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JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Number 46

April 2015

Pope Francis and the Environment

Anticipating Earth Day, April 22, 2015

by Fred Kammer, S.J.

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JSRI Upcoming Events

April 16

Dr. Weishar is helping plan an Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Justice and Compassion for Immigrants, to be held at 6:00 in front of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. [More information](#)

April 18

Fr. Kammer will deliver the keynote for a series on Pope Francis' *Joy of the Gospel* in Baton Rouge.

April 30

Fr. Kammer will deliver two lectures on Vatican II's *Church in the Modern World* at a New Orleans Clergy Study Day.

JSRI Recent Activities

April 15-16

Fr. Kammer attended the board meeting and retreat for the Ignatian Solidarity Network at Georgetown.

April 10-11

JSRI's Advisory Board met.

April 6

Dr. Weishar attended the Biloxi Board Meeting of El Pueblo/

As we approach the 45th anniversary of earth day next week, Catholics and others might well ask what Pope Francis thinks about our environment and our responsibilities for it. Francis watchers are looking to Rome for a planned encyclical on the environment due out this summer. This won't be just about turning down the thermostat or saving leftovers; but the Pope already has indicated that he sees the defense of the environment as interwoven with the defense of the family and of the poor "as part of the same agenda of ensuring the survival and thriving of humanity."^[1]

The Pope met with United Nations officials in May of last year and urged the international community to address "the structural causes of poverty and hunger, attain more substantial results in protecting the environment, ensure dignified and productive labor for all and provide appropriate protection for the family, which is an essential element in sustainable human and social development."^[2]



Image Credit: <http://www.paxchristiusa.org/>

April 2

Dr. Mikulich attended a conference on "A Public Health and Safety Approach to Drug Policy".

March 27

Dr. Mikulich presented "The Body of Christ Imprisoned in Louisiana" to Loyola's Immersion program.

March 25

Dr. Weishar urged the New Orleans City Council's Criminal Justice Committee, to discontinue NOPD participation in ICE raids.

March 25

Dr. Weishar spoke to a Tulane Social Work class about her work as the Director of Immigration and Refugee Services at Catholic Charities New Orleans.

March 24

Fr. Kammer delivered Loyola's Yamauchi Lecture on Catholic social thought and immigration.

March 24

Dr. Mikulich attended the Louisiana diocesan Life and Justice Committee meeting.

March 19

Fr. Kammer discussed the Jesuit tradition of faith and justice with Loyola's Ignatian Faculty Fellows.

March 5

Dr. Mikulich co-facilitated with Dr. Al Alcazar a Day of Enrichment for the Houma-Thibodaux diocesan and Catholic Charities staff.

erosion of farmlands, flooding of coastal areas, or the location of polluting factories. As the Pope explained last fall to an audience of those involved in popular movements:

"An economic system centered on the god of money also needs to plunder nature, to plunder nature to sustain the frenetic rhythm of consumption that is inherent to it. Climate change, the loss of bio-diversity, deforestation are already showing their devastating effects in the great cataclysms we witness, and you are the ones who suffer most, the humble, those who live near coasts in precarious dwellings or who are so vulnerable economically that, in face of a natural disaster, lose everything."[3]

Francis is not working from some ideological or political framework in his concern for the earth and its inhabitants. Instead, as were his two immediate predecessors, he is grounded in the Scriptures and what they reveal about our relations with God and the world around us:

"Brothers and sisters: creation is not a property, which we can dispose of at will; much less so is it the property of some, of a few: creation is a gift, it is a present, a wonderful gift that God has given us to take care of and to use for the benefit of all, always with respect and gratitude."[4]

The Pope already has staked out a place in contemporary history and culture, not just by his magnetic personality or his popular outreach to the poor and marginalized, but also by the lessons he has begun to teach the Church and the world. His recent apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* makes plain the connections he sees between the Good News of Jesus Christ, the primacy of the poor and marginalized in the love of God and God's people, and the challenges of consumerism, individualism, and inequality to the moral fiber of individuals and societies. If Pope Francis stays true to form, his promised letter on the environment will combine all these themes in ways that will be insightful, inspiring, and challenging.

[1] Cindy Wooden, "Vatican Letter," Catholic News Service, March 26, 2015.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Pope Francis, "Address to Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements," October 28, 2014, at <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-s-address-to-popular-movements> (accessed April 12, 2015). [4] Ibid.

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Published by the Jesuit Social Research Institute

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