



# International JPIC Newsletter Migrant Justice

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Missionary Society of St. Columban**



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## **"Stories of Home"**

*By Amy Woolam Echeverria, Co-Editor*

My first mission in and for the Church was at a refugee resettlement office run by Catholic Charities in North Carolina. We provided assistance to primarily Vietnamese, Cambodians, Hmong, Bosnians, Somalians, and Cubans. The assistance included housing, job placement, education enrollment, mental and physical health services, legal guidance; all the things you would expect.

But what I remember most about those years was sitting for hours around kitchen tables and in living rooms listening to stories of home, hearing the longing, the sadness, the hope that lingered on every breath. As this was the time before internet, cell phones, email, social media and all the rest, story-telling was the source of connection and discovery. Sometimes I would sit in hospitals by the bedside offering just the gentlest of touch of the hand before and after surgery trying to offer a bit of the solace that a daughter, sister, or mother might offer if they were able to be present. These memories are vivid and woven in to my DNA. I have no doubt that many of you understand what it feels like to have your DNA changed through such relationships.

Five years have passed since Pope Francis issued his call for the Church to open our homes and churches to welcome the stranger. This October, five years later, Pope Francis released his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. In reading it, I am reminded of those years in North Carolina and later Chile when I was fully immersed in the mission of encounter with refugees and with the community. I particularly love this simple reminder that, "implanted deep within us is the call to transcend ourselves through an encounter with others" (FT, #111).

Reading the stories in this month's newsletter, the mission of encounter is on full display. May you feel some measure of closeness through the storytelling and may we all be inspired to rediscover the longing nestled and nurtured in our hearts for universal friendship.

In peace & gratitude,

Amy



## **“The Mouth of a Shark”**

*By Wesley Cocozello, Co-Editor*

Both the Old and the New Testaments reveal God’s abiding love for migrants. Scripture, as well as our Church’s two-thousand-year history, tell many heart-breaking stories about people fleeing from violence, persecution, and poverty. Even Jesus and his family were refugees.

Reflecting on these sacred foundations, the Catholic Church recognizes that people have the right to migrate to sustain their lives, and the lives of their families, if they cannot do so in their country of origin. The migrant’s story reminds us of a fundamental principle of Catholic social teaching: that the goods of the earth are intended to benefit all people. It is never God’s will that some of God’s children live in luxury while others have nothing.

Catholic social teaching is prudent though: it does acknowledge that countries can legitimately regulate their borders and their immigration processes in a safe and orderly way. However, it also states that countries are obligated to design and conduct these processes with mercy and justice. Governments should understand their duties in light of the absolute dignity of all people and their sacred commitment to the common good.

In our times, it’s especially important to be aware of how subversive discourse distorts conversations in the public square and government policies, as well as our own attitudes.

St. Columban teaches us that “a life unlike our own can be our teacher.” We must always root ourselves in the lived experiences of vulnerable people, which includes migrants. For example, Fr. Bob Mosher, Director of the Columban Mission Center in El Paso, TX, has said that he considers it a blessing and an opportunity to serve and support them. All of us are transformed by the spiritual and cultural gifts migrants bring to our communities.

While Columbans “believe that we are called to both serve the needs of migrants everywhere,” we also have committed ourselves “to address[ing] the root causes of migration so that people and their families have the choice to remain at home” ([Society Migration Statement](#)).

It is important to remember that migration is a symptom of other injustices. Migrants all around the world are fleeing crippling poverty, environmental destruction, extreme violence, political instability, and other serious threats to life.

As British-Somali poet and refugee, Warsan Shire, wrote in her famous poem “Conversations about Home:”

“no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark.”

That’s why one of the most important things we can do to protect migrants is to advocate for policies that address the root causes of migration. These policies should help create just and dignified conditions for migrants in their home countries, allowing them to live in safety and with dignity.

As people of faith, God calls us to live in solidarity with others, especially with those who live in poverty or are marginalized. At the border, Pope Francis reminds us that we have “an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ, who identified himself with the foreigner who has been accepted or rejected in every age.”



## Jubilee for the Earth: Biodiversity & Our Sacred Story

“Jubilee for the Earth” is a podcast mini-series about the beauty of biodiversity and the threats it faces. It was produced by the Columban working group on biodiversity.

The podcast was published throughout the 2020 Season of Creation, but you can listen to it at any time of the year. The working group is currently writing a study guide to accompany the podcast.

The podcast has seven episodes:

- Episode 1: The Spirituality of Biodiversity
- Episode 2: A New Kind of Economy
- Episode 3: Embarking on the Path of Dialogue
- Episode 4: Nonviolence for the Earth
- Episode 5: No Land to Live On
- Episode 6: A New Beginning
- Bonus Episode: The Death of Life

You can learn more about the podcast and listen to each episode at [www.columbancenter.org/jubileepodcast](http://www.columbancenter.org/jubileepodcast).

Episode 5 - “[No Land to Live On](#)” - is about how environmental degradation is one of the causes of mass migration.

In 2017 alone, 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced by conflict, poverty, or environmental factors, more than at any point in human history.

Climate change and biodiversity loss create environmental conditions that strain local economies and exacerbate conflicts for scarce resources. In these situations, it is always those who are living in poverty or are forced to the margins of society that suffer the most.

The Earth’s resources - which have been entrusted to us - are for the life of the whole world. They do not belong to a wealthy minority, or even a human minority.

## Upcoming JPIC Days of Prayer & Action

- **Nov 6:** International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict
- **Dec 18:** International Day for Migrants

## Upcoming Newsletters and Submission Deadlines

Release Month	Theme	Deadline
December	Peace and Nonviolence	November 15

Please email your submissions to Amy Woolam Echeverria at [amywe@columban.org](mailto:amywe@columban.org).



## Swallows Beware

By Fr. Bobby Gilmore, Ireland

*India arrests Pakistani pigeon for spying. (The Times. 29/5/20)*

*The first of the swallows*

*Says winter is done*

*That spring and then*

*Summer has finally come. -Hullabaloo 22*

Since the middle of April I have been watching out for the arrival of a particular kind of migrant, this time a winged one, a swallow. After a few days of peering out from locked-down house arrest caused by the arrival of a wingless invisible, without body, soul or passport, I spied a real one flying the usual, zig zag, rapid flight path gobbling up the early spring bugs. Yes, a swallow has arrived. They have been arriving here in the warming atmosphere long before humans arrived. Like humans, in their genes there is a desire for a better life to settle, build a temporary home, bring their young into the world and nourish them in a safe surrounding.

As I observe the flight pattern my imagination goes back to its take off point in South Africa following a flight path through west Africa, passing over the Sahel and the arid Sahara dropping in to a variety of oasis for refreshment. The Mediterranean a cooling break before

avoiding the danger of nets on the European coastline. The humans below making a similar journey take similar risks in desert and at sea. At borders they confront hostility avoiding traffickers, smugglers and barbed wire fencing. Swallows have an advantage they do not recognise borders.

Swallows leave as the weather cools into winter for the long trip to Ireland. Like seasonal migrants who leave home to follow the planting and harvesting seasons as a way of life, swallows take a risk and follow the seasons to generate and nurture new life. Migration both for bird and human is a journey of hope, expectation and return to tell the story. Neither human nor winged migrant are always welcome by indigenous populations. However, both bring their skills, crafts, music energy and hope.

As I watch from my window in the late afternoon, having done their foraging and nest-building two swallows come to rest observing social distance on the roof beside two crows. The crows alerted by their presence look at the new arrivals as if surprised at having their rest disturbed. Then they look at each other as if exhibiting an irk that has to be tolerated. Human migrants also experience similar distancing and hostility on arrival too.

However, swallows have probably had their house-building skills copied by humans in their use of soft mud and grass on the walls of their nests. Unskilled seasonal migrants bring skills at planting, harvesting and caring locals don't appreciate. If they did agricultural work so-called unskilled migrants would not be needed to keep the food chain linked up. Both swallows and migrants spend a lot of energy coping with danger points. Swallows have to avoid nets and trigger-happy hedonists. Migrants have to cope with barbed wire, sea, desert, snakeheads, body-shoppers, traffickers and hostile border security forces representing governments having reneged on international declarations claiming to be protectors of culture and ethnic purity.

We all, humans and animals, carry movement in our inner landscapes. We are always driven to imagine what lies beyond the horizon. That's the way the world was populated out of Africa. The biblical story of the Exodus fleeing slavery resembles modern day groups fleeing oppression, conflict, hunger and disease. Another example is the flight of Joseph, Mary and the child Jesus for safety in Egypt, the journeys made by Europeans through the Atlantic and Southern Ocean to Australia and New Zealand, Americans fleeing the dust bowl, the Jewish people escaping from Europe after the Holocaust and in our screens the Rohingya today. Yet, political leaders, some of whom from migrant heritage, tell us that migrants are a burden, a risk, to be feared. Should we not be welcoming them?

The swallows announce a new season, new growth, new hope. Migrants tell us the same, making us aware that our world is a vibrant cultural salad bowl not an isolated insipid soup bowl. They probably tell us things about ourselves that we don't want to hear.



## **Do Not Deport the Children and Their Families!**

*By Scott Wright, USA*

*A Church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed - what Gospel is that? - Saint Oscar Romero*

There is a migrant and refugee crisis on the US-Mexico border, and a war in Central America and Mexico against children and their families. It is being waged by gangs and drug cartels, corrupt police and corrupt government officials complicit with these non-state actors or governments unable or unwilling to fulfill their obligations to protect children from the violence directed against them.

Today, our government has effectively dismantled our asylum system and forced migrant and refugee families from Central America and other lands to remain in Mexico, vulnerable to abduction and violence as they wait.

Children as young as two and their families are making a perilous journey north, fleeing violence in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, fleeing from countries with some of the highest murder rates in the world, seeking asylum and hoping to reunite with their families in the United States.

There is clearly a moral crisis in our nation, as Congress refuses to pass comprehensive immigration reform and the President asks Congress for more money to build a wall, issuing executive orders that put in jeopardy laws that protect immigrant families and uphold their right to ask for asylum.

Above all, there is a spiritual crisis in the nation. Undocumented children and their families have become the new scapegoats. Communities of faith, like the Columban Mission Center in El Paso and Corpus Christi parish in Ciudad

Juarez, on the other hand, have been among the first responders offering these families and children shelter, and advocating for greater justice for immigrants. Now we are being asked to take a stronger stand on immigration, and those who are asking are the children and their families who are fleeing the furnace of violence in their home countries and crossing the border to ask for asylum.

The bottom line is: Do not sacrifice these children and their families on the altar of a broken immigration system, political expediency, and administrative cruelty. Do not deport them. Protect them. Help them reunite with their families.

Welcome these families. Welcome the children. Fix the broken immigration system so that families may reunite with their children who are at risk. But do not sacrifice these families and their children, and do not pretend we are doing them a favor by deporting them back to the violence they are fleeing. Isn't that what the Gospel asks of us in this moment? And isn't that what the heroes of our faith ask of us as well?

*"The great need today is for Christians who are active and critical, who don't accept situations without analyzing them inwardly and deeply. We no longer want masses of people like those who have been trifled with for so long. We want persons like fruitful fig trees, who can say yes to justice and no to injustice and can make use of the precious gift of life, regardless of the circumstances." - Saint Oscar Romero*

There are many reasons for this crisis, and they have political and economic roots going back

decades and generations: U.S. support for military governments, free trade agreements that undercut local farmers leading to more poverty and increased migration, a military coup in Honduras, and the violence of corrupt police, drug cartels and youth gangs.

Every year, before the border was sealed, hundreds of immigrants died in the Arizona desert, and hundreds of thousands more were deported. Thirty to forty thousand immigrants were kept in detention to fill a congressionally mandated bed quota, many in for profit prisons, awaiting deportation. Since the year 2000, six million immigrants have been deported under

three successive administrations. Now the border is sealed. Those who do manage to cross are immediately detained and deported back to conditions of violence from which they fled in the first place.

*Cowardice asks the question: is it safe? Expediency asks the question: is it politic? Vanity asks the question: is it popular? But conscience asks the question: is it right? And there comes a time when one must*

*take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular - but one must take it simply because it is right. - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

For years, immigrant-led movements have targeted Congress and called for comprehensive immigration reform. They have led protests across the nation, calling on the President to stop the deportations that were dividing immigrant families.

Not long ago, the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) brought together African

**"Our message as people of faith must be unequivocal: do not deport the children. Protect them, offer them temporary protective or refugee status, and protect their families. Address the roots of the crisis in Central America and Mexico and failed U.S. policies on immigration. Do not blame these immigrant families and their children."**

*-Scott Wright, USA*



## Migrants Mass 2020

By Ellen Teague, UK

Americans from the Birmingham children's march fifty years ago and the children of undocumented immigrants today in a weekend worship, before the immigrant children took their message to the White House and were arrested, calling on the conscience of the nation to do more.

Our immigration system is broken, and there is plenty of blame to spread around. Congress has failed to act, but so have past presidents. Now the current administration has effectively sealed the US - Mexico border, and sped up administrative action to process and deport the immigrant families and children.

Our message as people of faith must be unequivocal: do not deport the children. Protect them, offer them temporary protective or refugee status, and protect their families. Address the roots of the crisis in Central America and Mexico and failed U.S. policies on immigration. Do not blame these immigrant families and their children. Press Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform and demand that the President end his war on immigrants.

Forty years ago, the martyred archbishop of El Salvador and now saint, Oscar Romero, spoke truth to power and defended the poor during a difficult and bloody civil war. His words remind us that something more is at stake here than politics:

*"Nothing is so important to the church as human life, as the human person, above all, the person of the poor and the oppressed. Besides being human beings, they are also divine beings, since Jesus said that whatever is done to them he takes as done to him. That bloodshed, those deaths, are beyond all politics. They touch the very heart of God."*



Each year, near to the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, the migrant communities of Brentwood, Southwark and Westminster Dioceses in Southern England gather for a Mass that is full of song, vibrant energy and great joy. Columbans always go and support. This year, however, we joined an on-line Mass on Saturday 2 May, celebrated by Fr Dominic Howarth, Director of Caritas in Brentwood Diocese. More than 1,200 people watched the Mass live.

Fr Howarth said in his homily:

A few years ago I stood in the simplest and most moving church I have ever encountered - in the refugee camp known as the Jungle, in Calais. In amongst the mud, the appallingly poor dwellings, the overflowing toilets, and so much else that was so wrong and sad about the Jungle, was the church of St Michael the Archangel, built of tarpaulin and wood by Eastern Rite Christians from Ethiopia and Eritrea. Can you imagine the journey that they had had - they were on boats where just 30 survived, of a hundred who started the journey across the Mediterranean; they had walked literally thousands of miles, and yet, when they finally arrived in Calais they built the church before they built anywhere for themselves to live. "We wanted to give thanks to God," they said, "for getting us this far." They built the church before they built their home.

But even with such glorious faith, life is not all joy, song, dance and blessing. There are times on the journey when migrants meet a wall, not a bridge; meet a fist, rather than a hand of welcome. I have a vivid memory of a young man arriving at church with his face bloodied and bruised. The night before, walking home, he had been beaten up, for no other reason than the colour of his skin. He was a nurse at the local hospital - those beating him up would not have known that, of course. And where was he the next day? At Mass. He was most certainly welcomed and cared for that day - I am sure

the poor man had never had so much tea and cake. And he was back serving as a nurse a few days later.

What sustains almost every migrant journey is work, and as we clap for National Health Service (NHS) workers, key workers and essential workers, of all faiths and all nationalities, the sad truth is that they are often amongst the lowest paid. How often I have seen families where one parent works a night shift and the other a day shift so that they can feed their children; the parents seeing each other for a snatched hour morning and evening, and perhaps a day off together once a month. The hard work of those from the UK and from beyond these shores is exceptional - and with many others I pray that a consequence of coronavirus is a re-evaluation of the dignity, the decency, the wages and the voice of the lowest paid yet utterly essential workers. The dignity of the human person, from conception to natural death, is engrained in our Catholic Social Teaching. Today it is good to be crystal clear that part of that dignity is the fact that every person should earn a real living wage - and it is also there in our Catholic teaching, right back to Pope Leo XIII in 1891.

The best way to sum it all up is in the simple words of the Prophet Micah from our first reading. May these words be a guiding light for how we meet all peoples, of all nations, all the time - inspired by Jesus Christ. "Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with God."



## Homily for the World Day for Migrants and Refugees

*Courtesy of She Capili, Taiwan*

*This homily was delivered by Bishop John Baptist Lee on September 27.*

Good morning! Today we are celebrating Migrants Sunday. Happy Migrants Day!!! Please greet your neighbors, Happy Migrants Day!

Some of you might be thinking, is there a reason or is it right to celebrate even amidst the disheartening effect of Covid-19 pandemic at present? The book of Ecclesiastes says, there is a time for everything, and St. Paul also encourages us not to let trouble, hardship, famine, or danger separate us from the love of God for us that is in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:35).

Every year we celebrate Migrants Sunday. But why do we have to celebrate Migrants Day? Have you thought of a reason why? There are many reasons why we are gathered today to celebrate.

First, it is an opportunity for all of us to recognize, affirm, and to be thankful for the remarkable contributions made by many of you and the rest of the migrants around the world to the economies both of the host and your home countries; through your financial remittances. Looking back to the past, in fact, "many nations ... would not be what they are today without the contribution made by millions of immigrants."

This is one example on the economic aspect. Another contribution is on the sociocultural and spiritual aspects. The contributions of migrants can be seen on a daily basis, through simple activities - such as shopping for food at our local market, eating out in a restaurant or ordering take-out food, visiting a place of worship, attending a musical performance, parties, sports and other social gatherings, interactions with your co-workers in your work places - all these places and occasions where people gather together promotes encounter

with others and are likely to have been influenced or enriched by your customs and traditions you brought with you.

...

More contributions are on the civic-political aspect on the part of the country of origin. For example, Migrants can bring back political ideologies to origin countries when they or you return, temporarily or permanently. Research has found out that returning Filipino migrants from Hong Kong, for instance, showed a higher commitment to democracy, while returnees from Saudi Arabia expressed more ambivalence towards it.

Migrants can also be an important agent of change in peace building and reconstruction processes, bringing your experiences, skills and resources to the rebuilding of infrastructure and social cohesion. Migrants have showed the capacity to turn negative experiences into positive/and become peace builders.

...

Furthermore, you, my dear migrants are considered heroes and heroines of our modern day time especially of your families who are left behind in your homeland. You are willing to sacrifice for the sake of them and freely forget yourselves for the sake of others. This is a mark of being a Christian.

...

This is the day to vouch for your strong determination to overcome challenges and difficulties in leaving your respective countries and to be away from home and be separated from you loved-ones, even during the outbreak of Covid-19, in search for a greener pasture.

This is the time to make effort to cheer up and encourage one another to share and be inspired with your very own migrant's faith-life experiences or stories.

...

The Church document, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*, puts plainly the Church's stance towards migration saying that, "The Church wants to be there where the migrants are, to share with them the joys and the hopes, as well as the grief and the pains of migration." Pope Francis and the entire Catholic Church is giving attention to the church's ministry on pastoral care of migrants especially in working out the full integration of migrants and immigrants into the host society and into the local Church.



...

Looking into the current and growing trend of migration, we cannot deny the fact that we are growing into becoming a multicultural church. Intercultural and religious dialogue is no longer optional but necessary to enrich our faith experience through personal encounter with God and one another.

...

Our gospel reading today, challenges us to respond to God's invitation to work in His vineyard and to fulfill our mission of doing God's will. For us to do God's will, St. Paul's letter to the Philippians teaches us to walk on the path of humility and obedience. Fulfilling God's will is to have the same attitude that is also in Jesus Christ who emptied himself; he humbled himself becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Likewise, responding to the challenge to take the path of synodality is also an invitation to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God and with one another.

## **Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity & Social Friendship**

*By Pope Francis*

On October 3, during the Vigil of the Feast of the Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis signed *Fratelli Tutti*, his third encyclical.

Like *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti* is a social encyclical, where the Pope applies the moral teachings of the Church to the social and economic challenges of the day. The Pope comments on many contemporary issues from economic inequality to the death penalty. He also talks about immigration.

For example, paragraph 37:

*Certain populist political regimes, as well as certain liberal economic approaches, maintain that an influx of migrants is to be prevented at all costs. Arguments are also made for the propriety of limiting aid to poor countries, so that they can hit rock bottom and find themselves forced to take austerity measures. One fails to realize that behind such statements, abstract and hard to support, great numbers of lives are at stake. Many migrants have fled from war, persecution and natural catastrophes. Others, rightly, "are seeking opportunities for themselves and their families. They dream of a better future and they want to create the conditions for achieving it"*

Other notable paragraphs on the subject of immigration include 39-41 and 129-138.

You can read the entire encyclical [here](#).

## **The Pope's Prayer for Immigrants**

*By Pope Francis*

Merciful God, we pray to you for all the men, women and children who have died after leaving their homelands in search of a better life.

Though many of their graves bear no name, to you each one is known, loved and cherished. May we never forget them, but honour their sacrifice with deeds more than words. We entrust to you all those who have made this journey, enduring fear, uncertainty and humiliation, in order to reach a place of safety and hope.

Just as you never abandoned your Son as he was brought to a safe place by Mary and Joseph, so now be close to these, your sons and daughters, through our tenderness and protection.

In caring for them may we seek a world where none are forced to leave their home and where all can live in freedom, dignity and peace.

Merciful God, wake us from the slumber of indifference, open our eyes to their suffering, and free us from the insensitivity born of worldly comfort and self-centredness.

Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters.

May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand, and recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.





## **A Calling Grows from an IDP Camp**

*By Joseph Madawk Doi San, Myanmar*

January 12, 2011 is a day I won't forget. That day everything we had was lost - destroyed by the war. We left the school that day but could not return home because we all have to run away from the fighting. Some of my friends and families have to run into the forest and stayed their for many days because they feared getting captured by the Burmese army or getting caught in the crossfire. There was no proper food to eat or no proper place to sleep. Every night they feared for their safety.

Many of those who escaped ended up in different camps. I was able to move into my relatives' place and stayed there while attending school.

But before that I lived with my mother in the camp for over six months. Then I stayed in the camp's boy's boarder house. The war affected the children and young people the most. Many students could no longer return to school. Teenage pregnancy was very high. Many young people became addicted to illegal drugs like heroin. Drug-use also led to

increased in HIV/AIDS infections among the youth. Young people were becoming more and more hopeless and restless.

Before the war began, my village was very peaceful and blessed with so many natural resources including jade and gold. But both the Burmese army and the local ethnic Kachin military wanted to control our village. The ethnic army looked after our village but during the war everyone has to flee except the local Burmese population because they believed the Burmese army will not hurt them. Many people left their homes rushing leaving behind most of their things and properties. When everyone was gone, the soldiers took everything.



We moved into the local IDP camp which was located within St. Columban's church compound in Lone Khin, Hpakan township. But the local people did not like us and they wanted us not to stay there. They were afraid that they could not worship peacefully and use the place for celebrating feast days. There was a lot of difficulties for us in the beginning of our stay

at the camp. We didn't have enough clothes or food. There was also very limited access to basic health and educational services. For us students, we did not have proper place to study and at night there was also no electricity. Water was also a big challenge. It was not enough for all the people in the camp.

My family did not have enough. When my younger brother got sick, we could not bring him to the hospital. My mother cried the whole time as she also tried to find ways to save my brother from dying. After a few days the local charity group came and helped the people and my family. Later, the local people also became more accepting of us and they began to support us.

During the war many Catholics died without receiving the sacraments. There was no priest at that time and the village was also very difficult to reach. I used to help the nun and the catechist in the church. I saw that we needed to have our own priest to bring Christ and the sacraments closer to the people. I decided at that time that I would become a priest one day so I can save souls. Now it has been four years since I joined the college seminary here in Myitkyina. I am now preparing to study philosophy and hopefully join the major seminary.

*Joseph Madawk Doi San is 20 years old. He is now a final year university student (Psychology major) from Kan See Village, Hpakant Township, Kachin State. He has four other siblings. His father was a Kachin Independent Army general who passed away when he was just a boy. His mother faced many challenges to provide for her children and to send them to school. While waiting for the university to open, he is assisting Fr. Kurt in teaching English to young people in the parish of St. Patrick.*



## **No Where Else to Call Home**

*By Fr. Kurt Zion Pala, Myanmar*

Nba Bum Nu was only 14 years old when the conflict started in the Kachin State of Myanmar. Now he is 23 years old. His village is located between the Burmese army camp and the Kachin Independent Army camp. There are times when the war is not serious but when the Burmese army began using helicopters to bomb the village they had to move and leave their village. He moved into the camp in 2017. Nba Bum Nu preferred to stay in the village. There is plenty of fish and even gold. He can do freely anything he wanted in the village. He has not gotten used to staying in a camp. The government gave them only a small room but no land to plant or cultivate.

One of the recent arrivals to the camp is U Ra Naw who moved in in 2018. He observed that the place is overcrowded and not great for raising a family. The pandemic was also making the situation even more challenging for many families in the camp including his family. His wife who works in China could not return back to the country. His daughter shared that it feels like to be in prison. She would rather return to her own village. Many of the children we spoke too shared their desire to return to their homes.

The resumed war in Kachin land has displaced hundreds of families. They were driven out of their home villages. Nine years after, temporary camps have now become their permanent homes. But still many are yearning to return to their home villages. They have nowhere else to call home but the camps. The ongoing conflict in Kachin is one of many conflicts happening in and around the country. Camps dot many parts of the country including the borders to Bangladesh, China and Thailand. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, inter-communal and political conflict trigger large numbers of new displacements in Myanmar on a regular basis. The Burmese army since the country's independence in 1948 has engaged in violent conflicts with the military.

A ceasefire agreement was signed in 2015 but a number of groups in Kachin, Shan and Chin states are still in active conflict with the military and regularly trigger displacement. Rakhine state was the scene of mass displacement in 2012 and more recently in 2016 and 2017 when 800,000 members of the Rohingya ethnic group sought refuge in neighboring Bangladesh.

Armed conflict is not the only reason why people flee their villages. Khon Ja, a local development worker and peace-maker working with the local churches and engaging communities to help the IDPs commented that the Kachin state is host to many internal migrants - displaced by climate change, agricultural and development projects. Central Myanmar for example is called the dry zone. Naturally it is dry but due to climate change it got worse. People can no longer cultivate the land and if they could the crops do not produce much or enough like before. Water resources also dry up. In one town I visited, an entire village was left empty when the families moved to other locations because of the loss of water source.

People also come to Kachin State to find employment or try their luck at finding precious stones like jade, amber or even gold. Large jade and other mines are found all over the state. All of these are linked to climate change and the scarcity of resources. Lately large Chinese investments in the agricultural and power sector has displaced many families and individuals. Many internally-displaced individuals lost their land to these agricultural investments usually banana plantations. Some of their land had been converted to industrial and special economic zones. The Myitsone Dam

Project for example although is temporarily stopped has displaced entire villages. If land is not grabbed for these projects, some lands are land-mined. These make returning to their villages impossible. The land and the forest are an integral part of the Kachin culture. For them the land and the forest is life. Losing their land and forest is death to their culture.

Pope Francis in his address for the World Migrants Days said that the "...tragedy of internally displaced people is one of the challenges of our contemporary world: Situations of conflict and humanitarian emergencies, aggravated by climate change, are increasing the numbers of displaced persons and affecting people already living in a state of dire poverty. Many of the countries experiencing these situations lack adequate structures for meeting the needs of the displaced" (9 January 2020).

The theme for this year's celebration is "Like Jesus Christ, forced to flee. Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating internally displaced persons." Pope Francis wants to affirm that "... displaced people offer

us this opportunity to meet the Lord, "even though our eyes find it hard to recognize him: his clothing in tatters, his feet dirty, his face disfigured, his body wounded, his tongue unable to speak our language" (Homily, 15 February 2019)." Pope invites us all to respond to this pastoral challenge by welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating internally displaced peoples.

**"The land and the forest are an integral part of the Kachin culture. For them the land and the forest is life. Losing their land and forest is death to their culture."**

*-Fr. Kurt Zion Pala, Myanmar*



## **Learning through encounter: Catholic educators and refugees**

*A conversation between James Trewby (Columban Justice and Peace Education Worker) and Steph Neville (Project Manager of [www.storiesofhome.org.uk](http://www.storiesofhome.org.uk) and previously English Teaching Coordinator at [www.stschadssanctuary.com](http://www.stschadssanctuary.com))*

**James: How appropriate that we are co-writing this article as an encounter!**

Steph: Yes, very much so, given that collaboration on lots of different levels has been such a central element of the whole of this process: us, working together; collaboration between the Columbans and the different projects you have worked with and all based around the idea of creating encounters to bring people together.

**Over the last 3 years we've facilitated so many learning encounters, including conversations, retreats, teacher training days, online meetings and even cooking sessions, with such encouraging results. Young people and Catholic educators from at least 10 schools have had significant encounters with asylum seekers and refugees. Why do you think people have been so open to learning in this way?**

I think there are a few factors. Partly it's about building positive relationships with schools that have meant they've been open to the idea, partly about creating opportunities to engage in a way that is something so different to what is normally offered. But I would say perhaps the most important thing that has enabled it to grow is how positive the feedback has been from those who have taken part ... word has spread, often from one school to another, or staff who have had a positive experience want to share that with their young people.

**I'd agree with all that, and add that for many of our educators it has been a truly eye-opening and privileged experience. They've been moved, emotional, angry.**

**But at the same time, they've laughed and enjoyed meeting new people, not just a labelled "refugee" or "asylum seeker". There have been many conversations about British weather, food, family, politics - time spent noticing what we have in common rather than what separates us. How do you feel taking part in these encounters has impacted your students and friends?**

When we first started exploring these ideas, I asked myself lots of questions about this, particularly around how we made sure we weren't exploiting those with lived experience of the asylum process whatever the benefit might be for others. Over time, I have become increasingly sure this is a mutually beneficial process, that my asylum-seeking and refugee friends who take part also gain a lot from being involved. At the most basic level, they always appreciate the opportunities for more English practice with different native speakers with different voices, but I think it goes much deeper than that. For some, they really understand the value of meeting with others from the host communities here: helping to challenge some of the perceptions they know exist, and encouraging people to understand their experiences and their humanity. These are often people who have very few spaces where their stories, be that the "refugee story" or other stories about their lives, are heard and believed: I have been reminded again and again of how empowering it can be for individuals to know they are really being heard.

**And story is such a powerful tool. I think people sometimes struggle to relate to statistics and metanarratives - by meeting individuals and hearing something of their lives there is a real opportunity for a moment of empathetic growth, hopefully leading to a perspective shift.**

Absolutely. That personal encounter is so important, and has great value in itself, but I think the programme surrounding it matters too. The young people and educators we have worked with have definitely been able to



engage more fully because of the input and contextualisation beforehand. I also think we have been able to help people to understand that these individual encounters are exactly that: to understand that while some of their experiences might be 'representative' in some ways of the 'refugee experience' actually, every story is unique and different.

**Preparation beforehand and debrief/follow up afterwards! As our programmes have evolved we've placed more and more emphasis on reflection - from taking the headteachers into the cathedral for lectio divina on the Holy Family's flight into Egypt to the 'homework' set after visits and the follow up sessions back in school. Do you remember some of the reflections educators have shared?**

Some of the reflections have been amazing ... Where we had perhaps expected a few simple sentences we received reflections in the form of poetry, art, photo diaries. One member of school staff even wrote their own song (words and music) and another submitted a video of an interpretive dance! Knowing how busy school staff are, the time and effort many have put into reflecting on their experiences are an indication of the impact it has obviously had. What would you say have been the key things your participants have gained through these experiences?

**So many! Educators have valued having first-hand experience to share with young people - and with their friends and family. It has been amazing to be part of something that so clearly challenges the wrong preconceptions and lack of knowledge found**

**even amongst our participants. In addition, the programmes have had a definite impact on faith formation. Headteachers have told me that taking part has massively improved the engagement of staff with the 'Catholic life' of their schools. Many people have been inspired by your faith and commitment, the faith motivation of St Chad's Sanctuary and the faith of the refugees. Finally, I think every school has taken action in response - donating, campaigning, informing others - what a privilege it is to plant seeds and see them grow. Many thanks for your ongoing collaboration with the Columbans!**

Thanks to you too ... And I definitely hope it will be ongoing! What we have done so far has been amazing, but I am constantly reminded that there is still so much more to do. I hope we will be able to continue working together to reach more educators and young people offering them these privileged encounters; and to offer more asylum seekers and refugees the spaces to have their stories heard.

**"Story is such a powerful tool. I think people sometimes struggle to relate to statistics and metanarratives - by meeting individuals and hearing something of their lives there is a real opportunity for a moment of empathetic growth, hopefully leading to a perspective shift."**

*-James Trewby, UK*



## Migration in China

By Fr. Dan Troy, China

In Hong Kong the number of foreign domestic workers is about 385,000. They are one in ten of the city's working population. About 70% of FDWs are from the Philippines, with smaller numbers from Indonesia and Bangladesh. Hong Kong families prefer to have a domestic worker to care for their children because it is three times cheaper than sending the children to child care facilities.

Migrant workers in Hong Kong usually live in cramped conditions, the smallest room in the apartment being their bedroom, assuming that the family gives them a room of their own. In 2017 Hong Kong regulations allowed employers to pay a minimum wage of US\$551 to FDWs, a figure that has increased only slightly each year since then. An indication of how FDW's lives are different from those of Hong Kong people is seen in the fact that only 18% of FDWs have bank accounts, the minimum balance needed to avoid heavy fees and the mandatory documentation to open an account contributing to the low level of account holders.

A walk through the centre of Hong Kong on a Sunday afternoon is one of the best ways to receive an initial introduction to the situation of those from other countries who live in Hong Kong as domestic workers. They meet with their friends and set up their group spaces on cardboard mats in public parks, covered walkways and the spaces in front of closed offices so as to avail of a few hours of support. Economic restrictions do not allow them to

gather in the city's restaurants and entertainment centres. Thankfully the churches in Hong Kong provide a welcome for migrant workers, many of whom are organizers of Church activities.

The presence of FDWs in Hong Kong allows both parents in many families to have full time employment in the city, resulting in a major economic boost to the city as well as to family income. In spite of their noble intentions, a majority of FDWs in Hong Kong have debts due to the need to borrow money to cover the fees that are involved in securing their jobs. Unfortunately it is the familiar story of poor people being at the mercy of a system that was not set up with their welfare in mind. Predictions are that Hong Kong will continue to need even more FDWs in the years ahead and that the numbers may increase to 600,000 by 2047.

Two members of the CMU based in Hong Kong have regular contact with Catholic domestic workers who have arrived in the city in search of a living to support their families in their home countries.

In the years ahead a potential change in the landscape could emerge if mainland China changes its policies on FDWs. It is estimated that China currently has a shortage of 7 million domestic workers. If the wages were to be higher than what is paid in other parts of Asia, the movement of FDWs to China would likely be huge. Some policy changes in this area are expected in China in the coming years.

Internal migration in China has been one of the country's main social changes over the past 30 years. Hundreds of millions of people have moved from the poor rural areas to the



cities, a reality that is highlighted by the fact that China now has 200 cities with a population of more than a million people each. In Shanghai the migrant support organization Youdao was established in 2005 by a Columbian and some of his friends. It has made a good contribution to supporting the school-going children of migrant workers as well as raising awareness about their plight in other areas of society.

The mass movement of people from the rural areas to the cities raises serious questions for China about providing the necessary housing, education and healthcare supports for its people. In a similar way, there are questions about who will eventually produce food from the land to feed a huge urban population in a country where working on the land is an experience of deepening poverty and increasing isolation. Young people in China do not aspire to living on the land. The changes that will emerge over the next thirty years in this area are likely to be immense.

Two years ago in Wuhan I was introduced to a young man from the Philippines who had arrived here on a two-week tourist visa. He arrived with the intention of working as an English teacher in a private school. As agreed in advance, his passport was taken by his Chinese employer when he arrived in Wuhan and he settled down to teach children whose parents sent them for private tuition at the end of their regular day in the nearby school. The plan for this migrant teacher was to work here for two years and then surrender himself to the police who would be expected to send him directly home on the next available flight. His story reflected the common experience of vulnerability for those living in the shadows of society. He was cautious about going beyond his immediate neighbourhood in case he were to be stopped by the local police. The amount of money he expected to gain from this difficult two-year commitment was not large. In a setting where he could not speak the local language and where he was meeting very few people, the likelihood for things to go wrong seemed to be high.

If economic opportunities increase in China, perhaps this one case is an indication of what is unfortunately likely to happen for others in the years ahead.





## **Celebrating Migrants & Refugee Day (June 20)**

*By Ellen Teague, UK*

Since an upsurge in migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats began in November 2018, more than 6,400 people have made the perilous journey across the Straits of Dover to the UK from France in often tiny, unseaworthy craft. In the favourable weather in August 2020 a run of ten days brought unprecedented numbers of around 100 - 200 people each day reaching the UK, most after being intercepted by border patrols at sea.

Iranians are still the largest group making their way across the Channel, but a growing number are Syrians and others from conflict-affected countries like Yemen, Afghanistan, Sudan and the West African Sahel region. They do not get a warm welcome from Britain's Conservative government, but opposition ministers and voluntary groups have called for compassion and a meaningful strategic approach to the issue of asylum.

On 20 June Columban JPIC joined an online rally, attended by around 60 people, to mark World Refugee Day. It was organised by People Not Walls, a French-British partnership, working for human rights for refugees trying

to make the dangerous Channel crossing. The Columbans are members, and key organisers are Catholic partners in the Justice and Peace Movement in Southern England. The second part of the session came live from the seafront at Dover, led by the Anglican Bishop of Dover.

During the meeting Secours Catholique-Caritas France in Calais reported on the squalid conditions endured by refugees in camps in northern France. Several thousand people live amongst bushes and at least 100 are children. Their property, such as tents and clothing, are constantly confiscated, along with documents and medication. The French government doesn't want refugee settlement and the informal settlements have no toilets, showers, or access to state help. There was a call for legal routes of access to be made available.

The small group actually at the Dover seafront remembered not only World Refugee Day, but also the 20th anniversary of the deaths of 58 young Chinese people found dead in a sealed container at Dover docks. Standing on Dover seafront before the plaques remembering those who have died trying to reach our shores, Rt Rev Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover, said, "Their hope was crushed, because the world turns its back on those who are most vulnerable." She suggested that, "for those who

are still trying to reach our shores, their lives matter, and until we live and believe that their lives matter, sadly we will see more of these memorials." She highlighted the push factors for people to leave their countries. "Don't sell weapons to places that you know are going to turn those weapons on their own people," she said, and "don't take all the natural resources from those countries and put nothing back in to those places so that families there can live and look after themselves."

Watch a video of Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkins giving her reflection here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNHuS1czfsk&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNHuS1czfsk&feature=youtu.be)

The previous year, on 20 June 2019, Ellen Teague travelled to Dover so that Columban JPIC could join the call for the French and British governments to provide opportunities for refugees in Northern France to claim asylum in Britain.

See Ellen Teague's report and Columban video at: <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/37332>



## Using Digital Communications to Educate for Mission

On June 17, the Oceania Region published "Concrete hope for migrants and refugees" on their YouTube page.

The description of the videos describes the "many ways and places around the world Columbans assist people in claiming often denied rights. Poverty must end because every life matters. We must all take part in the building of stronger communities and offer migrants and refugees a hope that is concrete.

You can watch the video by clicking on the image below.





## **Justice Delayed is Justice Denied**

*By Fr. Peter O'Neill, Australia*

"When I asked my boss for payment of my wages, he got angry and said he would call the police to take me to jail and then I would be sent home to Vanuatu." "For a number of days I had no food other than a piece of bread and water to drink." "Working for my boss was like slavery times." These heart wrenching words were spoken by three seasonal workers from Vanuatu in front of Judge Jarrett in the Federal Circuit Court of Australia in Brisbane on 10 June 2016.

In his Statement dated 24 March 2017, Judge Jarrett said the employer Mr Bani treated the workers "egregiously", that they "were mistreated and treated aggressively when they enquired about their lawful entitlements", and that his conduct "is approaching the worst example of contraventions of this type." The judge ordered Mr Bani to pay the workers their non-payment of salaries totaling \$77,649 and issued him with a fine of \$227,000. Nearly six years later the workers still have not received their stolen wages.

These workers were a part of a group of 22 workers who came to Australia on the Government's Seasonal Worker Program in July 2014. This program is part of Australia's

aid program in the Pacific and is administered by the Department of Employment on behalf of the Federal Government.

Over a period of seven weeks, the workers worked on six different farms. When they were not paid their salaries, they asked their employer who was the contractor for their wages. He refused and threatened to refer them to the police and have them deported. Sometimes they were only given one meal a day.

In July 2018 and June 2019, I travelled to Bundaberg, 6 hours north of Brisbane, Queensland to visit two of the workers who returned to Australia for the second and third time to work on a farm picking sweet potatoes. This time they were hired directly by a local farmer who treated them with dignity and respect. I was horrified hearing first hand their experience of labour exploitation at the hands of Mr Bani, and dumbfounded that justice had still been denied them.

Over the last 1 ½ years, as a member of ACRATH, (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans) I have assisted the 22 workers by regularly corresponding with the Australian Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO). Together with other members of ACRATH, I have walked the halls of Federal Parliament

to meet with many Ministers to advocate that justice for the workers be speedily accomplished. From June to December 2019, Mr Bani was summoned to seven enforcement hearings at the Brisbane Federal Circuit Court.

In February this year, the ACRATH National Office wrote a letter to the Prime Minister Mr. Scott Morrison requesting an Act of Grace payment be made to the 22 seasonal workers from Vanuatu.

The FWO obtained financial information in May to establish that Mr Bani does not currently have any substantial means to pay the judgement debt. The court has closed the proceedings. ACRATH has arranged a reputable law firm to provide pro bono service to assist the workers in requesting an Act of Grace payment from the Australian government.

Nearly six years after the workers were victims of labour exploitation on Australian farms, they are still fighting to get back their stolen wages.



## **New Columban Working Group on Migration!**

### **Members:**

- Fr. Brian Vale (General Council)
- Amy Echeverria (Central Administration)
- Fr. Peter O'Neill (Australia)
- Michael O'Sullivan (Ireland)
- Gonzalo Borquez (Korea)
- Fr. Kurt Zion Pala (Myanmar)
- She Capili and Joan Yap (Taiwan)
- Mauricio Silva (UK)
- Scott Wright (USA)

**If you are interested in joining this working group, please contact [Amy](#).**



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