

# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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## Out of Control

### Pope Denounces Criminal Justice Systems

by Alex Mikulich, Ph.D.

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“The criminal justice system is out of control,”<sup>[1]</sup> proclaimed Pope Francis to the International Association of Penal Law on October 23, 2014.

#### JSRI Upcoming Events

##### November 16

Fr. Kammer will present two workshops at the [Ignatian Family Teach-in](#) in Washington, D.C.

##### November 18

Dr. Mikulich will speak at the “[Fergusons Across America](#)” event on Loyola's campus.

Francis laments how societies have become overly punitive, thereby losing the capacity to practice the “primacy of life and the dignity of the human person.”

Sadly, Louisiana is a prime example of a criminal justice system out of control, as the state “locks up more of its people than anywhere in the world.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Newsmedia headlined the Pope's call for the abolition of the death penalty and his declaration that the “life sentence was taken out of the Vatican's Criminal Code” because a “life sentence is just a death penalty in disguise.”

Louisiana serves as exhibit #1 of applying the “death penalty in disguise,” as it incarcerates the highest percentage of inmates serving life sentences without the possibility of parole (LWOP), including some who never committed a violent crime.

#### JSRI Recent Activities

##### November 7-8

The JSRI Board of Advisory met on the Loyola campus.

##### November 6

Dr. Mikulich met with the Office of Black Catholics and archdiocesan leaders to plan a Black history month event for high school students.

##### November 5

Dr. Mikulich participated in the meeting of Catholics for Repeal held at the Diocese of Lafayette.

##### November 2-6

Dr. Weishar presented a paper at

As the Times-Picayune observes in an op-ed that underscores the Pope's message, Louisiana's “wasteful approach denies any possibility of redemption—throwing away lives but also throwing away money. An offender who begins a life sentence at 20-something and lives to be 70 will end up costing the state \$1 million.”<sup>[3]</sup>



The Times-Picayune's calculation does not include the social and economic costs of lost human productivity over the course of a lifetime to the inmate, his family, and community.

Yet the Pope's address goes well beyond a simple criticism of the death penalty and LWOP, as he develops a critical analysis of the roots of the present crisis.

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Mexico.

### October 28

Three Loyola students presented their research papers funded under a JSRI grant from the Keller Family Foundation.

### October 23-25

At the [5th Conference on Immigration to the US South](#), Dr. Weishar presented two papers and she and Fr. Kammer each led two panel discussions.

### October 20

JSRI staff briefed Fr. Binoy Jacob, SJ, of the Kerala Province on the intricacies of founding a peace and justice institute for his province.

### October 16 & November 4

Fr. Kammer met with the Social Justice and Outreach Focus Team of the Archdiocesan Synod.

### October 9

Mr. Bustamante commented on Florida's slow processing of unemployment claims in the [Tampa Bay Times](#).

### October 7 & 28

Dr. Mikulich led two lunch discussions on anti-racism efforts at Loyola for students and faculty.

and private "incitement for revenge," rages against racial and ethnic minorities, without sufficient proof or due legal process.

Second, the lust for revenge, in turn, fuels a "penal populism" that views public punishment as the resolution for "the most disparate social problems, as if completely different diseases could be treated with the same medicine." In other words, society places too much trust in punitive policies to resolve social problems that really demand other public policy tools to achieve "social and economic inclusion."

Penal populism gains cultural strength in the practice of "scapegoating," the deliberate process of blaming particular social groups, especially racial minorities and those who are economically poor. The stereotyped, the Pope explains, are "fabricated" to "represent all the characteristics that society perceives or interprets as threatening."

A perverse economic system makes Louisiana's penal system nearly uncontrollable. A majority of Louisiana's inmates are housed in for-profit facilities, a \$182 million industry that relies on a constant flow of inmates for profit.<sup>[4]</sup> Most private-prison entrepreneurs are also sheriffs, who take most of the \$24.39 "per diem" the state pays per inmate per day to buy more vehicles and build profit. Almost none of the per diem is spent for rehabilitation programs.

Private prison interests, including sheriffs, remain a major roadblock for Louisiana to achieve the kind of comprehensive sentencing reform that Mississippi achieved in 2013.

It is time for Louisiana to heed the Pope's call to practice the fundamental primacy of life and human dignity so that we may realize justice and glimpse the "joy of the Gospel."<sup>[5]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> "Address of Pope Francis to the Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law," Hall of Popes, 23 October 2014.

<sup>[2]</sup> "Louisiana Incarcerated: How We Built the World's Prison Capital," The Times-Picayune, An Eight-Part Series.

<sup>[3]</sup> "Louisiana's Treatment of prisoners is a vicious cycle: An editorial," The Times-Picayune, May 20, 2012.

<sup>[4]</sup> Cindy Chang, "Louisiana is the world's prison capital," The Times-Picayune, May 13, 2012.

<sup>[5]</sup> Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium of Pope Francis.

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