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JSRI Future Activities

JSRI staff and associates—working from home—will continue monitoring local, state, and federal administrative, legislative, and judicial actions regarding our priority issues and the impact of Covid-19; participating in advocacy communications with authorities; recommending resources on our website and by social media; research and writing for our publications; and activating our advocacy network as appropriate.

JSRI Recent Activities

July 15

Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ, did an on-line presentation for the Jesuit Novices of the Central and Southern Province on the history and development of "Jesuit Justice" in the light of Catholic Social Teaching.

July 16

Dr. Sue Weishar met with a member of Senator Bill Cassidy's staff to advocate for humane and just asylum policies in a Zoom meeting organized by the Interfaith Immigration Coalition.

July 28

The JSRI staff and associates had their monthly meeting virtually, their last with Dr. Nik Mitchell, who completed his contract on the July 31 and shortly afterwards moved to begin teaching at the University of Kansas.

July 29

Dr. Dennis Kalob attended the meeting (virtually) of the Care for Our Common Home Commission of the U.S. Central and Southern Jesuit Province.

August 4

Dr. Weishar participated in a Zoom meeting of the Board of Directors of El Pueblo, a Biloxi-based non-profit which serves vulnerable immigrants in central Mississippi and the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

August 9

Fr. Kammer's first of seven essays on key themes of Catholic Social Teaching was included in the parish bulletin of Holy Name of Jesus Parish here in New Orleans.

August 11

Fr. Kammer submitted to Dean Maria Calzada notice that he would be "retiring" from JSRI at the end of this academic year (July, 2021); he informed staff and the Advisory Board as well. His plans include a writing sabbatical, then a new Jesuit assignment. A search committee will be appointed within thirty days and information on application processes published as soon as feasible after that.

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From Katrina to Corona

By Dennis Kalob, Ph.D.

Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the region in late August of 2005. We are now approaching the 15th anniversary of this catastrophic event that put 80% of the Crescent City underwater and killed hundreds of our citizens. I was not living in New Orleans at the time, but I watched it unfold on television and the horror I felt has never left me.



Today, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, I find myself with the same sense of horror—and foreboding, sadness and anger.

Katrina. We knew for years that a major hurricane could cause catastrophic damage, particularly through a failure in the flood protection system. It's like that old joke about the weather. Everyone complained about the city's vulnerability, but nobody seemed to be doing anything about it. And we faced the consequences. Flood walls collapsed from the weight of a medium-sized hurricane. We watched with immeasurable frustration as the waters came pouring into the city and nobody was able to respond. There was no preparation, it seemed, for the (inevitable) collapse of a flood protection barrier. But there was more horror to come.

People by the thousands were left stranded in their homes, at the Convention Center, at the Superdome, and on bridges waiting for rescue which seemed like it would never come. Again, feelings of frustration...then anger at the inaction. Vulnerable people were left to suffer. A rich and powerful nation was impotent in the face of an entirely predictable event.

Finally, rescue came, but help for the clean-up and rebuilding effort became yet another source of frustration.

COVID-19. The parallels to Katrina are striking. Experts had warned for years that a health crisis—a pandemic—would likely come one day and that we were not adequately prepared. Then it struck. We again watched in horror as the nation and its political leadership demonstrated its lack of readiness. Like waters pouring over a fallen flood wall, the virus has poured over our nation, taking with it not hundreds of lives, but tens of thousands.

Like Katrina fifteen years ago, the COVID-19 crisis drags on without an adequate plan for dealing with it or for rebuilding our hurting nation. We will rebuild; but the difficulties, pain, and suffering will be much greater than they should have been.

What has happened to our nation? For an answer to that question we need to look to these words from Ronald Reagan in his first inaugural address (January 20, 1981): "Government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem."

Reagan was the head cheerleader for the strongly anti-government conservative movement that has largely been in ascendancy since the late 1970s. This movement has used its power to dismantle government and challenge the very idea of collective action for the common good.

The public sector has been neglected and marginalized. The results of this decades-long attack on the public sector can be seen in our impotent and chaotic responses to both Katrina and COVID-19. Our infrastructure and public health system (particularly the CDC) were once highly regarded in the world, but are now held up as evidence that our country is in a state of decay, a decay that has cost us dearly and that can be directly linked to the conservative, anti-government agenda.

We need to turn our nation around and we can use Catholic Social Teaching to help us find our way. As Pope John XXIII reminds us "...the whole reason for the existence of civil authorities is the realization of the common good." [1]

[1] Pope John XXIII. (1963). *Pacem in Terris*, 54.

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.

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