

# *Recreating Right Relationships*

— DEEPENING THE MISSION —  
OF RECONCILIATION IN THE WORK OF JRS





**JRS STRATEGIC  
FRAMEWORK  
2012 - 2015**

*The mission of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. As a Catholic organisation and a work of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), JRS is inspired by the compassion and love of Jesus for the poor and excluded.*

*Inspired by faith and the values of inclusiveness and solidarity, we will seek to understand and address the causes of structural inequality. We will work in partnership with others to create communities of justice, dialogue, peace and reconciliation.*

**📍 Thai-Cambodian border:**  
Pierre Ceyrac SJ, a JRS pioneer, stands by a refugee in one of the border camps, where he served from 1980 to 1993.



## Cover photo

**Colombia:** *The drawing is part of a mural at a JRS hostel in Barrancabermeja, which depicts the phases of war-induced displacement (see page 15). The image on the cover is the last part of the mural, depicting the refugees settling and integrating in their host community.*

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## Photo Credits

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# Preface

*In June 2013, as part of an ongoing collaboration between JRS and the Centre for Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College, JRS workers from across the world met with academics at the Metta Karuna Reflection Centre in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The aim of the workshop was to reflect on the role of reconciliation in JRS, and to articulate the underlying principles and elements of our work in this area.*

*Participants spent a week reflecting together on their experiences of reconciled and*

*un-reconciled communities in Cambodia, Colombia, Indonesia, Syria, the Philippines and the Democratic Republic of Congo. They also looked at the practical experience of JRS in the light of different reconciliation models and heard what world religions have to say about forgiveness, peace and reconciliation.*

*Through this process of listening and learning, the participants reached a shared understanding about why reconciliation is so central to JRS work, about what are its most significant underlying values and dimensions, and about*

*how reconciliation might be incorporated in the life stream of all JRS projects.*

*This manual attempts to capture both the insights of the workshop and the richness of its discussions. There is much to absorb. To get the most out of it, we recommend that you do not read the manual all at once but rather that you reflect together and individually on each section separately. We hope it will help you, JRS teams around the world, to make reconciliation part of all you do.*



# Introduction

*As JRS, we believe that our presence among the refugees can be an “effective sign of God’s love and reconciliation” (JRS Charter, 2000). Indeed, it would be practically impossible for JRS to fulfil its mission without working on reconciliation.*

*How can we accompany refugees without responding to their longing for healing and peace? How can we be present in conflict and post-conflict zones without supporting communities in their search for reconciliation and the*

*restoration of justice? How can we serve refugees targeted by intolerance, without building bridges with host communities?*

*I welcome this manual, the outcome of a workshop on reconciliation held by JRS and Boston College in June 2013, because its insights will help us to reflect on the work we have been doing so far in what is still a pioneer field.*

*Throughout its history JRS has always worked towards*

*reconciliation, usually without naming it as such. We have engaged in community programs that involve peace education, dialogue and conflict resolution. Education and psychosocial support, our areas of special focus, have fostered healing and hope. Our advocacy has promoted the search for truth and accountability necessary for reconciliation and justice. And our research has produced analyses of the causes of conflict and displacement.*

*I would like to take up the last point because, to embrace fully our mission of reconciliation, we need to be sharply aware of the evils that cause and perpetuate division in the first place. If we take the brute reality experienced by so many displaced people at face value, without naming the underlying sources of violence and despair, we would be little more than naïve do-gooders, embracing compassion but leaving wisdom behind.*

*What are the dynamics that drive the conflicts we face? Clearly the answer to this question depends on each specific context, but common trends can be identified, especially in civil conflicts. These include persistent injustices; weak and repressive governments; the exploitation of ethnicity and religion; external interference; and economic interests.*

**📍 South Sudan:** Secondary school students in Yei, an area badly damaged during the civil war.



*Ultimately, at the root of armed conflict lies the desire to gain or cling to power and wealth. Greed fuels lucrative global trades, some licit, others not, which cause tremendous suffering: in arms, in drugs, in human beings. The struggle over natural resources is a constant source of violence. In Colombia's civil conflict, for example, warring parties grabbed the land of hundreds of thousands*

*of families. In eastern Congo, armed groups supported by Uganda and Rwanda exploit the minerals found in the region to fund their endless warfare.*

*The interference of outside powers evident in Congo is another source of despair, clearly seen in Syria too: the Syrian conflict has become a pawn in a chess game played by external actors, starting*

**DR Congo:**  
Internally displaced people in the war-torn east.



*from neighbouring countries and drawing in other Arab states, the US, Russia and others.*

*There is no doubt that external forces, which we often feel we have no control over, are responsible for much of the violence in our world today. But we cannot stop there. In an atmosphere compromised by insecurity and intolerance, some individuals and communities get sucked into a downward spiral of fear, self-interest, indifference about the other and ultimately violence, with tragic consequences – “Brother will betray brother to death” (Mt 10:21).*

*The xenophobic violence targeting migrants and refugees in so-called ‘peaceful’ countries, often incited by unscrupulous politicians, shows how tragically easy it is to exploit people’s insecurities, prompting them to violent acts.*

*Our reconciliation efforts must be aware of and counteract all these levels of violence: from the macro-political level right down to the daily incidents at*

*micro-level. We need to encourage people to recognise and repudiate sources and acts of violence, and to recreate right relationships with themselves and with others. Sometimes this means going against the current, to build communities that not only resist evil but respond with forgiveness and goodness.*

*The projects outlined in this manual are excellent examples of such an approach: from countries as diverse as Colombia, Syria, Congo and Cambodia, we see how JRS teams and forcibly displaced people strive together for personal and communal healing, to create reconciled communities that are signs of peace and hope.*

*This work then needs to feed into our advocacy to bring about change at the macro-political level too, to tackle those root sources of violence and despair. A good question to consistently ask ourselves is this: how can we effectively connect our reconciliation work at community level to the bigger picture, to*

*generate solutions that are truly based on justice and peace?*

*I encourage you to view this manual as an immensely helpful tool to carefully analyse the situations we are at work in, and to improve our call as JRS to recreate right relationships in the context of the programs we offer. Its insights are an important step on our journey to reconciliation as individuals, as JRS teams and as an organisation.*

**Peter Balleis SJ**

JRS International Director  
September 2013



 **Chad:** Sudanese refugee Kitoma was badly injured by the Janjaweed in her home village.



## Sources of VIOLENCE & DESPAIR

What are the underlying sources of violence and despair that drive the conflicts we face? We have identified some common trends that combine to cause and perpetuate war and division:

1. Top of the list is the global arms trade, regulated by an international treaty only in 2013. Both legal and illegal arms dealing have deadly repercussions. Denouncing the illegal arms trade, Pope Francis demanded: “is this or that war really a war to solve problems or is it a commercial war for selling weapons in illegal trade?”
2. The struggle to control and profit from natural resources can lead to armed conflict, violations of human rights and

displacement, environmental degradation and the dispossession of marginalised communities. Many actors are involved, from those that control resource-rich territories to the governments and multinational companies that cash in.

3. When a country becomes an international battlefield, with foreign interference in its internal conflict, the people can do little to change things although they pay the highest price. They are tempted to despair because they feel they are not actors but marionettes, moved by others.
4. Another hallmark of division is the exploitation of national, ethnic and religious

tensions, of fears of ‘the other’. We have seen extreme consequences like genocide. But ‘peaceful’ countries are no strangers to such exploitation. The scapegoating and marginalization of refugees and migrants foments intolerance and xenophobia among host communities.

5. Impunity is the failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice. It compounds the despair of victims, denying them their right to justice and redress, and stands in the way of effective reconciliation.
6. Poor governance, leading to corruption, unequal distribution of resources and poverty, is a source of violence and despair.

WHY





## WHY WE FEEL CALLED TO RECONCILIATION

*“To be human means to care for one another!  
But when harmony is broken, a metamorphosis  
occurs: the brother who is to be cared for and  
loved becomes an adversary to fight, to kill.  
What violence occurs at that moment, how  
many conflicts, how many wars have marked our  
history! We need only look at the suffering of so  
many brothers and sisters.”*

POPE FRANCIS

 **Bosnia:** Marijan Pavlovic briefly returns home to Borovice, a Croatian village destroyed by Bosnian forces in the early 90s, when war raged throughout former Yugoslavia. In 1998, JRS supported the reconstruction of the first houses in Borovice.

In more than 30 years of accompanying forcibly displaced people, serving them and advocating their cause, one key lesson we have learned as JRS is that we need to strive constantly towards reconciliation. The traumatic reality of so many refugees continues to challenge us to deepen this aspect of our mission.

JRS works in radically different settings around the world. Most, if not all, share one thing in common. They are deeply marked by tensions of one sort or another: by hostility between refugees and host communities, by ethnic and religious antagonism, by the resentment often present in post-conflict situations, and often enough by outright conflict. Relationships have been torn apart by deep mutual suspicion, hatred and violence.

For us, the call to reconciliation is a call to recreate 'right' relationships, to work together for a more humane and just world where future generations can live more fruitful and happier lives. We believe that such a world is possible. But working with refugees, we are constantly reminded of the terrible consequences of conflict and division they face. Their pain reminds us that a better world will never exist unless we constantly sow the seeds of reconciliation.

This is no easy or quick fix solution. Working for reconciliation is often thankless and tiring, and it can also be dangerous. However we are motivated by the resilience and openness of refugees and others who have been deeply affected by violence, intolerance and persecution. Our task is to take small steps as we journey together with them towards reconciliation.

**We want to invite others of goodwill to join us in this journey by:**

- Making our dream contagious: as witnesses of reconciliation, we generate corners of hope through concrete acts of forgiveness, hospitality, compassion and justice.
- Helping people become more aware of the sources of division, violence and despair and how harmful they are.
- Welcoming all without discrimination, working for the good of all, and seeking the good in all. As agents of reconciliation, we strive not to take sides. We listen to the suffering of the victims and to the perpetrators. And we try to help people realise that real happiness will only come about when the dignity and rights of each one are respected.



 **Colombia:**  
The phases of displacement.

## *The call of* **DIFFERENT FAITHS TO FORGIVENESS & RECONCILIATION**

The JRS mission of reconciliation is built on faith in God who is universal and unconditional love, and who is present in human history, even its most

tragic moments. Rooted in the Christian tradition, we draw our inspiration from the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. We acknowledge that

reconciliation is a gift, a grace from God, and we are enriched by the wisdom of other religious traditions that speak to so many refugees and forcibly displaced people.





 **Nepal:** A school celebration in one of the camps for Bhutanese refugees in Damak.

# Christianity

*calls its followers to the ministry of love, reconciliation and forgiveness.*

2 Cor 5:17-18 ■

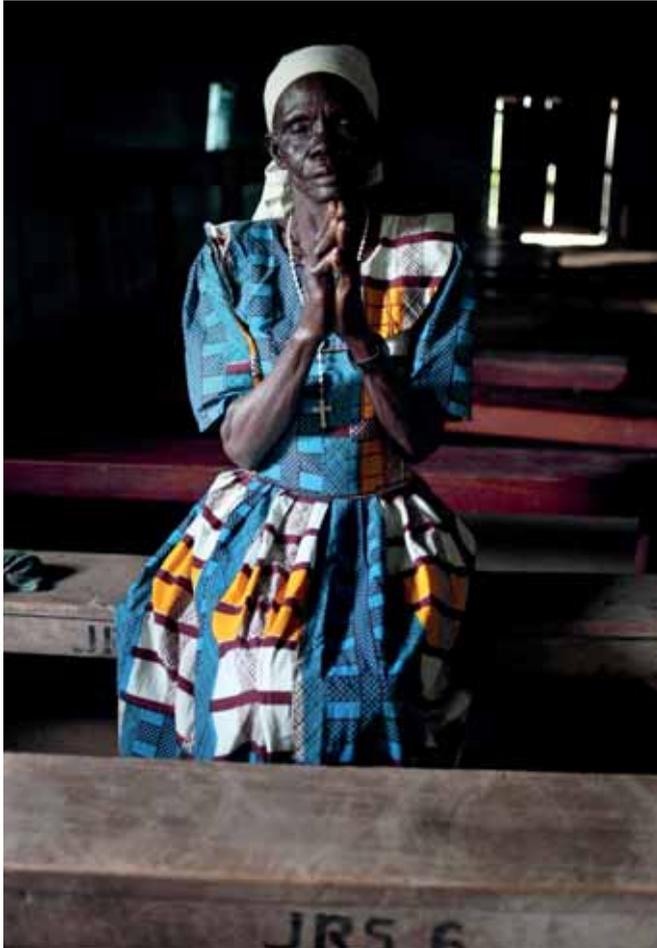
**“Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”**

Mt 5:43-44 ■

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”**

Lk 23:34 ■

**“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’”**



*“In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue, and peace is spoken... Let everyone be moved to look into the depths of his or her conscience and listen to that word which says: Leave behind the self-interest that hardens your heart, overcome the indifference that makes your heart insensitive towards others, conquer your deadly reasoning, and open yourself to dialogue and reconciliation.”*



**POPE FRANCIS**

# Islam

*calls its followers to forgive as God forgives, with compassion. Among the 99 names belonging to God, we find:*

**Ar-Rahmân:** The Most Compassionate, The Beneficent, The Gracious

**As-Salâm:** The All-Peaceful, The Bestower of Peace

**Ar-Rahîm:** The Merciful

**Al-Gaffâr:** The Forgiver

Q. 2 [The Cow] v.172 ■

**“God is All-Forgiving, Compassionate to each.”**

Q. 36 [Ya Sin] v.58 ■

**“Peace’ shall be the word from a Compassionate Lord.”**



## **Buddhism**

*calls its followers to mindfulness, loving kindness, compassion and wisdom (for compassion without wisdom causes great suffering) and to peaceful hearts, which lead to peaceful communities and a peaceful world.*

A few thoughts from Maha Ghosananda, a highly revered Cambodian Buddhist monk who worked for peace and reconciliation after the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia:

**“There is no reconciliation with jealousy, self-righteousness and meaningless criticism.”**

**“Peace-making means the balance of wisdom and compassion and the perfect meeting of humanitarian needs and political realities. It means compassion without concession and peace without appeasement.”**

**“Hatred never ceases by hatred but by love alone is healed.”**

**DALAI LAMA  
OF TIBET**

*“World peace must develop from inner peace. Peace is not the absence of violence. Peace is the manifestation of human compassion.”*

📍 **Thailand:** JRS staff meet with a Buddhist monk, Abbot Thiem, to ask for space on the temple grounds for a training centre for Burmese migrants in Ranong.



# Hinduism

*urges compassion, tolerance and unity.*

Yajurveda 36.18 ■

**“Strong one, make me strong. May all beings look on me with the eye of a friend. May I look on all beings with the eye of a friend. May we look on one another with the eye of a friend.”**

Basavanna from  
Karnataka ■

**“What sort of religion can it be without compassion? You need to show compassion to all living beings. Compassion is the root of all religious faith.”**

Rigveda 10.191.2-4 ■

**“Let your aims be common, and your hearts be of one accord, and all of you be of one mind, so you may live well together.”**



## Judaism

*stresses the concept of Tikkun Olam, an exhortation in the Kaballah for the Jewish community to labour to make the divine values of justice, compassion and peace a reality. Today, Tikkun Olam suggests humanity's shared responsibility to heal, repair and transform the world.*

Likkutei Etzot ha-Shalem,  
1913, 81-91 ■

**Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav: "Imitate God by being compassionate and forgiving. He will in turn have compassion on you, and pardon your offences."**

Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 ■

**"One person alone was brought forth at the time of creation in order to teach us that one who destroys a single human soul is regarded as the destroyer of the whole world, while one who preserves a single human soul is regarded as the preserver of the whole world."**

Mekh. Canticles 3 ■

**Abba Shaul: "Just as He is compassionate and merciful so you be compassionate and merciful!"**

 **Malta:** Flowers float on the Mediterranean Sea after being cast by African immigrants during a memorial service for those who died attempting to cross from Africa to Europe.

## Conclusion

These religions call us to take up the challenge of showing love and forgiveness in the face of hostility. Their calls are not limited to their followers alone. Each one of us is on an inner journey to personal reconciliation that seeks the meaning of suffering and death, hope and life itself. JRS welcomes all people of goodwill whose inner search propels them to pursue reconciliation in their communities.





WHAT



## WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF OUR RECONCILIATION WORK?

*“In our service to refugees, I ask how JRS can better build participatory communities. How can we build something more lasting, something that strengthens the humanity of those for whom we work? How can we help them experience and move towards reconciliation, the healing of deep wounds often connected with violent displacement, so that communities of peace can emerge?”*

JESUIT FR GENERAL ADOLFO NICOLÁS SJ

 **Indonesia:** In post-war Aceh, a village chief sprinkles rice on a tractor supplied by JRS for communal farming, in line with goals agreed between JRS and the community.

The word “reconciliation” means different things to different people. It cannot be pinned down by a precise definition; there is no one size that fits all, no ideal sequence of steps to follow to achieve reconciliation.

Reconciliation may be described as a journey – one that may never reach completion but achieves much in the search for healing. No two journeys towards reconciliation are the same. In JRS, the aim of reconciliation as we broadly understand it – to recreate right

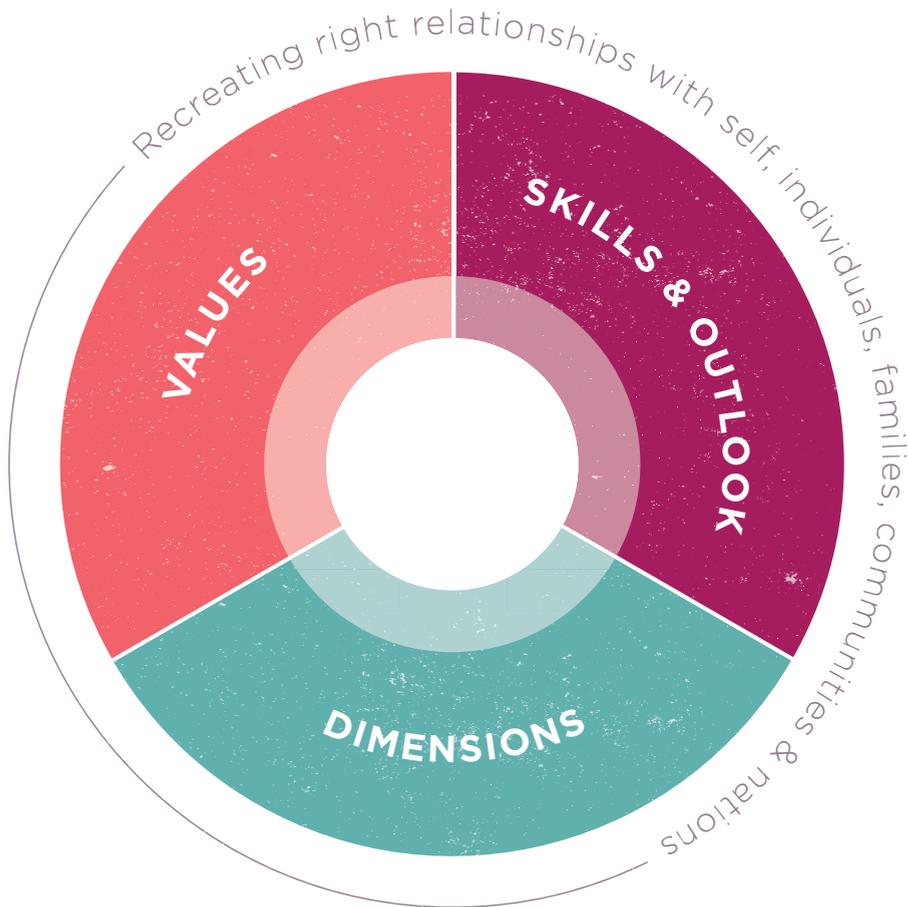
relationships – is expressed differently from place to place. Diverse as they are, all our efforts seek genuine reconciliation, which restores human dignity for all, and not artificial, meaningless gestures.

Our striving for authentic reconciliation is underpinned by the core values we subscribe to as a Catholic organisation and by the skills needed to translate our values into action. On pages 34-47 we feature the values of JRS and their relevance for reconciliation.

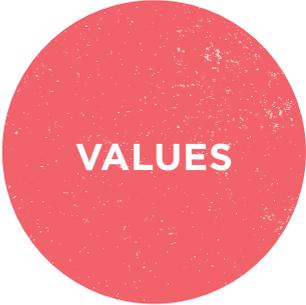
Overleaf, we present the values and the necessary skills, together with the different levels and dimensions of reconciliation, in the shape of a wheel. We chose this symbol for a number of reasons. The wheel is in motion, reflecting the reality that reconciliation is a dynamic process. The perspective of those involved changes depending on where they are in that process. The wheel integrates all the diverse elements of reconciliation together – all are interconnected to one another.







— *The Wheel of* —  
**RECONCILIATION**



**VALUES**

Compassion &  
 forgiveness  
 Hope  
 Dignity  
 Solidarity &  
 inclusiveness  
 Hospitality  
 Justice & truth  
 Participation

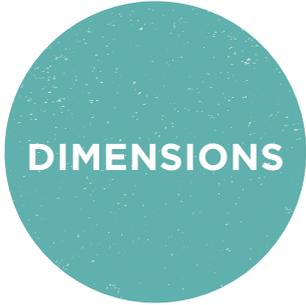
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**SKILLS &  
 OUTLOOK**

Personal conversion  
 Mindfulness  
 Discernment,  
 understanding  
 Vision  
 Listening, silence  
 Making space  
 for grieving,  
 healing of memories  
 Education for peace  
 Communication

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**DIMENSIONS**

Historical  
 Psychosocial  
 Gender  
 Cultural  
 Religious  
 Ethnic  
 Inter-generational  
 Legal  
 Socio-economic  
 Political

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# Compassion

- Compassion responds to all people, whatever their group membership or personal history.
- One of the key expressions of compassion is forgiveness, a refusal to hate and a desire to extend redemptive goodwill to those who have been hurtful. Redemptive goodwill does not just seek what is good for others, but also brings light into a dark place, offering a constructive perspective to a conflicted situation.

## JRS Project

*Kakuma is a huge refugee camp in the arid desolate vastness of northwest Kenya. The camp is home to 120,000 refugees from many different nationalities, mostly Somalis. JRS offers psychosocial and educational support, training refugees to become community counsellors, alternative healers and mental health workers, and responding to the needs of the most vulnerable. In December 2009, the Jesuit*

*Superior General, Fr Adolfo Nicolás SJ, visited Kakuma and told the JRS team: “I am impressed to find people like you who work with dedication to heal suffering. I encourage you to continue because what you do saves the world. A society that cannot heal itself has no future. You help society know there is healing and hope and this is the best gift you can give to others.”*

 **Kenya:** Tamrat, an Ethiopian refugee, working with JRS in Kakuma as an alternative healer.



# Hope

- Hope gives a sense of opportunity for the future that frees us from enslavement to the past.
- Hope gives us courage to persevere in challenging circumstances – sometimes hope wears the face of resistance against evil, which helps us to go on when surrounded by violence.
- Hope can turn the negative into something positive, helping us to come to terms with painful memories, so that they may inspire compassion and wisdom.

## JRS Project

*“Between 1996 and 2004, I was a refugee in Tamil Nadu. After we returned to Sri Lanka, we were displaced again. In spite of the pain we went through, I passed my Advanced Level exams and was given an opportunity to join the JRS English teacher-training*

*program. I want to teach children in our area, where there are hardly any English teachers. A candle has been lit in me and I want to light more candles in and around my village.”*

**Rathika, northern Sri Lanka**

 **Sri Lanka:** At school in the north during wartime.



# Dignity

- Dignity is realised in relationships and in community, and is affirmed in JRS through welcoming and befriending others.
- Genuine reconciliation only takes place when every person's dignity is respected and promoted. Calls to "forget" the past ignore the dignity of the victims, which can be restored only if the injustice they have suffered is publicly acknowledged.

## JRS Project

*Constant violence forced Concepción and her family to leave their rural home in northeast Colombia and to go to the city of Cúcuta, on the border with Venezuela. One day, Concepción's son 'disappeared' on his way to work. In her search for the truth, Concepción found herself face to face with her son's killers, in proceedings created by Colombia's Justice and Peace Law. A paramilitary commander admitted responsibility for her son's murder and said his body had been thrown into the river. This*

*unspeakably painful experience left a deep mark on Concepción's life, to the point that, in her own words, she "freed herself from fear". She is not afraid to persevere for justice and slowly her wounds are healing. For years, Concepción and other women in her community have been meeting once a week. Through listening, mutual support and prayer, they try to heal each other's wounds. They also search for other women who have not yet embarked on the path to reconciliation, to join their shared longing and work for peace.*

 **Colombia:** A workshop about historical memory, held in Cúcuta. You would become 'blind' if you forgot the past.



¡Hola!  
Soy Doris Espinoza  
NUESTRA JEFEA DEL  
COMITÉ DE MUJERES DE MONTE

¡Hola!

# Solidarity

- Solidarity strives to break down the walls that separate people from one another.
- A commitment to inclusive solidarity calls us to stand together and to work for the good of all, especially the poor and marginalised. This means we cannot remain neutral when the rights of the powerless are trampled.
- Inclusive solidarity encourages the building of trust and cooperation between people from different factions so they can build a better future together.
- The movement towards reconciliation culminates in solidarity.

## JRS Projects

*Across the world, states have put up formidable barriers to keep asylum seekers out. The hostile reception facing today's asylum seekers is reminiscent of the plight of the Vietnamese boat people who so touched Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ, the founder of JRS: then as now,*

*they are pushed back, exploited and abused. In places as diverse as Australia, Thailand, Malta and Italy, JRS advocates for the right of asylum seekers to access territory where they have realistic chances of finding refuge.*

 **Malta:** Newly arrived asylum seekers after a harrowing journey across the Mediterranean.



# Hospitality

- Our doors are open to all. A commitment to ‘welcoming the stranger’ has to extend a special invitation to those who feel most estranged and who we feel most estranged from.
- Hospitality displays extravagant generosity, actively seeking out ‘strangers’ and making them feel truly at home in our community. It is very different from passive toleration – merely accepting the presence of another as a regrettable inconvenience.

**JRS Project** *“As part of the Welcome network of JRS France, I offer lodging to asylum seekers. Young Afghans come to stay, and I am discovering the horrors of war and displacement, and the harsh journey of asylum seekers. I share their anguish as they wait for an answer from the authorities that will decide their future. But*

*I am also discovering the joy of receiving, of knowing that, for a while, my guest will not be hungry or cold. I am discovering the grace of smiling when they welcome me every evening. I admire their courage and hope, their faith in life.”*

**Nadette Noël**

 **Jordan:** An event for refugees organised by JRS in Amman.



# Justice

- Genuinely reconciled relationships are marked by justice that restores humanity. Pseudo-reconciliation, which is disconnected from the truth, could be a way of covering impunity.
- Transitional justice supports accountability and the search for truth, working to heal victims, to rehabilitate perpetrators and to provide reparations.
- Restorative justice builds trust between victims and perpetrators, healing their relationships.
- Distributive justice aims to share wealth more equally, addressing structural and not only immediate causes of suffering.

## **JRS Project**

*Northern Uganda was terribly scarred by the long-running civil war between Ugandan forces and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). JRS accompanied returnee communities in Kitgum in their search for reconciliation and the restoration of traditional structures. Support groups were developed for children who had*

*been abducted by the LRA and who were reintegrated into their communities. The people strongly adhered to their traditional justice system, which promoted forgiveness and restorative rather than punitive principles. The aim of justice, meted out by elders and chiefs, was to restore relationships and social harmony.*

 **Uganda:** The community outreach dance group performing in a camp for internally displaced people in Kitgum.



# Participation

- After serious conflict, true partnership and effective cooperation within communities cannot come about unless there is reconciliation.
- Sincere participation invites all sides to dialogue to identify causes and solutions together.
- Participation in a shared project is a mark of true reconciliation. People affected by conflict are reconciled to the extent that they can be actively engaged in the life of their communities.
- Reconciliation activities that draw on and are sensitive to local traditions and cultural norms are more likely to invite community and individual participation and to yield lasting results.

## **JRS Project**

*When JRS entered Cambodia in 1990, one of the projects it started was a vocational training centre for people disabled by mines. In one workshop, wounded soldiers of four different factions made wheelchairs for others who may have laid the mines that maimed them. One young man, who was forcibly recruited by the Khmer Rouge when he was 15, wrote:*

*“I was in the army for six years, until I stepped on a landmine. The wounds of such an experience stay forever. But in JRS I saw I could learn how to live in a community, how to respect people. I learned a skill, I studied and I became the assistant director of the wheelchairs workshop. I never believed my life could be so joyful.”*

 **Cambodia:** The JRS wheelchair workshop.







# HOW WE INCORPORATE RECONCILIATION IN OUR WORK

*“Today I can heal my past through my work. But I confess it is hard to reconcile in your heart. When you have had a seriously traumatic past, it takes time to reconcile... reconciliation is difficult for us who have lost so much. I confess that I cannot reconcile 100%, I pray to be reconciled but maybe it will take all my life.”*

SOK ENG, SURVIVOR OF THE CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE

 **Malta:** African migrants cast flowers on the Mediterranean Sea during a memorial service for those who died attempting to cross from Africa to Europe.



“There is a time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). In our work of reconciliation this is one of the most important things to bear in mind. Often, individuals and communities are simply not ready to start thinking about reconciliation. Hopefully the time will come when, little by little, we can start the process slowly, without even naming it as reconciliation.

It is crucially important to discern where people are at, and what they want and need, before deciding what initiatives are needed. As you read through the many elements listed in the following pages, you will realise that not all apply to your context – you need to pick and choose.

We have divided into two parts our suggestions of how JRS

teams may better incorporate reconciliation in their work. We look at interactive aspects of the process: an internal focus on our own need for reconciliation and a focus on the core elements needed in our mission with the people we serve. There is plenty of overlap: as JRS staff, you can and should reflect together, when appropriate and helpful, with the people you serve during the course of a project’s work.

# INTERNAL

A series of three reflections aimed at helping JRS team members reflect on their own experience, on their team and on the extent to which reconciliation is already incorporated in their programs.



 **Malta:** An African migrant takes time alone during a memorial service for those who died attempting to cross from Africa to Europe.

## A PERSONAL REFLECTION

---

- 1 What are your sources of inspiration, those places and memories in which you find joy and motivation to reconcile?

---

- 2 What personal experience(s) of reconciliation have you had in your life?
  - i. All of us face suffering.  
What hurts have you encountered in your relationships?
  - ii. What was your role in these situations:  
victim or victimizer?
  - iii. How did you restore right relationships?

---

- 3 What are the similarities and differences between your experiences of reconciliation and those of the people you serve?

---

- 4 What are the limitations and prejudices that hinder you from seeking reconciliation and right relationships with others? How are you dealing with them? Are you listening enough?

## A JRS TEAM REFLECTION

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- 1 All of us come across 'borders' in our lives and in our relationships within our teams. What are the unnamed borders within your team? Where do you find aspects of reconciliation in your daily work as a team?
  - 2 Can you trace and describe the journey your team has made towards reconciliation? For example, have you tried to envision where you want to be, to acknowledge your conflicts and to work towards reconciliation? What steps did your team use in the process?
- 

## A REFLECTION ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF RECONCILIATION THAT ALREADY EXIST IN YOUR PROGRAMS

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- 1 Where do you discover the aspects of the reconciliation wheel (pages 32-33) in your current programs?
  - 2 How can you strengthen your programs to incorporate these aspects of reconciliation more thoroughly?
  - 3 How can you be mindful of incorporating reconciliation strategies and practices in the future? How will you include them in your planning processes?
-

# SERVING OTHERS

Creating safe spaces for healing, reflection and dialogue, and working together in the hope of a reconciled and better future.



 **Kenya:** At a prayer group meeting run by the JRS urban refugee project in Nairobi.

## ENCOURAGING SELF REFLECTION

*Across the world, JRS runs psychosocial and pastoral programs that help individuals reconcile with their past, with grief, guilt, anger and other emotions that accompany trauma, pain and loss. Here are some core elements of this work:*

- Accompanying people – an integral part of our mission – builds trust and invites people to open up to themselves and to others.
- Creating a ‘sacred space’, where people are listened to with empathy, helps them to connect with themselves, with the values and strength they need to come to terms with the past and to cope with daily life.
- Counselling is often needed, especially for people who have suffered serious trauma.
- Faith is crucial for many refugees, giving them resilience, hope and often the willingness to forgive. Respecting the centrality of faith, through pastoral care, sharing and prayer, affirms the dignity of those we serve and furthers reconciliation.
- Sometimes silence, “God’s first language”, is the best support we can offer.

INÉS OLEAGA ACI

*“For the people, things happen, but God knows, God will not abandon us. Their God is always at the beginning and at the end, not only pushing but also pulling us towards a peaceful future. The risen Jesus beckons to us from eternal life, where there is only peace.”*

## GATHERING, REFLECTING AND WORKING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY

*Here we suggest elements of approach that may be introduced in our programs, policies and practices to imbue them with a spirit of reconciliation.*

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### WELCOMING EVERYONE, SHARING AND TALKING TOGETHER

- Create an environment where people affected by division and violence can gather to talk freely and reach new insights together. You could have specific support groups, for example, for women, for teachers or for JRS teams. In some cases, people from opposing factions may be brought together, to discover the good in one another through dialogue. Carefully consider the physical space, organisation, facilitation and security of such meetings.
- Part of the reason for coming together in a safe setting is to enable people to share their stories as part of a truth-telling process. This is important both for victims, to validate their experience, and for listeners so that they may gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of the conflict.
- Where possible and appropriate, welcome and try to understand perpetrators of violence, who may be excluded and isolated. Bear in mind that the truth lies not only in what the person has done but *why*. Always be aware of the roles in the conflict of those you are serving: victims, perpetrators, both?

- Share moments of celebration and hospitality like meals. Such events can be powerful moments of connecting to one another and of reconciliation.
- As a strategy to encourage communities to reconcile and look to the future, remind them – at an appropriate time – of how things were before the conflict, of previous links of brotherhood, friendship, trade and culture.
- Introduce reconciliation stories from other contexts; this can give insights and hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

 **Indonesia:** Members of the JRS team and villagers from Tapaktuan, Aceh, sharing a meal together.



 **DR Congo:**  
Making baskets in Masisi.



## PLANNING YOUR PROGRAMS

- Observe the humanitarian principles and serve all without distinction.
- Make inclusiveness a criterion of recruitment: employ people from different factions, tribes, races and religions on your teams.
- Bring members of different factions together in shared activities, such as teacher trainings or ‘food for work’ programs.
- Consider how livelihood and education projects can promote healing, hope and peace in your country.
- Listen respectfully to local communities when planning reconciliation activities. Always ask the community what makes sense and what works for them, and incorporate their cultural and religious values and practices as much as possible. Remember that village leaders play a crucial role.

 **Ethiopia:** Mai Aini camp for Eritrean refugees.



- Use rituals and symbols (for example, the peace walk, see *Cambodia case study* on page 70) to evoke the hope of reconciliation in a given context.
- Be creative: turn to sports, art, drama, film, puppetry, poetry, dance and music to deliver reconciliation messages in a non-threatening way and to encourage people to express themselves. Marionettes and photography have both proved successful. Getting people to be creative in voicing their feelings often serves as a good starting point, helping them to reconcile first with themselves and their experience and later with others.
- Implement peace education programs. Such programs vary in approach and style however a common feature is the redefinition of peace from the mere absence of war to something more positive and constructive: our responsibility and role in building and maintaining peace through mutual respect, solidarity, building bridges and other means.

## THE WIDER PICTURE: ADVOCACY AND FACILITATING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*JRS does not seek reconciliation in a vacuum. Our efforts must reach beyond our teams and those we serve. For this to happen, we need to raise awareness, to draw in others of goodwill and to deal with political and other decision-making entities. Here are some suggestions for our advocacy and communications:*

- 
- Connect reconciliation, truth and justice in your advocacy. Reconciliation work can be harmful if it is disconnected from truth and favours impunity. The journey of reconciliation has to include the whys of what happened as well as why we don't want it to happen again.
- 
- Communicate reliable and balanced information. To get this information, listen deeply and humbly to all sides of the conflict and undertake structural and historical analyses. Such an approach is essential to avoid bias and further misunderstanding, and to inform our advocacy.
- 
- In communicating the truth of what happened, give voice to those affected, to their stories and hopes for the future.
- 
- Identify the resources of wisdom and people of goodwill in your community, to encourage them and to work together to achieve lasting change.

- Identify and raise awareness about the sources of division, violence and despair in your context, and about how harmful they are.
- Identify practical ways of building bridges. For example, implement school outreach programs: teachers and children can be key 'messengers' of reconciliation in their communities.
- Encourage forcibly displaced people to engage in activities of healing and reconciliation of their host country and country of origin.
- Be informed of the structures in your country set up to deal with reconciliation issues, for example, peace, truth and justice commissions, tribunals and extraordinary courts. As a team, engage in dialogue to determine what stand and extent of engagement you intend to adopt vis-à-vis such structures. When appropriate, communicate with their officials and leaders of civil society.

 **Lebanon:** Abu Anas recalls how his eldest son was killed by a sniper back in Damascus.

 (right) **Cambodia:**  
An anti-landmine rally.



 **Uganda:** The community outreach youth group in Kitgum rehearsing a drama.





# The different faces of reconciliation

*JRS is at work in radically different settings around the world and reconciliation is expressed uniquely in each one. Here are some examples of JRS projects in different scenarios over the years.*

## **WAR ZONE**

Syria 64

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## **CHRONIC ARMED CONFLICT (RIVAL FACTIONS)**

DR Congo 66

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## **POST-CONFLICT**

Cambodia 70

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## **URBAN REFUGEES**

Latin America 78

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## WAR ZONE

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In the context of Syria's civil war, at a time when very few international aid agencies have access to the country, JRS offers emergency relief, medical care, education services and psychosocial support to some 35,000 displaced families in the cities of Damascus, Homs and Aleppo and elsewhere.

It would be impossible for JRS to reach out to so many people without the support and collaboration of a wide network of religious congregations, Christian churches as well as Muslim and secular institutions on the ground.

JRS offers its services to all without discrimination, regardless of where they may fall in the political and religious spectrum. Not all readily understand this choice. Christians in Syria, as a

minority, feel highly insecure and threatened by events. Some believe help should be given first to their own. But JRS is committed to follow the Christian ethos to serve all those in need irrespective of creed and tries to explain not only what it is doing but also a different way of doing things.

From Aleppo, Fr Mourad Abou Seif SJ, JRS project director, said: "If as a church we react through our fear, we would be unable to help others or ourselves. It is not by closing our community that we will save ourselves but by keeping our doors open, by putting aside our fears and helping others."

Hundreds of Syrians have come forward to work and volunteer with JRS, reflecting a vibrant civil society that wants peace and is struggling to resist the

destructive logic of war. Coming from several backgrounds – from different religions, including Catholic, Orthodox, Sunnites and Alawites, and from different origins, Arabs, Kurds, Armenians – their defining feature has been that they want to serve their fellow citizens in need. Every day, more people turn up asking what they can do to help, because they believe in what JRS is doing.

"What we are doing together is going well: the volunteers and staff share food, work and play together and share experiences about how the good we are doing is coming out in our lives. This is very rich for us," said Fr Mourad. "The good we are giving to others is having a clear impact: thousands of families every day receive help from us. We are offering food and hope, helping in a way that reaches everyone."

## CHRONIC ARMED CONFLICT (BETWEEN RIVAL FACTIONS)



# EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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The east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is plagued by chronic warfare involving the Congolese army and several rebel and militia groups. It is an extremely complex conflict and seemingly unsolvable, not least due to illegal intervention from neighbouring countries. While ethnicity, or rather the exploitation of ethnicity, plays a significant role in the violence, this is ultimately a political and economic conflict in which politicians, military leaders and others manipulate group identity for their own ends, to keep the conflict alive.

Civilians are frequently caught in the crossfire and face severe human rights violations. The UN estimates that there are more than 1.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in North and South Kivu, with

tens of thousands fleeing new outbursts of violence from one day to the next. They live in miserable conditions in scattered sites, often lacking even the basic necessities.

JRS visits some IDP sites to offer support to especially vulnerable people; literacy and income-generating activities for women and youth; and formal education through teacher training, school construction and the supply of materials. Emergency aid also forms part of the JRS response, especially when there are new displacements.

Living and working amid volatile ethnic tensions is not easy. In Masisi, which is plagued by long-standing antagonism and violence between the Hunde and Hutu tribes, the JRS team is based in territory

mostly inhabited by the Hunde. “It is easy for us to be accused of being on the side of the Hunde. For example, we work with the parish priest who is a Hunde; if everyone is evacuated, we go with them,” says Sr Inés Oleaga, project director in Masisi.

However the team works in both Hunde and Hutu territory. One of the criteria for the recruitment of local teams is that they are multi-ethnic even if “it is not easy to work together, nor is it obvious”.

For JRS in Masisi, reconciliation involves really understanding what the conflict is about and persuading local team members to understand it too. This is a challenge: “For example, we have one staff member whose close relative was killed and another says he is not sure what happened: we push them to

talk, to see who is better placed to tell the story, to discover what truly happened and to go further, to understand if anyone has really ‘won’ something with this killing.”

These efforts are paying off. “When there is fighting, Hunde members of our team warn us: ‘Tell so-and-so [a Hutu] not to come today because something will happen to her on the way,’” continues Sr Inés.

Through its programs, JRS brings people together. Some people from one tribe have not

met members of the other for years, but now they are doing something together. Teacher training is one shared activity; sport is another. A football championship, complete with training for referees in conflict resolution, was a great success. More than 60 teams signed up and the final, between two ‘enemy’ sides, went well.

Puppets are also an available and popular means of spreading positive messages. It is easier for everyone to address deep wounds and conflict indirectly, and the puppets, with their

comic expressions and exaggerated gestures, offer the possibility to do so in a non-threatening way. Villagers, no matter which tribe they belong to, welcome the multi-ethnic team, which is performing shows in all the schools in the area. “In some villages, they tell us these are the first Hutus to visit in 20 years,” says Sr Inés. Later, there is dialogue with the secondary school students, to try to build a generation with a new outlook, to create a better and happier future together.



📹 **DR Congo:** The JRS puppet show is welcomed everywhere it goes.



📹 (left) **DR Congo:**  
A site for internally displaced people in Masisi.

## REFUGEE CAMPS, RETURNEES & POST-CONFLICT

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An estimated two million people were murdered, starved and worked to death between 1975 and 1979 in Cambodia – the years of the Khmer Rouge regime. After the Khmer Rouge fled, a new period of civil war began, which officially lasted until 1991. More than 500,000 people fled to refugee camps on the Thai border where JRS began working in 1980. Listening to people's stories, creating welcoming spaces and providing spiritual care and education were part of the mission.

Following discernment about how better to serve all Cambodian people, JRS entered Cambodia in 1990, to work with Buddhist monks in advocacy for peace. A small group stayed in the refugee camps. The focus became how best to foster peace and reconciliation and prepare for repatriation.

Team members on both sides of the border connected refugees with relatives. In the camps, the team arranged visits between different factions, provided true information about conditions in Cambodia and conversed about disinformation.

The Dhammayietra, an ancient Buddhist practice, was revived in 1992 as a pilgrimage for peace and reconciliation from the refugee camps through Cambodia. Maha Ghosananda led the walk, accompanied by thousands and closely supported by then Jesuit brother Bob Maat. People from all factions in the civil conflict, soldiers and refugees, came forward to be blessed by the monks. This symbol struck a chord in Cambodian hearts and has continued every year since.

Inside Cambodia, as repatriation began, a JRS team of Buddhists and Christians welcomed trainloads of returnees, visited communities to foster their reintegration and hosted meetings for peace. There were three JRS projects: a vocational training centre for people disabled by mines and polio; a rural development program in nearby villages; and reconciliation activities highlighting friendship and awareness.

The road to reconciliation is not over yet: JRS has learned that hostility towards the Vietnamese remains an issue, as seen in the plight of those who are stateless. Other problems, such as land eviction and forced displacement, remain subjects of JRS reflection for action.

## POST-CONFLICT

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When JRS went to Aceh, a region in northwest Indonesia hard hit by the Tsunami in 2004 and by civil war that ended the following year, development was practically at a standstill. People were traumatised; youth especially nursed grievances against the army and rebels and against those who had been obliged to collaborate with either. “Everything was seemingly okay on the surface but there was something hidden underneath,” recalled JRS Indonesia advocacy officer Enggal.

JRS launched a multi-layered project that identified ways to both address the consequences of the war and to lessen the impact of environmental disasters. The project engaged different sectors of the community, from children to widows to village leaders to

government officials, in peace building and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

In schools, JRS gave teachers the space to talk freely – an important need because this was something they could not do in the conflict – and created a support network. The teachers were trained to integrate environmental education and positive living values in daily class. To communicate the key values of love, peace and respect, JRS turned to sources dear to the community: what does the Koran say about peace?

These values permeated the entire project. Puppets taught the children; women got the message during baking classes. With youth, they were transmitted mostly through sports, discussion and leadership training. Most were

former rebel fighters or victims of the conflict and some still nurtured hatred because of abuses committed during the war. On the other hand, they realised that with peace, they could live without fear, move around freely and have a future.

Based on the foremost need expressed by the Acehnese for food security, JRS supported sustainable rural development. The partnership between JRS and the people was cemented by formal welcome ceremonies in every village. Crops were planted, ditches dug to channel water and equipment purchased, all according to carefully considered village strategies. “By listening to and learning from the people, we could understand and do things for and with them,” said Doni, a member of the JRS Indonesia team.

## RETURNEES, POST-CONFLICT



## NORTHERN UGANDA

Northern Uganda was terribly scarred by the long-running civil war between Ugandan forces and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). A range of atrocities, including the abduction and forced conscription of young boys and girls, left people powerless and traumatised. In 2002, as the LRA attacks intensified, a government-led initiative enforced the displacement of most of the population of northern Uganda into centralised camps.

JRS started working in Kitgum in 2006, when people were preparing to return home. To help the returnees rebuild their lives, JRS decided to focus on education, psychosocial support and peace building. A parish-based approach was adopted, later evolving to a village-based approach, and local groups were involved from the start.

One major need lay in helping the displaced people – especially the most vulnerable – to face their accumulated frustration, stress and trauma. Another task was to accompany the community in its search for reconciliation and the restoration of traditional structures.

The team promoted reconciliation at different levels. At the personal level, a program was designed to address social and psychological problems like alcohol abuse, domestic violence, grief, fear, depression and nightmares. Volunteer community peer counsellors were trained and support groups were developed for children who had been abducted by the LRA.

Constructive activities helped people make some sense of

their situation. JRS organised functional adult literacy classes since many people had missed out on learning due to war and displacement. Vocational training was another focus.

At the community level, peace committees were formed in parishes. Cultural and religious leaders were trained on rights violations, pro-active conflict resolution and mediation.

Cooperation with others was vital: with local leaders; with government structures to secure a stable basis for the future; with the church so that people could be united through religious values. JRS left Kitgum after six years confident that the reconciliation process started would continue thanks to local involvement. In small steps, a more peaceful society is being built.

## RETURNEES, POST-CONFLICT

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## SOUTH SUDAN

In South Sudan, a JRS peace-building program started in Kajo Keji in 2002, as long years of civil war were coming to an end. When refugees returned to Kajo Keji, they met with a poor reception and mistrust, and conflicts emerged. Many faced discrimination for not participating in the war. Issues of land occupation became contentious.

JRS aimed to build the skills, knowledge and values needed to promote peaceful co-existence among internally displaced people, returnees and host communities. The program started with mass awareness-raising activities in schools and communities.

Peace soon became part of the curriculum in 16 schools, with JRS supporting and training teachers. The schoolchildren

became active in debates and penned poems and riddles with messages of peace.

The local leaders were at the heart of the JRS peace program: to this day, they remain the best-placed and equipped to work with and influence their communities. They were identified early on and trained as community peace facilitators. With their involvement, awareness-raising workshops and meetings were organised and peace clubs formed. The peace clubs proved exceptionally useful in creating awareness among all the communities. They conducted activities to promote human rights, unity among religious denominations, self-reliance and the revival of local cultures.

Religious forums, including representatives from 11

Christian denominations and a Muslim group, brought the first inter-religious dialogue to Kajo Keji. Community dialogues were held too, during which JRS staff guided community members towards workable solutions to their own problems.

Topics like forgiveness, reconciliation and patriotism reached wider audiences when they were shared on air on the Voice of Kajo Keji radio station, which started broadcasting in 2008.

JRS left South Sudan in 2012, hopeful that the peace-building projects it ran for so many years, alongside its educational and other works, will stand the fledgling nation in good stead as it struggles towards true peace, stability and development for all.

## URBAN REFUGEES

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JRS Latin America has many projects that use artistic expression as a starting point for reconciliation, where the perspective is to accompany people to reconcile with themselves.

Many families uprooted by Colombia's armed conflict end up disintegrated, with deep wounds. One woman, Rita\*, put it this way: "My life is like a glass that has been smashed to pieces, and I am mending it, gluing piece by piece together." Rita attended JRS Venezuela workshops that sought to transform violence, sadness and despair into colour, movement... and Life. How? By using photography, painting and creative writing to enable refugee women to express their feelings.

## LATIN AMERICA

In the photography workshop, the women held a camera for the first time. Soon they were smiling and snapping away. In another workshop, the women painted. Some images were loaded with pain while others left room for overcoming sadness, expressing the desire to change reality.

We soon realised that painting and taking photos helped the women to work on their story of suffering, lending them insight into what the future could look like. One of them, with large and splendid eyes full of emotion, said: "I feel like a panorama inside... I'm happy. I had never done this before. My work characterises me: it is happiness, peace and harmony."

Music is another means we use to restore war-affected individuals and communities.

In one regional project, JRS recorded a video of young Colombians, Haitians and Ecuadorians performing a song, *The border is within* – a border of fear and indifference about the other, of stigma and discrimination suffered by refugees and forced migrants, not least in big cities.

The young people made the lyrics of the song their own as they sang, played their instruments and danced with talent and flair. The song that emerged is wonderful to watch and easily transported around the world in a downloadable video.

Their performance is all the more touching, and their message more powerful, because all the artists have known deep suffering. Some come from Soacha, Barrancabermeja and

Buenaventura, all areas hard hit by Colombia's civil conflict, or from the Colombian-Venezuelan border. Others come from Haiti. But although they have suffered much, those who joined the project share the hope that through music, they can find a way to create stronger communities.

Working with talented musicians brought hope of salvation for many. One artist, who arrived in Buenaventura a few years ago as a commander of armed youth groups, said: "If it were not for music I'd already be dead. Now I am a role model for other young people who have before them the same path of violence I experienced."

*\*not her real name*

## URBAN REFUGEES



During the apartheid years, many South African refugees were empowered to be prominent in society through the generosity of neighbouring countries and beyond. In its fourteenth year of democracy, in 2008, South Africa saw its dark side when anti-immigrant violence erupted in the townships. JRS provided relief during and after the attacks and happily many refugees found their way again. Martha\* is one refugee who was assisted.

Back home Martha had been kidnapped and forced to train as a soldier. In captivity, she was molested and left in the sun for hours on end. She managed to escape but left behind two children and her elderly parents.

Martha suffers from a recurrent fungal infection. Sometimes her whole body breaks out in

## SOUTH AFRICA

a rash, her scalp starts peeling and her hair falls off. In South Africa, she found work at a hair salon but was soon fired as her appearance scared off customers. Many clinics told her there was nothing more to be done for her.

She heard about JRS from a friend and approached our offices. Through the advocacy efforts of JRS, Martha was referred to the Academic Hospital in Pretoria, where she saw a specialist and gradually began to respond to treatment. Martha came regularly to JRS for counselling, to help her reconcile with her painful past and present and look to the future. In 2010, Martha suffered another loss when her father passed away; she was devastated because she couldn't attend the funeral. Again she found comfort in JRS.

In 2012, Martha was much better and able to find her way. She applied for a small business grant to JRS and attended the training but sadly she did not make it. Resilient, she tried again. After the others left each day, Martha would stay behind and go over the work with the help of the JRS team to ensure she had fully understood. This time, she made it through.

Today Martha has a small hair salon in a township, a place many refugees are still afraid to go. She has a firm support base among the local people. One friend is Mrs Sehlapelo, who encourages Martha, giving her guidance when needed and material support. The two have a mother-daughter relationship, which emerged from the compassion Mrs Sehlapelo felt for Martha when her health was deteriorating. She cared

for Martha when others had abandoned her.

Martha has had a hard journey, her health improved only slowly and painfully, but with support from JRS and her local community, she rose above it all. It goes to show that when we forget our differences, there is so much good that can be achieved.

Martha has also had to reconcile with the fact that she has missed out on her children's upbringing. But she is now working towards providing a brighter future for them. With her income, Martha is paying her children's school fees back home and she hopes one day she will have enough money to bring them to South Africa.

*\*not her real name*

# *Annexes* }

# Models of Reconciliation

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Stephen Pope, professor of theology, Boston College

“Reconciliation” generally refers to the rebuilding of a relationship, community or society that has been significantly damaged. This paper examines three topics: the levels on which reconciliation is pursued, representative models of reconciliation and how reconciliation might be approached by JRS.

## 1. Levels of reconciliation

We can distinguish three general levels at which reconciliation takes place: personal, communal and national. Personal reconciliation aims at mending relationships in which trust has been violated, for example, in the context of friendship, marriage or family. Communal reconciliation seeks to repair

damaged relationships between more than two people. This can take place within groups or between groups. National reconciliation attempts to restore the social fabric within a society as a whole, for example, the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya. This level also includes international peace building between two or more states. Reconciliation efforts will be effective to the extent that they are directed appropriately to all relevant levels of conflict.

Reconciliation must be pursued in highly context-sensitive ways. It cannot be dictated by outsiders or devised by experts. Rather it is up to participants immersed in their own specific social circumstances, culture, history and experience to craft the concrete approach to

reconciliation that meets their own unique cluster of needs.

## 2. Models of reconciliation

What follows provides a sketch of a few “ideal types” of reconciliation. Models can help us identify the distinctive limits, opportunities, and needs encountered in particular troubled settings.

### Model 1: Reconciliation as adopting an attitude of “forgive and forget.”

This model is concerned above all for the order of society as a whole. Its advocates regard criminal indictments as incitements to continued animosity between enemies. We must look forward rather than backward. This model was

evident when Khmer Rouge leaders in Cambodia called for “national reconciliation”, which they interpreted to mean, “let bygones be bygones”.

**Model 2: Reconciliation is conceived as a state of co-existence promoted through retributive justice.**

Perpetrator immunity presents a significant obstacle to any attempt to reunify a society fractured by protracted lethal conflict. Violence undermines the social contract and must be punished. The government, or an appropriate body representing the international community (international tribunals and the like), must fulfil the demands of retributive justice, for example, the post-World War II Nuremberg Trials. This vision emphasizes the political and legal significance of publicly acknowledging injustice and holding perpetrators accountable. Retributive justice supports reconciliation understood as “democratic

reciprocity”, in which “former enemies or former perpetrators, victims and bystanders are reconciled insofar as they respect each other as fellow citizens. Further, all parties play a role in deliberations concerning the past, present and future of their country.”<sup>1</sup>

**Model 3: Reconciliation as national unification through truth.**

This model seeks to establish truth through public acknowledgement provided by truth commissions rather than the forensic truth established in criminal prosecutions. Truth commissions have been set up to facilitate transitions from authoritarian to liberal democratic rule. They were established under somewhat fragile democracies in which the state was able neither to tolerate a policy of “forgive and forget” nor to pursue retributive justice. Truth commissions typically have three tasks, according to Amnesty

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<sup>1</sup> David A. Crocker, “Retribution and Reconciliation”, *Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy* 20 (2000), 1-6.

International: clearly present the facts about past human rights violations, make the evidence gathered available for new investigations and criminal proceedings, and formulate effective recommendations for providing full reparations to all the victims and their families.

**Model 4: Reconciliation as community building based on “people-to-people” dialogue.**

This model treats reconciliation as a “bottom-up” process of dialogue that leads to interpersonal and communal concord. It addresses hardened in-group identity that excludes outsiders from moral concern. It seeks to build social trust by helping perpetrators, survivors and bystanders recover a sense of their shared humanity and common interconnectedness.

This model brings perpetrators and survivors together into small meetings in order to facilitate mutual understanding.

Dialogue enables survivors to speak about their own experience, allows offenders to offer an account of their own conduct and offers other people, including youth, an opportunity to hear first-person testimony about horrendous crimes done in their own country. It can help survivors understand how perpetrators came to act the way they did. Greater knowledge of the past encourages prevention in the future. Dialogue can help to humanize perpetrators, whose communication of their own fear, guilt and remorse might evoke some degree of empathy for them on the part of their interlocutors. Forgiveness, when it is granted, does not amount to “oblivion” or “amnesia”, but rather a “healing of memories” that makes possible a more hopeful view of the future. This model encourages participants to embrace their multiple identities.

**Model 5: Reconciliation as reconstituted social cohesion through the promotion of socio-economic development.**

Each person has a right to develop his or her own capabilities, to be free from social and economic oppression, and to have a positive opportunity to provide for his or her family. This model holds that social reconciliation is advanced more by public and structural socio-economic reforms than by prosecutions, forgiveness or dialogue.<sup>2</sup> It focuses on structural reforms that put ordinary people in better positions to act constructively on their own behalf. For example, reconciliation of people fighting over land disputes in rural areas is not accomplished by simply disarming and arresting antagonists. Communal reconciliation has to address land equity. Distribution of resources – cash grants, access to food and water and other

initiatives – can alleviate some degree of poverty. But reconciliation also depends on equitable economic growth pursued through serious development initiatives.

**3. JRS and reconciliation**

Each of these five models appeals to a basic human value: security (model 1), justice (model 2), truth (model 3), mutual understanding (model 4), and socio-economic development (model 5). We can now explore ways in which JRS might align with each of the basic human values promoted by the models.

The five models provide a menu of goals related to reconciliation. Practical efforts usually employ some kind of hybrid approach that adopts some of the values of the models and then creatively adapts them to meet the particular needs of their own settings.

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<sup>2</sup> *Gregory Baum and Harold Wells, eds. The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches (New York: Orbis Books, 1997).*

The underlying value affirmed by the first model is security. This value is extremely important, but, from a JRS perspective, the advice to “forgive and forget” for the sake of security promotes neither authentic forgiveness (because one can’t forgive unless wrongdoing is acknowledged) nor authentic peace (because authentic harmony is based on truth, not denial).

The second model of reconciliation values justice. JRS acknowledges the value of retributive justice, but interprets it within a broader view of justice conceived as “right relationship”. Justice viewed in this way includes many components: vindicating victims and punishing wrongdoing, but also reparation for harms, restoration of relationships, and socio-economic development. JRS does not press for retributive justice but its vision is consistent with accountability, fair trials and just punishment

for perpetrators. Yet JRS seems particularly attuned to restorative justice, the commitment to restoring offenders, victims and bystanders within a renewed community. Restorative justice can complement retributive justice, properly conceived, and both can play a role in reconciliation. Reconciliation includes the reintegration of newly released, formerly incarcerated people into their families, villages and larger society. This is a crucial part of reconciliation on many levels.

The third model underscores the importance of acknowledging truth as a prerequisite of reconciliation. JRS’ practice of accompaniment seems especially attuned to truth that emerges in the communication that takes place in ongoing relationships, in a context of companionship and safety (as opposed to the one-off testimony, or research findings, recorded in a truth commission report). Advocacy pursued

from the perspective of accompaniment strives to speak truth, especially from the point of view of the “least”.

The fourth model advances the value of dialogue, understanding and forgiveness. This model seems close to the focus of JRS on grassroots peace education aimed at promoting dialogue, mutual understanding and building relationships.

Finally, the fifth model accents socio-economic development. Service and advocacy in the context of accompaniment strive to address structural inequities that add to the marginalization of forcibly displaced people. The JRS mission suggests that socio-economic development ought to be conceived in ways that enable refugees to become effective agents of their own lives. For JRS, this would seem to involve helping them develop abilities both to cope with difficult circumstances in the present, and to be able to deal

with significant challenges in the future, through voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement.

Large-scale reconciliation efforts might do well to keep three distinctions in mind. First, it is important to distinguish personal healing and communal healing. Second, psychological healing of individuals is different from the social healing of previously damaged relationships within families, small communities and a larger society. Finally, it is important to note the difference between political and social reconciliation. The former involves the re-creation of at least minimally cooperative political communities. Social reconciliation depends upon security measures that include demobilization and disarmament. It also relies upon democratic institution building, power-sharing agreements and reforming the legislative and law enforcement system, particularly regarding

corruption. Measures of political reconciliation are necessary but not sufficient for social reconciliation, which also draws upon healing, memory and cultural creativity. And, as model 5 emphasized, social reconciliation often heavily depends upon rebuilding a damaged economy.

### **Conclusion**

JRS' approach to reconciliation grows out of a broad religious vision of humanity as created good, deformed by sin, and invited by grace to reconciliation. It holds that we are created in the image of God, social by nature, and called to flourish in healthy communities. JRS' vision thus seems implicitly to reject two extreme approaches to reconciliation: collectivism, which assumes that only large-scale political reconciliation matters, and individualism, which reduces reconciliation to repairing interpersonal relationships and ignores the

larger common good. Those committed to accompany, serve and advocate for forcibly displaced people seem well positioned both to appreciate the value of all levels of reconciliation and to recognize their interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship. Reconciliation is a process as well as a goal. The process does not always go smoothly, and the goal is never fully accomplished on all levels. Yet JRS staff members seem to appreciate the significance of partial, incremental reconciliation as they keep an eye on future challenges. JRS' vision of reconciliation is thus well positioned to encompass both a painful past interpreted in light of "healing of memories" and a more meaningful and constructive future interpreted in hope.

# *The spirituality of reconciliation in JRS*

Elías López Pérez SJ, JRS consultant and Comillas University researcher and professor on reconciliation

## **Doña María encounters the “enemy”: is this God’s justice?**

When I asked Doña María, “what could help you towards reconciliation?” she responded emphatically “justice!” I asked, “what justice do you want?” and she reflected a moment, her head bowed. A few moments later she looked up and shared her story: “They killed my husband, one of my sons and a nephew. Another son has been missing since 2003. I fear he may also be dead. Another of my sons is in prison. I don’t know what justice I want... Could it be God’s justice? I don’t want human justice!”

Taking time to discern her emotions and choose the right words, Doña María continued:

“I need to know if my missing son is still alive. We have had no news of him for more than six years. If he is dead I would like them to tell me where he is so I can bury him and find some peace... I heard the man who may be his murderer is in prison. Now prisoners can have their sentences reduced in exchange for confessing the truth of their crimes. I thought that perhaps this man might be interested in talking and could tell me the whereabouts of my son. So I decided to visit him in prison, face to face. All this I do for my son. When I saw him come out of his cell flanked by two wardens, handcuffed and deprived of freedom, I realised this was not the kind of justice I want.”

Doña María fell into a meditative silence. Then she added: “I pray and I put everything in the hands of God... So that he can forgive them. This helps me and eases me because I cannot forgive them. Who am I to forgive them? How can I forgive such a crime and such immense suffering? Yet by placing everything in the hands of God I can let go the burden of having to forgive and feel that, in this way, in some way, I have also forgiven a little.”

Doña María is one of millions of people worldwide who have been displaced by armed violence. Fundamentally the deepest wish of them all is to return home to live once more with those they love in safe and decent conditions. Putting an

end to violence at international, national and local levels can help bring about a favourable environment for voluntary return.

But we must not only hope and wait for repatriation and genuine justice to come about to begin working towards reconciliation. JRS teams work in the wider process of reconciliation in refugee camps, detention centres and city suburbs where thousands of forcibly displaced people congregate. JRS helps to build towards voluntary return from a day-to-day, here and now, spiritual perspective. JRS is “patiently active”, just like Doña María, for whom forgiveness and reconciliation are a task to which every possible effort is committed.

As an NGO of the Society of Jesus, JRS shares its mission to serve faith that does justice in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, a mission to which the 35th General Congregation

(GC 35) clearly introduces a fifth element – reconciliation defined as establishing just relationships with God, with others (with ourselves) and with creation. GC 35 invites all Jesuit organisations to the mission of reconciliation. JRS is especially well placed for this mission in so many areas of armed conflict and on the frontiers of humanity, where the limits of human and inhuman, love and hate meet.

### **What reconciliation?**

There are many ways of describing and understanding reconciliation. From a perspective of studies on conflict and peace, reconciliation is a way of understanding the transformation of conflict. Reconciliation transforms conflicts by

- a) Healing post-war trauma,
- b) Rebuilding social trust,
- c) Investigating and revealing the truth of what occurred,

- d) Accepting criminal responsibility and full condemnation for criminals,
- e) Ensuring reparation for victims and
- f) Reconciling to heal broken relationships and divisions within society.

These six conditions at the basis of transitional justice must be part of a wider justice context.

It cannot be stressed enough that reconciliation entails beginning to work towards ending all violence (whether physical, psychological, cultural and/or structural), motivated very often by economic and/or identity causes more or less legitimised by political and/or religious ideologies. Reconciliation seeks to stop present violence, heal the wounds of past violence and prevent outshoots of violence returning in the future.

Reconciliation seeks recognition of the right to dignity and equality for all human beings.

Reconciliation also seeks recognition of differences in personal capacities and cultural differences. In this way reconciliation promotes participation in peace processes by all sides in conflict so that everyone, in their inequalities and differences, can feel responsible in working towards peace.

### **A spirituality that discerns love for the enemy**

Based on more than 30 years of experience, JRS illustrates the spirituality of reconciliation from the perspective of its triple mission. JRS reconciles by a) listening and accompanying, b) serving and c) defending just relationships between all sides in conflict. If we remove any of these dimensions, the mission to reconcile would lose its specific JRS identity. These three dimensions, together and inseparable, characterise JRS spirituality.

#### ***a) To accompany all sides directly involved in conflict***

JRS reconciliation work is founded on personal and direct encounter with victims as the essential first step. JRS learns from Doña María and the Colombian widows, listening and accompanying. They, the victims, form a sacred space. JRS must further reflect on how they can also in some way accompany the aggressors. Where is “the other”, the enemy? Is this not also a sacred space? Working seriously in reconciliation entails making an effort for the victim and the aggressor to mutually accompany each other. There can be no reconciliation without encountering “the other”.

#### ***b) To serve***

Reconciliation with a special focus on education gives a means of providing opportunities for children towards a different future. Peace education can lead to change. Children are the new

educated generation and are capable of going further than their parents, learning to live together once more. Some refugees have said they do not want to pass on the hatred they feel to their children, to see if one day their children can forgive and live together with the children of their enemies. Educating not only children but also parents not to pass on hatred to their children, enabling them to transform conflict into peace, helps future generations to overcome the circle of violence.

Another aspect of service is offering material support to victims. I recall that at the end of our encounter, Doña María and other victims who suffered similar atrocities asked JRS staff: “What happens now, after we have shared our stories? We need to earn our daily bread. What material help can you give us?”

### *c) To defend*

Both the victims and aggressors have the right to heal and restore relations (restorative justice). JRS helps to reconcile when it defends investigation and dissemination of the truth about human rights violations. JRS tries to give a voice to both sides in conflict when these are excluded from the media and decision-making centres. Thus all sides take on the role of protagonist in their own defence. JRS reconciles by defending and incorporating those who are excluded from the processes that define how reconciliation should be understood and achieved. JRS reconciles by defending spaces where stories previously silenced can be listened to, where victims and assailants can discern how to articulate the conditions for reconciliation in a particular context. JRS defends reconciliation not imposed from outside, but based on the participation of all actors directly involved in each local context.

Reconciliation places a hard question on the JRS table – where is the enemy? Reconciliation invites a similarly hard response – from the perspective of the Christian faith, reconciliation occurs from and with God so that human beings can become “perfect as the Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48), doing justice in an unlimited way, loving and giving generously and unconditionally, in abundance, through forgiveness as a way of loving our enemies. Reaching the limit of the worst in human behaviour can only be surpassed by reaching the limit of the best in human behaviour; this limit in the human being touches the divine. “Straightening out relations” or reconciling is the consequence of doing justice without limits; the fruit of divine-human cooperation to love in excess and reconcile what appears to be humanly irreconcilable. In Doña María we see this co-operation in the divine-human limit generating concrete steps.

The prefix “re” of reconciliation means coming back to a relationship, but this relationship will not be as it was before the violent rupture. Doña María encountered the “enemy”, not to seek justice, but simply to discover the truth of the whereabouts of her missing son. Yet, seeing her “enemy”, she found herself reflecting on what justice she wanted for him, “what is God’s justice? Who can forgive?”

From Doña María and countless others like her, JRS has learnt that the source of forgiveness and reconciliation lies beyond us. This source is Jesus on the cross who turned to the Father to ask forgiveness for his executioners. We must turn to everything possible and impossible, within and beyond ourselves, to reconcile the irreconcilable.











## RECREATING RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

This manual, the product of a JRS-Boston College workshop held in Cambodia in 2013, describes how reconciliation is central to the work of JRS. Drawing on the core values of JRS, it shows how reconciliation might be incorporated in concrete ways in all JRS projects.

*[www.jrs.net](http://www.jrs.net)*

