

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Number 59

May 2016

The Meaning of Social Justice JSRI's *JustSouth Index*

by Jeanie Donovan, MPA, MPH

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JSRI Upcoming Events

May 21

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

May 31

JSRI will hold a Catholic Teach-In on migration at Blessed Trinity Church in New Orleans at 6:30.

June 6

Fr. Kammer will conduct a day on Catholic social thought for education and pastoral leaders.

June 20

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

When JSRI released the inaugural edition of the JustSouth Index on March 17, 2016, we were grateful to receive coverage by various local, state, and national news outlets. With media coverage, however, comes the opportunity for online readers to post their thoughts, comments and feedback without filter. The online comments related to the JustSouth Index included the usual array of submissions ranging from insightful to incendiary to incoherent. While most were not particularly notable, one provocative comment gave me pause. It made the claim that social justice is a “meaningless term.” While initially I was angered by the comment, I soon realized that it was a teachable moment.

I suspect the author of the comment may have meant that social justice is an ambiguous term; and one that they have seen the term applied in a wide variety of contexts. While social justice is in fact a conceptual term, it does have very specific meaning, especially in the context of Catholic social teaching. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) states that a society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and vocation. This includes having the material, cultural, and spiritual resources needed to achieve full development and contribute to society.

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JSRI Recent Activities

May 12

Ms. Baudouin and Dr. Weishar attended the annual meeting of Corrections Corporation of America, where Ms. Baudouin provided a statement in support of the implementation of human rights policies at CCA facilities.

April 26

Dr. Weishar, Fr. Kammer, and JSRI Mississippi Associate Cirilo Villa led [a Catholic Teach-In on Migration](#) at Our Lady of Fatima Church in Biloxi, Mississippi.

April 26

Dr. Weishar was a guest on Garland Robinette's *Think Radio*, about the need to oppose anti-immigration legislation being considered in the Louisiana House of Representatives.

April 24-26

JSRI staff assisted by board member Sal Longoria gave a workshop on Jesuit Justice for Jesuit Novices.

April 22

Fr. Kammer spoke on *Laudato Si'* at Fordham University.

April 21

Dr. Weishar testified before the Louisiana House Judiciary Committee opposing two bills outlawing so-called “sanctuary cities.”



In the JustSouth Index, we attempted to measure social justice quantitatively by selecting indicators that represent the sort of resources that are essential to human wellbeing. Specifically, we selected nine indicators related to health, education, and standard of living that could be used to assess whether individuals in each state have the resources they need to fully contribute to the common good of all of us. While the selection of indicators is not a perfect science, it is one way for us as social scientists to concretely compare how residents of the Gulf South are faring with regard to the fundamental rights and needs of the human person.

We found that many residents of the Gulf South, especially those who belong to racial and ethnic minority groups, do not have the resources they need to prosper. For example, immigrants in the Gulf South are significantly less likely to have health insurance coverage than native-born residents. In Louisiana and Mississippi, minority workers earn just four-fifths of what their white counterparts of similar age, education, and occupation earn. Public schools have much higher rates of racial segregation in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana than in other parts of the country. What's more, 90 percent of those in the lowest income quartile in the Gulf South states struggle to afford safe, secure housing.

To gain a better understanding of both the meaning of social justice and the measures that we used to quantify it, I encourage you to read through the full [JustSouth Index report](#) and explore the [corresponding maps and data](#) on our website for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. If you would like a hard copy of the report, have questions, or would like to request a presentation on the data, please email me at jdonova@loyno.edu. Further, if you are interested in joining JSRI's advocacy network to improve equity and justice in the Gulf South, please sign up at www.voterveil.net/loynola/register.

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