

# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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## Blood, Floods, and the Future Summer 2016 Baton Rouge Perspective

by Nik Mitchell, Ph.D.

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### JSRI Upcoming Events

#### October 13-14

Fr. Kammer will co-host and address members of FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities) meeting in New Orleans.

#### October 26

Fr. Kammer will provide a study day to clergy working as Global Fellows with Catholic Relief Services on the writings of Pope Francis.

### JSRI Recent Activities

#### September 20

Fr. Kammer presided and preached at the Red Mass for Michigan attorneys and judges at the Gesu Parish at the University of Detroit Mercy.

#### September 20

Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Weishar met with criminal justice reform advocates at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

#### September 18

Dr. Weishar trained eight Loyola students to teach ESL at St. Anthony of Padua Church's Café con Ingles program.

#### September 17

Dr. Weishar volunteered at the El Colibri Clinic for immigrants working to rebuild flooded homes in Baton Rouge.

#### September 15

Dr. Weishar and Dr. Mitchell led mini-seminars as part of *Loyola United for Racial Justice Week*.

#### September 9

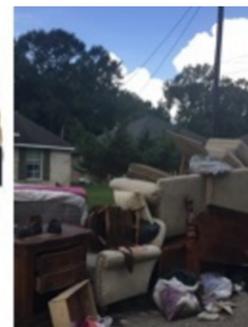
Dr. Weishar provided testimony to the Louisiana Senate Committee on Judiciary C on the need to show mercy and provide parole opportunities for juveniles convicted of capital crimes.

#### Sept 8

Fr. Kammer and Ms. Donovan released the results of the [2016 State of Working MS](#).

2016 has been a summer of strife for the city of Baton Rouge, my hometown. With the killing of Alton Sterling, the metropolitan area was locked in conflict as the long dormant ghosts of Baton Rouge's racial past shook off decades of uneasy sleep and began to demand redress. Scenes of police in riot gear with guns drawn went around the world placing this city better known for its college football teams at the center of the global debate on race and police conduct. Then came the murder of three police officers at the hands of Gavin Long.

The city had reached its breaking point. Then, an estimated 6.9 trillion gallons of rain fell on the Baton Rouge metropolitan area, flooding large swaths of it and leaving tens of thousands of people homeless. Mixed in with the images of flooded neighborhoods and devastated lives, there were images of unity in the face of nature's fury. Declarations of how "race doesn't matter" were echoed across social media; and how "united Baton Rouge had become" was emblazoned on t-shirts and profile pictures. It is true that natural disasters inspire a sort of racial unity that reveals how insipid "race" really is. It is also true that the Baton Rouge metropolitan area is grotesquely segregated racially and economically.



How do we reconcile these two stark realities? The answer is: we can't. The ghosts of Baton Rouge's past have not been put to rest. The anger that motivated hundreds to demand accountability for the sins of the past and present has not been extinguished. The echoes of the denial of timely emergency health services brought on by hospital closures and the failure of the St. George secession attempt by predominantly white south Baton Rouge due to a technicality still ring in African American Baton Rouge.

It is incumbent for all of those who adhere to social justice to watch the post flood rebuilding efforts carefully to ensure that it is equitable, minimizes any displacement, and stifles the efforts of those who wish to profit from this situation by targeting and exploiting the most vulnerable among us. If this rebuilding effort is to be just and successful, we must embrace race egalitarianism, which is "the conviction that, because of an unjust history, we should endeavor to reduce inequalities of wealth and power between racial groups, as such"[1] and commit to preserving the dignity of the affected. What remains to be seen is how Baton Rouge will transition into a new metropolitan area after the storm. Progress should not and must not come at the expense of the vulnerable. That would be a complete betrayal of the social contract and is the sort of transgression that marks the perpetrators and their descendants whose prosperity came at the cost of the rights and dignity of the vulnerable. The mechanisms of power can be used for justice only if constituents demand it and hold those in control of the mechanisms accountable for their actions so that no one gets left behind.

[1] Glenn Loury, *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 112

*Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please send feedback to [jsri@loyno.edu](mailto:jsri@loyno.edu)*

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