

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

LOYOLA
UNIVERSITY
NEW ORLEANS



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From Sea to Shining Sea, We Welcome Thee New Orleans Welcomes Syrian Refugees

by Sue Weishar, Ph.D.

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JSRI Upcoming Events

January 23- 26

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

January 25

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

January 27

JSRI will host a screening and panel discussion on [The Whole Gritty City](#), a documentary depicting the resilience of Mardi Gras marching bands in the face of adversity. [MORE INFO](#)

JSRI Recent Activities

January 14

Fr. Kammer led a strategic planning committee meeting for the Ignatian Solidarity Network in Baltimore, MD.

January 11

Ms. Donovan presented the results of [Too Much for Too Many](#) to the Income Inequality Study Group at the Community Church Universal Unitarian of New Orleans.

January 8-10

Ms. Baudouin and Fr. Kammer led the mid-year social justice retreat for 80 Jesuit Volunteers working throughout the South and Midwest.

January 7

Dr. Weishar organized a conference call with Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D., where faith leaders discussed their support of S. 2123, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act.

January 5

Fr. Kammer addressed a visiting group of Iona College students on the social realities of post-Katrina New Orleans.

December 24

Dr. Weishar warned that the Obama administration's plans for immigration raids would be a nightmare for immigrant communities in an interview with the [Wall Street Journal](#).



On a brilliantly sunny, crisp winter afternoon last month, a diverse group of more than 100 New Orleanians gathered at the Monument to the Immigrant in Woldenberg Park to show our support for Syrian refugees and celebrate what makes New Orleans and our country worth fleeing halfway across the globe to reach. The [Rally](#)

[and March](#) to Welcome Syrian Refugees began with remarks by Farah Alkhafaf, who reminded those gathered that, having suffered through Hurricane Katrina, we know what it's like to seek shelter elsewhere. Then Farah, the lead organizer of the rally and a student at UNO, asked everyone to "pass the peace" by shaking hands and greeting the people around them. Thus began an event that dared to counter the relentless narrative of fear and xenophobia that opportunistic political "leaders" have promulgated since the Paris terrorist attacks.

Having directed the refugee resettlement program at Catholic Charities New Orleans for many years, I was then asked to speak about our city's long history of welcoming persecuted people. Since the arrival of Acadian refugees in the mid-18th Century, to refugees from the Haitian revolution at the turn of the 19th Century-- which doubled New Orleans' population, to those fleeing war and persecution in Latin America, Vietnam, Bosnia, and Iraq in recent years, I reminded listeners that our city and state have always been enriched and strengthened by refugees and their ancestors.



Next, because the sacred texts of all the world's great religions speak of the importance of hospitality to and solidarity with those in need, local faith leaders were asked to share what their faith traditions say about welcoming the stranger.

Dr. Naomi Yavneh, Director of Loyola's Honors Program and a board member of Touro Synagogue, noted that welcoming the stranger is part of the sacred obligation that Jews have to *Tikkun olam*-- healing the world. She reminded us that in 1939 when Jews fleeing Nazi Germany were denied entrance to the U.S. our country could not tell the difference between an actual enemy and the victims of an enemy, and not to make the same mistake now.

Reverend Priscilla Maumus, Archdeacon for the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, challenged fellow Christians to "dare" to love as Jesus did and to welcome refugees from Syria and elsewhere with courage and compassion.

Imam Abdur Rahman Bashir of the Jefferson Muslim Association, noted that the Prophet Mohammed said that God helps those who help others, and that we should not let anything come between us and those in need.

Sister Maura O'Donovan, CHF, a member of Burning Bush, a collaboration of Catholic sisters and brothers working to end violence, reminded us that the Christmas story is really a refugee story, and that today the Holy Family is being excluded in the persons of thousands of Syrian refugees who hope to find welcome in the "inns" of our hearts.

When Syrian immigrant Dr. Ibrahim Ekaidi described what it was like to lose 43 members of his extended family to the conflict tearing apart Syria and how disappointed he was in the push to ban Syrian refugees, those gathered grew quiet. He concluded, "But (being) with you gives me hope."

After the group second-lined to the music of a brass band through streets crowded with holiday visitors to Jackson Square, Farah led us in a chant that was also a prayer of welcome. "From sea to shining sea, we welcome thee." Amen!

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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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