

Jesuit Refugee Service  
**Our Values**  
2014





# Introduction

This publication is the product of a larger partnership between JRS and the Boston College Center for Human Rights and International Justice. Sr. Maryanne Loughry, RSM, Associate Director of JRS Australia and a Research Professor with the Center, worked with the two groups to identify a project of mutual benefit. As the Center seeks to apply its academic and theological expertise regarding the human rights of forced migrants in practice-based settings, this partnership between a Jesuit university and a Jesuit-sponsored non-governmental organization in service to refugees was a natural, yet innovative, match.

With the support of a grant from an anonymous foundation, it allowed us to convene a group of JRS leadership and staff members with a number of moral and social theologians at Boston College in October 2011. In it, there was an extensive exchange that aimed to build a bridge between theology and JRS's work and which in turn provided the material, which is the basis of this publication, which provides meditations on JRS' values as witnessed through the real challenges facing the refugees that JRS serves.

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Dear Friends,

During the above-mentioned consultation two years ago, a theologian simply asked, what can we concretely do? Each of us had read a number of JRS stories and someone simply suggested that maybe we could do short reflections on these stories.

But what would the agenda for these reflections be? It was one thing that we theologians reflect on these brief but very human and poignant stories, but what dimension of these narratives should we reflect upon? What would serve to connect all the stories and their reflections? What would be the glue to make them cohere?

Certainly, JRS had to set the agenda. Eventually it was proposed that we enter into the Strategic Framework 2012-2015 and use as our foundation the seven JRS Values: Compassion, Hope, Dignity, Solidarity, Hospitality, Justice, and Participation.

In turn, we selected, from among the many stories, seven that matched the JRS Values. Then we gave to each of the seven theologians a specific value with its correlated story and asked for brief but hopefully very human and illuminating reflection.

We hope you find our project helpful as you take JRS strategically ahead.

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*James F. Keenan, S.J.*

Founders Professor of Theology, Boston College, and  
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# Mission

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







# COMPASSION

## Modesta's Story

*The Great Lakes Region, Africa*


Modesta, a woman of some 30 years old, was abandoned to die in the refugee camp hospital. A message arrived to the church through the catechist responsible for the care of the sick stating that she wanted me to bring her Holy Communion. Modesta was very weak, lying on a canvas made stretcher with a hole in the middle to help her to defecate into a stinking bucket beneath without having to move or ask the nurses for any help. The roofing and the walls of the "room" were all plastic, turning the room into a greenhouse during the months of heat.

There was no other floor but the soil. Rats would run and feed on Modesta's food bowl that was on the floor because there was no bedside table. Around the stretcher, her four children – between one and eight years of age – were playing and running. The children were alone with the mother. Some people claimed that her husband died from AIDS, others because of the war. The day that I came to see Modesta, I was exhausted. There was too much for a single priest in a camp of 50,000 refugees where 60% are Catholics. I arrived late and I said to her:

"Modesta, I am so sorry, I could not come with the Holy Communion that you asked for. I had too much work and no time to get it from the chapel. Now it is too late for it. I have to leave the camp in a few minutes because of security

reasons. It is getting dark. Tomorrow I will bring you the Holy Communion."

Instead of replying with a kind "Yes, thanks," she replied smiling, but firmly: "Chakula!" That means: "Food!" It took me a few seconds to understand. It felt like a punch to the stomach. This shock put me into movement. The catechists and I ran to the market, forgetting darkness and insecurity. We bought bread, fruits and made tea for Modesta. During the next days, we organized better charitable services for the needy in the hospital and the rest of the camp. We got money from the refugees and from JRS. We started denouncing the corruption in the hospital and the NGO responsible for its management, as the food given by the World Food Program for the sick in the hospital was disappearing in the hands of the administrators. We reached the European Parliament and obtained two different parliamentary resolutions asking European governments to send food to the Great Lakes region that was systematically suffering food shortages under the so-called donor fatigue. Modesta opened the eyes of the community. She taught us that a well-known Gospel message should also be read in the other direction "not only from God do human beings live, but from all that enters through their mouths."



“Modesta shows that there is no Christian forgiveness, no reconciliation, no communion or Eucharist (sharing the bread and the body of Christ), when there is no food for the hungry first.”

The food that the sick receive in the hospital is in most cases ugali, a boiled paste made of manioc flour, with very little nutritional value, topped with a few boiled beans. This is impossible to swallow for a dying person. Modesta has already passed away but she is one of the main sources of motivation in my work and life. She is my permanent master of political-mysticism.

Modesta shows that there is no Christian forgiveness, no reconciliation, no communion or Eucharist (sharing the bread and the body of Christ), when there is no food for the hungry first. There is also no structural justice, from the local to the international community, when there are an estimated 925 million hungry people in the world.

Almost 1 in 7 people are hungry (13.1 % out of the total 7 billion people in the world). Poor nutrition plays a role in at least half of the 10.9 million child deaths each year. This means that five million children die of hunger every year. Knowing this structural sin and that the world's food production could feed twice the world's current population, Modesta reminds us that, unless we work for just distribution of food and food security for all, there is no full Holy Communion in the Eucharist.

# Responding to Suffering with Compassion

Kevin Ahern

The account about Modesta is deeply moving. Tragically, as we know, her story is not unique. There are millions of women, men, and children crying out for communion in a world of hunger, pain, and isolation. In light of such suffering, how do we respond to these calls?

In its response to this reality, JRS embodies the value and virtue of *compassion*. Modesta's story helps to remind us that genuine compassion is much more profound than any vague feeling of sympathy at the distress and suffering of another. Sincere compassion, as most religious traditions testify, is far deeper.

From a Christian theological perspective, compassion lies at the heart of faith. It is deeply connected to who God is and how we are called to relate to one another. The *Psalms*, for example, praise the Lord as being compassionate, merciful and loving (103:8). For Christians, it is from God's love and compassion for the world, that Christ was sent to bring salvation to God's people (*John* 3:16). In the *Gospel of Luke*, Jesus urges his follower to "be compassionate as your Father in heaven is compassionate." (6:36). But what exactly does this call entail?

Modesta's story enables us to see that compassion involves a threefold movement of personal and social transformation.

The first step in the practice of compassion is to open our eyes to see the other as a neighbor and fellow human being. Far too often the voices of people like Modesta are disregarded and ignored.

As with poor Lazarus from *Luke's Gospel*, the displaced, the sick, and the poor are forced, often literally, to the margins of our communities where their needs and sufferings go unnoticed (16:19-31).

Genuine compassion demands that we pull ourselves away from the prisons of our own self-absorption to see the other, as Vatican II challenges us, "as another self" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 27).

Compassion does not stop only at seeing the marginalized. Rather, it must also be accompanied by a willingness to become vulnerable to the sufferings and hopes of others.


At the heart of compassion is the willingness to be moved by the reality of another person and to accompany them in their distress. This is not easy in a culture that values individual self-control and in a world where many people believe that they have the all answers.

Only by becoming vulnerable to the other, by letting go of our preconceived notions of what the other needs, can we truly listen to and discern the call of Modesta and other marginalized people for Chakula!

In becoming vulnerable and listening to people in their distress we can learn a lot about the world and ourselves. We can, like the JRS staff people who encountered Modesta, have our eyes opened to new perspectives about our lives and work. In this way, compassion is not unidirectional.

Authentic compassion transforms everyone involved.

Seeing and becoming vulnerable to the realities of others, however, are not enough. True compassion gives rise to action for and with people who are suffering. Such action, as the case of Modesta highlights, involves attention to both the immediate needs of those afflicted and to the broader social and structural forces at work. In other words, compassion finds its fulfillment in both acts of charity and justice.



Responding to the call of refugees like Modesta is not easy. From a Christian perspective, we continually need God's help and grace to enable us to more effectively and lovingly respond to the needs of others. In a prayer for compassion, Pedro Arrupe, SJ, looks to Christ as the model of compassion. In our efforts to respond to the needs of refugees, we might join with Arrupe in his prayer:

“Teach me how to be compassionate to the suffering,  
to the poor, the blind, the lame, and the lepers;  
show me how you revealed your deepest emotions,  
as when you shed tears,  
or when you felt sorrow and anguish  
to the point of sweating blood  
and needed an angel to console you.  
Above all, I want to learn  
how you supported the extreme pain of the cross,  
including the abandonment of your Father.”



# SOLIDARITY

## Eradi's Story

*Democratic Republic of Congo*



His name is Eradi Salumu and his contract explains that he is a chauffeur for the JRS team of Masisi, however he is much more than this. He is 37 years old, married, and has 3 kids. In the past, he has fled the country many times as the result of war, and in several countries in Africa, he has lived as a refugee without ever having this status. During the time he lived in South Africa, he tried many times to enter Europe, but he was denied in Bulgaria and in Turkey. In the end, he gave up on his dream and attempts for a better life and returned to his native Congo.

It's been 3 years since he has worked with JRS and since then his commitment to the mission has only grown. He is full of generosity, and never has any trouble working overtime; when he receives you in his car he'll say, "Welcome to my office". He is Muslim, and as such he loves to talk about "things of God". In our environment the Muslim community is a minority but works much like a small community. He always says that working for JRS helps you to become a better Muslim.

Without expressing it in words, the reason he is driven to share his pride of being Muslim and a member of the JRS staff is the priority to provide compassionate service for those who are most vulnerable.

Many times along the road he is the one who notices that there is someone in need of assistance on the edge of the path. Many women owe him for helping them arrive to the

hospital in time to give birth after wandering for almost 20km! When there are conflicts, which frequently arise, he reports what happens and always supports the decision that JRS not evacuate quickly and abandon their people. His decision is often to remain put and continue working.

Once when we had to suspend a project dealing with sports and cultural activities in the youth camps because the head in charge had left, he told me that we could not abandon the youth and he organized several championships and continued to nourish their hope that someone would be able to come, take charge, and continue the activities planned. We are not mistaken if we say that the face who is brightest and most consistent with the mission to accompany, serve, and defend the JRS team in Masisi belongs to Eradi, and he is Muslim. Many other organizations, even those from the local church are surprised to learn about his dedication as JRS is a Catholic organization. However, we see it as a gift and a challenge, reminding us about the presence of God and Allah within all of us.



# Solidarity of the Hearts

Paul Kline

When I first read this beautiful story I was immediately captured by the description of Eradi as “*the one who notices*”. This is a wonderful way of describing what it means to be in solidarity with others. To notice someone is to do more than just “see”. Eradi’s story teaches us that to be in solidarity with others we must see them with open eyes and with open hearts - as people who carry the dignity of a child of God. Because Eradi notices others with his eyes *and* his heart he sees and he reaches out to others with comfort and kindness.

Jesus, too, walked in the world as “one who notices”. Jesus sees others with a pure and perfect heart of love. The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus standing with outcasts - men and women who are alone, rejected, and abandoned. Some are alone because they suffer with broken bodies, broken minds, or broken spirits. Some are rejected by others because they look different, sound different, or have different beliefs and traditions. Like Eradi, Jesus notices with his heart the ones who are broken and the ones who are different and the ones who are pushed away from the community. By listening to their stories, Jesus heals their loneliness. By sharing meals with them, walking with them and touching them with compassion and concern, Jesus eases their burdens and strengthens their hope.

Jesus is, for Christians, the perfect example of one who notices others with an open heart and stands with others in compassion and solidarity. His ministry of love and mercy heals broken bodies and broken spirits and, because he stands with them, Jesus also frees them from the prison of isolation.

Eradi has experienced hard times in his life. He has been rejected. He has been treated as one who is invisible. He knows what it feels like when others aren’t interested in your story or your

“His ministry of love and mercy  
heals broken bodies and broken  
spirits”

dreams. Many of us have similar stories to tell. We, too, have experienced moments when we could find no compassion in the eyes of others. We, too, know the loneliness that comes when others fail to open their hearts to us. We, too, know how it feels to stand alone.

Yet, even though others have failed to notice him, the Wisdom of his faith has taken root in Eradi’s heart. His heart is kept open by his love for talking about “things of God”. Talking about God is how Eradi welcomes God into his heart to strengthen his heart with Wisdom and to heal his heart with love and to “nourish hope” in his heart so that he can be a person “full of generosity” for others. God stands in solidarity with Eradi so that Eradi can stand in solidarity with others.

We are told that Eradi is a chauffeur and that he performs his job very well. But, we are also told that he is “much more than that”. His job tells him WHAT he should do for others but his faith tells him that he should do all things with love. For Eradi, his job is a way for him to live as God wishes him to live.

Like Jesus, he welcomes with love the stranger as a friend whose story is important. Like Jesus, he notices with love the ones who are lost, alone, forgotten, and rejected.

Eradi does whatever he can to make sure that no one stands alone. Love transforms everything he does into an experience of belonging and solidarity.



# DIGNITY

## Digna's Story: *The Dominican Republic and Haiti*



One of the most apostolic women I have ever met is Digna. She is illiterate, but runs a community school for children who are excluded from her neighborhood's overcrowded public school and too poor to pay for a private one. She accompanies the sick to the hospital and makes sure they get adequate care. She participates in social movements and grassroots organizations, always as a voice for justice and the common good. Digna is Haitian, but has made so many friends among her Dominican neighbors that she has already baptized over 50 godchildren.

Her own children were born in the Dominican Republic, and have suffered the effects of legal discrimination against people of Haitian origin, such as not being able to obtain a birth certificate despite their Constitutional right to Dominican nationality. With the help of JRS lawyers, Digna has struggled for years to obtain a birth certificate for her oldest son, still to no avail.

Rather than lose hope, though, she helps other Haitian-Dominican families open their cases with our lawyers, so that once the state rectifies its unjust ways some day, their files will be ready to be processed along with her son's. Early one morning, I went on a round of family visits with Digna, and then brought that day's new cases to the JRS office with her. As we waited for the lawyer to arrive, Digna told me a story.

The previous week, she had been walking near a bustling open-air market in Santo Domingo, and

watched as a Dominican woman took a popsicle from a Haitian vendor and kept walking, without paying. When the Haitian man demanded that she pay for the popsicle, a policeman came and arrested him.

Digna went to the policeman and said, "You can't arrest that man."

"And who are you?" he replied, seeing before him a poor, black Haitian woman.

"I'm nobody," she said in her broken Spanish, "but to arrest that man is an injustice; he didn't do anything wrong."

"Well, he's under arrest, for being fresh," said the policeman.

Digna took him by surprise when she responded without missing a beat, "Then I'm under arrest, too," and started walking with both of them towards the police station.

As they approached the police station, the officer, looking confused, stopped and asked her, "Lady, aren't you going to go away?"

"How can I?" she said, "I'm under arrest."

Finally, the policeman let the popsicle vendor go ("he was probably thinking, she must be *somebody*," she tells me, chuckling), and Digna, a wife and mother who had just risked arrest, deportation, and worse for the sake of a complete stranger, continued on her way.





# Dignity Found In Accompaniment

David Hollenbach, SJ

Why did Digna take the dramatic step of heading to jail alongside the unjustly arrested Haitian man?

Why did this “nobody” insist that if he was going to be treated this way, she would be too?

Digna saw something in the Haitian man—his dignity as a human being—that bound them together as sister to brother. The bond was not the blood relation that ties her to her children. Nor was it simply the link between two Haitian migrants routinely facing mistreatment in their Dominican exile. No, Digna saw the arrested man as a human being just like herself, who should be treated the way she wants to be treated. Just as her name is Digna, she saw “dignity” in the unfairly arrested man. What was happening to him could happen to anyone, including herself. She would protest if she were treated this way, so she protested his treatment. She *accompanied* him to jail. When the police officer saw Digna and the arrested man side-by-side on the way to jail, he woke up to their *shared* dignity and released them both.

The Bible tells us that the dignity of Digna, of the arrested man, and of the policeman all have a common origin. Each has been created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 26).

Each has been redeemed and recreated in Christ. When we look upon the face of a human being with the eyes of our heart open, we see something sacred. Just as we should approach God with reverence, we should treat every human person with respect—with justice and ultimately with love.

No human being should be arrested unjustly; the human rights of every person should be respected.

Mistreating a human person is a kind of sacrilege. Our laws should see it as a crime.

This dignity can be seen by all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, if we just open our eyes. Because we are created in God’s image, we possess freedom and can think for ourselves. So that’s the way all of us should be treated—not as “things” but as people who can reflect, choose, and act. Digna saw that the arrested man was not being treated with this kind of respect. So she did something about it.

The God in whose image we are created is not a solitary, isolated power on high. Christians believe that this God is love—a Trinity of three persons united with each other in love.

Since we are in this God’s image, we are bound to each other in an interdependent community. When this relatedness is lived rightly, we accompany and serve each other in solidarity and in love. All humans can recognize the importance of this solidarity, not just Christians. We are all social beings, interdependent on each other.

We can’t attain our dignity on our own, but only through mutual respect and support. As the British poet John Donne put it: No person “is an island,” we are all part of the mainland of the human community.

Digna’s eyes are open to the dignity of the children she helps in her neighbourhood’s school and to the dignity of the sick people she accompanies to the hospital. Solidarity binds her in friendship not only to her fellow Haitians but also to the Dominicans in her neighborhood.



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To become Digna's companion, you just have to be human.

Because her heart saw the dignity she shares with the arrested man, she accompanied him on the way to jail. This kind of solidarity is the deepest form of respect for another person's dignity, a solidarity that says "we are in this together." Respect for dignity is never condescending; it seeks to be with the other person with the kind of respect that arises in mutual support. Because Digna showed that kind of respect in solidarity for the arrested man, she also helped the policeman open his eyes to the dignity of the man he had arrested and set him free. We can hope that respect in solidarity and accompaniment can help open all our eyes to the dignity of the refugees and other displaced people of our world today.



# HOPE

## Flabius's Story

South Sudan



As we traveled toward Morobi, I was informed that Flabius, the head catechist in the village, had lost a daughter, and she had been buried only the day before. “He probably will not be at the seminar, Father, because there is much grief. This was his only child.”

Catechists receive no money for their work; they serve their people selflessly in a million pastoral ways from birth to death. In Africa, they are the heart of the day-to-day Catholic Church, the tall trees of faith. They serve out of a deep sense of commitment to and love for their people and an unyielding confidence in God.

This good man had lost not only his twenty-one-year-old daughter—and his wife a few years ago—but over time seven children to war and disease. Four died in Sudan at the hands of government soldiers as his family was fleeing the hostilities in the mid-nineties, and three died in Morobi of malaria. As for this last child, Sabina, the cause of death was unknown. She became ill and died within twenty-four hours.

This happens in the bush: one day a person appears healthy, able to perform the physical tasks in the village and the home, and the next day she is gone, her body struck down by a swift and efficient killer.

At the Morobi chapel—a table and a few log benches under a huge tree—we were greeted by a group of young Nuer men. It was an uncharacteristically subdued greeting, a sign of respect for their catechist, who, although he is

Bari, speaks fluent Arabic, a second language of the Nuer.


Flabius appeared and took a seat off to my left. He is a frail, gray-haired man of about fifty, small of stature, with a face dominated by huge gleaming eyes.

We proceeded with the seminar. There were lots of questions and answers, and dramas to illustrate various points. People looked to Flabius periodically, in part out of concern and in part seeking his approval of the teaching. He nodded thoughtfully.

Later after the seminar Flabius, who had sat silently while we ate, asked to say a few words. Speaking in his native Bari, he said something like this:

*“I don’t have much to say, Father and my brothers and sisters. I have suffered deeply this past week with the death of my last child, and now I am alone, and there is no one to assist me, except yourselves, for which I am grateful. I did not feel like coming to Prayers today, but I needed to trust God, and to come and give to him all my pain, and trust that the Word of God will heal me in these trying times. I came because God is great and his plans, though hidden from us, are plans of love for all of us. I am herewith you knowing that being with my brothers and sisters and you, Father Gary, I shall be given strength.”*

We sat in silence for a long time, letting the rain of his words soak into the soil of our hearts. He



concluded, his heavy eyes catching us all in a single glance, *I don't have much more to say. Pray for me and thank you.*

It was heartbreaking. There were seven men and two women in that tukul, and each one knew his or her own version of that dear man's agony. They too had lost children; they too had seen death slash into their lives and raid them in the night and in the day, stealing precious pieces of their hearts. This is part of the landscape of the refugee's life. But none there had lost *eight* children.

Flabius knew that all were grieving with him. I was witnessing the Body Of Christ suffering and ministering.

I found Jesus that day.

As we left, looking back past all the waving hands and shining faces, I saw Flabius, standing to the left and in the back of the crowd, bidding us farewell with a peaceful smile and a gentle wave. Behind him stood two watchful Nuer men, looking after their suffering Bari brother.



# Faith that Provides Hope

Jacques Haers, SJ

"I am here with you, knowing that being with my brothers and sisters and you, Father Gary, I shall be given strength." Those are the words of Flavius, words of grief and hope after the death of his daughter, the words of a man who had already lost to war and disease his wife and seven of his children. When people suffer massive pain, they are at risk of becoming isolated, the prisoners of their own trauma, excluded by those who fear to share their fate, unable to communicate, although they long to experience and hear that there is life beyond the pain. Those are times when we need others to invade our space and to tell us that there are good reasons for us to move beyond the entrapments of trauma.

It may be very hard, but to those for whom hope is the only path left apart from despair and loneliness, the first step is to open up to others who know about their pain without being its prisoners: friends who suffer with them and are at the same time capable of perceiving the world beyond the pain. The first step on the road to hope is to become aware of such friends, fellow human beings who pull us out of our isolation. For all of us, the first step is also to become friends, as the compassionate Samaritan, to move out towards suffering fellow human beings. Hope, as Flavius reminds us, is about such life giving companionship, about friendship and community-building at life-sharing depth. Gracefully, hope reveals that suffering does not inevitably isolate people: it can become a creative source of deeply shared life that changes our being together. The real threshold is that first step out of the tempting isolation and self-victimization, not only for those who suffer exclusion, but for all of us. Blessed are those community builders who dare to proclaim, demand and practice this "move out of isolation", who trust that the response to our


suffering is through the presence and strength of others, who surround us and take away the veil of our blindness.

Jesus of Nazareth's authority and his impact on people rested to a large extent, I imagine, on his capacity to friendship, his practice of community-building through the de-isolation, by sharing their fate, of suffering and excluded people, who then could become the soul of renewed life together. This is a multi-faceted effort. It requires sympathy with those who suffer and are in danger of isolation particularly when this isolation is triggered or maintained by our societies and communities.

It trusts those who proclaim the vision of another possible world without traumatic violence or exclusion, or better: it looks for the signs of the times, those delicate events when people do not give in to the temptation to be imprisoned in valleys of tears, and when they touch the resources of life in themselves.

The effort towards this new community may be dangerous, as it confronts structures of power and self-interest that attempt to maintain the societal status-quo that profits to some of us, even when it causes the suffering of others. The strong resistance Jesus experienced during his life as soon as he started paying attention to those who had been excluded as well as his death on the cross, remind us of these dangers.

The authority of Jesus emerges not only in the words and actions through which he restores our communities by opening them up to those we so readily exclude, but also in the proclamation of a dream, the Kingdom of God, which he likes to compare to a banquet that all of us enjoy together. It seems an impossible dream, a horizon that can never be reached, but Jesus'



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faith in a God who comes forward out of that horizon and makes it reality, is contagious. When he asks the tricky question: “who do you say that I am?” We may come to share the joyful hope that will make us commit to change our broken reality, that turns us into dreamers who discover the vision while embodying it and who become friends. We may also come to experience the companionship with those whom we encounter as Christ on our way: those who share Jesus’ marginal place, his traumatic suffering and, as we hope, his resurrection. We receive strength from one another, as a gift from God in each of us, for all of us.



# HOSPITALITY

## Thomas's Story

*Australia*

Thomas has been one of our clients since the Sydney World Youth Day 2008. In Sydney, JRS houses asylum seekers who are at risk of destitution while they undergo their refugee status determination.

When Thomas came to us he was already struggling with the demands of the refugee determination process, and life in general. We housed him near our office, a large house where we can accommodate up to 10 men at any one time. Living near our office Thomas became a very regular visitor. His capacity for cooking, cleaning and concern for the needs of other residents endeared him to us. We also noted that as time passed he was getting thinner, poorer in health and occasionally incoherent.

Over the years, JRS accompanied Thomas to his various refugee hearings, counseled him in his needs, chatted with him and befriended him.

At each stage of his refugee determination process, Thomas received negative decisions; and each appeal seemed to take him further and further into a downward spiral. Throughout this struggle, we continued to enjoy Thomas's presence and offer all the support we could to someone who was becoming an old and familiar friend.

Two months ago Thomas attempted suicide. The effect of the downward spiral we had witnessed had become too much for him. The night before, he went to evening Mass, chatted with some of

the residents in his house and wrote a desperate email to all the human rights organizations he knew.


Thomas was saved by a fellow asylum seeker in his house who happened to be a doctor. The doctor recognized what was happening, gave first aid and called the ambulance. Thomas survived this attempt and is back in the cycle of claims and appeals for refugee status.

A friend in need.

For JRS, it felt like on our watch, a friend, accompanied by us, had succumbed to despair. We inevitably asked ourselves questions about our care: could we have done more? Should we have seen the signs? Thomas's house companions asked themselves the same question. Why, when chatting the night before, hadn't he shared his despair?

Each one made his way to the hospital to visit their companion. Even those who did not share a common language, shared a common concern for Thomas. His moments of despair reminded us that accompanying asylum seekers is a waiting game, often discouraging and filled with frustration. They wait for the decisions they want to hear and JRS rides the emotional journey with them. Our office is a barometer of strong, often unspoken emotions, a place of waiting.

Recently, JRS staff joined with theologians, ethicists and spiritual resource persons to



explore how best to support our teams with concrete resources in their demanding and taxing work. In addition, JRS seeks to strengthen responses to asylum seekers and refugees and to deepen the organization's understanding God's poor.

The sharing of personal stories and more profound reflection on their meaning is an important fruit of our labor at JRS, and a source of inspiration to many who support our work.



# Nature of Jesuit Hospitality

James F. Keenan, SJ

*While the term was rarely used, GC 34 was touching upon the Christian virtue of hospitality, of making the Society a symbol of welcome- to the poor, to lay people, to those searching for meaning, to those who want to talk seriously about religious issues. (General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, No. 34, Decree 1: United with Christ on Mission 11, [11])*

The General Congregation's statement might strike some readers as certainly peculiar, for regardless of the many charisms associated with the Jesuits, hospitality is not one of, say, the first dozen descriptions that come to mind. If you want religious hospitality, go to a Benedictine monastery: you'll be treated like God!

Jesuit hospitality is VERY different. In order to understand it, we need to first understand Jesuit identity and spirituality.

Its identity is caught up in its mission. Jesuit identity is not shaped by where we live, but rather by what we do.

We are missioned throughout the world. This includes being missioned to accompany the most vulnerable.

As one theologian writes "The central image of the Jesuit St. Ignatius seems to have had in his own mind, right up to his death, was that of a kind of apostolic vagabond." How can an apostolic vagabond be hospitable?

One of the early founders of the Society of Jesus, Jerome Nadal wrote that Jesuit ministry does not expand from the Jesuit community; rather, community occurs where Jesuit ministry is. "Wherever there is need or greater utility for our ministries, there is our house." We live

“...sometimes we are as powerless and as alienated as the refugees we serve. In those instances, when all we can do is accompany, we realize just how much we are like him without even a place to rest his head.”


wherever those in need live. Nadal adds, "The principal and most characteristic dwelling for Jesuit is not in ... houses, but in journeyings..."

In a manner of speaking Nadal sees our ministry as like the first apostles: our mission is to go to those most in need; we meet them as apostles of the Church; where they are, we dwell.

That journeying forth to meet those in need is, then, an act of hospitality, though strikingly different from the common notion of hospitality. Jesuit hospitality is not found in its receiving, but in its sending.

As one "in the Church" and "in the world," the Jesuit goes to those on the margins of society to welcome them into the Church by preaching, catechising and confessing or into the wider society by education or social ministry. If "the world is our home" as Nadal proclaimed and if our mission is to those who are refugees, then our call is to bring them into sanctuary.

Our model for Jesuit hospitality is not found, then, in the gracious Benedictine monastery, though indeed there is much we could learn from that place. Rather the model for Jesuit hospitality



is the refugee center. Whether those refugees are without country or church, we go to meet them and welcome them into the world where God works.

Where anybody in need is, there is our mission and our hospitality. Our hospitality is not then a domestic one, but a mobile one, not because our communities are mobile, but because those whom we serve are found throughout the whole earth.

Therein we encounter our own lack of stability. For often, we are no more at home, than those we serve. And sometimes that means, as in the story of Thomas, that we are not as effective as someone who lives at home or in one's native land. It means that sometimes we are as powerless and as alienated as the refugees we serve. In those instances, when all we can do is accompany, we realize just how much we are like him without even a place to rest his head. We discover what it means to be a vagabond.

Inasmuch as the Jesuit charism is so strikingly defined by its mission to go to those in need, the new accent on hospitality ought not to be understood as a call to appreciate and develop a more sensitive sense of domesticity.

On the contrary, the new emphasis warns us against seeing the world as solely the place where they live; rather it calls us to be more attentive to where and how others live. It is to meet others as the itinerant Good Samaritan did.

*For a longer essay on this see James Keenan, 'Jesuit Hospitality?' Promise Renewed: Jesuit Higher Education for a New Millennium ed. Martin Tripole (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1999) 230-244. Alternatively, readers can write directly to Fr. Keenan, james.keenan.2@bc.edu, for a copy of the article.*

# PARTICIPATION

## Eunice's Story

*Uganda*

It was a hot West Nile day at our JRS Rhino Camp location. Lots of dust. I was discussing some business with my logistics man, Atibuni, when two women, Regina and Lilian, from a nearby refugee village of Tika, came through our gate looking for me. Good women, I knew them, wearing tattered clothes and prematurely aged faces. They were elders in the community and the unofficial midwives of the village. Both were widows, both had husbands killed in the Sudan civil war, both had outlived their children. We greeted each other and they shared their problem they had brought to me.

One of the young women in the village, Mary, was in labor prematurely. They felt that there was not sufficient time for them to escort her by bike or by foot to the nearby clinic. Would I drive them to the local health clinic? Yes, of course. We piled into my pickup and drove to their village, about a kilometer away. There we fetched Mary, a beautiful young woman and an orphan, someone I knew well. She was looking very ragged, a face full of anxiety and the pain of rapidly increasing contractions. I sat the three of them in the back seat and proceeded to the nearby clinic. It was closed.

The next clinic was several kilometers away but I headed for it knowing that the bumpy bush road would only aggravate Mary's struggles. But I had no choice and figured I use a couple of short cuts, cutting down the time of driving there.

Halfway to this second clinic one of the midwives tapped my shoulder and said calmly, "Father, she is not going to make it. We have to arrange for her to have the baby here." "Here?" I said to myself, "in the middle of nowhere, on a hot day, without medical people?" Rhetorical questions. I pulled over to the side of the road, finding shade under the ubiquitous Neem trees. Some curious children came over and were sent off by the midwives to collect water and cloths. I put down a tarp in the bed of the pickup, placed Mary down, using an old blanket I carried in the pickup as a headrest and the midwives went out about their comforting and knowledgeable ways.

The wisdom and suffering of many years took over. Mary, undergoing her first birth experience, was amazingly calm and followed their instructions. I leaned over the side of the pickup looking upon the unfolding drama. When the children returned from the nearby village, some with their mothers, I directed them be available to Regina and Lilian.

And so, under the Neem trees, slightly stirring from a warm Northern breeze, in the bed of a pickup, the child was born. A girl.

Everyone seemed like they knew what was happening except me. It wasn't that I was naïve; I had seen births before in the States. But this was different, obviously.

All I could do, gazing at the people and sinking into the event here in the bush of northern



Uganda, was stand in the West Nile breeze and stand in the mystery of it all. I had talked about birth as a reality and as a metaphor, I had preached about it and talked about it all a kajillion times. But this moment took me to a deeper level of mystery.

What was it?

This: in the midst of so much death and disease and hardships and uncertainty that lived daily with the Sudanese refugees, a new life, a new start would not be denied.

But it wasn't over, this moment.

The midwives handed the baby to Mary. She held it to her breast, and then, suddenly, turned her head and looked at me, and simultaneously held the child out to me. The midwives took the baby, wrapped in part of an old dress the kids had brought and placed the girl in my hands. So tiny. So wrinkled. So...alive. I flashed on something that Marilynne Robinson had written in her book *Gilead*:

***Any human face is a claim on you, because you can't help but understand the singularity of it, the courage and loneliness of it. But this is truest of the face of a child. I consider that to be one kind of vision, as mystical as any.***

Mary whispered, "Father, what is the name of your mother?" In an instant I was connected to the tradition of a people who name their children after the occasion of the birth, and connected forever to his little girl and her mother and the midwives and the growing number of people surrounding my car.

"Eunice," I responded.

Mary: "She shall be called Eunice."

So there it was: The truth of the event. It fell upon me like a falcon: the union of humanity, the mystery of God bringing forth life, the simplicity and transparency of this young mother's gift to me, and permeating it all, the rush of my love for these refugees who had taken me into such a profound and intimate moment of their lives. Eunice. Had my mother been alive she would have cackled in joy at the occasion.

Maybe she did.





# Participating in New Life

Daniel G. Groody, CSC

At the core of every human heart, there is a deep need to belong and to give. We want to know that we are not alone, that someone cares, that someone understands us and that someone is there for us.

At the same time, we are not complete unless we find a way to give ourselves away, to do something meaningful in this world, to live in a way that makes a difference, to contribute to something beyond ourselves that has significance, purpose and value. To participate means to live in mutually reciprocal relationships and life-giving mission. The story of Eunice reminds us that despite all the trials and tribulations in the world, God is constantly creating new life, a life into which we too are called to share and participate.

It bursts forth in this story through the birth of a child, and it bursts forth every time we connect with another, every time we reach out to another's need, every time we allow others to help us, and every time we participate in all that is the gift of offering and receiving love.

To love and help the poor means little if we do not at the same time seek to empower them to discover and use their own gifts. If we treat the poor as if they were objects to be helped rather than brothers, sisters and friends to accompany in a common human journey, then we not only deprive them but we demean our own dignity as well.

To help Lilian and Regina participate requires more than feeling pity for them.

Pity is about feeling sorry for them. But empathy is about feeling with them.

Empathy means participating with them in their

struggles and empowering them to use their gifts that will help generate new life in the world.

It entails having a heart that feels with them, a *concordia* in their suffering and a *collaboration* in their liberation. They are not just projects to be accomplished, problems to be fixed, issues to be resolved. They are people to be loved, friends to accompany, brothers to walk with, and sisters who have gifts to offer.

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us "We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny.

Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly...Did you ever stop to think that you can't leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? You go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that's poured into your cup by a South American. And maybe you want tea: that's poured into your cup by a Chinese. Or maybe you're desirous of having cocoa for breakfast, and that's poured into your cup by a West African. And then you reach over for your toast, and that's given to you at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half the world. This is the way our universe is structured; this is its interrelated quality. We aren't going to have peace on Earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality."

Because we are hard-wired for inter-connectedness, when we participate in the life of those who are suffering and in need, and we reach out and try to help, something is not only born in the other but something comes to life in us as well. Grace is at work when new life comes



forth even in what seems to us as the most godless of circumstances. In participating in God's love for the world, we participate in the rebuilding and renewing of relationships with God, others, ourselves, and the environment. In giving to those struggling to live we paradoxically find new life at the same time. Participation means all belong to God; we belong to each other. Although God could have saved the world without our help, he invites us instead to participate with him in proclaiming his love for every creature and discovering our place in the common human family.

# JUSTICE

## Story of Organizing for Justice Dominican Republic

A group of young Haitian men approached us about the problems they were having with their boss. They sold frozen yogurt cones on the streets of Santo Domingo, pushing a heavy machine through traffic all day, and made almost nothing after the boss took his 80% cut. More than the low pay and the physical dangers of the job, though, what hurt them to the bone were the daily insults and humiliation they received from him, especially when, after a day of exploitation, he would accuse *them* of stealing and force them to empty their pockets in front of him. (For the record, the boss is himself an immigrant from another Latin American country; he is not Dominican.)

The Haitians worked seven days a week. When one vomited blood from exhaustion and asked for a day off to go the hospital, the boss told him that if he didn't show up to work the next day, he could consider himself fired.

Another felt the need to go to Mass, where he could sing hymns in his own language and feel like a child of God.

The two began to organize their co-workers and eventually they confronted the boss together, getting him to concede a weekly day off for each of them. Meanwhile, the boss decided to hire an armed thug to intimidate the workers with violent threats, lest they continue making "trouble." Naturally, we took on the case. It quickly got

intense, when one of the group's leaders had a gun put to his head and Naturally, we took on the case. It quickly got intense, when one of the group's leaders had a gun put to his head and escaped with his life, and another was threatened.

Besides following up on the process at the Labor Tribunal, it became part of our routine to walk with the workers who had been threatened on their way back to the warehouse at night to return the frozen yogurt machines and settle their accounts with the boss. When the workers requested it, a couple of us would arrive at the warehouse with them, make ourselves visible and then wait outside until the workers left, as a way of ensuring their safety.

One night that we hadn't gone, we received a cell phone call letting us know that one worker had been beaten by the thug for refusing to go along with an unfair demand (once the labor cases were underway, a clever lawyer had taught the boss to pressure the workers each night into signing a blank form regarding hours and pay, which he would later fill in with lies). We met the worker, still in his bloodied uniform, on a street corner and went with him to the hospital and the police station.

Of course, none of this had been part of our strategic plan for the year, and the case forced us to neglect some of our regular work. We



stuck with it, though, and after many visits to the district attorney, the worker who had been beaten finally faced his (now ex-) boss in front of a judge, with his co-workers as witnesses. The whole process was tainted with open anti-Haitian discrimination and clear signs of corruption, however, and ultimately the cases led to nowhere. Not only that, but now the whole group was now unemployed as well.

We felt miserable. After all those sleepless nights, and with such clear, solid cases, we had failed to make any difference. And yet, the young men we had accompanied thanked us sincerely. They told us that when we walked with them, they had felt safe, and that when they faced their employer and said the truth in front of a judge, they had felt some recognition as persons with dignity (even if their rights were not fully protected). If nothing else, our accompaniment had given them that. It had been worthwhile.





# Accompanying Justice: Hard Work, Lament and Hope

Lisa Cahill

I am a college professor. Many of my graduate students work with the poor, and several are preparing for ministry as priests, religious or lay people. Last week we studied a book by an American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote that there is a “new peril of evil on every new level of the good.” This evil is so stubborn, effective, and hard to defeat that it is symbolized by the Antichrist, who cannot be overcome by human power (1 John 2:18-19; 4:2-3). “The Antichrist who appears at the end of history can be defeated only by the Christ who ends history.”

Many students found this much too pessimistic! One commented that Niebuhr “portrays a world where charity and proper justice are myths of the masses. It is hard to come away with some sort of empowerment to send me out into the world to be Christ-like.” I tried to reassure the students that while we must be realistic, work for justice can be successful. Our efforts make a difference in the world. But after class, two students spoke to me. One has worked in a secondary school in New York that serves poor and immigrant children, many of whom are racial minorities, and whose lives are difficult. She said, “Work for justice is hard!” Another student, experienced in peace building efforts in Rwanda, agreed. “Niebuhr is right that most political decisions are based on self-interest.” Work for justice cannot count on signs of success. Hope must be sustained by working in solidarity with others, even when there seems to be no progress.

The story of the yogurt vendors in Santo Domingo confirms that my students were right. Perhaps the best religious response to the vendors’ troubles—and to the disappointment of

those who walk with them—is the Psalms of affliction and lament.

*Hear my prayer, O Lord;  
Let my cry come to you.  
Do not hide your face from me  
In the day of my distress...  
All day long my enemies taunt me...  
I wither away like grass (Psalm 102).*

In the words of African American theologian Bryan Massingale, “Laments are cries of anguish and outrage, groans of deep pain and grief, utterances of profound protest and righteous indignation over injustice, wails of mourning and sorrow in the face of unbearable suffering...laments...are uncivil, strident, harsh, and heart-rending.” Dying almost abandoned on the cross, Jesus laments in the words of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Though laments express desperation, they are also protests calling God to account and asserting a higher justice. Lament helps make suffering bearable by forming community, even when no “solution” is possible.

The JRS spokesperson who tried to protect the yogurt sellers from their boss and went to court with them recounts that “the young men we had accompanied thanked us sincerely” because “they had felt some recognition as persons with dignity.” Mutual recognition and respect for one another’s dignity is the essential meaning of justice and the basis of all just laws and structures. When the laws and courts of Santo Domingo failed to vindicate the workers they reinforced structures of injustice. But the faithfulness of the JRS members planted small seeds of justice that may grow roots reaching

deep and far enough to erode those structures from below. Yet whatever the eventual societal outcome, JRS accompaniment has already created new community, nourished mutual respect, and lessened the suffering of being counted a nonperson.

John Paul II called all Christians to take from the Eucharist “the strength to commit ourselves ever more generously” to “actions in the world in favor of development and peace.” He assured us that “our personal commitment, like Christ’s and in union with his, will not be in vain but certainly fruitful” (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 48). Despite the truth of these words, experience teaches that the fruit of our actions might be small and slow-growing. Yet it is still possible to struggle on and encourage one another, since “all serious and upright human conduct is hope in action” (Benedict X, *Spe Salvi*, no. 35). The community created by courageous and hopeful action waters the seeds of justice.





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## Special thanks to:

A special thank you to all of the theologians that contributed their thoughts and expertise in understanding the values of the Jesuit Refugee Service: Dr. Kevin Ahern, Professor Lisa Cahill, Sr. Denise Coghlan, RSM, Professor Catherine Cornille, Professor Virgilio Elizondo, Fr. Howard Gray, SJ, Fr. Thomas Greene, SJ, Professor Daniel Groody, CSC, Professor Jacques Haers, SJ, Professor David Hollenbach, SJ, Professor James Keenan, SJ, Fr. Isaac Kiyaka, SJ, Professor Paul Kline, Professor John Makransky. We also thank Tori Duoos, Molly Holden, and Tim Karcz for their assistance in design and production.



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