-mail [ijs@slu.edu](mailto:ijs@slu.edu)

### Editorial Office

Faber House  
102 College Road  
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467-3841  
Tel. 617-552-0860; Fax 617-552-0925  
E-mail [flemingpb@bc.edu](mailto:flemingpb@bc.edu)

---

## CONSOLATION IN ACTION

### *The Jesuit Refugee Service and the Ministry of Accompaniment*

---

Kevin O'Brien, S.J.

---

STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

37/4 · WINTER 2005

---



## *The first word . . .*

Over the years most of us have developed creative strategies for dealing with unreasonable superiors, like the ones who object to our keeping our horse behind the students' tennis court or question our needing a personal SUV to get to our weekend call in an inner-city parish. In these instances the guilt trip tactic usually works quite well. Do you hate animals? Do you question my preferential option for the poor?

Personally, I find it quite effective to keep the genetic/nuclear option in reserve. Here's how it works. One side of my family claims a connection to Richard Croker, the nineteenth-century head of the Tammany Hall machine in New York. Great Uncle Richie came up through the ranks of the Tunnel Gang in Hell's Kitchen on the West Side of Manhattan and was alleged to have dispatched a rival somewhat forcibly. He was acquitted of the charge of murder, but no one ever challenged his leadership again. The historical events are true, it seems, even though the relationship to my grandmother Ellen Croker remains a bit problematic.

The other side of the family was always thought to be good, hard-working Midwestern stock. (Isn't that the way the cliché is usually expressed?) A distant cousin started to nose around family history on the Internet and discovered that one of our mutual ancestors had become a key figure in a labor dispute in an Illinois factory town. As a good union man, he performed his duty rather vigorously and definitively. Well, what else does one do with strike breakers? My cousin never let me know if he was convicted. Even though the courts might have taken a dim view of his arbitration techniques, in some circles in those days he may have been regarded as a hero.

So in dealing with obtuse superiors, I merely let it be known that homicidal genes lurk in both strands of my double helix and suggest that it wouldn't take much provocation to loose the rogue DNA in the genome. Subtext: Be careful. Very careful.

A silly conclusion, isn't it? Still, there's a point to the silliness. Here I am in the twenty-first century, a mild-mannered, soft-spoken, bookish little guy who would hesitate to step on an ant, but I waded in the same gene pool as men of extraordinary violence—presuming the stories are true. Biologically, I'm made of the same stuff as my more colorful nineteenth-century forebears. Yet unlike them, I've never turned to violence. The fact is, I've never been in a position where I felt I had to. They were immigrants or second-generation working people trying to fight for a foothold on the lower rungs of the ladder of success. They had to face challenges to

survival in a very harsh world, and perhaps did not choose wisely, but they did what they felt they had to do. Because they survived and prospered in their new country, I don't face those choices.

As we think about it, many and probably most American Jesuits today could tell similar stories from their family history. Famine, war, persecution, discrimination, and hopelessness drove our ancestors from their home countries. Even those who were relatively secure came to the New World in search of a better life for their children. Often enough, they were less than welcome. They came into a world of urban ghettos and criminal gangs, of frontier lawlessness and range wars, sweatshops, mines, and mills, of Molly Maguires and the dreaded Pinkertons. Welcomed at first as cheap labor to jump-start the economic engines of the new republic, they were told to keep in their place, and in many instances they with their strange Catholic rituals were considered a threat to the American way of life. If they spoke English at all, they had a funny thick accent (contemptuously called a "brogue") that provoked laughter or contempt or outrage. Can it be any surprise that some, many, reacted to the hostility with deeds of violence? A few generations later, we, the respectable mainstream American clergy, can scarcely imagine what it must have been like for our immigrant ancestors in the wild days of the nineteenth century. Or we've forgotten. Or we deny.

But it is important to remember. If placed in their position, who of us could be sure we would not make the same mistakes? Do we have any right to assume a posture of moral superiority? Desperation leads to desperate actions, and I have never, ever been desperate enough to do what they purportedly did. It's the rare American Jesuit who has ever wondered if he would have a place to sleep at night or would have anything to eat the next day. This degree of material security probably places us in a minority of the world's citizens over the last millennium.

What if it were otherwise? Let's let the imagination play with that notion of desperation. At the outset, I admit a certain bit of inspiration from Philip Roth's recent novel *The Plot against America* but work in several outlandish variations on his theme. His story is based in the past when Charles Lindbergh defeats Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940. Keeping to his isolationist promises to keep us out of the war, Lindbergh seeks an accommodation with the Nazis, and this détente bears serious implications for the Jewish communities in the United States.

My story takes place in the future. Midway through the fourth term of President Malthus P. Hobbes, the Minuteman Party, with solid majorities in both houses, enthusiastically supports the President's America First strategy to suppress the last vestiges of insurgency by authorizing a program of compassionate depopulation of San Francisco; Madison, Wisconsin; New York City, and the entire state of Massachusetts. Congress rushes passage of the legislation on rumors that a renegade legislature, the Hillary,

had met in its secret tunnels under the left wing of the Harvard University library and formulated a declaration in support of human rights.

Several communities of Jesuits in the targeted areas are caught in the round-ups. No one accuses us of doing anything, but we are in the wrong place in the wrong season and thus constitute a potential threat. We are sent to a detention camp outside Fargo, North Dakota, isolated from family and denied the right to counsel. Independent bands of Minutemen confiscate our schools and rectories on the grounds that they could be used to support subversive causes. Controlled as they are by the Minutemen, the courts do nothing. After two years, Amnesty International finally arranges for us to be transported to Hokkaido, the northernmost major island in Japan. (The locale could be Nepal, Uzbekistan, Algeria, Uruguay, Latvia, or Norway, but a novelist should be specific about setting, even if it involves an arbitrary selection. I've got nothing against the good citizens of Hokkaido. Really. Nothing. I love sushi.)

The local people see my light pink face and round blue eyes and immediately regard me as an undesirable alien. The more outspoken will use the term "racially inferior." All my marketable job skills—teaching, writing, editing—spring from my English-language capability, but fearing a corruption of their own culture, the natives pass legislation banning the use of English entirely. Since I don't know a single syllable of Japanese and am excluded by law from schools or training programs to learn it (an unfair burden on the taxpayers, they feel), I can't give voice to my most basic needs, like getting medical help for a persistent fever that saps my strength. Because of their long-standing conflict with the Russians, who are Orthodox Christians, my record as an employee of the Catholic Church, printed on my temporary identification card, adds to the climate of suspicion and hostility.

Without money for housing, we Jesuits live in a squatter's camp outside Sapporo, not exactly under guard, but without internal visas and work permits, we are kept from access to the city and its more substantial housing. There is no plumbing in the camp, and we Jesuits gain a reputation for living in filth like animals, obviously a threat to the health of the local residents. Disease becomes part of the normal condition of our lives. Willing to take any job at any salary, we are exploited for our work yet at the same time accused of taking jobs away from local citizens. Unemployed workers from the town regularly storm the camp and try to burn us out. The people don't want us; the government will not or cannot provide protection. We can't go home. No other country will take us. We're stuck.

This is a despair that leads to desperate action, and perhaps even the most desperate course of action, which is inaction. Faced with starvation, we might find ourselves competing to the death with one another not only for jobs but for the limited resources of food, water, shelter, and medicine. We could try to fight our way out of the camp, blazing a trail of

violence which, though suicidal, might call the world's attention to our plight. By such a quixotic gesture, we would sacrifice ourselves in order to better prospects for others. We could mark time and hope for some intervention from the outside world, even though as the months pass by, this becomes ever less likely. Most horrible of all, we could languish passively, in effect simply waiting only for the liberation of death.

End of fantasy. As far-fetched as this little story seems, let's recall that it contains elements of the desperate lives of many of our great grandparents as they faced the traumas of dislocation. On second thought, perhaps it's not fantastic at all. In fact, the details in the parable are not terribly different from the plight of tens of thousands of people around the world at this very moment. Famines, wars, political, religious and ethnic persecutions, disease and natural disasters uproot entire populations with monotonous regularity. Mass tragedy has become a familiar centerpiece of the nightly news. With our own eyes we see the tent cities, the long lines of displaced people wandering through deserts, mountains, and swamps or clinging to one another forming human islands after a tsunami or earthquake. We know the word "genocide," but settle for the euphemism "ethnic cleansing." It's not that no one cares—in fact, a vast number of people care very deeply—it's rather that the series of natural and man-made disasters seems too vast for anyone to deal with. Some people use the term "compassion fatigue." Political activists might prefer the term "outrage fatigue."

Once we comfortable Americans might have thought of refugee problems as something that happens elsewhere, in less stable societies. A series of horrifying hurricanes striking the Gulf Coast this fall has shown us what happens when vast numbers of our fellow citizens suddenly become homeless, jobless, and, at least for a time, hopeless. After a forced relocation, they try to build new lives with few resources, and as their presence stretches into months, their welcome cools and pockets of resentment and hostility develop. And these are the people who feel blessed simply to be alive despite their desperate needs.

Jesuits have a tradition of serving people in need. "Helping souls" is the current expression. The need is obvious but a realistic and effective response calls for some ingenuity. The Society of Jesus alone clearly lacks the resources to try to take on the problem head-on. Doing nothing in the face of such desperate need, however, is out of the question. In the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Society has struck out into organizational structures a bit different from our more customary way of proceeding. In the pages that follow, Kevin O'Brien tells us how Jesuits around the world, often working with lay people in leadership roles, have formed flexible, temporary partnerships with private agencies, nongovernmental organizations, with other church groups and other Jesuit institutions to provide help in the most effective ways possible. The story of JRS is fascinating not only in itself but



as a potential model for other ministries. As we read about its challenges and strategies, we might be prompted to begin imagining possibilities for other Jesuit ministries in the decades to come.

We might see a bit of paradox here. Our ancestors struggled to create a society of stability where we would not have to live in an atmosphere of violence and fear. They succeeded to an extent they might never have thought possible. We have stability, a lot of it. Now we Jesuits have been challenged to re-imagine our apostolates in a world of rapidly changing needs. The Jesuit Refugee Service might provide a valuable model for us.

*Richard A. Blake, S.J.*  
**Editor**

II. THE ROOTS OF THE JESUIT STORY	2
The Spanish Tradition	7
Works of Mercy	10
III. THE APOSTOLATE	15
Swan Song to the Society	15
The JRS after the Argentine Dismissal	17
A Beckoning against Immigrants	21
IV. THE MISSION OF THE JRS TODAY—SOMETHING OLD	23
Scratching Your Head	23
A Time to Know Yourself	25
A Ministry of Education	26
Collaboration outside the Society	27
V. WALKING WITH REFUGEES	30
A Ministry of Accompaniment	30
Ambiguous Circumstances	34
VI. THE JRS AND THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES	36
Prayer Practice	36
The Board of Martyrs	38
VII. CONCLUSION	42
APPENDIX: HOW YOU CAN BECOME PART OF THE JRS STORY	44
Sources	46
DOCUMENTATION	49
LETTER TO THE EDITOR	51



# CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. THE ROOTS OF THE JRS IN JESUIT HISTORY .....	7
The Ignatian Tradition .....	7
Works of Mercy .....	10
III. THE ARRUPE LEGACY .....	15
Swan Song to the Society .....	15
The JRS after the Arrupe Era .....	17
A Backlash against Immigrants .....	21
IV. THE MISSION OF THE JRS TODAY—SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW .....	23
A Time to Reinvent Itself .....	23
A Ministry of Education .....	26
Collaboration outside the Society .....	27
V. WALKING WITH REFUGEES .....	30
A Ministry of Accompaniment .....	30
Ambiguous Circumstances .....	34
VI. THE JRS AND THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES .....	36
Prayer Practice .....	36
The Blood of Martyrs .....	38
VII. CONCLUSION .....	42
APPENDIX: HOW YOU CAN BECOME PART OF THE JRS STORY .....	44
SOURCES .....	46
DOCUMENTATION .....	49
LETTER TO THE EDITOR .....	52

## Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Mark Raper, S.J., Robert McChesney, S.J., and Ken Gavin, S.J., for their gracious assistance and encouragement in researching this article over many months. Thanks also to Kevin Burke, S.J., John O'Malley, S.J., and Jim Martin, S.J., for their faithful support and wise counsel during my writing and editing. This article is a testament to the people of JRS with whom I worked in Los Angeles and the noncitizens in detention centers and jails who welcomed me into their lives several summers ago. Their stories—which make up the living narrative of the JRS—continue to inspire today.

---

Kevin O'Brien, S.J., a native of Florida and member of the Maryland Province, completed his undergraduate studies at Georgetown and received his law degree at the University of Florida. In preparation for ordination, he is currently pursuing a program leading to the M.Div. and S.T.L. at Weston Jesuit School of Theology. As a scholastic, he taught business law at Le Moyne College and philosophy at St. Joseph's University, in addition to serving with the Jesuit Refugee Service as chaplain in the immigration and detention centers in Los Angeles. He has published articles in *America*, *Medical Science Monitor*, and *Hastings Center Report*.

# CONSOLATION IN ACTION

## *The Jesuit Refugee Service and the Ministry of Accompaniment*

---

*Images of refugees created by recent natural disasters within the United States have sharpened our awareness of the many crises of displacement in other parts of the world. A project inspired by Father General Pedro Arrupe, the Jesuit Refugee Service has grown into a worldwide organization as it has adapted to meet each subsequent need. Its flexibility and collaboration with secular organizations have shown its astonishing adaptability, but its mission is rooted deep in the traditions of the Society and the spirituality of the Exercises.*

---

*You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.*

—Exod. 22:21

## I. Introduction

**A** day after Christmas 2004, from an epicenter far off in the Pacific, towering waves raced across the ocean, crashing into unsuspecting beach resorts and coastal towns. As reports and video images of the destruction made their way around the world, *tsunami* became ingrained in our lexicon of disaster. Among the harder days after the tsunami, Andre Sugijoprano, S.J., Asia Pacific regional director of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), finally reached the JRS office in Banda Aceh, the main city in the province. A JRS

worker offered him a grim account, conjuring up images that would become all too familiar after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States nine months later:

Corpses, corpses and more corpses. That is Banda Aceh now. Walking on foot in the streets, it is all corpses. The river behind the office is full of floating corpses. Yesterday they buried 40. Today more corpses appeared in the river brought by the stream. There is a rotten smell everywhere. Because people drowned, their stomachs are full, and today they started to tear open. The Raya mosque is full of corpses. The market in Banda Aceh is wiped to the ground. The stores are filled with dead bodies. In the jail in Kedah, all inmates died inside. The Brimo Asrama is also destroyed. The hospital is destroyed; only the health station is left. Many doctors are dead. There is no medicine in the health station. Disaster.<sup>1</sup>

The 4.5 million residents on Aceh had become familiar with disaster. For decades they lived through a civil war between the Indonesian government and separatist groups. With the conflict came human-rights abuses, a breakdown of social services, and a massive displacement of peoples from Aceh to North Sumatra and elsewhere. To respond to this humanitarian crisis, the JRS established a presence in Aceh in 2001.<sup>2</sup> After the tsunami, the JRS set up forty-nine refugee camps for 440,000 displaced persons in Aceh.<sup>3</sup> Soon they would focus their attention on the long-term task of rebuilding Aceh, including setting up schools, reestablishing health and sanitation infrastructures, and helping people generate income.<sup>4</sup> Equally important, the JRS committed itself to caring for the spiritual and mental health of the people so traumatized by the disaster and wondering where God was in the tragedy. Yet, even in a catastrophe that would claim more than 250,000 lives across the region and dislocate over 2 million people, the JRS mission did not fundamen-

---

<sup>1</sup> "JRS Indonesia Alert," no. 2, Dec. 30, 2004, accessible at [www.JRS.net/alerts](http://www.JRS.net/alerts)

<sup>2</sup> Jesuit Refugee Service, *Annual Report*, 2003, 42; "JRS Indonesia Alert." no. 1, Dec. 30, 2004, accessible at [www.JRS.net/alerts](http://www.JRS.net/alerts)

<sup>3</sup> Becky Troha, "Sanctuary," *Company*, Spring 2005, 18, 23. According to Troha, JRS team members were the first to arrive at Aceh Island, where only six hundred of the between fifteen hundred and two thousand residents survived.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 f. According to the Indonesian government, about 117,000 students were without schools. Over 70,000 students and 1,700 teachers were reported dead or missing. Eleven hundred schools were destroyed (22).

tally change.<sup>5</sup> As before, it was present to accompany, serve, and advocate for the people of Aceh.<sup>6</sup>

The JRS responded to the victims of the tsunami and similar catastrophes out of heartfelt compassion. The plight of refugees and other displaced persons touches a primal nerve.<sup>7</sup> As with any human enterprise, there are practical choices to make, logistics to orchestrate, and politics to negotiate. But the mission always remains rooted in a love for other human beings that is inextricably tied to God's unrelenting love for us and our love for God. In February 1981, Pedro Arrupe, S.J., speaking at the Center of Ignatian Spirituality in Rome, gave a talk entitled "Rooted and Grounded in Love." In it, he explained how love is the "dynamic of our apostolic character" and the "weighty power of the soul" that defines the Society's charism.<sup>8</sup> This lofty rhetoric is made concrete in specific apostolic commitments. "The plight of the world," Father Arrupe said, "so deeply wounds our sensibilities as Jesuits that it sets the inmost fibres of our apostolic zeal a-tingling."<sup>9</sup>

Just months before this talk, Father Arrupe founded the Jesuit Refugee Service because his heart was moved by the plight of

---

<sup>5</sup> JRS, *Annual Report*, 2004, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the tsunami, the JRS in the United States organized a massive appeal for charitable contributions. By March 2005 funds raised exceeded \$1.3 million; by October 2005, the amount exceeded \$1.75 million. A majority of these donations came from Jesuit provinces, communities, schools, parishes, and individual donors (interviews with Kenneth Gavin, S.J., held on March 24, 2005, in Washington, D.C., and via e-mail on September 24, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> In this essay I rely on the definitions of "refugee" and "displaced person" as adopted by the JRS in its charter of 2000 and by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People in its document *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity* (1992). A refugee is one who crosses a national boundary because of (a) persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or membership in social or political groups, (b) armed conflict, (c) natural disaster, (d) violation of human rights, or (e) life-threatening economic conditions. Displaced persons, on the other hand, are those forcibly uprooted from their homes for the same reasons mentioned above, but who do not cross a national border. Both groups of people live a provisional existence awaiting return to their home, resettlement to another country, or integration into their host country. In this essay I use the word "refugee" to include displaced persons as well.

<sup>8</sup> Pedro Arrupe, "Rooted and Grounded in Love," in *The Spiritual Legacy of Pedro Arrupe, S.J.*, 146.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

refugees both near and far. In the late 1970s, thousands of Vietnamese took to the seas, fleeing war and terror in their homeland. They would later be joined by refugees from Cambodia and Laos. Newspapers and television news chronicled the desperate journey of refugees in crowded boats. At the same time, Father Arrupe saw with his own eyes the dire need of hundreds of Ethiopian refugees in Rome. They were living on the streets and around the main railway station, homeless, hungry and fearful.<sup>10</sup> The General called the Society of Jesus to act, and the JRS was born.

Father Arrupe knew from personal experience what it was like to be a refugee. As a scholastic, he was forced to leave Spain after the Socialists expelled all Jesuits from the country in 1932. The

---

*Even as Ignatius and his companions were discerning their future together and defending their new company from the attacks of their detractors, they were moved to respond wholeheartedly to the suffering in their midst.*

---

ensuing civil war kept him from returning to Spain for many years.<sup>11</sup> Later, when serving as director of novices near Hiroshima, he cared for hundreds of severely wounded people fleeing the fallout of the atomic bomb. His novitiate became a hospital. Upon entering Hiroshima hours after the blast, Arrupe found "an indescribable spectacle . . . a macabre vision which staggered the imagination . . . the tragic sight of those thou-

sands of injured people begging for help." Among the harrowing scenes, he recounted one in particular:

As we approached the river, the spectacle was awful beyond words. Fleeing the flames and availing themselves of low tide, the people lay across both shores, but in the middle of the night the tide began

---

<sup>10</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach recounts this history in a letter to the whole Society in 1990. See *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* 20:317. Hereafter this source will be abbreviated to *ActRSJ*, followed by the volume number (if needed for clarity) and the page number.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin Burke, *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings*, 19. Father Arrupe completed his Jesuit formation in Belgium, Holland, and the United States. Other Jesuits knew first-hand the life of a refugee. Ignatius fled from various inquisitions; Edmund Campion and his companions were exiled from their native land; Joseph Pignatelli and thousands of other Jesuits were dislocated after the Suppression; Karl Rahner was expelled from Innsbruck by the Nazis.



to rise, and the wounded, exhausted now and half buried in mud, could not move. The cries of those drowning are something I shall never forget.<sup>12</sup>

For Pedro Arrupe, the sights and sounds of Hiroshima came alive again in the desperation of Vietnamese and Ethiopian refugees decades later. What in 1945 was a personal response to the plight of those displaced by a terrible bomb became in 1980 a corporate commitment of the Society to displaced persons around the world.

For inspiration for such a bold apostolic commitment, Father Arrupe looked well beyond his own personal experience to the example of Ignatius: "I ask myself what would have been Ignatius' attitude today in the face of the calamities of our times: the boat-people, the starving thousands in the Sahara belt, the refugees and forced migrants of today."<sup>13</sup> He found the answer in the story of how Ignatius and his nine companions spent their second winter in Rome in 1538.

It was a particularly harsh winter. Famine, disease, and cold forced thousands to flee the countryside for the city. Every night people were dying in the streets. Even as Ignatius and his companions were discerning their future together and defending their new company from the attacks of their detractors, they were moved to respond wholeheartedly to the suffering in their midst. During the day, they begged for food and firewood; in the evening, they gathered people from the wet streets and brought them to the house where Ignatius and the others were staying. As many as four hundred people at a time lived under the same roof. The first companions washed and fed their guests. They offered the most weak and infirm their own beds. After dinner, they assembled in the hall where, before a warm fire, the Fathers taught catechism and prepared their guests for confession and the Eucha-

---

*The General and his advisors first asked why they should get involved. To answer this question, they turned to the example of Ignatius and the first companions, the founding documents of the Society, and the decrees of recent general congregations.*

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 45. For other accounts, see Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism*, 257–60; George Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe, S.J.*, 157–72.

<sup>13</sup> "Rooted and Grounded in Love," 169.

rist. In the course of a year, in this house and other places, Ignatius and his companions cared for over three thousand refugees.<sup>14</sup>

Reflecting on the significance of these and other works of mercy performed by the first Jesuits, Father Arrupe made these observations:

Natural calamities and disasters—like outbreaks of famine, epidemics, catastrophes—make demands on our charity for assistance and help that can brook no delay. The practical conduct of Ignatius in this matter is of a decisively instructive value for us. . . . Ignatius teaches us by his deeds the primacy that charity—even initiatives of material assistance—can and must have, in given circumstances, in the totality of the Society's apostolic activity.<sup>15</sup>

Since before the founding of the Society of Jesus, refugees have made a rightful claim on our assistance, whether they are the famine victims of Ignatius's time, the atomic-bomb survivors, boat people, and Ethiopian refugees of Father Arrupe's time, or the tsunami victims of today. Since 1980 the Society has depended on the Jesuit Refugee Service to honor our obligation to the millions of people who wander the earth as refugees.

---

*"The members will also occupy themselves in corporal works of mercy to the extent that the more important spiritual activities permit and their own energies allow."*

---

In this essay, I will share the highlights of the compelling story of the JRS over its first quarter century. In certain respects, the JRS appears as a distinctive ministry of the Society of Jesus. At the same time, it manifests the characteristics

of a typical Jesuit ministry. To appreciate both the continuity and discontinuity that the JRS presents as a ministry, we will compare them to the ministries of consolation to which the first Jesuits devoted themselves.

In recounting the vibrant story of the JRS, we learn that *how* the JRS goes about its work is as significant as *what* it does. The JRS

---

<sup>14</sup>This history was recounted by Arrupe (*ibid.*, 166 f.) and by Father Kolvenbach in *ActRSJ* 20:316. See also William V. Bangert, *A History of the Society of Jesus*, 19 f.; Cándido de Dalmases, *Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Jesuits*, 164.

<sup>15</sup>"Rooted and Grounded in Love," 165 f.

accompanies refugees: walking with them, listening to them, learning from them, empowering them. In this accompaniment, the graces of the Spiritual Exercises come alive in remarkable ways. We see what consolation looks like in action. As a privileged expression of contemporary Jesuit spirituality, the JRS offers a model for ministry that can benefit any Jesuit work.

## II. The Roots of the JRS in Jesuit History

### The Ignatian Tradition

Around Christmas of 1979, Father Arrupe gathered his assistants together for an informal consultation about how the Society could best respond to the refugee crisis. The General was realistic about the global dimensions of the problem. As provincial in Japan, he had learned much about the geopolitical situation in Asia and the pressures that forced people to flee their homes. Moreover, soon after he was appointed superior general in 1965, he traveled to Africa, a continent marked by civil conflicts that dislocated thousands of people.<sup>16</sup> Following the Christmas meeting, he sent telegrams to about twenty provincials around the world. The response was immediate, with offers of personnel, food and medical supplies, financial help, and logistical support in relocating refugees.

---

*Though the "Formula" and the Constitutions prioritized spiritual ministries over corporal works, the documents contain an inherent flexibility necessary for a religious order devoted to ministering to people in a variety of settings.*

---

A more formal two-day consultation followed in September 1980. Meeting with the General were members of the Jesuit Curia, including Michael Campbell-Johnston, S.J., head of the Social Secretariat of the Society, and five people from outside the Curia with experience working with refugees.<sup>17</sup> Recalling the initial consultation,

---

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Vincent O'Keefe, S.J., April 16, 2005, in New York City.

<sup>17</sup> This account of the discussions that preceded the founding of the JRS is based on Father Arrupe's 1980 letter announcing the establishment of the JRS (*ActRSJ* 18:319–21), and recollections by Michael Campbell-Johnston, S.J., the first

Campbell-Johnston observed, "We are not concerned just with the survival of refugees, but with their full development. Our apostolate should therefore aim at improving the quality of refugee work already being done rather than adding our name to the list of existing agencies" (*EvChal* 44). The General and his advisors first asked why they should get involved. To answer this question, they turned to the example of Ignatius and the first companions, the founding documents of the Society, and the decrees of recent general congregations.

The "Formula of the Institute" constitutes the rule of the Society.<sup>18</sup> In the "Formula" of 1550, Ignatius states that the Society was founded "chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine" ("Formula," 3). To achieve these ends, Ignatius commits the Society to a variety of spiritual ministries, including preaching the Word, teaching Christian doctrine, giving the Spiritual Exercises, hearing confessions, and administering the other sacraments (3). According to Jerónimo Nadal, Ignatius's faithful interpreter and spokesman, the use of "chiefly" and "especially" in the "Formula" indicates that for Ignatius, the spiritual ministries were primary.<sup>19</sup>

In the next paragraph of the "Formula," Ignatius expands the ministries of the Society to include works of mercy. A Jesuit, he writes, "should show himself ready to reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those in prisons or hospitals, and indeed to perform any other works of charity, according to what will

---

international director of the JRS, presented in *Everybody's Challenge: Essential Documents of Jesuit Refugee Service, 1980–2000*, 40–45. This source is a collection of official documents, personal recollections, and essays about the first twenty years of the JRS. *Everybody's Challenge* will be abbreviated to *EvChal*, followed by the page number.

<sup>18</sup> Antonio M. de Aldama, *The Formula of the Institute: Notes for a Commentary*, 33. This source will be abbreviated to "Formula," followed by the page number of Aldama's text. The first draft of the "Formula," written in 1539, is also known as the "Five Chapters," and the second draft is included in the papal bull that approved the Society in 1540. In these initial forms, the "Formula" reflects the deliberations among Ignatius and his companions about what their Society would do and how it would function. The final version, approved in 1550 by Pope Julius III, was written mostly by Ignatius, with the assistance of his able secretary, Polanco. Its greater specificity reflects the lived experience of the Jesuits in the first decade ("Formula," 28–33).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good" (3). According to Nadal, the corporal works of mercy "must be given second place and undertaken when the [spiritual ministries] allow, if we cannot do justice to both" (3). A similar ranking of ministries is found in the *Constitutions*,<sup>20</sup> which Ignatius and his editor, Juan Alfonso Polanco, began drafting in earnest in 1547.<sup>21</sup> Here too, preference is given to the spiritual works over corporal works: "The members will also occupy themselves in corporal works of mercy to the extent that the more important spiritual activities permit and their own energies allow" (*ConsCN* 650).

Though the "Formula" and the *Constitutions* prioritized spiritual ministries over corporal works, the documents contain an inherent flexibility necessary for a religious order devoted to ministering to people in a variety of settings. They presume that Jesuits will try to perform both kinds of ministry whenever possible, rather than choose between them. At the consultation on the refugee problem, Father Arrupe quoted from a commentary on the "Formula" by Polanco: "The provision of doctrine and instruction should be preferred to that of food and clothes unless there is urgent need such as hunger, in which case we must insist on trying to remedy it" (*EvChal* 41). The JRS charter, which we will consider later, quotes Nadal: "The Society cares for those persons who are totally neglected or inadequately attended to. This is the basic reason why the Society was founded; this is its power; this is what makes it distinctive in the Church" (*EvChal* 13).

---

*Jesuits must also be willing  
to engage the social  
structures in which we  
live and dare to be  
countercultural in the gospel  
values we live and preach.*

---

According to the *Constitutions*, the superior must always keep in mind "the greater service of God and the more universal good" (622). This means that Jesuits must labor where there is the more pressing need either because others are not meeting those needs or

---

<sup>20</sup> See *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*, *Cons.* nos. 400–414, 636–50. This source will be abbreviated to *ConsCN*, followed by the boldface paragraph number in the text of the *Constitutions*.

<sup>21</sup> Antonio M. de Aldama, *An Introductory Commentary on the Constitutions*, 4. The definitive text of the *Constitutions* was completed in 1553.

because the misery of the people is so great (622f.). In his letter announcing the establishment of the JRS, Father Arrupe relies on these criteria for selecting ministries and finds the JRS to be a perfect fit:

In the Constitutions, St. Ignatius speaks of the greater universal good, an urgency that is ever growing, the difficulty and complexity of the human problem involved, and lack of other people to attend to the need. With our ideal of availability and universality, the number of institutions under our care, and the active collaboration of many lay people who work with us, we are particularly well fitted to meet this challenge and provide services that are not being catered for sufficiently by other organizations or groups. (*ActRSJ* 18:319)

In making decisions about ministry, flexibility has always been characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding.

## Works of Mercy

In its founding documents, the Society relied on traditional distinctions between spiritual and corporal works of mercy to explain what Jesuits did. In practice, however, this distinction is less fine. Jesuit ministry tended to both the mind and heart, body and soul. They responded to human need, whatever and wherever it was. In Venice, for example, while waiting for passage to the Holy Land in 1537, Ignatius and his companions worked in hospitals, nursing patients, cleaning rooms, and burying corpses. Works of mercy, like service in hospitals, were so important to the first Jesuits that they later resolved not to be bound by the obligation of saying the Divine Office in common lest it interfere with their ministry.<sup>22</sup> After the founding of the Society in 1540, Jesuits continued to devote themselves to a variety of works of mercy. For example, they worked in hospitals, washing and feeding patients, as well as preaching to them and hearing their confessions. Similarly, Jesuits cared for prisoners and prostitutes.<sup>23</sup>

Faced with urgent human need, the first Jesuits naturally desired to help people, or as they would often say, "help souls." In Ignatius's so-called autobiography, the *Constitutions*, and his thousands of letters, no phrase occurs more frequently. For Ignatius and the first companions, to "help souls" meant to help the whole per-

---

<sup>22</sup> John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 166.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 171–74; 178–85.

son, body and spirit.<sup>24</sup> Father Arrupe explained this matter more fully: "For Ignatius, the true exercise of love for one's fellowman is apostolic zeal, the ardent desire to procure his salvation and perfection; but it is no less evident that Ignatius loves man whole and entire, as did the Lord for whose sake alone he loves."<sup>25</sup>

This desire to "help souls" was embodied in various ministries of "consolation," another oft-repeated term among the early Jesuits. "Consolation" had a particular spiritual meaning for Ignatius.<sup>26</sup> To console someone was not necessarily to make him or her feel better, as we would say today. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, "consolation" describes a movement of the heart to greater faith, hope, and love in God.<sup>27</sup> It may be associated with deep-seated peace, quiet joy, tearful self-reckoning, or confident zeal. Recognizing that only God gives consolation, the first Jesuits did not "bring" consolation to people; rather, they tried to help people be open to God, who is present to all creatures, animating every moment (*SpEx* 234–37). Traditional spiritual ministries, like administering the sacraments, were well-suited for consoling people ("Formula," 3). But in Ignatius's vision, any ministry could be a way of putting consolation into action; that is, of imitating Christ who comforts, consoles, strengthens and uplifts (*SpEx* 224).

---

*He was concerned about the JRS being used politically by the various warring factions in the region, but excited about the opportunities in working with non-Christians.*

---

The Jesuits' expansive understanding of "helping souls" and "consolation" explains why their oft-cited list of ministries was so long and seemingly open-ended. This devotion to the care of the whole person and their creative approach to ministry are illustrated

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. Pierre Favre explained how he wanted to bring help to others "not only for their spirit but also (if one may presume in the Lord) for their bodies" (*ibid.*, 167).

<sup>25</sup> "Rooted and Grounded in Love," 171.

<sup>26</sup> See O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 19 f., 82–84.

<sup>27</sup> References to the Exercises are taken from George E. Ganss, S.J., trans. and ed., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Here the reference is to marginal number 316. This source will be abbreviated *SpEx*, followed by the marginal number in Ganss's text.

in the story of the first Jesuits caring for the famine victims in Rome in 1538. As they fed and bathed their guests in one room, they preached and catechized in the next. Today, the JRS embodies this integral concern for the refugee. At the inception of the JRS, Father Arrupe said, "[t]he help needed is not only material: in a special way the Society is being called to render a service that is human, pedagogical and spiritual" (*ActRSJ* 18:320). From the beginning to the present day, Jesuits have committed themselves to any ministry that allowed them to help souls and console people in their needs, both spiritual and physical.

To support his decision to establish the JRS, Father Arrupe not only relied on this tradition of Jesuit ministries but on the mandates

---

*Father Arrupe envisioned a loosely organized structure, committed mostly to networking people and mobilizing resources to respond to the refugee crisis. With each year, however, the worldwide refugee crisis got worse, demanding a more institutional, longer-term response.*

---

of the more recent Thirty-first and Thirty-second General Congregations. These congregations essentially recast in modern terms Ignatius's commitment to help souls. The inspiration for this recapitulation of the Jesuit charism was the Second Vatican Council, which affirmed the Church's solidarity with the entire human family, especially the poor and suffering.<sup>28</sup> Reading the "signs of the times," the Church vowed to serve the world, particularly as it confronted a host of challenges, ranging from economic injustice to war, discrim-

ination to illiteracy. Against these affronts to humanity, the council asserted the inherent dignity of the human person as created in the image of God.<sup>29</sup>

Soon after the last session of Vatican II, in GC 31 the Society responded to the Council's call for renewal of mission in light of the needs of the modern world.<sup>30</sup> The congregation urged the Society to

---

<sup>28</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1, nos. 1, 57f.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 3f., 12.

<sup>30</sup> GC 31, nos. 1f., 14–16, in *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*. This source will be abbreviated to GC 31 or GC 32,



“devote strong apostolic efforts without delay” to parts of the world struggling with “hunger and many other miseries of every sort” (GC 31, 375). It commended the social apostolate in its endeavor “to build a fuller expression of justice and charity into the structures of human life” (569).

Ten years later, in 1975, GC 32 stated more explicitly the Society’s commitment to faith and justice: “The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement” (GC 32, 48). To serve the faith is “to help people become more open toward God and more willing to live according to the demands of the Gospel” (67). Yet, the Gospel reveals that love of God and love of neighbor are inseparably linked (80), demanding “a life in which the justice of the Gospel shines out in a willingness not only to recognize and respect the rights of all, especially the poor and the powerless, but also to work actively to secure those rights” (67).

---

*As it grew bigger to meet more demands, the JRS had to be careful about not becoming too bureaucratic, losing touch with the lives of refugees who are at the heart of its mission.*

---

In every apostolate, therefore, Jesuits must preach Jesus Christ, who offers “the complete and definitive liberation of mankind” (76), a liberation that must be as much material as spiritual (89). While attending to the immediate needs of the poor and powerless, Jesuits must also be willing to engage the social structures in which we live and dare to be countercultural in the gospel values we live and preach (84, 89, 93).

Father Arrupe insisted that the Society, with its universal reach, its resources and connections, was in a unique position to offer a concerted response to the refugee crisis and thus live up to the ideals of Vatican II and the recent congregations. He and his advisors discerned that a new structure was required. Many Jesuits around the world were then serving refugees and exiles. What was lacking was a corporate, concerted effort to link these more particular Jesuit commitments.

On November 14, 1980, after additional consultation with provincial conferences around the world, Father Arrupe wrote a letter to the whole Society, announcing the establishment of the Jesuit Refugee Service (*ActRSJ* 18:319–21). He constituted the JRS as an apostolate of the universal Society, not of any particular province. It was to be managed by the Social Secretariat in the Jesuit Curia. He did not intend for it to become a large-scale relief agency. Instead he

sought to rely on existing institutions and personnel within the provinces of the Society. He imagined that individual Jesuits would commit to the works of the JRS for short periods of time, thus not disrupting existing apostolates. He outlined some limited objectives for this new structure: to coordinate relief efforts currently underway; to gather information about

---

*There was some disagreement about how central advocacy should be to the JRS mission: would such work take them away from being with the people?*

---

current needs and resources; to act as a “switchboard” between offers of help from the provinces and secular relief agencies or nongovernmental organizations; to support research about the underlying causes of the refugee crisis; and to promote public awareness of the problem (*ActRSJ* 18:320f.).

Like Ignatius’s “Formula,” Father Arrupe’s brief letter contains enough specificity to provide guidance for ministries to get off the ground. At the same time, its generality allowed those who took on this work to adapt their mission creatively, based on the lessons of experience. As a Jesuit ministry of consolation, the JRS would care for both the spiritual and physical needs of refugees. His letter ended with the following exhortation:

St. Ignatius called us to go anywhere we are most needed for the greater service of God. The spiritual as well as material needs of nearly 16 million refugees throughout the world today could scarcely be greater. God is calling us through these helpless people. We should consider the chance of being able to assist them a privilege that will, in turn, bring great blessings to ourselves and our Society (*ActRSJ* 321).

### III. The Arrupe Legacy

#### Swan Song to the Society

Shortly after his letter was published, the Jesuit Refugee Service began its work in earnest.<sup>31</sup> Michael Campbell-Johnston, as head of the Social Secretariat, directed the JRS in its first years. He recalls that within the Curia there was some opposition to establishing a new apostolic structure. Father Arrupe's support for the JRS never faltered, however. He was confident that a small group of people could handle any big problem with God's help. One of the first projects that the JRS supported demonstrated not only the connection between the JRS and the Society today but also between this new ministry and the Society's history. To care for the Ethiopian refugees in Rome, the JRS opened a center in which to provide food and shelter to them. This center, called *Centro Astalli*, was set up in the basement of a large building, part of which occupies the site of the Curia in Ignatius's day, a site not all that distant from where Ignatius and the first companions helped house and feed the famine victims in the winter of 1538 (*EvChal* 58). In this same large building the International College of the Gesù has its present-day quarters.

As he drew near the end of his tenure as superior general, Pedro Arrupe kept the interests of the JRS in mind. On August 6, 1981, the thirty-sixth anniversary of Hiroshima, he visited JRS workers in Thailand. From that meeting, as Campbell-Johnston remembers, a clear consensus emerged about how the JRS would distinguish itself from larger and older relief agencies. In his description, we catch glimpses of what the JRS mission statement eventually comes to call "accompaniment."

---

*By 1995, the basic structure of the JRS was in place with nine (now ten) regional offices around the world, three of them in Africa: in Eastern Africa, the Great Lakes region, and Southern Africa.*

---

<sup>31</sup> For the following account of Father Arrupe's involvement with the JRS in its first years, I rely on personal interviews with Vincent O'Keefe, S.J., general assistant of the Society of Jesus from 1965 to 1983, and Mark Raper, international director of the JRS from 1990 to 2000.

Our way of proceeding should consist essentially in a ministry of presence and sharing, of being with rather than doing for. Our value system and lifestyle is different from that of professionals. From our poverty (few funds, little experience, no transport) we were powerful and able to give the people a sense of their own worth and dignity. (*EvChal* 32)

At the end of the meeting in Bangkok, Father Arrupe gave an impromptu talk. He acknowledged the difficulty of working in Thailand, referring to the challenges as "birth pangs before this new apostolate can be born" (37). He advised those present at the meet-

ing to be prudent and flexible. "In today's world," he said, "nobody can be a 100 percent certain. For this reason, great risks have to be taken in many places" (34). He was concerned about the JRS being used politically by the various warring factions in the region, but excited about the opportunities in working with non-Christians (35f.). In such complicated circum-

---

*There was some disagreement about how central advocacy should be to the JRS mission: would such work take them away from being with the people?*

---

stances, the JRS had to discern carefully as a group, balancing "prophecy and prudence, security and risk" (37). Any policy they adopt, he said, "should be flexible precisely so that we can experiment further. . . . The elasticity of this experimentation and risk-taking should be all in one direction—the direction pointed out by the Holy Spirit" (34). He concluded by counseling prayer above all.

I will say one more thing, and please don't forget it. Pray. Pray much. Problems such as these are not solved by human efforts. I am telling you things that I want to emphasize, a message—perhaps my "swan song" for the Society. . . . If we are indeed in the front line of a new apostolate in the Society, we have to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. These are not the pious words of a novice master. What I am saying is 100 percent from St. Ignatius. (37)

That night, while flying back to Rome, Pedro Arrupe suffered a cerebral stroke from which he would never fully recover. His talk to the JRS in Thailand would be his last talk as general, the very "swan song" he predicted. Yet, even as he became more and more incapacitated in the years that followed, he maintained his interest in the JRS. One year at Christmas, Michael Campbell-Johnston

brought him over to Centro Astalli for dinner with the refugees. "He was warmly applauded and deeply moved," Campbell-Johnston remembers. "He spoke a few words which, though difficult to understand and translate, conveyed his feelings" (*EvChal* 39). Mark Raper, S.J., whom Father Arrupe appointed as regional director in Asia, recalls visiting him in the mid-1980s. Barely able to communicate, he sketched out a crude map of India and pointed to it emphatically, as if to say, "What are you doing about the refugees in Sri Lanka?"

By then, the JRS was becoming more institutionalized, with its ministries expanding. In its first years, as it found its footing, the JRS was animated largely by the vision of Pedro Arrupe. Like Ignatius, Father Arrupe presented a captivating ideal for service that tapped the apostolic zeal of many people.

That vision, as we shall see, would later be incarnated in particular projects and defined in various documents. At the same time, accompaniment would gradually become its distinctive way of proceeding. The JRS would continue its ministries of consolation after

---

*Before writing policy papers,  
the JRS listens to refugees  
so that they can help  
set priorities.*

---

its founder's incapacitation. As the former General would quickly remind us, pointing to Ignatius's dictum at the end of the *Constitutions*, we entrust our work not to any one person, but to Christ above all: "In him alone must be placed the hope that he will preserve and carry forward what he deigned to begin for his service and praise and for the aid of souls" (*ConsCN* 812).

## The JRS after the Arrupe Era

In 1983, the CG 33 accepted Pedro Arrupe's resignation as superior general and named Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., as his successor.<sup>32</sup> The congregation affirmed the Society's commitment to refugees, calling Jesuits to respond to the "sad plight of millions of

---

<sup>32</sup>For much of the history of the JRS after the Arrupe era, I rely on personal interviews with Kenneth Gavin, S.J., national director of the JRS/USA from 2004 to the present; Robert McChesney, S.J., national director of the JRS/USA from 1991 to 1997; Vincent O'Keefe, S.J.; Peter O'Driscoll, who worked with the JRS in El Salvador from 1987 to 1994; and Mark Raper, S.J., international director of the JRS from 1990 to 2000.

refugees searching for a permanent home, a situation brought to our special attention by Father Arrupe."<sup>33</sup> Father Kolvenbach maintained the personal commitment shown by his predecessor. In 1984 he separated the JRS from the Social Secretariat and made it an independent entity in the Curia, naming Dieter Scholz, S.J., as its first international director (*EvChal* 45). This appointment marked a transition for the JRS.

John O'Malley describes the evolution of ministries in the early Society as a "superb case study of transition to institution from charismatic fellowship."<sup>34</sup> The JRS underwent a similar transition in the decade after it was founded. Father Arrupe envisioned a loosely organized structure, committed mostly to networking people and mobilizing resources to respond to the refugee crisis. With each year, however, the worldwide refugee crisis got worse, demanding a more institutional, longer-term response. Like any Jesuit ministry, the JRS had to adapt to meet the desperate needs of a growing number of people. Mark Raper explains this gradual evolution.

We may ask, then, why an enterprise conceived originally in relatively small terms has grown so complex. The most obvious reason, of course, is that any original optimism that this was a brief crisis to be addressed quickly and solved, was soon shown to be misplaced. In 1980, there were some six million refugees around the world, and another four or five million people displaced in their own countries. In 1998, there were about 15 million refugees, and up to 30 million people displaced within their own countries. (*EvChal* 58)

As it grew bigger to meet more demands, the JRS had to be careful about not becoming too bureaucratic, losing touch with the lives of refugees who are at the heart of its mission.

In its first years, much of the attention of the JRS was focused on Asia. Refugees continued to leave Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in large numbers. To meet this rising tide of refugees, the JRS extended its commitments to camps in Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Many projects concerned basic education, language classes, and vocational training, so important to help refugees get back on their feet again. In the late 1980s, an increasing number of refugees were repatriated to Vietnam because

---

<sup>33</sup> *Documents of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, no. 48.

<sup>34</sup> O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 14.

of stricter immigration laws in once welcoming countries. In response, the JRS set up an office in Ho Chi Minh City to monitor the condition of those sent back to Vietnam (*EvChal* 59 f.).

In 1990 Father General appointed Mark Raper to succeed Dieter Scholz as international director. In a letter to the Society announcing the appointment, he restated the Society's commitment to the JRS, which he described as a "a timely mission in the service of faith and the promotion of justice" (*ActRSJ* 20:314). He noted a growing resistance to refugees. Governments, he wrote, were making sharp distinctions between granting asylum to political refugees but not to economic refugees. Such distinctions, he asserted, were artificial. The reasons that compel people to leave their homes are varied and often inter-related—violence, poverty, famine, political repression. Regardless of the cause, the effect is the same: a dislocation that causes human suffering.

---

*With the charter and its attendant guidelines, the JRS emerged from its adolescence, and was now standing on its own, a mature apostolate ready to meet the demands of the new millennium.*

---

Father Kolvenbach also expressed concern that "our Refugee Service has, inevitably perhaps, given the difficulties and complexities of this work, grown into an apostolate somewhat apart from the mainstream activities of the Society" (*ActRSJ* 20:319). He lamented the impression that "service to refugees is the responsibility of a small group of specialists with a particular calling for this ministry." To the contrary, he reminded the Society of Father Arrupe's original intention: "Our service to refugees is an apostolic commitment of the whole Society, and in particular of those Provinces where the refugees come from, where they seek protection and first refuge, and where they finally settle" (320). Admitting that "there remains a fairly frequent lack of apostolic availability" among Jesuits, Kolvenbach added that "service to refugees is one real test of our availability today" (323).

When Raper took over as international director, the JRS operated in twelve Asian countries and three countries in Africa. The JRS was also present in El Salvador during the civil war there. In the United States, under the leadership of Frank Moan, S.J., the JRS

focused on resettlement, publicity, and fundraising. Because the refugee crisis was not abating, Raper set about to reorganize the JRS to make it more adaptable to meet changing needs in the diversity of contexts in which the JRS was working. He gave the regional directors more autonomy to approve projects. He stepped up recruiting efforts, particularly among lay persons and refugees themselves.

Meeting with Raper soon after his appointment as international director in 1990, Father Kolvenbach asked him to do more in Africa. Since the early days, the JRS had been working in Ethiopia providing relief to thousands displaced by war and stricken by

famine. This effort was matched by growing commitments in and around Sudan, which was mired in a long civil war that displaced millions. The JRS projects in southern Sudan and in neighboring Uganda and Kenya included pastoral services, educational programs, medical care, and legal assistance. Similarly, the JRS assisted

---

*Whether in schools or other works, the JRS has increasingly relied on lay persons to carry out its mission.*

---

Mozambican refugees in Malawi, Angolan refugees in Zambia, and Liberian refugees in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. In some cases, the JRS was able to accompany the refugees home after the civil war had ended (*EvChal* 60–61).

In the 1990s no civil war in Africa received more attention than that in Rwanda, where in the spring of 1994, 800,000 people, mostly of Tutsi origin, were slaughtered in a three-month period. The violence ignited a massive refugee emergency: more than two million people, both Tutsi and Hutu, were displaced within Rwanda or in neighboring Burundi, Tanzania, and Zaire (now Congo). Before the massacres, there were only a handful of the JRS staff working in Rwanda and Burundi. Patrick Gahizi, S.J., then superior of the Jesuits in Rwanda and director of the local JRS program, was killed during the bloodshed. After the hundred days of killing, the JRS worked with other relief agencies in these countries and maintained a presence even after the Rwandans returned home. In the years that followed, JRS workers walked with Rwandans on their long road to peace and reconciliation. By 1995 the basic structure of the JRS was in place with nine (now ten) regional offices around the world, three



of them in Africa: in Eastern Africa, the Great Lakes region, and Southern Africa.

In Latin America the work that began with displaced peoples in El Salvador in the 1980s expanded to countries like Mexico, working with Guatemalan refugees, and Colombia, serving internally displaced persons. With the end of the civil war in El Salvador in 1992, the JRS began to focus its mission on helping people resettle back to their homes and to assisting in the reconstruction of the country. Eventually, this development work was handed over to the Central American Province of Jesuits, which founded a new agency, the Jesuit Development Service (JDS; *EvChal* 61). According to Peter O'Driscoll, who worked for seven years in the region, the transition in El Salvador from the JRS to JDS provided a new model for transferring responsibility to the local level. The JRS exists as an international apostolate because the refugee crisis is an international problem. But the JRS mission is not boundless. Just as the JRS must be willing to take on new projects, it must also be free to leave projects which are no longer needed or which can be taken over by other organizations or the local church or Jesuit province.

### A Backlash against Immigrants

In the mid-1990s, the JRS/USA began to assist refugees directly for the first time. Robert McChesney, S.J., national director from 1991 to 1997, and his colleagues noted that the compassion shown to boat people and refugees in the 1980s was giving way to suspicion and fear of immigrants. In 1996 Congress passed a bipartisan immigration-reform bill, which mandated the detention of large numbers of noncitizens and asylum seekers, including children. These detainees may wait for months or years before they are deported or granted asylum.<sup>35</sup> Responding to the needs of those in detention, the JRS began offering religious and pastoral services in several detention centers around the country, and partnered with the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference in offering legal aid to detainees.

---

<sup>35</sup> According to the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, as of March 2005, 1,225 immigrants from more than one hundred countries were being held in long-term detention—that is, for many years—because they could not be easily repatriated to their home countries (Jodi Wilgoren, "Refugees in Limbo: Ordered Out of U.S., but With Nowhere to Go," *New York Times*, June 4, 2005, A9).

Advocacy became more integrated into the work of the JRS/USA. On a visit to El Salvador, McChesney asked a forcibly displaced person how the JRS could help: "She responded that I should go home to Washington and tell the President to stop sending so many weapons to her country." Dislocated persons from Guatemala in southern Mexico shared the same sentiment. McChesney recalls that among JRS officials around the world, there was some disagreement about how central advocacy should be to the JRS mission: would such work take them away from being with the people? But listening to the counsel of refugees, McChesney insisted that the JRS must advocate strongly before governments whose policies on immigration, foreign aid, or arm sales have a disastrous effect on refugees' lives. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, more stringent policies made immigrating into the United States far more difficult. Consequently, the JRS/USA has devoted a great deal of effort to advocacy before the U.S. State Department on behalf of refugees trying to settle in the United States.<sup>36</sup>

In Europe, advocacy also became more central to the JRS mission. The number of refugees skyrocketed after the fall of Communism in the late 1980s and during the civil wars in the Balkans in the 1990s. The alarming increase in displaced persons was accompanied by an emergent xenophobia. While providing the pastoral, spiritual, and material support traditionally associated with its mission, the JRS set up offices in Geneva and Brussels to lobby governments on behalf of refugees. As in the United States, the JRS provided legal assistance to asylum seekers in Rome, London, Vienna, Brussels, Malta, and Berlin (*EvChal* 62). The JRS also began serving displaced peoples in Croatia, Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia and continued to facilitate networking among governmental organizations and relief agencies. As one example, the JRS helped broker a

---

*While collaboration with the laity is a particular emphasis in the modern Society, the first Jesuits were not unfamiliar with the benefits of relying on lay people to help their ministries.*

---

<sup>36</sup>In 2004 approximately 53,000 refugees were resettled in the United States (JRS, *Annual Report*, 2004), 79 f.

deal to renew a water source for an entire neighborhood of war-torn Sarajevo.

In its advocacy, the JRS becomes a voice for the voiceless. But before writing policy papers, the JRS listens to refugees so that they can help set priorities. Before speaking out on their behalf, the JRS helps refugees give voice to their own experience, from which all advocacy stems.

## IV. The Mission of the JRS Today—Something Old, Something New

### A Time to Reinvent Itself

Over the last twenty-five years, The JRS has grown much bigger than Father Arrupe ever expected. Father Kolvenbach observed in 1997, “JRS must be big if the problem and tasks at hand are big” (*EvChal* 77). When the JRS began in 1980, there were about five million refugees. Within a decade, that number tripled. In the first years of the new millennium, over forty million dislocated persons wandered the earth. At the turn of the century, the JRS sponsored projects in fifty countries and employed over five hundred workers, a fifth of whom were Jesuits.<sup>37</sup>

With its expansive reach, the JRS determined that it needed to clarify its mission, specify its operating procedures, and define its relationship with Jesuit provinces. To those ends, in 2000 Father Kolvenbach promulgated the JRS charter and a set of operating guidelines (*EvChal* 10–25). In the letter announcing the charter, Father Kolvenbach also stated that Lluís Magriñá, S.J., would succeed Raper as international director of the JRS.

Its charter roots the JRS in the work of the first Jesuits, in the experience of Father Arrupe, in the *Constitutions*, and in recent general congregations. It defines the mission of the JRS in three ways: “to accompany, serve, and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people” (*EvChal* 15). Jesuits, fellow religious, and lay persons had been living the mission before it was put into words. Introducing the charter and guidelines, Father General remarked, “Drawing on 20 years of experience in the field and in

---

<sup>37</sup> JRS, *Annual Report*, 2003, 3; *EvChal* 58, 77.

partnership with other agencies, the two documents distill much of what the JRS has learned from our co-workers and from refugees themselves" (10f.).

In 1995 GC 34 explicitly affirmed the ministry of the JRS as critical to the Society's mission of promoting faith and serving justice. It also made the threefold mission of the JRS central to the identity of the universal Society.

There are over forty-five million refugees and displaced persons in today's world, 80 percent of whom are women and children. Often lodged in the poorest of countries, they face growing impoverishment, loss of a sense of life and culture, with consequent hopelessness and despair. The Jesuit Refugee Service accompanies many of these brothers and sisters of ours, serving them as companions, advocating their cause in an uncaring world.<sup>38</sup>

With the charter and its attendant guidelines, the JRS emerged from its adolescence, and was now standing on its own, a mature apostolate ready to meet the demands of the new millennium.

There is something old and something new in the JRS's mission. The sheer size of the JRS sets it apart as a Jesuit ministry. In 2004 the JRS directly served over 400,000 persons in fifty countries. Though in the common imagination the JRS is associated with refugee camps, the work of the JRS is as varied as the contexts in which it serves.<sup>39</sup>

- In the United States, the JRS and another religiously affiliated NGO, Church World Services, worked under contract with the federal government to provide spiritual care in eight immigration detention centers. Similar projects were underway in Europe.
- In Ecuador the JRS assisted refugee women in establishing income-generating businesses.
- In Columbia the JRS trained community leaders in human rights legislation and conflict-resolution skills.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Documents of the Thirty-fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, no. 65. This source will be abbreviated to GC 34.

<sup>39</sup> For a complete description of JRS projects around the world, see *JRS, Annual Report, 2004*, available at [www.JRS.net](http://www.JRS.net)

- In the Balkans the JRS worked with land-mine survivors and helped resettle families after a long civil war.
- In Slovenia the JRS conducted training on human rights for detention-center staffs.
- In Tanzania the JRS supported a radio program that broadcasts reliable information about the situation in refugees' home countries and produces programs concerning peace and reconciliation.
- In East Timor the JRS worked for the reunification of families.
- In Cambodia the JRS offered legal assistance to asylum seekers and helped resettle families to Canada.
- In Thailand the JRS promoted children-protection policies in refugee camps.

The JRS, like Jesuit ministries of all ages, strives to go where the spiritual and physical needs of people, especially the poor, are not being met. To address these needs and to have the most impact, the JRS must adapt its mission and its organization as needed. In 1997 Father General told the JRS regional directors' meeting in Rome: "JRS must be flexible: closing down when not needed and being ready to go to meet new needs which are unattended to by others. JRS, in the spirit of Father Arrupe, should go where no one else would like to go or is not going" (*EvChal* 78). The JRS has been flexible in its organization, particularly in partnering with other relief agencies, NGOs, and local churches. We find further evidence of accommodation in, for example, the decisions to commit more resources to advocacy, to serve in detention centers in the United States, and to transition the JRS in El Salvador into a new independent organization focused on long-term development.

---

*The challenge remains to make that collaboration meaningful by giving more institutional control to lay persons and by devoting resources to form them in the Ignatian tradition.*

---

## A Ministry of Education

In its mission, the JRS reflects the Society's long-standing commitment to education.<sup>40</sup> Education empowers refugees and promotes their full development as persons. Adult-education programs help them read and write in the language of their host country and learn income-generating skills. Schools orientate refugees to the future and give them reason to hope. They also occupy both adults and children in the sometimes discouraging routine of camp life. Educating in camp schools requires creativity. During his time as regional coordinator in Asia, Mark Raper established partnerships with religious congregations, such as the Sisters of Mercy, who sent personnel to work in camp schools and who engaged their educational institutions at home in new projects to support refugees. In some cases, refugees in the camps were following the curricula of institutions on the other side of the world, sitting for examinations, and receiving credit.

In his 1990 letter to the Society, Father Kolvenbach challenged Jesuit universities and research centers to devote more resources to help the JRS find long-term solutions to the intransigent refugee crisis. He stressed the need for more research into the underlying causes of forced migration, "a task which as yet we have hardly begun to tackle" (*ActRSJ* 20:321). While immediate charitable assistance is necessary, Kolvenbach learned from the JRS workers in the field that "the best service one can offer a refugee is the opportunity to stay at home," that is, to determine the reasons that cause refugees to flee their homes in the first place (321). Kolvenbach also proposed that universities in developed countries educate refugees by enrolling students who relocate there, by constructing distance-learning programs, and by sending faculty members abroad to work directly with refugees.

The JRS and Jesuit universities have responded to Father Kolvenbach's challenge. For example, tutorships in refugee studies and human rights were established at Oxford University and at the University of Deusto in Bilbao (*EvChal* 65). In the United States, the JRS developed a partnership with Fairfield University in 2002 to

---

<sup>40</sup>Though not mentioned in the "Formula," by 1560 education became a primary ministry of the Jesuits, with new schools opening at a rate of four or five a year (O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 200).

promote scholarship relating to migration and detention issues. Among the initiatives at Fairfield is a program to evaluate income-generating projects in JRS regions worldwide.<sup>41</sup> In the 2002–3 academic year, Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia organized a year-long series of programs relating to refugees, including lectures, a common reading of Jesuit James Martin's *This Our Exile* (an account of his experience working with the JRS in East Africa), and a talk by a Sudanese refugee, then a student at Saint Joseph's.

Jesuits know how to run schools, an expertise often called upon by the JRS. Patrick Samway, S.J., a professor at Saint Joseph's, took advantage of a sabbatical in 2004–5 to work in refugee camps in Chad. Thousands of Sudanese were spilling over the border, fleeing the genocide in Darfur, western Sudan. In this humanitarian crisis, Samway assisted the JRS in organizing schools in three refugee camps, acting as a superintendent of sorts. He writes the following:

These camps should be considered villages where traumatized individuals and families can stay and cope with the exigencies of everyday life until at some moment, maybe in two or three years, they are able to return to their homeland in relative peace and security. One simple way to test the present level of fear among the Sudanese in these camps is simply to look into the eyes of the children. Their eyes always tell the truth.<sup>42</sup>

## Collaboration outside the Society

Whether in schools or other works, the JRS has increasingly relied on lay persons to carry out its mission. Lay men and women make up about three-fifths of all JRS workers (*EvChal* 58). Although the international director and many regional and national directors are Jesuits, a growing number of lay men and women (as well as women from other religious orders) are assuming leadership roles in the JRS. While collaboration with the laity is a particular emphasis in the modern Society, the first Jesuits were not unfamiliar with the benefits of relying on lay people to help their ministries. As the

---

<sup>41</sup> In June 2005 Fairfield hosted a conference, "Migration Studies and Jesuit Identity: Forging a Path Forward." More information about Fairfield's initiatives related to the JRS can be found at [www.fairfield.edu](http://www.fairfield.edu)

<sup>42</sup> Patrick Samway, "Living on the Edge: A Report from Eastern Chad," *America*, November 15, 2004, 9.

Society emerged as an institution committed to meeting the spiritual and material needs of people, Jesuits looked to confraternities of lay men and women who provided organized relief to the poor and the sick. These confraternities not only helped the Jesuits get their ministries started, but they supported their operation after individual Jesuits left a town or city.<sup>43</sup>

This traditional openness to working with lay persons in ministry was renewed in the Church after Vatican II. According to GC 34, "Since that time a growing cooperation with the laity has expanded our mission and transformed the ways in which we carry it out in partnership with others. It has enriched what we do and how we understand our role in that mission" (GC 34, 332). The challenge remains to make that collaboration meaningful by giving more institutional control to lay persons and by devoting resources to form them in the Ignatian tradition.

The JRS mission to serve refugees resembles the aspirations of the first Jesuits to "help souls" and offer ministries of "consolation." As a rationale for the JRS, both Fathers Arrupe and Kolvenbach often raised the example of Ignatius and the first companions helping the

famine victims of Rome in the winter of 1538. Today, the JRS worker continues to feed, clothe, and shelter the poor. The Society's commitment to corporal works of mercy is incarnated in a very real way in the JRS. Workers also care for the spiritual needs of the displaced person, listening to them, praying with them, offering Mass and hearing confessions, anointing

---

*By the early 1990s, "accompaniment" became the preferred way of describing the JRS's way of proceeding and was soon enshrined in the JRS mission statement.*

---

the sick, and preaching the Gospel. Given that the JRS serves people of different faiths and works in many non-Christian countries, their spiritual care may look different than that offered by the first companions, who provided food in one room and catechism in the next. The Gospel that today's JRS worker preaches may be one of example or presence more than of words. In his 1990 letter, Kolvenbach wrote these lines:

---

<sup>43</sup> O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 166 f., 194.



Our service and presence in the midst of refugees, if rooted in fellowship with Christ, can be a prophetic witness to God's love for us and make that love visible and tangible to those refugees who have not heard the Good News. This witness is the pastoral dimension of our work with refugees. (*ActRSJ* 20:323)

In the JRS's mission to advocate on behalf of refugees, we find another example of continuity with the early Society. In responding to human need, Ignatius was as interested in structural solutions to problems as he was devoted to personal care of the needy. For example, Ignatius successfully procured the intervention of Pope Paul III in 1542 to forbid the harsh practice of confiscating the property of Jewish converts and declaring their children disinherited. In the same year, he persuaded the pope to moderate an outright ban on begging in Rome and to establish the Society of Orphans to help the poor who were sick or physically unable to work.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, by focusing on policies that contribute to the suffering of refugees, the JRS strives to have the greatest impact and do the greatest good. In the spirit of Vatican II and GC 32, the JRS addresses the root causes for the injustices suffered by refugees, challenges sinful social structures, and empowers refugees to reclaim their rights. With its contacts around the world, the JRS is uniquely situated to zealously advocate for the poor and displaced. In the United States, for example, the JRS is working with other JRS regions to address the plight of 105,000 Bhutanese refugees warehoused for the past fifteen years in camps in Nepal; the dire needs of Burmese Chin refugees, who live in hovels in the forests surrounding Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia; and the issue of food pipelines for refugees, especially those in Africa.<sup>45</sup>

The diverse service and advocacy programs of the JRS incarnate noble human efforts to respond to what John Paul II once described as "perhaps the greatest tragedy of all the human tragedies of our time."<sup>46</sup> What program descriptions and statistics cannot adequately convey, however, is how the JRS goes about its work.

---

<sup>44</sup> Arrupe, "Rooted and Grounded in Love," 167 f.; Dalmases, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 180.

<sup>45</sup> Interview via e-mail with Kenneth Gavin, October 24, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> See Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity* (1992), Introductory Letter, accessed at [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/migrants/documents/rc\\_pc\\_migrants\\_doc\\_19920625\\_refugees\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_19920625_refugees_en.html)

From the crucible of refugee camps, war zones, and areas of natural disaster, the JRS workers started to describe their way of proceeding as one of presence, companionship, and accompaniment.

## V. Walking with Refugees

### A Ministry of Accompaniment

As the JRS developed structures to serve dislocated people better, it also cultivated a distinctive style of ministry, which Peter-Hans Kolvenbach helped articulate in his 1990 letter to the Society.

---

*Listening and learning from refugees, the JRS worker affirms their dignity as persons and empowers them when so many decisions are taken out of their hands and when the circumstances of their lives conspire only to devalue them.*

---

With experience, the JRS had learned that while giving food, shelter, and medicine is crucial, what the refugee most needs, Father Kolvenbach wrote, is "friendship, trust and a shared understanding of the reasons why they are forced to flee their country. Friendship, trust, and understanding give refugees hope in their struggle against overwhelming odds" (*ActRSJ* 20:318). He distilled the meaning of accompaniment in these terms: "In so far as possible,

we want to feel what they have felt, suffer as they have, share the same hopes and aspirations, see the world through their eyes. We ourselves would like to become one with the refugees and displaced people so that, all together, we can begin the search for a new life" (316).

We can trace the inspiration for "accompaniment" to the spirit of Vatican II, which in its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, proclaimed: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."<sup>47</sup> The recently published *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* adopts the language of accompani-

---

<sup>47</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

ment to describe the Church's mission in the modern world.<sup>48</sup> The Church speaks to "the people of our time, her traveling companions" (3) and "journeys along the roads of history together with all of humanity" (18). A recent Vatican document on the plight of refugees declared that "God, who walked with the refugees of the Exodus in search of a land free of any slavery, is still walking with today's refugees in order to accomplish his loving plan together with them."<sup>49</sup>

In papal social encyclicals of the last quarter century, we hear echoes of accompaniment in expressions of solidarity. For example, in his landmark social encyclical, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, John Paul II described solidarity as a virtue, "not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far."<sup>50</sup> Solidarity helps us see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and recognize the bonds of interdependence among us (40). The virtue is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (38). If solidarity is a virtue emblematic of Christian character, then accompaniment is the way solidarity is lived and learned. By making accompaniment so central to its mission, the JRS enriches Catholic social teaching and the life of the Church.

Only gradually did "accompaniment" become part of the JRS lexicon. In 1985, at the first meeting of JRS regional coordinators from around the world, the participants explained that what sets the JRS apart from other relief agencies is, as Father Arrupe noted, its focus on *being with* rather than *doing for*. They continued, "We want our presence among refugees to be one of sharing with them, of accompaniment, of walking together along the same path" (*EvChal* 70). Mark Raper recalls that "accompaniment" (*acompañamiento*) was a term strongly in vogue in Central America in the 1980s. Though skilled in many ways, JRS workers were recruited primarily for their

---

<sup>48</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. References to the *Compendium's* paragraph numbers will be given parenthetically.

<sup>49</sup> *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity*, no. 25.

<sup>50</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, 393–436. Here the reference is to no. 38. Subsequent references to the encyclical's section numbers will be given parenthetically.

---

capacity to be friends (*compañeros*) with the people, that is, to fit into the local culture, to work and live alongside them, even at great risk. "Accompaniment" expresses in familiar terms the call to love and seek justice. Raper has this to add:

Our mission is not primarily building infrastructure. We do not have the resources for that. What we can do very well is to stay with the displaced person. We let them tell their stories. We help souls by listening above all. This is so important because they must be able to share their pain and also their guilt over leaving their homeland or family behind, or their disappointment that life did not turn out for them as they had hoped. Only then can they move on.

By the early 1990s, "accompaniment" became the preferred way of describing the JRS's way of proceeding and was soon enshrined in the JRS mission statement. The mission to accompany refugees echoes the early Society's commitment to "help souls" and to "console" others. Yet, these terms are not interchangeable. "Accompaniment" intimates a relationship of mutuality between the JRS worker and the refugee, an insight into pastoral theology that cannot be ascribed anachronistically to Ignatius and his companions. For the first Jesuits, ministry was fundamentally about doing for and helping others, not themselves. A conception of ministry as *being with* rather than *doing for* is reinforced in the opening decree of GC 34. While acknowledging that the "overarching motive" of today's ministries "is the simple Ignatian desire to help people in Christ," the congregation also called Jesuits "to learn how to be helped by people" (GC 34, 6). In the third decree, "Our Mission and Justice," the congregation describes Jesuits as "fellow pilgrims" with the poor, both journeying in faith towards the Kingdom: "We have often been touched by their faith, renewed by their hope, transformed by their love" (50).

Accompaniment, therefore, requires a high degree of mutuality in the relationship between the JRS and refugees. On the one hand, the JRS exists to help the refugee. James Martin, S.J., worked for the JRS in Kenya from 1992 to 1994. With a background in business administration, Martin saw his mission as assisting refugees in East Africa in starting small businesses. He soon realized that listening to refugees and spending time with them was as important as giving them money and practical business advice.

All of them had been for much of their lives forced to wait and wait and wait in endless lines—in the camps, in the UN offices, in government offices, in jails, in hospitals. And when in those places they were finally ushered in to see this or that official, they were typically treated shabbily and dealt with as quickly as possible. So I was happy to sit with them and listen as carefully as I could to their concerns. Time, not just money, was something that I could easily give them, and it cost nothing.<sup>51</sup>

Peter O'Driscoll recalls from his experience in El Salvador that the temptation to do something for the refugee immediately is strong. This response to suffering is understandable, but "we had to be willing to 'waste time,' listening to those we were sent to serve and learning from them."<sup>52</sup> In the end, this time was hardly wasted. The trust and relationships that fermented over time yielded benefits, both practical and spiritual. Listening and learning from refugees, the JRS worker affirms their dignity as persons and empowers them when so many decisions are taken out of their hands and when the circumstances of their lives conspire only to devalue them. The companionship of a JRS worker, who freely chooses to live and work alongside refugees, is a presence that gives them hope when they feel the absence of so much in their lives.

Accompaniment also has practical effects. The presence of the JRS "internationalizes" a situation, thus protecting refugees from attack in war-torn areas (*EvChal* 85). Raper offers an example: "When North Americans volunteered to live with communities of refugees in El Salvador, local armies knew that if they used U.S.-supplied M16s to kill American citizens, military aid and external political support for the dictatorship would dry up. Just by being there, one could protect human rights." Just being with refugees in detention centers in the United States and elsewhere helps to ensure that they will not be neglected or mistreated.

---

*In the Contemplation on the Incarnation, Ignatius invites retreatants to join the Trinity gazing on the world with compassion.*

---



---

<sup>51</sup>James Martin, *This Our Exile: A Spiritual Journey with the Refugees of East Africa*, 106.

<sup>52</sup>Interview by telephone with Peter O'Driscoll, October 6, 2005.

---

Moreover, listening to dislocated persons helps the JRS devise effective strategies of action. For example, in conversations with Central Americans caught in the violence of civil strife, Robert McChesney learned that the JRS/USA had to focus more of its resources on advocacy to change U.S. government policy in the region. In Thailand and Cambodia, JRS workers learned first-hand about the suffering caused by land mines. In 1994 the JRS joined a coalition of agencies working against land mines. In 1997 the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines won the Nobel Peace Prize. The award was accepted by Tun Channareth, a JRS worker crippled by a mine (*EvChal* 65).

### **Ambiguous Circumstances**

Accompaniment begins with a profound respect for the circumstance of the refugee. O'Driscoll adds, however, that this respect is not necessarily an endorsement of everything a refugee does or has done. Civil strife is complicated. Family loyalties and political ideologies run deep. Before persons are refugees, they are parents and citizens, allegiances that may get one mired in morally dubious situations. The JRS still commits itself in some situations to work both sides of a border, to help refugees from all sides of a civil conflict. In Rwanda, for example, the JRS assisted both Hutus and Tutsis caught in the cycle of violence.

Because accompaniment is steeped in mutuality, we acknowledge too how refugees serve the JRS staff, the Society of Jesus, and the Church. JRS workers in a variety of settings testify to how much they are personally and spiritually transformed by the refugees' resilience against all odds, their courage in the face of grave dangers, their generosity amid destitute poverty, and their hospitality in times of great scarcity.

In their shared vulnerability, JRS workers and refugees build community. In their shared poverty, workers from developed countries break out of the prisons of materialism and individualism and learn to live more simply. They learn to value people for who they are rather than what they do or what they have. Amid the uncertainties of a transient life, JRS personnel learn to trust in God's providential care. Walking with refugees, they come to appreciate that they are not alone in their own suffering and that part of the human vocation is to share the burdens of others.

The refugee teaches the Society to be more available for mission, ready to leave home, institutions, and familiar surroundings to redress the more pressing need and to serve the greater glory of God. In 1985 the regional coordinators of the JRS described the witness that refugees offer the Society: "Beware, they are saying to us, of immobility, of fixed institutions, of set patterns of behavior and modes of operation that bind the Spirit; be bold, be adventurous, for to gain all one must be ready to lose all—as we have" (*EvChal* 71). If we are to be "friends in the Lord," as Ignatius insisted, then we must be friends with those whom Jesus chose to accompany: we must be "friends with the poor."<sup>53</sup> The poor and displaced "teach us about our own poverty as no document can. They help us to understand the meaning of the gratuity of our ministries, giving freely what we have freely received, giving our very lives" (GC 34, 548).

As for the universal Church, refugees, in the words of the JRS regional coordinators, "are a constant reminder that the people of God is essentially a pilgrim people, never settled, always on the move, always searching, always reaching out further. We must be a Church of mission, not maintenance, whose task is ever to question prevailing attitudes and structures, especially those that discriminate against the poor and oppressed" (*EvChal* 71). To the local churches, the presence of refugees "is a standing invitation to open their doors to the stranger, to put into practice the Christian precept to love one's neighbor.

Accompaniment is a novel expression of Jesuit ministry, but it is steeped in the tradition of Jesuit ministries of consolation and in Catholic social teaching. The language of solidarity provides a helpful context to consider what accompaniment means. But for the virtue of solidarity to mean anything, it must be practiced. Accompanying the refugee, the JRS reveals what solidarity looks and feels like amid the gritty reality of a beautiful but broken world. While solidarity calls us to high ideals, accompaniment asks us to get our hands dirty, our feet worn, and our heart broken because we walk with *someone* in particular on the road to *somewhere* specific. Peter O'Driscoll recently returned to El Salvador, to the same village where over a decade ago he lived and worked with *campesinos*. On his return, the people of the village—his old friends—ran out to greet him with

---

<sup>53</sup> Dalmases, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 119; GC 34, 34.

warm, joyful embraces. Homecomings like these are signs of solidarity lived out in faithful accompaniment.

## VI. The JRS and the Spiritual Exercises

### Prayer and Practice

Father Arrupe was convinced that the JRS would be "of much spiritual benefit also to the Society" (*ActRSJ* 18:320). The last twenty-five years of accompanying the refugee has affirmed his conviction. In their journey with refugees, JRS workers have experienced the graces of the Spiritual Exercises in compelling ways. The Exercises too are a form of accompaniment: walking with Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection.

On the road to Emmaus, Christ appears as the stranger who catches up with the dejected disciples (*SpEx* 303; Luke 24:13–35). Like Christ, JRS workers walk alongside refugees, listen to their stories, offer them hope by word and action, and embolden them to rebuild their lives. An equally compelling image of accompaniment in the Gospels is Simon the Cyrene, who is enlisted to carry the cross of Jesus (*SpEx* 296, Matt. 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26). The JRS freely offers to ease the burden of the refugee, taking on some of the poverty, fear, and insecurity that comes with displacement. The JRS worker is finally the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) who, moved by compassion, takes the risk of personally caring for the wounded on the margins of society and offering them a reliable way to get back on their feet again.<sup>54</sup>

---

*This is where our commitment to Christ and our response to the call of Christ the King lead us. In the same way, JRS workers accompany the refugee and taste some of the poverty, fear, and insecurity that mark a refugee's life.*

---

<sup>54</sup> Hospitality to strangers is an ancient virtue. Abraham welcomes the three mysterious strangers by the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1–15). The Israelites are told to love the alien, for they were once strangers in a foreign land (Exod. 22:21; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19). St. Paul exhorts his communities to extend hospitality to strangers (Rom. 12:13). The author of Hebrews similarly admonishes his readers, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels



In the Contemplation on the Incarnation, Ignatius invites retreatants to join the Trinity gazing on the world with compassion. Seeing so much suffering, the divine persons resolve, "Let us work the redemption of the human race" (*SpEx* 107). Sending the Son is God's way of accompanying all of us in our need. With the loving gaze of the Trinity, we witness the plight of millions of people, dislocated by violence, poverty, natural disasters, and repression of all kinds. Moved as Ignatius and Father Arrupe were by the suffering of others, we ask to join the Son in the work of redemption.

With Christ, the JRS dares to get mixed up in the painful reality of dislocated lives, becoming their faithful accompanier, their humble servant, and their zealous advocate. Using our imagination, we pray through the Gospels, immersing ourselves in the sights and sounds of Jesus' life. We beg to know, love, and serve Christ more deeply and faithfully (*SpEx* 104). We ask to take on his mind and heart, his values and ideals.

In today's refugee, we meet the child Jesus and the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt to escape Herod's persecution (*SpEx* 132, 269; Matt. 2:13–23). In a homily on this gospel passage, Father Kolvenbach reflected that "Jesus, the Son of God, finds himself at odds with the political powers as soon as he is born. . . . In his own personal experience, Jesus fulfills the destiny of his own people and of so many other peoples. He experiences emigration, immigration, flight, exile" (quoted in *EvChal* 93). The message of the Gospel, he concludes, is that "the refugee, the migrant and the exile is the Lord himself. Whenever they benefit refugees, actions that are effective touch the very heart of God" (93). Like a modern-day icon of the Holy Family, the logo of the JRS features a family of five, walking together to a faraway place.

Our more intimate knowledge of Jesus impels us to make commitments. The JRS gives Jesuits and their colleagues a concrete way to respond to the call of Christ the King, which we hear at the beginning of the Second Week: "Whoever wishes to come with me must labor with me, so that through following me in the pain he or she may follow me also in the glory" (*SpEx* 95). If we take on the mind and heart of Jesus, we live in a certain way, loving and serving as Jesus did. Accompanying the refugee, we labor with the man

---

without knowing it" (13:2). For a helpful summary of biblical views of hospitality, see Daniel J. Harrington, *The Church according to the New Testament*, 138–40.

Jesus whom Ignatius depicts as always on the move: preaching, teaching, healing, and caring for those most in need (GC 34, 7).

By standing with the refugee, we opt for the standard of Christ, choosing to be with Christ poor, misunderstood, and humble (*SpEx* 146). In a world that esteems with upward mobility, the

---

*The JRS is a concrete sign that death does not have the last word, nor do the civil conflicts and the refugee camps they spawn.*

---

JRS takes the countercultural stance of downward mobility.<sup>55</sup> Michael Campbell-Johnston observes how important such considerations were for Father Arrupe in deciding to establish the JRS. He insisted that working with refugees "will be a great help in developing our

own spirit of poverty when we see so many suffering so much. This work will give us credibility by showing we are ready to suffer with the people" (*EvChal* 41).

This way of living is not only a witness to a world seduced by riches and honors; it is also the way of our salvation. Having reflected on the life of Jesus, we then walk with him in his passion and death in the Third Week. More intimately united with Christ, we seek only to be with him in his suffering, feeling his sorrow and brokenness (*SpEx* 203). This is where our commitment to Christ and our response to the call of Christ the King lead us. In the same way, JRS workers accompany the refugee and taste some of the poverty, fear, and insecurity that mark a refugee's life. The JRS staff experience frustration or despair when tireless labor confronts immovable bureaucracies and popular indifference, or when a Gospel-inspired zeal yields few discernible results.

## The Blood of Martyrs

To walk with the refugee can also entail great risk. The blood of JRS workers has sanctified the earth, a testimony to their faithful companionship with the refugee and a reminder of Father Arrupe's words at GC 32 that commitment to faith and justice would have "ultimate consequences."<sup>56</sup> Some JRS workers have been killed.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> See Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, 98–100, 106–8.

<sup>56</sup> Modras, *Ignatian Humanism*, 274.

Others have died by accident or illness while on mission. Still others faced close calls. In 1987 Peter O'Driscoll's first assignment with the JRS was to live in a refugee camp near San Salvador. The camp had a hospital that treated wounded guerrillas who were awaiting transport by the Red Cross. Within a few months of his arrival, the camp was attacked by the Salvadoran military. Soldiers entered the camp and attempted to drag the wounded guerrillas out, prompting a relocation of many persons in the camp.

Following Christ, the JRS engages the painful reality of displaced lives and chooses to stand with the crucified peoples of the world, like Amalia Molina. Amalia and her husband, Gil, fled the civil war in El Salvador. They were arrested by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Los Angeles in 1998. Separated from their children and each other, they were taken to a nearby detention center in San Pedro, where they lived with hundreds of other detainees for sixteen months. "We had one thing in common," Amalia recalls for us: "We were all suffering and we were all feeling frustrated and sad. In this situation, you just feel like dying. You don't know anything about your case, your future, how your family is doing. You are just waiting for the door to open to your freedom." She started a Bible study and prayer group in the detention center. Amalia recalls: "At San Pedro, I had an encounter with Jesus personified; the Romans made fun of Him; they took His clothes, they rejected Him. He was a prisoner and He suffered."<sup>58</sup> Inspired by the example of JRS workers who visited her in detention, Amalia decided to work with the JRS after receiving asylum in this country. Time and time again, she returned to San Pedro and other detention centers, laboring in solidarity with the suffering and forgotten.

---

<sup>57</sup> To name just a few of these martyrs for the Gospel, Patrick Gahizi, S.J., was killed in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Antonio Bargiggia was shot dead as he traveled in Burundi in 2000. Karl Albrecht, S.J., was shot dead in his community by an intruder in East Timor in 1999. A few days earlier a young Indonesian priest, Tarcissius Dewanto, S.J., working with displaced people, but not technically a member of the JRS, was killed along with around thirty people who had taken refuge in the Catholic Church in Suai, East Timor. Richie Fernando, S.J., a scholastic from the Philippines, was killed in 1996 by a hand grenade at a school founded by the JRS in Cambodia (interview via e-mail with Mark Raper, October 25, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Ana Amalia Molina, *War Has Changed Our Life, Not Our Spirit: Experiences of Forcibly Displaced Women*, 120f. For a more complete account of Amalia's experience, see Ana Amalia Molina, *The Power of Love: My Experience in a U.S. Immigration Jail*.

Like Ignatius, Jesuits and their colleagues ask to be placed with the Son, carrying his cross.<sup>59</sup> It is here, at the cross, where Ignatius invites us to ask those three disquieting questions that cut to the chase: "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?" (*SpEx* 53). Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., martyred at the University of Central America in 1989, reworked those questions for the present age. He suggested that we stand before the crucified peoples of today's world—like refugees—and ask: "Have I helped to crucify them? What am I doing to remove them from their crosses? What must I do so they can rise up again?"<sup>60</sup>

In the shadow of the cross, we encounter the cost of our inaction and the regret of not doing enough. We face head-on our complicity in unjust social and economic structures that ultimately

cause or tolerate the dislocation of millions. In the refugee, we encounter Christ, who judges us by how we treat the most vulnerable in our midst (Matt. 25:35). In Father Kolvenbach's words, "Jesus identifies with the homeless so that he may bless all who welcome him in the refugee and curse those who do not assist him in the migrant" (*EvChal* 94).

Yet, we know that beyond the shadow of the cross lies Easter morning. The JRS is a concrete sign that death does not have the last word, nor do the civil conflicts and the refugee camps they spawn. In often mundane work in

camps and detention centers, courtrooms and classrooms, offices and libraries, the JRS gives us opportunities to remove refugees from their crosses and to empower them to rise up again. In its various ministries of consolation—in the care of the refugee's spiritual and physi-

---

*The reign of God is that vital symbol in our tradition that describes God's dream for us: to live in union with God and others, where love conquers hatred, peace overcomes discord, and joy casts out all fear; where the littlest among us are given the place of honor; where every person is invited to eat at the same table; and where every refugee finds a home.*

---

<sup>59</sup> For a description of Ignatius's vision of La Storta, see Joseph Tylenda, trans. and ed., *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, 113, and accompanying notes.

<sup>60</sup> Brackley, *Call to Discernment*, 40.

cal well-being—the JRS imitates the risen Christ of the Fourth Week, the One who consoles (*SpEx* 224). The consolation of the Exercises is a movement that impels us, like the disciples in the upper room, outward to console others.

The resurrection means that any disciple of the Risen Lord must carry on the work of salvation. Jesus saves us so that we can save others. To save the world is to work for a faith-inspired justice, for the liberation of all people from oppression and from all that devalues life, degrades human dignity, and stifles the human spirit. With Jesus we help realize the reign of God on earth, even as we anticipate its fullest expression in heaven. The reign of God is that vital symbol in our tradition that describes God's dream for us: to live in union with God and others, where love conquers hatred, peace overcomes discord, and joy casts out all fear; where the littlest among us are given the place of honor; where every person is invited to eat at the same table; and where every refugee finds a home.

Our hope is future-oriented but it is based on God's action in the past and present, which shows how faithful God is. Through the work of the JRS, God steadfastly accompanies those most in need of consolation. This hope is contagious. For Srey Pot, a Cambodian refugee, hope came in the form of a dance. Srey was born in a refugee camp near the Thai-Cambodian border, but soon after her birth, the camp was bombed and destroyed, forcing her family to flee to Thailand. There she and her family were placed in another camp, which would be her home for ten years. When she was six years old, Srey, along with her sisters, learned traditional Cambodian dances at a camp school, practicing every day for four hours. After a peace agreement was signed in Cambodia in 1991, her family was repatriated to Cambodia, where they were given a small plot of land and some money to build their lives again. At the village school, Srey continued to learn dance and joined a group of dancers who used traditional dance as a way to lobby for world peace and for an end to land mines. Here are Srey's reflections:

My favorite Cambodian dance is "Peace," in which I dance as a dove of peace. I also like the "Ban landmines" dance. In this one, I dance as a butterfly captured by a landmine. One of my dreams is to visit the world with my dancing troupe, to dance and wish people peace, to make friends and show them our culture and to learn how people

live in other countries. I look to the future with the hope that real peace will one day come for all of us.<sup>61</sup>

In the fall of 2000, Srey's dream came true: she and her dancing troupe traveled to Spain. In her graceful, grace-filled dance of the dove and the butterfly, we are reminded that God's dream for the world is still in the making and that we are called, each in his or her own way, to labor with Christ to build a more just, more gentle world.

## VII. Conclusion

*You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

—Deut. 10:19

**I**n the wake of Hurricane Katrina, we were given an unexpected peek into what JRS teams face every day. With thousands of people driven from their homes by storms and floods, we confronted an unsettling reality all too familiar to people in less-developed nations. When reporters described hurricane and flood victims as refugees, Americans were suddenly not so different from those displaced by the tsunami a year ago. Ill-prepared to deal with the long-term dislocation of its own citizens, government agencies were urged to turn for help to relief organizations expert in dealing with resettlement of refugees.<sup>62</sup> As New Orleans drained and the hurricane season passed, cities and states prepared themselves for the long haul of redeveloping lands laid waste by Katrina.

Perhaps after Katrina—after seeing the tragedy of dislocation played out on every cable channel and after hearing horrifying tales of lives on the run—we understand better why the JRS does what it does. Perhaps one day, the JRS will cease its work of accompaniment, service, and advocacy. This will be good news because the JRS began and still exists to respond to the agony of an ever-growing number of refugees. Andrew Hamilton, S.J., an Australian theologian and long-time collaborator with the JRS in Asia, observed that “the history of JRS is the history of the refugees. Until there are no more refugees,

---

<sup>61</sup> Molina, *War Has Changed Our Life*, 90 f.

<sup>62</sup> James Dao, “No Fixed Address,” *New York Times*, 11 September 2005, sect. 4, 1. These agencies have resettled over two million refugees in this country since 1975.

there can be no satisfactory conclusions to the story of JRS" (*EvChal* 57). The story continues to unfold in the resilient lives of refugees and the faithful accompaniment of the JRS personnel.

For now, the story of the JRS lacks an ending. But we know its beginnings in the vision of Pedro Arrupe, in the prophetic calls of Vatican II and GC 32, and in the early Society's commitment to helping souls and offering ministries of consolation. In these beginnings, people today find inspiration to rally to the defense of refugees and displaced persons. In these beginnings, we find the seeds of hope that one day may lead to a happy ending for the refugee and a quiet end to the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service.

## Appendix: How You Can Become Part of the JRS Story

Over the last twenty-five years, many Jesuits, religious, and lay persons in the United States have played significant roles in the JRS story, offering months or years of service to this international apostolate that Father Arrupe held so dear. This opportunity still exists for Jesuits called to the social apostolate, even if only during the time of tertianship, a formation experiment, or sabbatical. Consult the JRS international Website ([www.jrs.net](http://www.jrs.net)) or the JRS/USA site ([www.jrsusa.org](http://www.jrsusa.org)) for more information about the many programs and needs of the JRS.

Jesuits and their colleagues can contribute to the vital mission of the JRS without becoming formally a part of its structure. First, we remember Father Arrupe's "swan song"—his message to all of us just before he suffered his stroke. "Pray. Pray much," he said. "Problems such as these are not solved by human efforts." We can only cope with the refugee crisis if we beg for the assistance of the Holy Spirit. One way of keeping the plight of the refugee close to us is to make use of the special readings and prayers for refugees and exiles provided in the *Lectionary* (4:868–77) and *Sacramentary* (pp. 913f.). To be a "companion" is, at least etymologically, to "break bread" with one another. In the Eucharistic meal, we accompany the refugee in our prayer.

We can also support the work of the JRS by learning and teaching about migration issues. Sometimes we need only look as far as the Jesuit community for the best resources. Some of our younger Jesuit brothers of Asian descent have experienced the tragedy of displacement in their own lives or families. Moreover, studying at our theology centers and universities are Jesuits from other parts of the world who know first-hand the tragedy of displacement. They need to tell the story of their families and countries, and we who have lived lives unscarred by displacement need to learn from them.

Another indispensable source of information is the national and international news media (even though news accounts of refugees are often buried on page 9 or at the end of a telecast). On the JRS Internet site, you can access *Servir*, the JRS magazine published three times a year, and sign up for *Dispatches*, a twice-monthly e-mail news bulletin. Another valuable Internet source is the Website for a recently announced campaign by the United States Catholic Bishops, *Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope* ([www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org)). The aim of the campaign is to



mobilize Catholic institutions and persons of good faith to support comprehensive immigration reform. The Website is a treasure trove of documents and information about migration issues, including Catholic social teaching and pending legislation. Most practically, the campaign has compiled "resource kits" for use by liturgists, homilists, parish leaders, and educators.

Educators can make a significant contribution to the labor of the JRS. In a talk at Santa Clara University in 2000, Father Kolvenbach declared that Jesuit universities must be actively engaged in forming persons in solidarity with the real world.<sup>63</sup> This means that our students must "let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering, and engage it constructively."<sup>64</sup> Part of this painful reality is the plight of refugees and displaced persons, which John Paul II graphically described as "the festering of a wound which typifies and reveals the imbalances and conflicts of the modern world."<sup>65</sup> Teachers can put students in contact with refugees and migrants through service-learning programs and immersion experiences and then help them reflect on these experiences.<sup>66</sup> They can also bring this reality into the classroom by assigning reading that gives voice to refugees, by inviting in guest speakers, by incorporating case studies dealing with migration issues, and by using multimedia to introduce students to life on the border or in refugee camps.

Finally, the JRS can always use our financial support. Jesuit communities, families, businesses, and schools may consider fundraising or tithing part of their income. This generosity becomes an act of solidarity especially when coupled with prayer for the JRS and refugees and education about the challenges they face.

---

<sup>63</sup> See Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," 31, no. 1 (January 2001): 24.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 24.

<sup>66</sup> For an engaging account of one such immersion program on the Mexican border, see Kurt Denk, ed., *Many Hands, One Dream*.

## Sources

### Books

- Aldama, Antonio M. de. *An Introductory Commentary on the Constitutions*. Translated by Aloysius Owen. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989.
- . *The Formula of the Institute: Notes for a Commentary*. Translated by Ignacio Echániz. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1990.
- Arrupe, Pedro. "Rooted and Grounded in Love." In *The Spiritual Legacy of Pedro Arrupe, S.J.* New York: New York Province of the Society of Jesus, 1985.
- Bangert, William V. *A History of the Society of Jesus*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972.
- Bishop, George. *Pedro Arrupe, S.J.* Gujarat, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2000.
- Brackley, Dean. *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2004.
- Burke, Kevin. *Pedro Arrupe: Essential Writings*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004.
- Dalmases, Cándido de. *Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Jesuits*. Translated by Jerome Aixalá. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985.
- Denk, Kurt, ed. *Many Hands, One Dream: The Story of Project Mexico*. Baltimore: Resonant Publishing, 2004.
- Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977.
- Documents of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984.
- Documents of the Thirty-fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources: 1995.
- Flannery, Austin, ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents*. Vol. 1. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1992.
- Ganss, George, ed. and trans. *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.
- . *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992.
- Harrington, Daniel J. *The Church according to the New Testament*. Chicago: Sheed and Ward, 2001.
- Martin, James. *This Our Exile: A Spiritual Journey with the Refugees of East Africa*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999.
- Modras, Ronald. *Ignatian Humanism*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004.
- Molina, Ana Amalia. *The Power of Love: My Experience in a U.S. Immigration Jail*. Washington, D.C.: Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean [EPICA], 2003.
- O'Brien, David, and Thomas Shannon, eds. *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992.

O'Malley, John. *The First Jesuits*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Tylenda, Joseph, ed. and trans., *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991).

### Periodicals

Kolvenbach, Peter-Hans. "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education." *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 31, no. 1 (January 2001): 13–29.

Raper, Mark. "Remembering Rwanda, 1994–2004." *America*, April 19, 2004, 14–17.

Samway, Patrick. "Living on the Edge." *America*, November 15, 2004, 8 f.

Troha, Becky. "Sanctuary." *Company*, Spring 2005, 17–23.

### Official Publications

General Curia of the Society of Jesus. *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*. Vols. 18 and 20. Rome, 1981 and 1991.

Jesuit Refugee Service. *Annual Report*, 2003 and 2004.

———. *Everybody's Challenge: Essential Documents of Jesuit Refugee Service, 1980–2000*. Rome, 2000.

———. *War Has Changed Our Life, Not Our Spirit: Experiences of Forcibly Displaced Women*. Rome, 2001.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005.

Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity*. 1992. This publication can be accessed at [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/migrants/documents/rc\\_pc\\_migrants\\_doc\\_19920625\\_refugees\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_19920625_refugees_en.html)



# DOCUMENTATION

Curia Generalizia della Compagnia di Gesù

Borgo S. Spirito, 4

C.P. 6139 / 00195 ROMA-PRATI (Italia)

Tel . 06/689.771 – Fax 06/686.8214

## 25th Anniversary of the Jesuit Refugee Service

2005/19

### TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

*“St. Ignatius called us to go anywhere we are most needed for the greater service of God. The spiritual as well as the material needs of nearly 16 million refugees throughout the world today could scarcely be greater.”* The words of Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ in his letter of 14 November 1980 (AR XVIII, 319–321), which established the Jesuit Refugee Service, have inspired many Jesuits and others to give themselves to refugee ministry. JRS was to be a new apostolate for the Society and opened new paths of service to and learning with refugees.

Today, 25 years later, this apostolic work is still a priority of the Society as one response to our option for the faith that does justice. Now with 50 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, the context in which JRS works has changed dramatically. Forced migration is taking place in a rapidly changing world where the old certainties are often out of date. Wars and conflicts are ending while others are erupting. The important geo-

political issues and the areas of the world most significantly affected are not those of yesterday.

JRS has tried to remain faithful to the original vision of Fr. Arrupe while adapting to new scenarios of forced migration. In the last few years, the number persons displaced within their own countries of origin, i.e. IDPs, has surpassed that who has sought refuge internationally, i.e. refugees. Working with internally displaced persons is often more difficult because of the volatile national political and security. This work will require even greater collaboration between JRS and local churches and Provinces.

While traditional refugee camps continue to shelter millions of refugees, there are many people who end up in urban areas. These groups are often very isolated, and difficult to identify and thus assist. Migrants who are trapped in detention centres are unfortunately a growing trend. The present debate on the asylum-migration nexus requires creative initiatives.

JRS cannot be expected to respond to the needs of everybody on the move. The debate on who exactly we are mandated to assist will continue. It is clear, however, that JRS has to restrict itself to those who are forcibly displaced.

Advocacy, communications and programme strategies have been developed in JRS and continue evolving to serve the most forgotten people in places overlooked by governments and ignored by the mass media. JRS works in over 50 countries in six continents around the world. It employs over 1,000 staff: laywomen and men, Jesuits and other religious to meet different needs of nearly a half a million refugees and IDPs. It has developed particular specialisations in education and pastoral care. *"The help needed is not only material. In a special way the Society is being called to render a service that is human, pedagogical and spiritual."* (Ibid.) These are the words of Fr. Arrupe in his letter. A clear service and sign of hope is precisely the work of JRS in education. JRS reaches out to some 160,000 refugee students, offering formal and informal education. JRS also offers skills training to adults, in the hope that they will be self-reliant once they return home. A relatively new and important component of JRS work has been that of peace and reconciliation education.

To do all this work, JRS needs to constantly analyse the context in which it is present. Understanding what the implications of these

changes will require an intellectual discernment on future directions and needs.

In these 25 years, JRS has learnt many things. It is relatively easy to become involved in work. It is less easy to remain flexible, prioritising where and when to stay and when to move on to new situations. JRS constantly needs to renew its identity as a flexible organisation, ready to move where people are most in need and where JRS is most needed. This requires a light administration coupled with a professional approach to provide a quality service to refugees.

JRS' most valuable resource is its staff. Many excellent lay people and other religious work together with Jesuits in every part of the world. Over these years, JRS has developed work with non-Christian groups. Within JRS, there are many Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and other non-Christian workers. This collaboration has been most fruitful.

The JRS mission statement, *to accompany many of these brothers and sisters of ours, to serve them as companions and to advocate their cause*, established at General Congregation 34 is clear and well-accepted. It is this mission that JRS must not lose sight of. GC 34 also asked the Society to assist the work of JRS wherever possible. We can ask ourselves if we have met this request. The assistance to JRS should not exclude financial considerations. JRS deals with the most unpredictable of works and it is unfortunate if its financial situation is also precarious.

The work of JRS requires a high degree of availability. JRS workers, including Jesuits, need to be ready to go to even the most difficult situations. Fr Arrupe reminded us that *"with our ideal of availability and universality (...) and the active collaboration of many lay people who work with us, we are particularly well fitted to meet this challenge."* (Ibid.)

Many Jesuits have been and still are witnesses to this ideal of availability. Now that JRS has to be more specialized, given the complexity of this apostolate, Jesuits are needed not just for short periods of time, but for the longer term as well. In this way they can learn and train to be more effective in this apostolate. Perhaps this is a sign of what is needed for the new evangelisation, a commitment which preaches the Gospel by showing Christ's love in action, by deeds and by sharing our lives.

Let us thank the Lord for these 25 years in the ministry of refugee care. It is also the occasion to thank all who, during these years, have given witness to God's love for refugees, the poorest of the poor. I would like to mention in particular the directors of JRS, the Jesuits and all their partners in this ministry of compassion: religious priests and lay persons, religious brothers and sisters. Without their generous commitment, JRS would not have been able to help so many refugees in so

many hopeless situations. May the Lord bless them all because they have in effect served Him, as a refugee among all the refugees!

These 25 years of history are a work of love. Despite being kept in the shadow of injustice and evil, refugees are a witness to survival in the face of adversity. This directs us towards the light of the Lord. The destructive forces which cause refugee situations reveal the structural sin embedded in the systems of today's world. There is a task still to be accomplished. *"God is calling us through these helpless people. We should consider the chance of being able to assist them a privilege that will, in turn, bring great blessings to ourselves and our Society."* (Ibid.)

Let us pray that the need for a service like JRS will diminish. However, while such urgent cries of the poor continue to be heard, I also pray that all those who work and support JRS may be as effective as possible in providing safety to many in a place they can call home.

Fraternally yours in the Lord,

**Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.**

Superior General

Rome, 14 November 2005





## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION, EFFECTIVE MARCH 2001

### ➤ U.S. JESUITS:

An annual subscription is provided by the ten United States provinces for U.S. Jesuits living in the United States and U.S. Jesuits who are still members of a U.S. province but living outside the United States.

### ➤ ALL OTHER SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Subscriptions to STUDIES:

U.S.: one-year, \$18; two years, \$35

Canada and Mexico: one year, \$26; two years, \$50

All other destinations: one year, \$29; two years, \$55

**\*\*\* All payments must be in U.S. funds. \*\*\***

### ➤ CHANGE-OF-ADDRESS INFORMATION:

- »» Jesuit subscribers: Your province office should send us your change of address; you need not do so.
- »» Non-Jesuit subscribers: Change-of-address information (please include former address label if possible) should be sent to Address Correction.

### ➤ EDITORIAL OFFICE

Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality  
Faber House  
102 College Road  
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467-3841  
Tel: 617-552-0860  
Fax: 617-552-0925  
E-mail: fleminpb@bc.edu

### ➤ SUBSCRIPTIONS

Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits  
3601 Lindell Boulevard  
St. Louis, MO 63108  
Tel: 314-977-7257  
Fax: 314-977-7263  
E-mail: ijs@slu.edu

### ➤ SINGLE ISSUES (Current or Past):

The price for single copies of current or past issues is \$3.00, plus postage and handling charges. Double issues (for example, 5/1-2, 8/2-3, 9/1-2, etc.) are \$6.00 each, plus postage and handling.

8074 045

**The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality**  
**3601 Lindell Boulevard**  
**St. Louis, MO 63108**

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Brainerd, MN  
Permit No. 265

S5 P3 \*\*\*\*\*ECRLOT\*\*C005  
BOSTON COLLEGE SERIALS DEPT  
Thomas O Neill Library  
140 Commonwealth Ave  
Chestnut Hill MA 02467-3800

