

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Faith in Action

Mississippi Catholics and Child Well Being

by Fred Kammer, SJ

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JSRI Upcoming Events

February 29

Fr. Kammer will attend the Los Angeles meeting of the board of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps.

March 5

Fr. Kammer will provide two presentations on Catholic Social Teaching to Dallas deacons.

March 8

Ms. Donovan and Fr. Kammer will present the findings of the first *JustSouth Index* at a press conference on Loyola's campus.

JSRI Recent Activities

February 17

Fr. Kammer presented Pope Francis' *Joy of the Gospel* as part of Loyola's Lenten series.

February 14

Dr. Weishar provided a training and orientation to Loyola Service Learning students who will teach ESL this semester to adult immigrants at [Café con Ingles](#).

February 11

Ms. Donovan co-planned and Fr. Kammer presented at the Catholic Day at the Capitol in Jackson, MS.

January 27

JSRI hosted a screening and panel discussion on [The Whole Gritty City](#).

January 25

Fr. Kammer received the [Harry A. Fagan Roundtable Award](#) honoring his contributions and achievements in social justice.

January 25

Dr. Weishar participated in a meeting of the board of directors of [El Pueblo/ Seashore Mission](#) in Biloxi, MS.

January 23- 26

Ms. Donovan and Fr. Kammer attended the [Catholic Social Ministry Gathering](#) in Washington, D.C.

January 21

Dr. Weishar presented a webinar about [Organizing a Catholic Teach-In on Migration in Your Faith Community](#) for the Loyola Institute for Ministry.

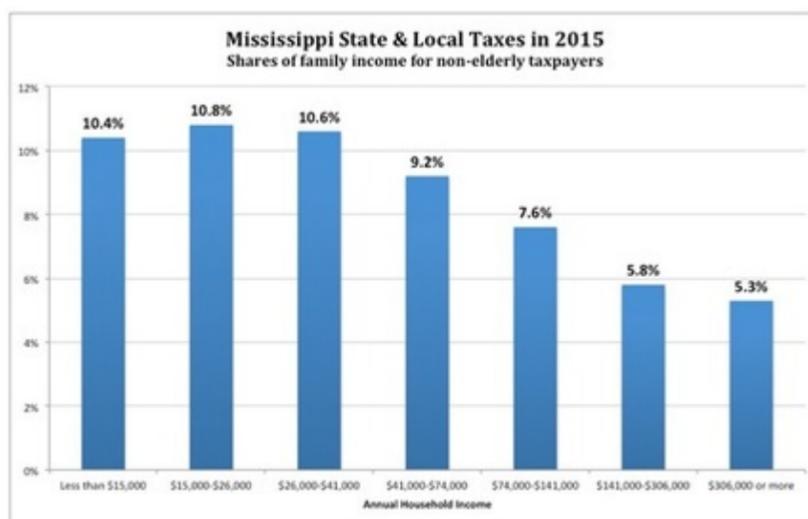
On Thursday, February 11, 85 concerned Mississippians gathered in the parish center at the Cathedral of St. Peter the Apostle in Jackson for the annual Catholic Day at the Capitol. Three issues were the focus of the advocacy gathering: adequate funding for the child welfare system in Mississippi; support for the maintenance of community-based mental health services; and raising adequate revenues to meet the State's duties towards the common good.

Bishop Joseph R. Kopacz of Jackson welcomed the participants, reminding them of the remarks of Pope Francis to the U.S. Congress and his call to Christian responsibility for the common good. The Bishop also spoke from his own experience as godfather to a young woman adopted from the Pennsylvania foster care system and her struggles and those of her family to address childhood traumas.

Matthew Burkhardt of Catholic Relief Services reminded participants of the call to Catholics to the "two feet" of social justice: individual acts of service to those in need and advocacy for greater justice for all those who are poor and vulnerable.

The panel that followed vividly described the plight of children and those needing mental health services: literal "atrocities" in a child welfare system under court order to institute major reforms; caseworkers shredding case files of children whom they were unable to serve; greater numbers of families "failing" within Mississippi's economy; and multiple "adverse childhood experiences" (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect, hunger, and abandonment. Last year, there were 25,000 cases of abuse reported, but only 6,200 were "evidenced" (meaning there was a documented investigation) due to shortages of state workers. Thirty-five percent of Mississippi children live in poverty.

In recent years, Mississippi's legislature has rebuffed efforts to increase significantly the funding for the child welfare system, rejecting the governor's requests. Instead, lawmakers have approved various tax breaks and loopholes for corporations that have significantly decreased the corporate contributions to the tax base. The state relies heavily on regressive sales and property taxes where lower income families pay higher shares of their family income in taxes, as reflected in the table below. [\[1\]](#)



Source: Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy

In a brief luncheon address, I reminded participants of three principles from Catholic Social Teaching:

First, the tax system should raise adequate revenues to pay for the public needs of society, especially to meet the basic needs of the poor.

Secondly, the tax system should be structured according to the principle of progressivity, so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation. The inclusion of such a principle in tax policies is an important means of reducing the severe inequalities of income and wealth in the nation.

Thirdly, families below the official poverty line should not be required to pay income taxes. Such families are, by definition, without sufficient resources to purchase the basic necessities of life. They should not be forced to bear the additional burden of paying income taxes. [\[2\]](#)

In his closing address at a press conference on the steps of the State Capitol, Bishop Roger P. Morin of Biloxi, underscored the purpose of the Catholic Day at the Capitol, to urge the care and protection of children and the vulnerable and to remind all of us of our responsibility for the common good.

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Office Phone: 504- 864-7746 | **E-mail:** jsri@loyno.edu | **Website:** www.loyno.edu/jsri

Mailing Address: 6363 St. Charles Avenue, Campus Box 94, New Orleans, LA 70118

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