



## THE MISSION OF ACCOMPANIMENT

Accompaniment is one of the priorities for JRS Singapore. Besides supporting the refugees with their basic needs, it is important for us to connect with them on a personal level and let them know that they are not forgotten. Moreover, presence can be a sign. That a free person chooses willingly and faithfully to accompany those who do not have the same freedom, who have no choice about being there, is itself a sign, a way of eliciting hope.

With the focus on accompaniment, a group of nine set out on Nov 20, 2008 for a 6-day trip to visit a refugee camp and a few orphanages and schools, supported by JRS, at the Thai-Burmese border. Three are JRS volunteers, two are parishioners of Church of Christ the King (both making their second trip) and the remaining four, making their first trip, are from the parish of Church of the Risen Christ. We were fortunate to be led by two experienced JRS Thailand staff, Joe and Somnuk.



Trip Members before departure

Although this was my second trip, it was the first that I was leading. This added much to the anxiety in preparation for the trip. Most in the group were strangers to each other. To get the group dynamics right from the beginning is important in carrying out our mission. But that was an unnecessary worry as all in the group bonded well. The team members were focused in their mission, receptive, enthusiastic and committed to making the trip a meaningful one. The daily prayers, sharing and reflections were crucial in helping to kick-start our days by putting us in the correct frame of mind and keeping us focused on our mission throughout the trip. Our mission was not so much to evangelise as to show God's love in our actions. Our focus from the beginning was the mission of accompaniment.



...with Joe and Somnuk @ ChiangMai Airport

The 'tools and equipments' we armed ourselves for this task were very simple. Balloons were bought for balloon sculptures – which was no easy feat as no one knew the art at all! Paper plates and rubber bands were used to make face masks for the children to colour and play with. The children were squealing with glee and laughter over stickers, face-painting and henna tattooing; while their parents watched on with happy faces. There were also sports equipments like basketballs, volleyballs and sepak takraw balls, which the older kids could not resist playing with, almost immediately – which also started some old bones of our team members cracking too! A few tins of biscuits also created a lot of excitement and was a rare treat for them. Some of us just sat and chatted with the adults.



*JRS Singapore  
wishes you  
A Blessed  
Christmas  
&  
A Happy New  
Year!!*

## THE MISSION OF ACCOMPANIMENT - CONT'D



Distributing Stickers

In all the activities, the team spirit was evident. Most importantly, I hope our short presence not only brought some joy, but also maybe, even a small sense of hope into the lives of our homeless friends, both young and old. They, too, gave so generously – their smiles and friendship, their sharing and their food (despite the little they have).



Balloon Sculpting

Every trip is different. But the experience is always exhilarating and inspiring. Below, my other trip members share their experiences.

*Leong Seey Seey /JRS Singapore*

*I had been thinking about the meaning behind this mission trip which brought us to the refugee camp and orphanages along the Thai-Burmese border, and realized that through this trip, God had given us the opportunity to visit him in prison - in visiting people forced out of their own countries and live as "prisoners" on foreign ground-, clothe him when he was naked - in giving clothes to those who had little or nothing to wear- and feed him when he was hungry- in giving food to the children.*

*For the Lord thus said, what we do unto his children, we do unto him. I thank the Lord for having chosen me for this trip.*

*Jasslyn Lew /Church of the Risen Christ*

*As each day on the trip passed, my happiness grew as every person I recognized in Krung Jor Camp remembered me as well. Compared to two years back, the camp now has a library, clinic and even a computer room; God has taken good care of them!*

*Reflecting upon the trip, I have rediscovered the value of not coveting what you lack; rather, appreciate what you already have and thank God for it!*

*Peter Lee / Church of Christ the King*



Lovable children,  
uncertain future

*I have been yearning to go on a mission trip for some time now and indeed, my first trip turned out to be a fruitful one. My love for nature was what prompted me initially to visit the Shan refugee camp at the Thai-Burmese border. Reflecting on it now, it was perhaps God's call for me to go on this trip to experience it first-hand.*

*At the Shan camp, a little girl greeted me and struck a conversation with me in the Shan language. Although I could not understand her, I was really touched by her ready smile and open friendliness.*

*"Creation itself suffers and nurtures the hope that it will share in the freedom of the children of God."(Rm. 8: 19 - 22)*

*My wish is to be able to serve positively for the love of Christ.*

*Doreen Law /Church of the Risen Christ*

## THE MISSION OF ACCOMPANIMENT - CONT'D

*Although this was my second trip to the Shan refugee camp and the orphanages, I was still greatly moved. I saw the warm, smiling faces of the children and their families, felt their joy and heard their laughter as we talked and played with them; yet there hung a cloud of uncertainty about their future.*

*Despite that uncertainty, their poverty and hardship, they were steadfast in their faith, in their god. This can be seen in the priority they placed in the construction of their temple rather than improving their own living conditions. I realized, then, that we as Christians must always maintain our faith in the Lord both in good times and the bad.*

*Richard Mah / Church of Christ the King*

*I was interested in learning how refugees live, and this trip to the Thai-Burmese border gave me an opportunity to. Although I was disheartened upon seeing how dilapidated the living conditions were (especially at the Wat Mae Kaen Orphanage), I was moved by their optimism amidst all the uncertainty about their future. I deeply respect the refugees' resilience and quiet pride in persisting with their various income-generating activities.*

*I truly felt God's presence on this trip. Personally, I gained inner strength and experienced a deep sense of peace and spiritual healing. My time with the refugees was distinctly different from all the other volunteer work I had done, which was what made this experience a truly remarkable one.*

*Christine Khoo / Church of the Risen Christ*

*There is no end to the refugees' material needs, but we can, in a small way, help fulfil their emotional ones by raising awareness of their plight and promoting social justice. Human dignity and respect may be the best gifts we can offer them, given the limited time spent with them. Whenever I close my eyes, I can vividly picture their faces, and am constantly reminded that we are all God's children. No one should have to suffer through all the hardships they have endured.*

*Wendi Wong / JRS Singapore*



Some orphans at the Wat Mae Kaen Orphanage

*I volunteered for the trip simply because I wanted to see first hand how the refugees were faring. I am now convinced of two simple truths:*

*The first is, whilst the Catholic Church through its multiple efforts has done much to assist the refugees in their day to day living, there is only so much we can do. An old Hindu saying tells us - that to really comfort someone, is to be with them in their time of need and to share ourselves in their daily lives.*



The Buddhist temple at the camp



Weaving, an income-generating activity

## THE MISSION OF ACCOMPANIMENT - CONT'D

*Giving basic materials like clothes, food is essential but to mix and mingle and partake with them as they go about in their daily lives is probably what they need most. As Mother Theresa once said, you may not be able to help all the poor, but to touch one person and make him comforted is all you need to do. This is one area which Parish Missions can help generously – willing volunteers spending time with refugees and just being themselves.*



A New Friend

*The mistake many volunteers make is that we see the refugees as an oddity - different from us, we are curious about them and how they live, we want to shower them with gifts, food and toys. We secretly hope that these acts will earn us merit points and give us the recognition we crave. This must stop. We need to have a proper system of recruiting the right individuals for mission work – selfless, humble, prayerful, sociable, team player are some attributes to look out for.*

*The second and more important fact is that both the refugees and the church need to plan sustainable income generating activities that will support long term independence. Much thought needs to be given to this. It can only be done with the collaboration of both the donor and the recipient. Time, effort, skills, discipline, natural elements like weather all play a part in deciding what can and cannot be done to generate income.*

*The poor and the marginalised will always be around. We need to identify and channel our resources to the most pressing and needy of these. Groundwork is the key in finding who to help.*

*Through prayer comes discernment. The respective parish mission teams, JRS, and other parties involved in refugee work need to meet regularly to pray, reflect and ask God for guidance.*

*John Bosco /Church of the Risen Christ, Parish Mission Team*

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Call us or email us  
at:**

Phone:  
6463 6022

E-Mail:  
[admin@jrssingapore.org](mailto:admin@jrssingapore.org)

Our website:  
[www.jrssingapore.org](http://www.jrssingapore.org)

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Thank you for  
making our work with  
refugees possible.

**Check out our New Website:  
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We welcome your feedback!**

### About Our Organisation

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 our priority is to be where the need is greatest or where no other organisation is present.