

# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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## Our Better Angels

### Senate Committee Rejects Effort to Scapegoat Immigrants

by Sue Weishar, Ph.D.

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#### JSRI is Hiring

JSRI is accepting applications for an administrative assistant. Click [HERE](#) to learn more and apply.

#### JSRI Upcoming Events

**June 17**

Fr. Kammer will lead a strategic planning meeting in Baltimore for the Ignatian Solidarity Network.

**June 20**

Bill McCormick, SJ, Ph.D. will start a summer internship at JSRI.

#### JSRI Recent Activities

**June 16**

Ms. Donovan attended the Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families legislative wrap-up.

**June 9**

Fr. Kammer presented on living wages in Louisiana to the Archdiocesan Priests Council.

**June 6**

Dr. Weishar participated in a meeting of Langeloth Foundation grantees in New York City.

**June 6**

Fr. Kammer conducted a day on Catholic social thought for education and pastoral leaders for Loyola Institute for Ministry.

**June 4**

Ms. Donovan and Fr. Kammer appeared on WWNO's *All Things New Orleans* radio show to discuss recently released CFPB rules related to payday lending.

**May 31**

JSRI held a Catholic Teach-In on migration at Blessed Trinity Church in New Orleans.

**May 26**

Emily Polvado began work as a JSRI summer intern. She will assist with tracking alleged human rights abuses at privately owned and/or operated prisons and immigration detention centers.

**May 25**

Dr. Weishar participated in a press conference to protest the inhumane and unconstitutional

In the recently ended regular session of the Louisiana legislature, immigrant advocates worked hard to convince state legislators that the bias-free policing policies adopted by the NOPD and Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office [1] did not make New Orleans a "sanctuary city," and that a bill introduced to prohibit New Orleans' bias-free law enforcement policies, HB 1148, should be opposed because it scapegoats immigrants and would undermine community safety.

Sanctuary is an ancient Christian tradition that ensures anyone who seeks the mercy of the Church will be protected. Unfortunately, nativist politicians have besmirched that term by implying that cities that have adopted bias-free law enforcement policies, like New Orleans, are "sanctuary cities" where an undocumented immigrant is not held accountable for crimes he/she may commit. That bias-free police policies do not in any way permit or encourage immigrants to commit crimes seemed lost on Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry and State Representative Valerie Hodges, the major proponents of HB 1148.

When defending the bill in the Louisiana legislature the misinformation, fear-mongering, and scapegoating Landry and Hodges engaged in was stunning. The AG claimed that New Orleans law enforcement policies were creating a "safe harbor for terrorists," defying both common sense and [national security experts](#) who understand that building trust between police and community members, including immigrants, is key to thwarting terrorist acts. He also asserted that "sanctuary city laws" will lead to an "automatic" increase in crime, even though cities with bias-free policing policies, [like San Francisco, have seen their murder rates](#) drop much more than similar cities without bias-free policing policies. His most outrageous assertion was that New Orleans law enforcement policies give undocumented immigrants "more rights than your average citizen." Is it possible our state's chief attorney is unaware of the rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship?

The most offensive statements, however, came from Rep. Hodges. When her bill was going down the drain after being [dramatically condemned by Jefferson Parish Sheriff Newell Normand](#), she exclaimed, "What about the children who are being raped and murdered [by undocumented immigrants]?"



Photo: *Scapegoat*, bronze sculpture by C. Jongen, 2012

After hearing Hodges' and Landry's testimonies, Sr. Maura O'Donovan, CHF herself an immigrant from Ireland and a leader of Burning Bush: Catholic Sisters and Brothers for an End to Violence, told the committee she was "Appalled, embarrassed and saddened... appalled that some in public office... whom we hold to high standards of decency, would so engage in the scaremongering and stereotyping... appalled at the indifference of the plight of immigrants, who are often fleeing for their lives from poverty, crime, and corruption in their own countries... saddened, especially in the presence of my Latino sisters and brothers, at the tenor and tone of the debate."

conditions facing incarcerated men and women held at the Orleans Justice Center.

#### May 24

Dr. Weishar testified opposing HB 1148, a bill prohibiting so-called “sanctuary cities,” at a hearing of Louisiana Senate Judiciary Committee A. Later that day the committee voted to defer the bill, thus killing its chances of passing.

#### May 21

Fr. Kammer celebrated the closing Eucharist for graduates of the Loyola Institute for Ministry.

#### May 17

Ms. Donovan served as a panel judge for Senior Thesis Presentations on Policy Issues at Sci Academy, a Collegiate Academies School.

#### May 16-17

Dr. Weishar and Fr. Kammer co- led a meeting in New Orleans of the Advisory Board for *Changing the Human Face of Immigration*.

Sr. O’Donovan concluded her remarks by asking the committee to “take to heart the words of Pope Francis, who has repeatedly challenged the fear and mistrust that marginalizes immigrants: *‘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.’*”

The homicide in San Francisco of Kate Steinle by an undocumented immigrant was tragic. What also is tragic is that horrible incident is being used to make political hay by ambitious politicians and scapegoat undocumented immigrants living Louisiana where they work hard to support themselves and their families, contribute to on-going recovery efforts, and enrich our faith communities.

Thankfully, the Senate Judiciary Committee rejected HB 1148.

[1] In 2016 the City of New Orleans created a bias-free policing policy as part of a federal consent decree following the NOPD’s participation in widely condemned immigration raids that resulted in numerous civil rights abuses. The policy requires that New Orleans police do not inquire into the immigration status of people with whom they interact and carefully delineates when and how the NOPD should cooperate with ICE enforcement actions. In 2013 the Orleans Parish Sheriff’s Office agreed not to respond to voluntary requests from ICE to hold immigrants beyond the time the sheriff would otherwise release them, also as part of a federal consent decree. [Law enforcement leaders have endorsed such policies](#) because they build trust in local law enforcement and make it more likely for immigrants to report crimes, thus increasing overall community safety. New Orleans bias-free policing policies also uphold basic Constitutional rights of due process and equal protection under the law and were approved by a federal consent decree monitor and U.S. District Court judge.

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