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# REFUGEE VOICE

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**We wish you a blessed and joyful Christmas.**



**JRS 25th Anniversary Mass**  
Sat 17 Dec Church of St Ignatius @ 6 pm



We are commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the founding of JRS with a thanksgiving mass on 17 Dec.

Please join us to give thanks to God for His blessings and guidance during the past one year.

We especially thank YOU, Donors and Friends for supporting our work with refugees.

Come and have fellowship and refreshments with us after mass at the St Ignatius Hall.

**Celebrant: Fr Colin Tan SJ Country Director JRS**

***"If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one" - Mother Teresa***

**Individual Highlights:**

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**NEWS**

**Shan refugees received surprise visit from Church of Christ the King parishioners**

PARISHIONERS from the Church of Christ the King joined JRS Singapore on a visit to the Shan refugees in North Thailand in October. The trip was part of the advent fund-raising project which the parish had launched to help Shan refugees.

## The Earth 's Fury: Who's to blame?



It's cold comfort for this sick and malnourished Shan refugee living in the mountainous terrain of northern Thailand.

Year 2005 was marked by a spate of natural disasters: post-tsunami quakes, hurricanes, floods. In his Christmas message, **Fr Colin Tan SJ**, Country Director JRS Singapore, challenges us to reflect on our Christian duty to bring hope, care and love to others in the face of human suffering.

WITH the first Anniversary of the deadly tsunami round the corner on 26<sup>th</sup> Dec, we are invited to look at the state of our world, and ask ourselves some hard questions.

Have we become a more compassionate society? Have we learnt to respect the laws of nature? Have I been generous in responding to the victims of these disasters? What would have Jesus done in these situations? What are some lessons that we can draw from here?

While there are no easy answers to these questions, it is good to take stock of our conscience lest we become callous and immune to them.

### Human frailty in the face of nature's might

Post-modernity has been marked by our complacency and self-forgetfulness of our own mortality and vulnerability. Scientific and technological breakthroughs have led some to believe that human beings can be invincible and 'masters of the universe'.

The successful mapping of the human genome has unleashed the potential to know, identify and create countless cures to human diseases that are genetically linked .

With it, comes the tempting possibility that we can become like God, and create our own kind.

Will this grandiose idea of '*we can be like God*' be our downfall that will further alienate us from God, and blind us from recognizing our place as creatures – and not creator in the scheme of creation?

By thinking that we can be God, are we staging a *spiritual coup* that we will later regret? Simply because we are incapable of knowing the outcome, let alone control the consequences.

Our forgetfulness of self and God is a result of our disconnectedness with nature and humanity. We forget that we are frail and need each other and God.

But our helplessness in the face of nature's might shows the fragility of our lives, and the folly of thinking that we can be God.

### Human accomplice in natural disasters

Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, drought, etc seem to be occurring at a frequency that disturbs even the hardcore atheists. Is there a pattern to the growing number of natural disasters that afflict us with a vengeance?

Have we over exploited the earth's resources to the extent that we pose a danger not only to nature but also to ourselves?



Refugees want a normal working life: is that too much to ask?

***“I live with the possibility that I am in every child, every woman and man who is in pain, and I ask myself these soul searching questions that only I can answer: ‘What have I done to alleviate the pain and suffering’, ‘What am I doing to prevent further sufferings?’”***

The emission of hydrocarbons and CFCs are poisoning the environment and atmosphere, resulting in sudden global climatic changes. Scientists are alarmed at the warmer ocean currents becoming cocktails for more potent and destructive hurricanes.

Have we become like the irresponsible steward who not only buried the talent, but also his head in the ground for fear of an exacting master?

Natural disasters result in even more refugees, displaced and homeless in the world..

Are we able to face the truth that our poor stewardship of the earth’s resources could have been the cause of these global climatic changes and the ensuing disasters that follow? When we are able to accept the truth, we can then look at those displaced by natural disasters with greater compassion.

When I look squarely at the human complicity in these disasters, I know that the more I admit of my responsibility, the more I will act honestly, justly and truthfully to help others in their misfortune.

### **Our response in the face of human suffering**

In every child and woman and man who has experienced and survived a disaster, fear and pain is etched on their faces that continue to haunt us.

They confront us with these innocent questions: “Why should this evil be afflicted on me?”

“What have I done to deserve this?”

The plea of a child who has lost father, mother, brothers and sisters is also my loss.

I live with the possibility that I am in every child, every woman and man who is in pain, and I ask myself these soul searching questions that only I can answer: “What have I done to alleviate the pain and suffering”, “What am I doing to prevent further sufferings?”

### **Giving the poor a lifeline**

It is our Christian duty and dignity to help others who are more needy and poorer than ourselves.

Indeed, it is not only a duty, it is a lifeline for ourselves, for humanity, and for our wounded world. We need more carers who can bind the wounds with courage and compassion.

Let us learn to value life and creation, and face our limitations and weaknesses with courage and compassion. Jesus came to take on our weak human condition to identify with us. He will give us the power to overcome our weaknesses.

Thank you for bringing hope, care and love to others, especially the refugees in the world during this Christmas.

I wish you a blessed Christmas.

**Fr Colin Tan SJ**  
Country Director JRS S’pore

## Cause to Celebrate?

A day after Christmas last year, parts of Asia were hit by the worst ever tsunami. Is there cause for celebration this Christmas?

**Fr Edi Mulyono SJ**, Country Director JRS Indonesia probes for answers.

*The angel said to the shepherds, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."*

THE DAY after Christmas 2004, quakes and tsunami wiped out a part of the world, mainly Aceh, a province in the northwestern region of Indonesia. Offices, markets, houses in many cities of some districts in Aceh were destroyed, and more than 200,000 people were killed.

An estimated 400,000 persons took refuge in displacement camps and relatives' houses living as widows, widowers, or orphans. Most of them live in tents expecting help from others. Aid came with hundreds of humanitarian workers and agencies.

The disaster brought many people insomnia, either from the distress they had directly endured or the deep concern they had felt for the massive destruction, pain and suffering it had caused.

I remember that I could not sleep for two nights thinking of how to respond.

On December 27th 2004, after attending a wedding ceremony of an ex-JRS staff, JRS Indonesia held an emergency meeting in the same Church where we had attended the wedding earlier.

How are the survivors now?

Though many actions have been done during the ten months since the disaster, thousands of vulnerable IDPs still live in tents, as the number of disaster affected-people is high, the destruction is large, and the problems are complex in the fields.

The survivors continue to live in the makeshift camps, and in narrow spaces that lack facilities. Why don't they return home?

"We cannot go home. There is no cleanwater, because the seawater has flooded the wells. We would be better off staying here," said Murhabban 42, an IDP staying at the KONI (Indonesian National Olympic Committee) building of Sigli.

He added, "Some IDPs insisted on returning home, but they went back to the camp when they could not find any clean water in the camps."



**JRS house rebuilding project for the Meulingge village in Pulo Aceh**

***"A year has passed by and many survivors are still in misery, living in rotten tents, just like Jesus who was born in a lowly manger in Bethlehem"***

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"But we cannot live in tents anymore because they all become ragged by the weather," complained Nafsiah, an IDP from Keudee Aron.

### Embracing one another as members of God's family

The global outpouring of compassion for the tsunami victims brings out the oneness of humanity.

What does this response say about the meaning of Christmas?

Christmas is a celebration of the human family's experience of having a single father-mother, who is God; where people from various backgrounds share in solving the

problems of members of other faiths and nationalities who are in distress.

A year has passed by and many survivors are still in misery, living in rotten tents, just like Jesus who was born in a lowly manger in Bethlehem.

We can make Christmas a truly meaningful celebration by remembering these suffering members of God's family.

Let us show our concern and solidarity with the tsunami survivors through prayer, way of life, and attitude.

## GIVE A CHRISTMAS MEAL TO A KARENNI REFUGEE

**CHRISTMAS** is like any ordinary day for the 6,500 Catholic Karennis refugees living in the Karenni refugee camps except for the mid-night mass on Christmas eve.

Fr Mark Phebya, Chaplain of the Karenni Catholic ministry, hopes this Christmas would be different.

"For this year, I would like to offer a meal to all the Catholic refugees on Christmas Day. There are many refugees but I can only count the Catholic community. I would like to arrange a simple meal that would cost about 20 Thai Baht (about 83 Singapore cents) per person."

Estimated cost of organising the Christmas treat is 130,000 Thai Baht or S\$5,300. Another 150,000 Thai Baht (about S\$6,150) is needed to provide 150 internally displaced children under his care with primary education in 2006.

### ***About Our Organization...***

*JRS is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve and plead for the rights of refugees and internally displaced people. JRS was founded by the Jesuits in 1980 and the priority is to be where the need is greatest or where no other organisation is present.*