

July 2020 Update Letter

Dear Friends of JRS,

Greetings to you once again from Bella Roma, and thank you for the many ways you support our mission.

In a recent discussion, the phrase *post-COVID* came up, imagining the virus would soon be behind us. I suggested that post-COVID is at least three years away, and the challenge and opportunity we have is to live in its reality, trusting in the work of God amidst it.

This reality is quite different in various parts of the world and will continue to be. In Europe, the wave has flattened, while it is just beginning in many African countries. India and several Latin American countries are heavily impacted, while parts of Asia Pacific have reopened.

These waves will continue large and small, and we must be prepared for the gamut, from suspending a program a second or third time, to incorporating long-term COVID-appropriate measures in camps and urban communities.

We are engaging in COVID preparation and sensitization in Cameroun, Colombia and Nigeria. We continue to distribute food and emergency supplies, much needed in places like Angola, Iraq and Venezuela.

Yet more and more we are moving into the world of long-term living with COVID. We are installing handwashing stations in camps with limited sanitation, and designing phone referral systems for services and collaboration with other agencies. Our livelihoods programs have adapted to the market and are making facemasks, as pictured on the right.



Above, mask preparation by Chin refugees, New Delhi; below, making masks at Centro Astalli/JRS Italy.





Above, radio classes in Herat, Afghanistan; below, radio classes in Goz Beida, Chad. More photos [here](#).

Our education and training programs have made the most changes. With classrooms still mostly closed, radio has returned as a preferred mode of education, as seen on the left.

Sometimes, radio isn't enough. JRS Pathfinder, our post-secondary education and training program in Dzaleka Camp, Malawi, has a partnership with Konexio, a French-based NGO. Together we train Francophone refugees to participate in the global online job market for translation, transcription and data entry. Designed for the classroom, COVID threatened the program's existence. Working with Konexio, students were able to continue their training from home, and some trainees are now consistently earning up to \$300 a month... a small fortune in Malawi.

All of this means that JRS continues its mission. While we must live and deal with COVID, we cannot let the virus distract us from accompanying and serving refugees as best we can, believing that God is at work even in the midst of a pandemic.

Sri Lankan Jesuit and Kakuma Camp Project Director Fr. Lasantha de Abrew shared this reflection with us. Back in April, when COVID had not yet arrived in the camp, a refugee community member came up after Sunday mass and said to him:



Father Lasantha, there is no need to be anxious. You fear because of uncertainties. We as refugees experienced these uncertainties from the moment we started running away from our countries. When we

took the first step from our lands, we did not know the future. Those were dark uncertain moments. We lost everything, but God saved us, so still we are living. We do not know the future but we know that God will care for us. Even when we die; we die with God who loves and cares for us.

Let us support one another in the midst of COVID, accompanying the forcibly-displaced women and men who share with us more than we could ever give.

Thank you for walking with us. Blessings for hope and health at this time.

Thomas H. Smolich SJ
JRS International Director