



link



Director's Letter:

 A group of asylum seekers are welcomed to Australia by Indigenous Elders.

A Crisis of Solidarity

Aloysius Mowe SJ

The Christmas story is steeped in irony. The shepherds who work on the edges of the city move to the centre of the world when they become the recipients of the angelic message. The Magi seeking a King are sent to see a newborn baby. The vulnerable child is in fact the Lord of the universe.

In the familiar words of Christina Georgina Rossetti's *In the Bleak Midwinter*,

*Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign.
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed*

*The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.*

This Christmas edition of LINK contains stories of welcome: the city of Parramatta, where the JRS centre, Arrupe Place, is based, becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone; indigenous people welcoming people who seek asylum; and the welcome that Arrupe Place continues to provide to those who are in need of comfort and friendship.

That notion of welcome is one of the greatest ironies of the Christmas story. The child born at Christmas receives hospitality from the world, and finds a home in it; but in fact it is that child who offers the world hospitality, and

who welcomes all of us into his eternal home. The guest is in reality the true host, the One who has made all things, and will gather all things to Himself.

We have forgotten this central fact: that we all share, in the words of Pope Francis, a common home, one that is given to us as pure gift, not ours by ownership or by right. The great irony about the so-called migration and refugee crisis is that it is not about that at all. What the world is facing is a crisis of solidarity: an inability or an unwillingness to share the home that we have been given, and to risk the largesse of the hospitality that we enjoy.

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Women Seeking Asylum Attend JRS Health and Pamper Day

A cold, stormy morning in the middle of winter created the perfect conditions for women seeking asylum to take a break, and focus on their own care and relaxation at the second JRS women's health and pamper day.

Around 20 women gathered together at Arrupe Place to share cups of tea and conversation before kicking off the day's activities with a laughter yoga session. They were then treated to a range of facial treatments, massages, manicures and flower arrangement lessons—luxuries far removed from the way these women would usually spend their days.

'When we first came to Australia, life was very difficult, and we tended to get depressed,' said one woman. 'But now we've made friends and there are things like this to come

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 An asylum seeker is treated to a manicure at the JRS women's pamper day

that make them and their families extremely vulnerable in the Australian community.

Yet, despite the adversities they face, these women remain strong and resilient, determined to provide a safer and better life for their families and themselves.

'What touched me the most was that you can see how incredibly busy, difficult and stressful the women's lives are just by looking at their hands and nails,' said Angela Gallard, a JRS case worker. 'It was obvious the women

did not have the time, money, energy or space for someone else to treat them to something as simple as a manicure.'

JRS pamper days are an opportunity for us to provide a much-needed day off for these incredible and inspiring women. It's a day, not only to relax and laugh together, but to make them feel welcome in their new community.

'Today was really fun. It's made me feel very happy,' one woman said as she left for the day.

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It is ironic that at the end of the year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis, Australia has demonstrated by its treatment of people seeking asylum what it means to lack mercy. Instead of celebrating the Prince of Peace, we have allowed ourselves to be ensnared by the Prince of Lies, and all his works, and all his empty promises: border security,

resettlement as our only obligation, stopping illegal arrivals, and so on.

Scrooge was haunted in A Christmas Carol by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future. This Christmas I pray that we also will all be haunted: by every child whom we have turned away from Australia; by every family that we sent to Nauru; by every young man who has seen hope and life seep slowly

away while confined to Manus Island. The Prologue to John's Gospel tells us that the Word was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. That does not make for a comforting Christmas message, but perhaps there is little this Christmas for us to be comfortable about.

Indigenous Elders Welcome People Seeking Asylum

Uncle Des and Aunty Kerry are indigenous elders in the Parramatta area, and recently they were among a number of First Australians who welcomed a busload of JRS clients and friends to their country.

Before the first English speakers arrived, the Parramatta area had long been a meeting place for people of different nations and languages. It was fitting then that a group of asylum seekers from many lands, came together in this place to share in the rich culture and history of the original inhabitants.

As we walked around Parramatta lake admiring the beautiful bushland and soaking up the quiet integrity of

the environment, worries seemed to drift further and further away.

‘This place is very peaceful. Here I feel peace in my heart,’ said Hamid from Afghanistan.

Uncle Des and Aunty Kerry, together with Steve and Phil from the City of Parramatta Council, made us so welcome, in traditional and contemporary ways, and the memories of beauty, openness and genuine togetherness will remain in our hearts.

As guests in this land, which will always belong in a special way to the indigenous community, we were welcomed and embraced as fellow travellers, and as members of one

human community.

The significance and meaning of this place was clear, even to this group made up of some of the newest members of the Australian community.

Before the group parted ways, Fatima from Iraq stood to thank the hosts.

‘I want to say thank you. I am very honoured to meet you. When I came to this country I never thought I would meet an Aboriginal person. This is your land and we are all visitors here. I am very happy to be here. I am very happy that you said welcome to us. Thank you so much.’

Sarah Puls SGS, Casework Team Leader



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Parramatta to be a Refugee Welcome Zone

JRS, the Sisters of Mercy Parramatta, and the Refugee Council of Australia, together approached the City of Parramatta to classify the region as a Refugee Welcome Zone.

This national initiative recognises local government areas that make a commitment to welcoming refugees into the community.

“The City of Parramatta has a long history of welcoming many thousands of refugees and people seeking asylum. Becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone recognises the council’s ongoing commitment and support for refugees.” Maeve Brown, Manager of JRS’s Arrupe Project said.

Led by Administrator Amanda Chadwick, the City of Parramatta formally endorsed this recommendation.

At a ceremony planned for 26th November this year, Parramatta will be officially recognised as a Refugee Welcome Zone.

Christmas Appeal

\$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:

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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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