

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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"We Belong to Each Other"

Forgetting Our Oneness at a Town Hall Meeting

by Sue Weishar, Ph.D.

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JSRI Upcoming Events

June 16-21

Fr. Kammer and Ms. Baudouin will coordinate and be trainers for the Ministry of Management Institute held on Loyola's campus and sponsored by the New Orleans Jesuit Province.

June 17

Dr. Weishar will participate in a grantees meeting for the Langeloth Foundation in NYC.

June 25

Fr. Kammer will do a presentation on communal discernment to the steering committee for the Synod of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

JSRI Recent Activities

May 13

Dr. Mikulich presented at a faculty symposium that concluded his year of work as an Ignatian Faculty Fellows.

May 14

Fr. Kammer participated in a meeting of the Mission Committee of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans.

May 2014

Dr. Weishar agreed to chair the Speakers Committee for the [Gillespie Memorial Community Breakfast](#), a community coalition which addresses social justice issues affecting New Orleans and the Gulf South region.

June 10

Dr. Weishar addressed the migration committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on alternatives to immigrant detention.

June 10-12

Fr. Kammer directed the Ignatian Volunteers retreat in St. Louis.

June 12

Dr. Mikulich participated in a field hearing and community roundtable in New Orleans conducted by Director Richard Cordray of the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

In late August last year, two months after the U.S. Senate had passed a bipartisan immigration reform bill, I attended a Town Hall meeting called by Congressman Steve Scalise. The meeting was held in Lakeview --one of the New Orleans neighborhoods hardest hit by flooding when the levees failed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Immigrant workers, many undocumented, were essential in rebuilding Lakeview and much of the Gulf Coast after Katrina[1]. I came to the meeting assuming that a neighborhood that had benefited so much from immigrant laborers would be open to the possibility of immigration reform. I was proven wrong.

The meeting began with the obligatory slams of the Affordable Care Act and all things Obama. Forceful arguments on the need for immigration reform were soon voiced, however, by several of Congressman Scalise's constituents, including JSRI board member and Tulane University professor of psychology Dr. Oscar Barbarin. One young teacher from St. Charles Parish was in tears when she explained that although she and her husband, a construction worker from Mexico, had been married for seven years, they were too fearful of their future together to start a family because he is undocumented and there is no way under current law for him to legalize his status.

Almost every chair in the church hall where the Town Hall was being held was filled when about thirty minutes into the program a large group of Latino immigrants and their children entered the room. With no place to sit, the group—totaling about forty people, stood in the back of the room. After a few minutes one of their members, through an interpreter, told of how her family's life had been upended when her husband and the father of her three children had been deported. She pleaded with the Congressman to work for immigration reform.

I was startled by the response the pleas of that young mother and other Latinos generated from some audience members. When I objected to the ingratitude and injustice of our community benefitting from the labor of undocumented immigrants and then refusing them the means to legalization, an elderly woman with a walker exclaimed, "We paid them for their work. That doesn't mean they get to stay!" One middle-aged man was so overcome with anger that when it was his turn to speak all he could manage to say while pointing at the Latino immigrants was, "They can't even speak English!"

Mother Teresa observed that the source of many of the world's problems is that we've "forgotten that we belong to one another." What caused the communal amnesia displayed at the Town Hall meeting? My sense is that it was fear--fear of the "other", fear of change, fear of losing one's privileges.

This summer there appears to be a window of opportunity for House Republicans to finally take action on immigration reform. I urge our readers not to allow the forces of fear and prejudice to maintain their stranglehold on reforming our unjust immigration system that is a stain on the soul of our nation. Please stand with our undocumented brothers and sisters and demand that your Congressman work for immigration reform.

To learn how you can advocate for just immigration reform please visit the links below or e-mail sweishar@loyno.edu to receive action alerts.



[1] A study conducted in March 2006 found that almost half the reconstruction workforce in New Orleans was Latino, and 54 percent of that group were undocumented. See Laurel E. Fletcher, Phuong Pham, Eric Stover, and Patrick Vinck, *Rebuilding After Katrina: A Population-based Study of Labor and Human Rights in New Orleans*, International Human Rights Law Clinic and Berkeley Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley, and Payson Center for International Development and Technology Transfer, Tulane University, June, 2006.

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