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📷 The value of partnerships: The team from Arrupe Place accept the Zest Award 2016 for 'Exceptional Community Partnership in an LGA'. Read this story on p3. Photo: Ben Williams Photography

Director's Letter:

Easter brings life and hope

Aloysius Mowe SJ

The Easter bunny comes to hide chocolate eggs in the garden for us to find, and that is the meaning of Easter.

If one were to observe Easter as it is celebrated in most parts of Australia and the Western world today, that would not be an inaccurate description of the significance of Easter (though in France the chocolate apparently is delivered by flying bells on their return from a three-day visit to Rome: yet another reason to be grateful for the outcome of the Battle of Waterloo). It should come as no surprise, as religious observance and cultural literacy continue to decline, that the significance of Easter as the culmination of the most solemn season of the Christian calendar should be obscured by the forces of commercialism and self-indulgence. Chocolate and Easter are as entwined

in the average punter's mind as are Santa Claus and Christmas.

At least the fat old bearded man in the red suit carries with him the freight of giving and generosity on the occasion of Christ's birth; the consumption of chocolate eggs at Easter does not even function as a reward for the previous forty days of fasting and abstinence, given that such penances have gone the way of all flesh. In our southern hemisphere it does not even serve as a festival presaging spring, signalling the arrival of new life after winter's barren bleakness: the secular Easter is all sugar and no substance.

As I reflect on Easter I cannot but think of the men, women, and children still caught up in the cruel offshore processing regimes that are the brainchild of Labor and the beloved

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Visit by JRS Asia-Pacific Director

Fr. Bambang A. Sipayung SJ, Director of JRS in the Asia-Pacific, visited Arrupe Place during his recent stay in Australia, where he spoke with caseworkers, staff and volunteers.

"Over the last five to ten years many of the services provided to people seeking asylum have increasingly been located in major cities such as Bangkok, Jakarta, and Sydney."

"I was impressed by the work at Arrupe Place which embodies accompaniment as one of the core values of JRS, and does it in a collaborative way with a number of partners," he said.

The visit to Arrupe Place, Fr. Sipayung said, showed him that Australia's international reputation for harsh policies towards people seeking asylum was not "the whole story".

"I think that this is the importance of Arrupe Place and the people who volunteer there to help asylum seekers adjust to Australian society," he said. "This is lived advocacy that shows Australians taking a critical stance against their government's policies through their practical support for asylum seekers."



Stephanie Beckwith, Fr. Aloysius Mowe SJ, Fr. Bambang A. Sipayung SJ, and Maeve Brown

Fr. Sipayung said that the growth in the number of displaced persons who leave refugee camps or bypass them entirely, preferring to settle in urban communities where they hope to find jobs to

support themselves and their families, has led to a shift in the focus of JRS's work in the region.

Over the last five to ten years many of the services provided to people seeking asylum have increasingly been located in major cities such as Bangkok, Jakarta, and Sydney.

"In the past most refugees lived in rural or remote camps, but refugees today are more often than not to be found in urban settings; this shift provides us with different and unique challenges."

"The education, psychosocial, and pastoral elements of our work will still be our main priorities in the region, but probably within a more urban setting."

"JRS is currently supporting some of the 13,000 refugees and asylum seekers living in urban areas in Indonesia, either in the community or in detention centres," said Fr. Sipayung. "In Thailand there is also an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers seeking protection in urban areas, with close to 10,000 registered by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)."

"The interfaith dimension has also been a crucial part of our work from the beginning, but our engagement with other religious traditions has become a more critical need because we have to interact with people coming from myriad religious traditions and a secular world at the same time."

"It will be a challenge for JRS in the region, but it will be a productive and healthy challenge to take on."

cont from p1 stepchild of the Coalition. The Easter Proclamation chanted in churches at the Easter Vigil speaks of the children of Israel being led out of bondage in Egypt, and of Christ breaking chains. How do we hear that with any equanimity, when people who tried to make their way to Australia to seek safety from persecution and conflict continue to be subjected to all the cruelties of a botched offshore processing policy, unlucky victims first of the politics of their own countries, and now victims of the debased politics of Australia?

Any claim that keeping people on Manus Island and in Nauru continues to act as an effective deterrent to boat arrivals is just political legerdemain: we know that boats have continued to come, and the only reason why there have been no new arrivals is that Australia has turned those vessels back, and even returned the passengers to their countries of origin. Much like the secular Easter of bunnies and chocolate, this government's offshore processing policy is all sugar for the masses, and no substance.

As our government ministers and their Labor counterparts peel the foil off their Cadbury Crème Egg or Great Bunny on Easter morning, I wonder if any of them, even the obviously card-carrying Christians, fully realise the significance and import of what Easter is supposed to be.

The Easter Proclamation says:

The sanctifying power of this night dispels all wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty.

We cannot reverse the great harm done to the asylum seekers and refugees on Manus Island and in Nauru, but we can still offer them new life and hope by bringing them back to Australia. Let us pray this Easter that the God of mercy will roll away the rock that blocks up the hearts and minds of our policy-makers and political leaders. If that does not happen, then let us hope that the grace of Easter will indeed bring down the mighty, and that better minds and larger hearts will take their place.

Project Update

Arrupe Place wins community award

JRS has been praised for its “capacity building, advocacy and leadership” in the official citation for the ‘Exceptional Community Partnership in a Local Government Area’ award which it won at the 2016 Zest Awards.

“This award is a testament to the JRS team and our exceptional partners whose great support has helped Arrupe Place work,” said Maeve Brown, coordinator of the JRS Shelter Project.

JRS has entered into partnerships with 7 other organisations to provide services at Arrupe Place. These include the Sisters of Mercy Parramatta, the Sisters of Charity, the Good Samaritan Sisters, the Australian Red Cross, the Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS), Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE), and Training for Change. Two other partners, STARTTS and Baker & McKenzie, are providing free counselling services and legal assistance in civil law cases respectively to asylum seekers.

“We were drawn together with the common goal of providing a safe haven that allows asylum seekers to live with dignity and become



Arrupe Place, Parramatta

self-sufficient whilst waiting for their claims for protection to be assessed,” said Maeve.

“At Arrupe Place we are able to offer a range of services from English language and cooking classes to food provision and legal aid, as well as, most importantly, offering a sense of community.

“Arrupe Place has become a safe haven where many asylum seekers can gain access to programmes that have led to their increased participation in the local community.”

JRS’s Zest Award followed closely on its winning a Scanlon Foundation Community Grant.

“This grant will allow us to expand the services at our new space at Grose St.,” said Maeve.

“We will develop and expand the JRS education and social support programmes that help people seeking asylum build connections with the local community.”



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Easter Appeal

The increasing demand for services at Arrupe Place has led to the opening of a second JRS centre in Parramatta, Communities Connect, and the expansion of existing services.

The large number of people seeking asylum living in the community on bridging visas has led to a growing need for support services to help them live independently and with dignity.

There is now an opportunity to build on Arrupe Place's reputation as a safe haven, and establish

programmes to assist asylum seekers to secure stable employment, connect with the broader community, and contribute to Australian society.

JRS receives no government funding.

Our work is completely dependent on donations made by people like you.

If you'd like to help support our work this Easter, please go to:

www.jrs.org.au/donate-now/

\$40 for an Opal Card for train / bus costs help asylum seekers travel to appointments with lawyers, doctors, and potential employers.

\$50 provides a family with a supermarket voucher for essentials such as rice, flour, tea, and fresh vegetables for the week.

\$150 is the fortnightly allowance for the food, travel, and medical needs of asylum seekers living in the JRS Blaiket Shelter.

\$450 assists a family seeking asylum with their basic weekly living expenses including rent, food, travel, and medical needs.

social media

Follow JRS: Facebook or Twitter

We track and highlight the latest in policies and attitudes for people seeking asylum, not just in Australia but around the world. Let us know what you think at:

 www.facebook.com/JRSAustralia

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donate

How your donation will help

General donations to Arrupe Place will directly fund:

Emergency assistance, food vouchers, casework services, home visiting services, legal advice, social support.

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