

# JustSouth QUARTERLY



SPRING 2019

# THE ENCUESTRO PROJECT

## Seeking the Grace of Encounter on the El Paso/Juarez Border

BY MARY BAUDOQUIN<sup>1</sup>

From the front porch of Casa Encuentro in El Paso, Texas, you can see Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, about a mile away. The thin ribbon of water that separates these two cities and the countries of the United States and Mexico—the Rio Grande—is only discernable at turns in the river where sunlight reflects on the water. A large red X sculpture is visible to the southeast, but from the vantage point of Casa Encuentro, it is impossible to tell if the structure is in Mexico or the United States (it's in Mexico). On the immaculate streets surrounding Casa Encuentro—where Spanish is heard more often than English, adobe style homes feature frescos of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and big American cars rev their motors to ascend the steep hills—one gets a sense of being in two worlds, two cultures, two realities at the same time and in the same place.

Casa Encuentro is the home of the Encuentro Project, a new collaborative and inter-congregational ministry involving the Jesuits of El Paso, the Marist Brothers of the United States and Mexico, the Hope Border Institute, and numerous other organizations on both sides of the border. The project, which is the vision of JSRI Associate Fr. Rafael Garcia, S.J., launched its ministry of encounter in December

2018, drawing its inspiration from the call of Pope Francis for a “culture of encounter” to address the fear and indifference that marginalizes migrants and refugees.

By offering programming and lodging for border immersion experiences to groups from high schools, universities, and parishes, the Encuentro Project aims to help participants gain a greater understanding of the complex history and present reality of migration in the El Paso—Ciudad Juarez border community and inspire participants to challenge the borders in their own communities that push immigrants to the margins.



*Fr. Rafael Garcia, S.J. speaks to Queen's University students outside of Casa Encuentro.*

—Continued on page 2

INSIDE

Catholic Social Thought and Integral Human Development ..... page 3

Hate Crimes ..... page 4

Raise the Wage ..... page 6

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS | COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES



*Sacred Heart religious education participants and students from Jesuit College Preparatory Dallas converse while on an Encuentro Project immersion trip.*

Immersion programs, typically four to six days in length, are tailored to the needs and ages of participants. Each Encuentro Project experience typically includes:

- Direct work and encounter opportunities with asylum seekers, migrants, or refugees, either in a local emergency shelter or detention center, or through the education and social service programs offered by *El Sagrado Corazon*, the Jesuit parish in El Paso;
- Education in Catholic Social Teaching on migration;
- Discussion of the push and pull factors causing migration from Central America and Mexico to the United States;
- Site visits in El Paso and Las Cruces, and if desired, to organizations serving Ciudad Juarez residents across the US-Mexico border; and
- Evening reflections, prayer, and community living.

Fr. Garcia also serves as the Director of the Encuentro Project. Under his leadership the Project is deeply impacting participants' attitudes toward and understanding of the harsh realities faced by migrants at the southern border of the United States through experiences like the following:

- **Volunteering at a temporary shelter in El Paso for families seeking asylum after being released by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.** Lena Chapin, who led an Ignatian Solidarity Network sponsored trip for Jesuit parishes in January, expressed the feelings of many of the Encuentro participants who visited the shelter during their trip:

There weren't divisions just because they had passed through the wall or crossed a borderline. There was no "us" and "them." There were simply parents sharing understanding glances as children made messes out of cookies and juice. They were weary travelers appreciative of clean sheets and the promise of a good night sleep.

• **Visiting "the wall."**

Participants can reach through the huge steel slats separating the United States from Mexico and shake hands with residents from Ciudad Juarez, who themselves may be permanently separated from family members by the very same wall. In a recent excursion to the border wall by students from Jesuit College Preparatory School in Dallas, Texas, children from Ciudad Juarez passed their puppies to the Jesuit Prep students through the slats in the wall that they themselves are forbidden to pass through.



*A student from Jesuit College Preparatory Dallas holds a puppy from a child in Ciudad Juarez.*

- **Sharing Eucharist with men and women being held at ICE's El Paso immigrant detention center.**<sup>2</sup> Sue Weishar, Migration Specialist for JSRI, describes the significance of this encounter for her:

The harsh bright lights and the metal everything décor of the prison cafeteria were in stark contrast to Fr. Rafa's homily on the tender mercy and infinite love of God. While serving communion to the women, whose painful journeys to this sorrowful place I could only imagine, I experienced clearly and profoundly how the Eucharist—no matter border walls, prison bars, or other artificial barriers—united us as we became what we received: the Body of Christ.

Internationally renowned author and speaker Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM has observed, "when we receive and empathize with the face of the 'other' (especially the suffering face), it leads to transformation of our whole being. It creates a moral demand on our heart that is far more compelling than the Ten Commandments written on stone or paper."<sup>3</sup> The Encuentro Project seeks to provide many more people the transformative experience of encounter. For additional information and to inquire about Encuentro Project border immersion trips, please contact Fr. Garcia at [encuentroproject@gmail.com](mailto:encuentroproject@gmail.com) or 505-288-9552.



*Lee Thielen, an Encuentro participant from Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in San Antonio, speaks with a little girl from Anapra through the fence that separates Mexico from the US.*

—Endnotes on page 8



JESUIT SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

6363 St. Charles Avenue, Box 94  
New Orleans, LA 70118-6143

(504) 864-7746  
jsri@loyno.edu  
www.loyno.edu/jsri

Connect with us!



giving.loyno.edu/jsri

Nonprofit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
New Orleans, LA  
Permit No. 213

## ENCUENTRO - ENDNOTES —Continued from page 2

- Mary Baudouin is the Provincial Assistant for Social Ministries of the US Central and Southern Jesuit Province. She serves on the Encuentro Project Board of Directors and as a JSRI Associate.
- Through the Jesuit Refugee Service sponsored chaplaincy program, Fr. Garcia is one of two volunteer priests who celebrate Masses for hundreds of men and women every Friday at the El Paso ICE detention center.
- Rohr, R. (2019, January 31). The Face of the Other. *Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation* at <https://cac.org/the-face-of-the-other-2019-01-31/>

## MINIMUM WAGE - ENDNOTES —Continued from page 7

- The source of this estimate is the Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator. I measured inflation from the effective start date of the \$1.60 minimum wage, which was February 1968 and ended with December 2018. Based on this calculation, the inflation-adjusted peak minimum wage would be \$11.75.
- Economic Policy Institute. (August 2018). *The Productivity-Pay Gap*.
- Occasional research in recent years, such as a controversial CBO report (*The Effects of a Minimum-Wage Increase on Employment and Family Income*) from February 2014 still concludes that there are clear job losses associated with minimum wage hikes. However, the overwhelming contemporary evidence suggests otherwise. Here is just a sample: Jesse Rothstein. (April 27, 2017). *Do Minimum Wages Really Kill Jobs?* Econofact; Paul K. Sonn and Yannet Lathrop.

- (May 5, 2016.) *Raise Wages, Kill Jobs? Seven Decades of Historical Data Find No Correlation Between Minimum Wage Increases and Employment Levels*. National Employment Law Project; Paul Wolfson and Dale Belman. (last revised, December 14, 2016). *15 Years of Research on U.S. Employment and the Minimum Wage*.
- John Schmitt. (February 2013). *Why Does the Minimum Wage Have No Discernible Effect on Employment?* Center for Economic and Policy Research;
- This press release was published in The Missouri Times on September 13, 2018, under the title *Business Support Grows for Raising the Minimum Wage: More than 400 Business Owners Endorse Statement Backing Prop B*. More than 700 business owners eventually signed on to the statement.
- W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. *Does increasing the minimum wage lead to high prices?* Retrieved on February 5, 2019 from Upjohn.org. Arthur MacEwan. (July/August 2014). *The Minimum Wage and Inflation*. Dollars and Sense.
- Economic Policy Institute. *Worker Rights Preemption in the US*. Retrieved February 5, 2019: <https://www.epi.org/preemption-map/>
- National Conference of State Legislatures. (January 7, 2019). *State Minimum Wages / 2019 Minimum Wage by State*.
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (February 2014). *Just Wage and the Federal Minimum Wage*.
- Tony Magliano. (February 3, 2014). *Raising the minimum wage an economic and moral necessity*. National Catholic Reporter.
- In a 2018 report titled "Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing," the National Low Income Housing Coalition found that it takes an income of \$22.10 per hour to afford the average modest two-bedroom rental in the United States. Report accessed February 12, 2019: [https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR\\_2018.pdf](https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_2018.pdf).
- Kunal Sindhu. (January 23, 2019.) *Raising the Minimum Wage Would Save Lives*. Huffington Post; American Public Health Association. (November 1, 2016.) *Improving Health by Increasing the Minimum Wage*.

**JustSouth Quarterly one-page articles are available free at [loyno.edu/jsri/publications](http://loyno.edu/jsri/publications)**

JustSouth is published quarterly by the Jesuit Social Research Institute, College of Arts and Sciences, Loyola University New Orleans, 6363 St. Charles Avenue, Box 94, New Orleans, LA 70118

The JustSouth Monthly is published 12 times a year and is available upon request without charge at [jsri@loyno.edu](mailto:jsri@loyno.edu). Copyright 2014 © Jesuit Social Research Institute. ISSN 2161-315X

## THE MISSION OF THE JESUIT SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Jesuit Social Research Institute works to transform the Gulf South through action research, analysis, education, and advocacy on the core issues of poverty, race, and migration. The Institute is a collaboration of Loyola University New Orleans and the Society of Jesus rooted in the faith that does justice.



JESUITS<sup>®</sup>  
USA Central and  
Southern Province