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JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Creating a Culture of Encounter

Through Prayer, Dialog, and Listening

by Susan Weishar, Ph.D.

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JSRI Upcoming Events

June 1

Jesuit scholastic Sephen Pitts begins his summer internship working on economic justice projects with Alí Bustamante, Economic Policy Specialist.

June 23-28

Ms. Baudouin and Fr. Kammer will lead the Ministry of Management program of the Jesuit Province held on the Loyola campus.

JSRI Recent Activities

May 12-17

Fr. Kammer chaired the working sessions of the [General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis](#) in Rome, Italy. This included concelebration with Pope Francis at St. Peter's.

May 8

Fr. Kammer preached the homily for the Baccalaureate Mass for the Loyola graduating class.

May 7

Dr. Mikulich participated in a conference with national faith leaders on the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's

As migrant deaths in the Mediterranean Sea continue to mount and U.S. politicians persist in hardline rhetoric opposing immigration reform, Pope Francis's 2014 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees takes on greater urgency: "A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization—all typical of a throwaway culture—towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world."^[1]

How can a "culture of encounter" with undocumented immigrants be realized in our community, especially considering barriers of language, class, location, and privilege? Perhaps by creating a welcoming space of equals, where respect and dialog are nurtured and facilitated and the deepest values of our faith traditions are recognized and affirmed. These were the goals of the Catholic Teach-In on Migration for Young Catholics, held this past semester in the Audubon Room at Loyola.

Participants included fifteen immigrant teens and their parents—all members of the Congress of Day Laborers, sixty juniors and seniors from Jesuit, St. Mary's Dominican, Cabrini, and Brother Martin High Schools, and twenty chaperones. Eleven Loyola students from Honors, the Spanish Department, and LUCAP's Loyola Immigration Advocates served as small group discussion leaders. Simultaneous and consecutive interpretation were provided by sixteen students with Loyola's Interpreting and Translation program.

The Teach-In began and ended in prayers for love and hospitality for those who migrate. Participants were asked to follow "ground rules", i.e. treat each other with respect and aim to understand one another's points of view. After brief overviews from JSRI staff on the Church's teachings on migration and the U.S. role in undermining healthy economies and democracy in Central America, local Catholic high school students listened intently as young immigrants bravely told their migration stories in small group discussions, including why they and their

May 5-7

JSRI Board Member Dr. Manuel Vasquez, Fr. Kammer, and Dr. Weishar facilitated a meeting in Atlanta on how faith leaders can advance the discourse on immigration.

May 5

Dr. Mikulich met with Mark G. Walters, a community organizer with the Micah Project.

April 30

Fr. Kammer delivered two lectures on Vatican II's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World at a New Orleans Clergy Study Day.

April 26-28

Fr. Kammer led three days of reflection in New Orleans on social justice for the second year novices of the Jesuit Central and Southern Province.

April 25

Fr. Kammer provided the second workshop on the social implications of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius for the Ignatian Spirituality Institute in Lake Dallas, TX.

April 18

Fr. Kammer delivered the keynote address for a series on Pope Francis' *Joy of the Gospel* in Baton Rouge.

April 16

Dr. Weishar helped organize an Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Justice and Compassion for Immigrants in front of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. [Twenty-three local faith leaders](#) provided statements in support of President Obama's Executive Action on Immigration.

challenges they face in our community living undocumented. The small group discussions were led by Loyola students, who were trained by JSRI for this task.



Photo Credit: Kyle Encar, Loyola University New Orleans

As participants huddled closely together in their groups to hear the teens and their parents speak, there was a sense that something sacred was taking place: vulnerability giving way to trust; mutuality and presence; giving and receiving.[2] I observed a Loyola student hugging an immigrant mother while she tearfully told of the pain of being separated from her children. When an immigrant boy broke down when trying to speak of his mixed emotions about leaving his uncle's family in Honduras, a student from Brother Martin, in a spontaneous act of compassion and solidarity, rushed to the front of the room to embrace him. After the event students from Jesuit and Brother Martin eagerly exchanged phone numbers with an immigrant teen who had shared with them the loneliness he has felt since leaving Honduras.

The most frequent comment from U.S. teens in event evaluations was that the Teach-In opened their eyes. An immigrant teen wrote, "[I learned] that it is not bad to be an immigrant." What more can Jesuit institutions do to create a culture of encounter with vulnerable people marginalized by fear and indifference?

[1] Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html

[2]See Richard Rohr, *Job and the Mystery of Suffering* (New York, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), p. 157.

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