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WANT TO FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING? ADDRESS YOUTH POVERTY

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In this time of increasing partisanship and discord in the United States, there is one thing that people on the left and right seem to agree on, and that is the need to reduce human trafficking. The crime of trafficking is committed when someone compels a person to work through force, fraud, or coercion, or when someone engages a minor in a commercial sex act. Both sex and labor trafficking happen in every single state in the union, and it happens in a wide swath of industries—not only in the illicit sex and drug trades, but also in agriculture, door-to-door sales, construction, restaurants, and even teaching.

As attention to this issue increases, so does the desire to find a way to address it. Many states have significantly increased penalties imposed on convicted traffickers in the hopes that it would deter future predators. Legislators in the state of

Utah, where the use of firing squad was legalized in 2015, have gone so far as to attempt to make the death penalty available as a punishment for child sex traffickers.

While there is no doubt that trafficking in any form is a heinous crime, we cannot punish our way out of the fact that people are made vulnerable to forced labor because they are impoverished, lack a social support network, and are cut off from the services they need to access well-being and independence. While activists and legislators focus on intensely penalizing those caught for trafficking, they are doing little to provide potential, current, and former victims of trafficking what they need—a route out of poverty.

Researchers with Loyola University New Orleans' Modern Slavery Research Project interviewed over 640 homeless

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Ms. Archie, a Covenant House Staffer, welcomes a young person

youth in Covenant House shelters around the United States and Canada, including Ft. Lauderdale, St. Louis, and our own hometown of New Orleans. We found that, of the homeless youth we interviewed, nearly 1 in 5 had been trafficked either for sex or some other form of labor. Many people in those communities were surprised to learn that 8 percent of the youth we interviewed had been trafficked for labor in the drug trade, factories, domestic service, or agriculture. Because we tend to think of trafficking simply in terms of young women forced into the sex trade, it was also notable that we found that 11% of the young men we interviewed had been trafficked for sex in their lifetimes as well. What we learned is that regardless of sex, gender, race, religion, or nationality, homeless youth were extremely vulnerable to trafficking precisely because they were homeless.

Youth reported that their fear of sleeping on the streets left them vulnerable to sex and labor traffickers and to survival sex. Eighty-four percent of youth who reported engaging in the sex trade without a third-party controller (colloquially called a “pimp”) did so because of economic need. Securing housing was a primary concern for the vast majority of the youth we interviewed. Sixty-eight percent of the youth who had either been trafficked or engaged in survival sex or commercial sex had done so while homeless. Nineteen percent of all youth interviewed had engaged in survival sex solely so that they could access housing or food. This problem is even starker among those who were not sheltered. The incidence of trafficking among drop-in youth—sometimes called “street youth”—was high relative to the sheltered cohort: 24 percent were trafficked for sex, 13 percent for labor.

We asked the young people who had been trafficked what could have been done to prevent them from being trafficked and what young people with similar experiences need in order

to escape their traffickers. The young people we talked to were surprised that we asked them their opinions at all. Indeed, few people had ever asked them for their own thoughts on what they needed or what programs might work to help other youth who had been trafficked. As far as we know, few if any of the legislators deciding the fates of trafficked people and their exploiters have interacted extensively with survivors of trafficking to learn what we as a society should prioritize in our efforts to address this problem.

When asked what exploited and trafficked youth need, not one respondent in our study said they needed to see their traffickers punished—and certainly none of them mentioned increasing sentencing. While certainly justice is critical to some survivors’ recovery processes, the sort of prevention through punishment plan that legislators focus on was not at the front of the minds of the survivors with whom we spoke.

Instead, what young adult survivors of human trafficking told us was that they needed jobs and a living wage. The majority of those who were trafficked were seeking work opportunities when they were approached by their traffickers. In fact, 91 percent of the youth we interviewed had been approached by someone offering them a job opportunity that sounded (or turned out to be) too good to be true. Some of the young people were resilient against such offers. But too many others were so desperate for a reasonable wage or a place to stay that they were willing to take the risk of accepting a job, even when the offer seemed suspicious, dangerous, or even illegal. Others felt forced to turn to trading sex because they could not find legitimate work.

Indeed, the vast majority of the youth we interviewed indicated that they encountered people who took advantage of them when they were searching for work and housing. A lack of job opportunities converged with a lack of computer literacy and job skills and a lack of affordable housing to lead to vulnerability.

What did young trafficked people need to avoid and escape traffickers? They needed jobs and job skills. They sought training on how to identify a safe job and additional job skills training programs to help them avoid labor traffickers, sex traffickers, and other exploitative labor situations. They needed a living wage, so that when they did find work, they were able to afford rent and food. They needed a support system that could help them identify fraudulent offers and places to stay when they ran into trouble.

ENDNOTE

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Catholic Social Thought and Education

In 1948 the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the *right to free basic education* and even equal access to higher education based on merit.¹ In modern Catholic social thought, Pope John XXIII enumerated a number of human rights in 1963 including, “the right to a basic education and to technical and professional training in keeping with the stage of educational development in the country.”² This was affirmed by the Second Vatican Council in 1965 as the “inalienable right to an education.”³

As articulated by Pope Paul VI in 1967, “integral human development” must include basic education in any plan of development since “hunger for education is no less debasing than hunger for food.”⁴ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares that education is necessary for a human being to lead a truly human life—as much a necessity as food, work, water, clothing, and shelter.⁵

Whose Responsibility?

The Council declared that parents “have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring” and should be “acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children.”⁶ While this education begins in the home, “imparting education requires the help of society as a whole.”⁷ This implies certain rights and duties belonging to civil society, including overseeing the duties and rights of parents and other educators, assisting them in their duties, completing the task of education when parental and educator efforts are insufficient, and “building its own schools and institutes, as the common good may demand.”⁸

The Council was emphatic about the importance and beauty of the vocation of schoolteachers—a calling which requires “extraordinary qualities of mind and heart, extremely careful preparation, and a constant readiness to begin anew and to adapt.”⁹ It also underscored the unique role of the Church itself in faith formation, involving traditional catechesis and new forms of social communication.¹⁰

Balancing Interests

Parents, however, “should enjoy true freedom in their choice of schools.”¹¹ This implies that public authorities should fund education in ways that respect that right “so that parents can freely choose to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens.”¹² At the same time, the

U.S. Bishops have expressed strong support for the public school system in this country. They explained:

There can be no substitute for quality education in public schools, for that is where the large majority of all students, including Catholic students, are educated.¹³

Quality education is especially important in low-income communities where poverty is fundamentally a problem of powerlessness and marginalization and “the importance of education as a means of overcoming it cannot be overemphasized.”¹⁴ Education must be part of creating fair and just economic and social reforms which seriously address the grossly unequal distribution of wealth and resources in so much of the world.

Conclusion

Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, Pope Francis returned to the crucial role of education in promoting integral human development as a way to enable people worldwide to escape extreme poverty:

This presupposes and requires the right to education—also for girls (excluded in certain places)—which is ensured first and foremost by respecting and reinforcing the primary right of the family to educate its children, as well as the right of churches and social groups to support and assist families in the education of their children.¹⁵

Thus, education is the foundation upon which people can become “dignified agents of their own destiny.”¹⁶

ENDNOTES

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SLOW ~~BUT~~ SURE PROGRESS

Education Equity in the Gulf South

BY NIK MITCHELL, PH.D.

Education equity has been a constant issue for the United States since the establishment of the country, and it continues to be a policy and cultural flashpoint deserving of study. Second-class education for African Americans, and by extension all people of color, was not an act of mere happenstance. It was, as James Anderson wrote, “the logical outgrowth of a social ideology designed to adjust black southerners to racially qualified forms of political and economic subordination.”¹ Historically, black education was a major political and policy issue in the United States and was largely shaped by white concerns about how newly freed blacks would be integrated into the national pool of skilled and unskilled labor, how the South would be integrated into the emerging industrialized economy of the 20th century, and how white supremacy would be maintained throughout the country.²

These concerns steered policy creation on a wide range of topics that ranged from the training of black teachers to the curriculum black students received. Subsequently, the education that was imposed upon the black community was designed to produce unskilled and semi-skilled workers through industrial education. To this end, in many states there was an intentional absence of higher education and even secondary education opportunities. These policies also led to the creation of historically black colleges and universities throughout the South for African Americans to provide adequate higher education and professional training, especially for African American teachers, to mitigate the effects of segregated and unequal school systems.

The “separate but equal” doctrine that governed education policy in the United States was later abandoned in the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision in 1954.³ The *Brown* decision ruled that racial segregation in public education was unconstitutional because it deprived students of color of equal educational opportunities and caused demonstrable harm. This was shown at trial court by the Clark doll tests.⁴ With this ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court required states and local governments to provide a quality education to students regardless of race; but this shift in doctrine away from “separate but equal” created an immediate and sustained resistance among policymakers, administrators, and the white public in general. The cumulative effect of this resistance from the past few decades is the slow but proven re-segregation of K-12 education in the United States along lines of race and socioeconomic status.⁵

But what about African American educational attainment? Has the end of the “separate but equal” doctrine increased this crucial metric for a healthy standard of living? This article focuses on African American education rates for adults ages 25 to 100 years old in the Gulf South states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

The data analyzed here was gathered from the 1970 U.S. census and the 2016 five-year averages (2012-2016) from the U.S. census. Data from 1970 was used because it is the first census collected after the fall of Jim Crow so all adults ages 25 and older in these states would have received their entire education under the “separate but equal” doctrine.⁶ Data from 2016 captured adults who received their education in the post-Brown context as well as older adults who were educated during Jim Crow.⁷

Figure one (opposite page) shows the combined African American educational attainment rates in five Gulf South states as a whole for 1970 and the five-year averages for 2016. According to U.S. census data from 1970 and the 2016 five-year averages, there has been a pronounced shift in African American educational attainment in the Gulf South states as a whole. In 1970, only 9.09 percent of African Americans had attended university, and another 14.48 percent had completed high school. Over three quarters—76.43 percent—of Gulf South African Americans had less than a high school education in 1970. In 2016, the less than high school education rate had contracted to 15.16 percent, while both the rates for high school completion and some college and above had increased to 40.25 percent and 44.59 percent respectively. Comparatively, the less than high school rate shrank by 61.27 percentage points.

Figure two (opposite page) shows African American educational attainment in each Gulf South state in 1970 and the five-year averages for 2016. According to U.S. census data from 1970 and the 2016 five-year averages, in each of the five Gulf South states African American educational attainment increased from 1970 to 2016. The largest drop in rates of less than a high school education from 1970 to 2016, 64.93 percentage points, occurred in Mississippi. The greatest increase in rates of some college and above, 41.62 percentage points, occurred in Texas.

The data show that ending Jim Crow segregation had a discernible affirmative impact on African American educational rates in the Gulf South states due to increased access to secondary and post-secondary education that followed the *Brown* decision.

Education is a basic human right. This is affirmed by both Catholic social teaching⁸ and in article 26 section 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, of which the United States is a signatory. While education equity between the races is still a pressing issue, data show that the end of the “separate but equal” doctrine had a positive impact on African American educational attainment.

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Figure 1: African American Educational Attainment in the Gulf South States Combined for Ages 25-100, 1970 vs. 2016

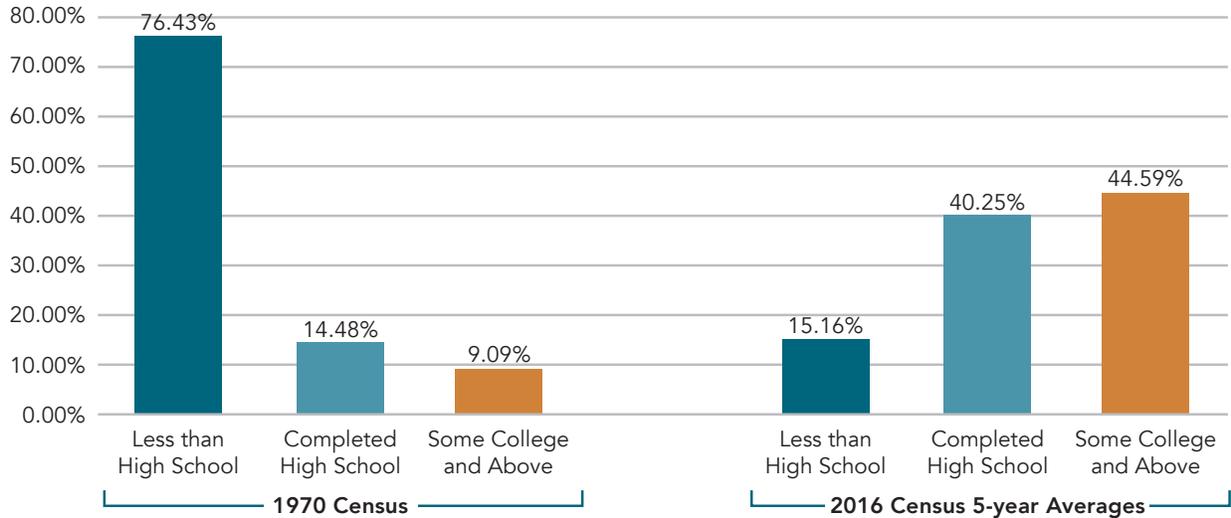
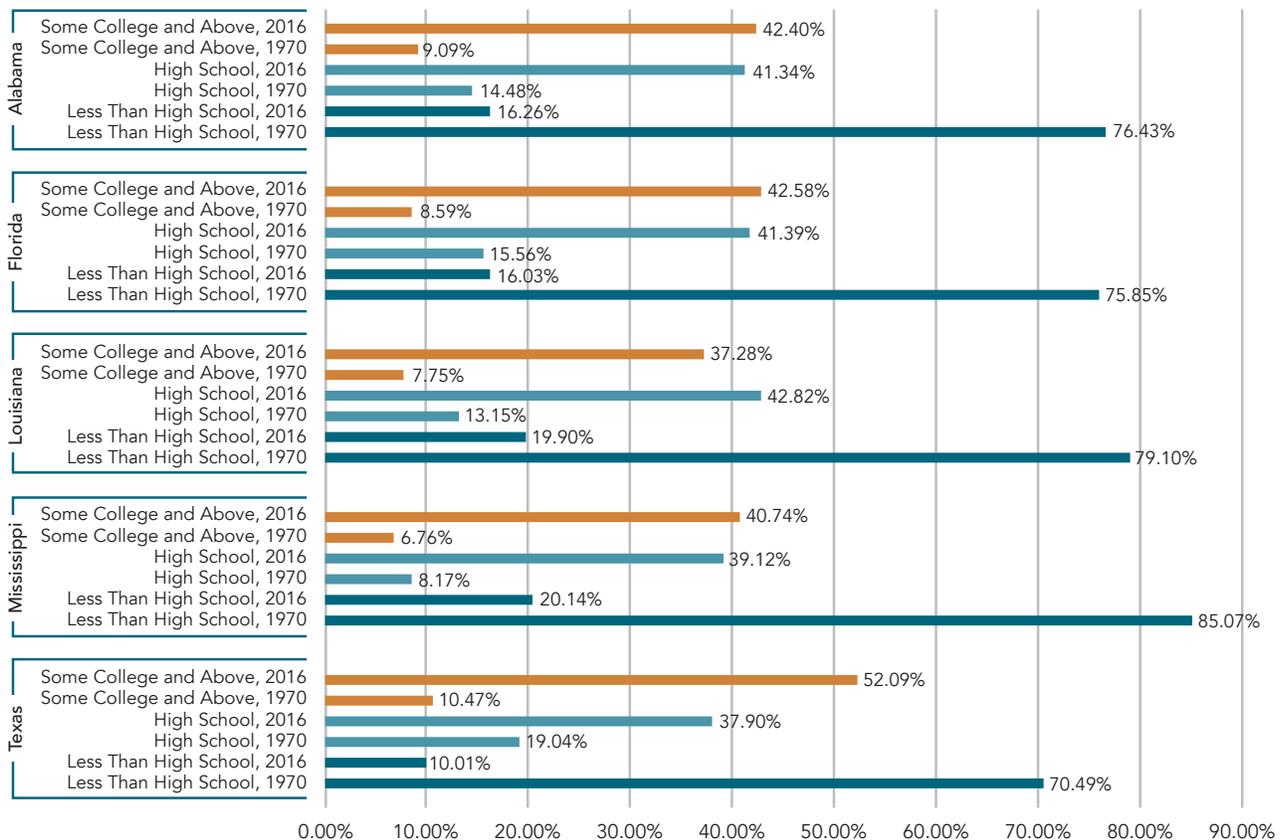


Figure 2: African American Educational Attainment by Gulf South State Ages 25-100, 1970 vs. 2016





CRIMINALIZING MIGRANTS: Immigrant Detention Explodes in Louisiana and Mississippi

BY SUE WEISHAR, PH.D.

It was good news for supporters of criminal justice reform this past spring when the Louisiana Department of Corrections announced a significant drop in the state's prison population as a result of 2017 sentencing reform bills. At a press conference on June 13, state officials touted a 20 percent decrease of persons incarcerated for nonviolent crimes and a 42 percent decrease in the number of persons sent to prison for drug possession since the reforms were implemented. The total number of persons imprisoned in Louisiana at the end of 2018 was 32,397, almost 19 percent lower than its peak in 2012. The governor told reporters that Louisiana was no longer the "incarceration capital" of the nation, and that "shedding that title is just the beginning."¹

Little did many anticipate that Louisiana's historic effort to de-incarcerate its residents would be the beginning of a massive expansion in the number of immigrants detained in the state. In 2016 there were two large immigrant detention centers in

Louisiana, LaSalle Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Processing Center in Jena and Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center in Pine Prairie, which together can detain up to 2,254 immigrants. By the end of this summer, ICE had signed agreements with local sheriffs and private prison companies to detain immigrants in nine former correctional facilities located in rural communities in north and southwest Louisiana, expanding the number of beds available to detain immigrants in Louisiana to 11,541, second only to Texas.² In August, 55,220 immigrants were detained by ICE nationwide—the highest number of detained immigrants ever.³ Since 2018, ICE has opened two large detention centers in Mississippi as well, in Natchez and Tutwiler.⁴ (See Chart 1).

ICE arrests have skyrocketed under the Trump administration, especially in the New Orleans ICE District, which saw a 54 percent increase in arrests in FY 2017, followed by another 29 percent increase in FY 2018.^{6,7} Since the early 1990s Louisiana

Chart 1: Information on LA and MS Immigration Detention Centers

Name of Facility	Location	Capacity ⁵	Operator	Driving Time from New Orleans	Percent Foreign Born in Parish/County
Bossier Parish Medium Security Facility	Plain Dealing, LA	600	Sheriff	5 hr 39 min	4.1
Richwood Correctional Center	Richwood, LA	1,129	LaSalle SW Corrections	4 hr 20 min	1.6
Jackson Parish Correctional Center	Jonesboro, LA	1,252	LaSalle SW Corrections	4 hr 30 min	1.3
Winn Correctional Center	Winnfield, LA	1,576	LaSalle SW Corrections	4 hr 11 min	0.4
River Correctional Center	Ferriday, LA	602	LaSalle SW Corrections	3 hr 13 min	0.9
LaSalle ICE Processing Center	Jena, LA	1,160	The GEO Group	3 hr 58 min	2.4
Catahoula Correctional Center	Harrisonburg, LA	835	LaSalle SW Corrections	3 hr 22 min	1.6
Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center	Pine Prairie, LA	1,094	The GEO Group	3 hr 10 min	3.2
Allen Correctional Center	Kinder, LA	1,538	Sheriff	3 hr 23 min	3.6
Basile Detention Center	Basile, LA	1,000	The GEO Group	3 hr 6 min	1.5
LaSalle Correctional Center	Olla, LA	755	LaSalle SW Corrections	4 hr 9 min	2.4
Sub-Total		11,541			
Adams County Correctional Center	Natchez, MS	2,232	CoreCivic	2 hr 23 min	8.6
Tallahatchie County Correctional Center	Tutwiler, MS	1,350	CoreCivic	5 hr 1 min	5.5
Sub-Total		3,582			
TOTAL		15,123		TOTAL Average = 3 hr 52 min	

sheriffs have incarcerated over half of state-sentenced prisoners in parish-owned-and-operated correctional facilities.⁸ When they started to lose their state prisoners—and state funding—to sentencing reforms, offers of ICE funding to detain the growing number of immigrants arrested by ICE were apparently too good to turn down. The ICE average daily rate to detain immigrants in Louisiana, approximately \$70, is far greater than the \$25.39 per diem offered by the Louisiana Department of Corrections!^{9,10} The warden at the East Baton Rouge Parish Jail recently informed advocates that it was getting difficult to place “overflow” arrestees since other parish jails were taking so many immigrant detainees.¹¹ A North Louisiana immigrant advocate told me the “only silver lining” to the arrangement was that parish prison facilities would have to improve their conditions of confinement to meet ICE detention standards.¹²

A lawsuit filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center in August makes clear that the conditions of ICE detention facilities in Louisiana and elsewhere are far from satisfactory, however. The suit alleges that, due to ICE’s “abject failure to monitor and enforce detention standards” at the approximately 158 detention facilities overseen by the agency, detained immigrants are being denied health care, discriminated against because of their disabilities, and subjected to solitary confinement.¹³

According to Homero Lopez, Executive Director of Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy, a non-profit providing free legal services to immigrants detained in Louisiana, approximately 75-80 percent of immigrants detained in the state are asylum seekers who requested asylum at the southern border.¹⁴ During the Obama Administration asylum seekers were often released on bond (usually granted by a judge) or parole (granted by ICE when the asylum seeker’s identity and lack of danger to the community have been established). Now immigration judges in Louisiana routinely deny almost every request to bond out of immigration detention, while the New Orleans ICE District Office has a near-blanket policy of denying parole.^{15,16} If the asylum seeker remains detained, her chances at obtaining asylum from a Louisiana-based immigration judge are bleak. Between 2013 and 2018, over 84 percent of asylum cases heard by Louisiana-based immigration judges were denied.¹⁷ (The national rate of denial in that same time period was 56 percent.)¹⁸

After fleeing persecution at the hands of government officials or gangs in their home countries, asylum seekers detained for months on end in Louisiana immigration detention facilities are becoming desperate. They have staged hunger strikes in Ferriday, Jena, and Bossier Parish.^{19,20} On October 15, an asylum seeker from Cuba, Roylan Hernandez Diaz, detained since May, committed suicide in the Richwood Correctional Center in Monroe, Louisiana.²¹

Because detention centers in Louisiana and Mississippi are located in remote rural areas, it is very difficult for detained asylum seekers to obtain the competent legal counsel so critical to successfully pursue an asylum case. The average drive time from Louisiana and Mississippi immigrant detention centers to New Orleans, the city in the two-state area with the largest number of immigration attorneys, is three hours and 52 minutes.²² Most detained immigrants speak Spanish or another foreign language. Only 4.2 percent of Louisiana residents and 2.3 percent of Mississippi residents are foreign-born. Texas, with 16.9 percent of its residents foreign-born, has 20 times the number of foreign

language speakers as Louisiana and Mississippi combined.²³ A member of my New Orleans church parish from Mexico, recently released from a Louisiana detention center, told me that detained immigrants there were routinely asked to interpret for prison officials, even regarding medical issues.²⁴

We must demand that Congress de-fund the hyper-detention of immigrants and support humane and effective community-based alternatives to detention for asylum seekers, like the one operated by Catholic Charities of New Orleans from 1998 to 2003.²⁵ How else can people of faith and good will in Louisiana and Mississippi respond to this human rights crisis in our “backyards”? One way is by volunteering with Detention Lifeline or Freedom for Immigrants to visit detained immigrants and, for some, assist with their cases.²⁶ If Louisiana and Mississippi churches could mobilize members living near detention centers to visit detained immigrants, just their presence could help ensure that humane conditions of confinement are being observed.

We are living in an era of relentless attacks on immigrants. So, too, our prayers, accompaniment work, and advocacy for just and humane immigration policies and laws must be relentless.

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EDUCATION - ENDNOTES

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