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# *Marist Ex-Students Gather at Newman College, Churchlands, January 2010*

Over 140 Marist ex-students came for Mass and a barbeque at the Newman College Champagnat Chapel for their annual pre-Australia Day reunion.

Mass was celebrated by Fr David Barry OSB, an ex-student of St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, NSW.

As usual, New Norcia ex-students were to the fore, with a very pleasing number of men from Marist Churchlands (pre-Newman College), St Joseph's Subiaco, and a group from Northam.

Coordinator of the evening was Ambrose Depiazzi and former Test cricketer Laurie Mayne again the chief cook. St Ildephonsus' ex-students of the early 60s were pleased to meet Br Richard Spain again.



**Lawrie Mayne & Tom Woller**



**Brian John, Doug Morgan  
& Peter Doyle**



**Ted Capp, Tom Scally  
& Br Red Casey**



**Paul Fellowes, Eric Chidlow & Br Terry Orrell**



***Kevin Badgeris, Kim Larson, Allen Rose,  
Tony Ince, John Holland & Michael  
Byrne***



***Doug Morgan, Leo Morgan,  
Kevin Morgan & Br Matthew  
Clarke***



***John Ryan, Basil  
Ryan & Neil  
Mannolini***



***Jim Bianchini, Des Martiensen, Brendan Thompson & Ben Bianchini***

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## “PEOPLE” OR “BOAT PEOPLE”

Fr Sacha Goldman S.J.

Director, Jesuit Refugee Service



In Australia, this past year we saw an increase in the number of asylum seekers coming to our shores by boat (around 1500), mainly from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, as a result of the wars and armed conflicts ravaging those nations, but also from other neighbouring nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Burma. The number of people arriving by plane—from all parts of the world, including about a third from African nations—remained fairly stable (close to 4000). In comparison with other nations (there are close to a million Iraqi refugees in Syria, for example), these numbers are very small. Yet, because the arrival of asylum seekers, especially those coming by boat, is a very politicised issue in Australia, tapping into fears of invasion by large masses of people, claims of inadequate border control (we have the toughest system we’ve ever had), and a fear of ‘the other’—those who are different from us in culture, ethnicity or religion—much of the debate and arguments presented in the media focused on what could be done to curtail the arrival of these asylum seekers, who were in fact fleeing persecution and violence in their homes.

Thus, much of the work we do, besides direct assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in the community and in detention centres, is aimed at dispelling these inaccurate myths and trying to raise awareness about the plight and hardships faced by asylum seekers and refugees. My own approach is always to try to give a human face to the statistics, the numbers

and the generalisations, by sharing stories of some of the people I come into contact with.

Two of those people are Lalitha and Ravi whom I met, together with their three-year old son Aprit, at Christmas Island, during a short visit there to offer religious services and pastoral care to the local community as well as to detained asylum seekers. Australia has built a huge detention centre in this remote island and all boat arrivals (people who come without a visa) are initially detained there. I spent most of my time with groups of Catholic Sri Lankan Tamils, many of whom spoke of persecution and abuse in their homeland, of horrific journeys across the sea in unsafe and rickety boats, of hope at the prospect of starting a new life in Australia, and of disillusionment and despair after months in detention.

I met Lalitha, Ravi and Aprit during one of the masses I celebrated at the detention centre. I was moved by their amazing faith in God as they prayed that the God who had protected them during their perilous journey across the sea would also lead them to the Australian mainland. At that same mass, several of the men took out their wallets and showed me photos of their children and then asked me to pray for them. Some could not hold back the tears as I held the photos in my hands and offered prayers for them. It is hard for us to understand what it must be like, but try to imagine saying goodbye to your wife and your children knowing that you might never see

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them again or that it might take several years before you are reunited with them. There was so much emotion in that room. Earlier we had prayed for those who had been lost at sea, for those who had not made it. At the end of the mass, one by one first, and then in groups, all of them came and knelt before me and asked for a blessing. As I placed my hands on their shoulders and prayed for them, I was struck once again by their deep faith. They had placed all their trust in God—there was no one else to trust—and they truly believed that God held them in God’s hands and would answer their prayers.

Lalitha’s and Ravi’s prayer to be allowed into Australia was indeed answered! I met them again unexpectedly three weeks later, this time at Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney. They had been granted protection visas and were now waiting for final health and character checks before being released into the community.

The following week, when I returned for my weekly visit, I was welcomed with great warmth by this family, which had prepared a delicious Sri Lankan meal expressly for me. As she offered me the food, Lalitha smiled and said, ‘I didn’t forget my promise, Father!’ And indeed she hadn’t. As we’d said goodbye at Christmas Island, she had promised that the next time we met she would cook a meal for me. Our Christian tradition calls us to welcome the stranger into our land, our homes and our hearts, and to treat them as we would like to be treated if we found ourselves in their place. And here I was, being welcomed in my own country by those same ‘strangers’, into their home and their hearts.

As we shared the meal, Lalitha and Ravi expressed their concern for the detainees on Christmas Island and their sorrow for those who had died along the way. ‘Why is it that people don’t want to welcome us in Australia?’ they asked. I replied that if people were to meet them and hear their story, perhaps their hearts would open in compassion. ‘Then we will share it,’ Lalitha said, ‘if it will help others.’

I later discovered the level of their commitment to help others when Ravi mentioned their wish to adopt a child once they were given permission to stay in Australia. With a second child on the way I was surprised to hear this, but Ravi explained, ‘Before leaving Sri Lanka I volunteered at one of Mother Teresa’s homes and met many orphans there. My heart moved with compassion for them, and we decided that even if we could only help one, at least we could do that much.’ Here were two people who had suffered so much already in their young lives, who had an uncertain future and nothing to their name, yet they could still think about those less fortunate than themselves!

I could share so many other stories of pain and suffering, but also of faith, courage, reliance and hope such as this. A Jesuit Refugee Service staff member working in South Africa wrote recently, ‘The mystery of grace is mediated through concrete situations—the more concrete, the more powerful.’ This is certainly what I experience in our day-to-day work at JRS. Our work is indeed quite challenging, but people like Lalitha and Ravi make it also fulfilling and life-giving.