

The Charter of *Jesuit Refugee Service*

1. The mission of the Jesuit Refugee Service is intimately connected with the mission of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), namely to serve faith and promote the justice of God's Kingdom, in dialogue with cultures and religions. As one of St Ignatius Loyola's early companions wrote: "The Society cares for those persons who are totally neglected or inadequately attended to. This is the basic reason why the Society was founded; this is its power; this is what makes it distinctive in the Church."¹ St Ignatius personally gave shelter to the homeless of Rome and established organisations to continue these services. Many of his followers have responded to the pressing social needs of their own times.
2. Jesuit Refugee Service [JRS] was established in 1980 by Father Pedro Arrupe, then Superior General of the Society of Jesus. JRS was designed as a spiritual and practical response to the plight of refugees at that time, and to coordinate Jesuit efforts.² Given the increased incidence of forced displacement in the 1980s and 1990s, the Society of Jesus has several times restated its commitment to refugees.
3. In 1983, calling for a "review of all our ministries, traditional and new,"³ the 33rd General Congregation reaffirmed the Society's concern for refugees. The Congregation urged the Society to take note of critically urgent concerns, among them "the sad plight of millions of refugees searching for a permanent home, a situation brought to our special attention by Father Arrupe."⁴
4. The mission of JRS, and its service to "refugees and displaced people," were confirmed by Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach in a letter to the whole Society in 1990. "Our service to refugees is an apostolic commitment of the whole Society, and in particular of those Provinces where the refugees come from, where they seek protection and first refuge, and where they finally settle. In the local context, the role of the JRS is to help our Provinces initiate and develop this work in collaboration with other Church and secular organisations, voluntary and governmental, which are active in the same field."⁵
5. In 1995, the 34th General Congregation drew attention to several critical situations, among them "over 45 million refugees and displaced persons in today's world, 80 per cent of whom are women and children. Often lodged in the poorest of countries, they face growing impoverishment, loss of a sense of life and culture, with consequent hopelessness and despair."⁶
6. In 1997, Pope John Paul II stated, "The Church looks with deep pastoral concern at the increased flow of migrants and refugees, and questions herself about the causes of this phenomenon and the particular conditions of those who are forced for various reasons to leave their homeland. In fact the situation of the world's migrants and refugees seems ever more precarious. Violence sometimes obliges entire populations to leave their homeland to escape repeated atrocities; more frequently, it is poverty and the lack of prospects for development which spur individuals and families to go into exile, to seek ways to survive in distant lands, where it is not easy to find a suitable welcome."⁷

1 Jerome Nadal, MSHI, V.90-2, p. 126

2 "The Society of Jesus and the Refugee Problem", Letter of Pedro Arrupe, S.J. to all Jesuit Major Superiors, 14 November 1980. The aims and activities of JRS were initially set down by Fr. Arrupe as:

(a) to set up a network of contacts within the Society so that existing work for refugees can be better planned and coordinated;
(b) to collect information that might lead to new opportunities for assistance to refugees;
(c) to act as a switchboard between offers of help from Provinces and the needs of international agencies and organizations;
(d) to conscientize the Society about the importance of this apostolate and the different forms it can take both within the countries of first asylum and the receiving countries;
(e) to direct the special attention of the Society towards those groups or areas that receive little publicity or help from elsewhere;
(f) to encourage our publications and institutes of learning to undertake research into the root causes of the refugee problem so that preventative action can be taken."

3 GC 33, 1983, #39 (Note: A General Congregation is the highest decision making body in the Society of Jesus.)

4 GC 33, 1983, #45

5 "Review of the Jesuit Refugee Service", Letter of Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. to the Whole Society, 14 February 1990

6 GC 34, 1995, Decree 3, "Our Mission and Justice", #65

7 Pope John Paul II, Message on World Migration Day, November 1997

7. The 34th General Congregation affirmed JRS as one means by which the Society fulfils its mission to serve faith and promote justice: “The Jesuit Refugee Service accompanies many of these brothers and sisters of ours, serving them as companions, advocating their cause in an uncaring world.”⁸
8. The mission given to JRS embraces all persons who are driven from their homes by conflict, humanitarian disaster or violation of human rights, following Catholic social teaching which applies the expression ‘de facto refugee’ to many related categories of people.⁹
9. Jesuit Refugee Service, therefore, is an international Catholic organisation whose mission is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people. JRS facilitates the involvement of individuals and communities, promotes regional and global cooperation and networking on behalf of refugees. JRS undertakes services at national and regional levels with the support of an international office in Rome.
10. JRS shares in the Church's response at the parish, diocesan and international levels. “By her nature, the Church is in solidarity with the world of migrants who, with their variety of languages, races, cultures and customs, remind her of her own condition as a people on pilgrimage from every part of the earth to their final homeland.”¹⁰
11. Jesuit Refugee Service is a work of the Society of Jesus, namely, a work whereby the Society carries out its mission,¹¹ through which it manifests Ignatian values and for which in various ways assumes ultimate responsibility. The 34th General Congregation appealed “to all Provinces to support Jesuit Refugee Service in every way possible.”¹²
12. Jesuit Refugee Service forms part of the Society’s social apostolate, expressed in the Characteristics of the Jesuit Social Apostolate. The social apostolate arises from the very nature and mission of the Society of Jesus. Its aim is “to build, by means of every human endeavour, a fuller expression of justice and charity into the structures of human life in common.”¹³ The Characteristics provide criteria for planning and evaluating JRS activities.
13. Within the Ignatian spirit, JRS welcomes the involvement of lay persons and cooperation and partnership with religious congregations. “All those engaged in the work [of JRS] should exercise co-responsibility and be engaged in discernment and participative decision-making where it is appropriate.”¹⁴
14. The criteria that JRS uses to select areas and activities are drawn from Part VII of the Jesuit Constitutions, concerning the mission of the Society of Jesus and its choice of activities.¹⁵ JRS gives priority to situations of great need, to places where a more universal good may be achieved, and to needs that others are not attending to. JRS chooses situations where it can make a special contribution because of its own expertise, because a partner is already established there, or because its initiative can enable others to become involved.
15. To accompany refugees is to affirm that God is present in human history, even in most tragic episodes. Jesus as an infant fled with his family into exile. During his public life, he went about doing good and healing the sick, with nowhere to lay his head. Finally he suffered torture and death on the cross. In companionship with Jesus Christ and serving his mission in the midst of refugees, JRS can be an effective sign of God's love and reconciliation. The biblical welcome offered to the widow, the orphan and the stranger is the JRS model of authentic pastoral service.

The Feast of St. Joseph
Rome, 19 March 2000

8 GC 34, 1995, Decree 3, “Our Mission and Justice”, #65

9 The term refugee is defined by the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951. Since this definition refers only to individuals in fear of persecution, regional organizations in both Africa (OAU 1969) and Latin America (OAS 1984) have developed definitions which more accurately cover the mass displacements resulting from the social collapse consequent on conflicts and human rights abuse. “Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity”, (Pontifical Council Cor Unum, and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 1992), applies the expression ‘de facto refugee’ to all “persons persecuted because of race, religion, membership in social or political groups”; to “the victims of armed conflicts, erroneous economic policy or natural disasters”; and for “humanitarian reasons” to internally displaced persons, that is, civilians who “are forcibly uprooted from their homes by the same type of violence as refugees but who do not cross national frontiers.”

10 Message of John Paul II for the 85th World Migration Day, 1999, #2

11 **Constitutions**, Part VII, #622, #623

12 GC 34, 1995, Decree 3, “Our Mission and Justice”, #65

13 **Constitutions, Complementary Norms**, Part VII, 7. Social Apostolate, #298 – 302

14 GC 34, 1995, Decree 13, “Co-operation with the Laity”, #343

15 **Constitutions**, Part VII, #622, #623