

For the Sake of the U.S. Children of Immigration

by Anna Alicia Chavez, JSRI Migration Specialist

Among the many childhood memories I have is one of the day my mother was detained at the entry port of the U.S.-Mexico border. It was a late Saturday evening and we were headed back home after a splendid day spent with our family in Ciudad Juarez across the border from El Paso, Texas. As we approached the inspection station, my mother became very nervous realizing that she had forgotten her green card at home. I remember all five of us children looking out the rear window of our van as my dad drove off, leaving my mother in the hands of the border patrol while we went home to get her green card. How scared we all were, asking my father a hundred questions and never quite understanding why we would have to leave my mother with those authorities whom we believed to be police. We cried all the way home believing my mother was in grave trouble with the law and imagining that she would surely be put in jail for who knows what.

Within an hour, my mother was back in the van and the whole ordeal would simply become a passing memory and a long-lasting family joke of the day my mother almost got deported. Even the border patrolmen joined in on the joke and soon became familiar, friendly faces at the crossing of the border.

Today, the thought of deportation is far from being a laughing matter. The reality faced by hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizen children as they witness their undocumented immigrant parents being taken away by agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and eventually deported is appalling and indeed a scandal to our society.

In the last two decades, as our world has increasingly become globalized, immigration laws in the U.S. have proven to be seriously deficient and far from being in sync with reality. A system that was intended to protect our society, boost our economy with a needed labor force, and safeguard our human rights as well as the nation's resources is failing miserably. Among the many violations, our present day immigration system with its "enforcement only" strategy is violating the human rights of the most vulnerable in our

society—the children of immigrants—and seriously undermining their future success as healthy, productive members of their U.S. society. *Who is looking out for these children?*

Of grave concern to us must be the hundreds of thousands of children whose well being has been seriously compromised due to the unprecedented and escalating nationwide home and worksite raids conducted by ICE. The enforcement actions taken by ICE against immigrant parents are yielding serious and long-term consequences that will plague our society for generations to come.

According to the latest statistics, there are approximately four million U.S. citizen children who live with at least one undocumented parent.¹ The Urban Institute estimates that for every two adults arrested by ICE, one U.S. citizen child is affected. ICE has not been required to keep accurate records of the number of U.S. citizen children belonging to the adults they arrest. However, with deportations reaching more than 1.9 million in this decade, the institute concludes that it is safe to say that "hundreds of thousands of citizen children have suffered the loss of one or both parents, or effective deportation to a foreign land, as a consequence of enforcement actions over the past several years."² Data indicates that these U.S. citizen children have been traumatized by the ordeal, and today many of them are being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder. They suffer separation anxiety, depression, bedwetting, nightmares, and numerous behavioral problems. They live with a pervasive sense of insecurity and uncertainty, and they are doing poorly in school.³

Daily in the news one can find the sad story of an immigrant family which has been devastated by the arrest of a family member. Our government's intent on "securing the nation" at all costs has subjected millions of people—both U.S. citizens and undocumented immigrants—to live with a prevailing fear of losing their livelihood and being unable to keep their family intact.

Miguel was a well-adjusted six-year-old boy until December 12, 2006 when his mother, an

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Biblical Hospitality, Immigration,

by Alex Mikulich, Ph.D., JSRI Research Fellow

At the very heart of Hebrew and Christian scriptures, hospitality is a way to understand the unity of the commandments to love God and love neighbor. God's call to welcome the stranger reveals the radically universal love of God, the fact that God's love overflows for the whole of creation, and that we are called to share that love with all others in the world. However, practicing hospitality—or solidarity—is no easy task for North American Christians whose relative power and advantage may block us from hearing, much less practicing, the biblical call to welcome newcomers in our midst.

I say “the radically universal love of God” because in *Torah*, God's call to the people of Israel to extend love to the stranger and alien in their midst would have sounded absurd to a tribal people. It may sound too abstract to North Americans or lose its particular meaning if we do not attend to its historical context. In the ancient Middle East, the gods of most groups were narrowly tribal or nationalistic. Also, there was no notion of the individual as it has developed in Western modernity. Identity was wrapped up with the tribe and in the demands of the tribal gods. Identity—and physical survival—was impossible if one was separated from the clan.

The *Book of Exodus* recounts Israel's experience of a radically different kind of God. In *Exodus*, we learn of a God who is intimate—who has “seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and who hears the cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the Egyptians, and bring them to the land of milk and honey (*Ex 3:7-8*).” God is so present that God hears their cries and knows their suffering. This suggests a God beyond all gods, yet, because God calls a particular people to liberation from oppression, this intimacy might still be misconstrued as tribal.

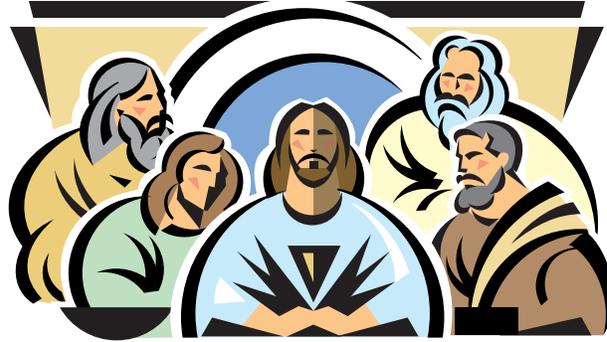
The mark of universal love is the way God's hospitality erases any tribal or nationalistic boundaries. The Lord God calls the people to practice love in a radically different way: “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were once aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God (*Lev 19:33-34*).” This call is unequivocal and radical.

God's call to Israel to practice hospitality is radical because in the ancient context, if an individual were separated from the tribe, one of two things would most likely happen: the person was either enslaved or killed. Not only does God call the people not to kill, God clearly calls the people to treat the widow, the orphan, alien, or stranger—anyone disconnected from their tribe—as a member of one's own family and community.

Welcoming the vulnerable, excluded, and strange is the radical mark of the universal love of God. God calls the people to recognize their commonality with, and moral responsibility for, vulnerable strangers in the land. This story is integral to Jewish memory as a covenantal people who recognize themselves and their shared humanity in others who are oppressed in any way.

The most important Gospel texts in the history of Christian hospitality, *Matthew 25* and *Luke 14*, are

central to Jesus' ministry and how He identifies with the marginality, vulnerability, and rejection experienced by strangers. Whereas *Exodus* and *Leviticus* reveal the interconnection between treatment of aliens and the covenant, *Matthew 25* and *Luke 14* reveal how Jesus appropriates roles of guest



and host, and calls His followers to practice hospitality in the same way. Matthew suggests an explicit connection between Jesus and those who are dependent upon others' welcome: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

Luke 14:12-14 contrasts ordinary hosts who uphold social boundaries and expect repayment from their guests with Christian hosts who anticipate God's incoming community of hospitality by welcoming the poor, physically sick or disabled, the blind, and those who struggle for survival at the margins of society.

The Eucharistic meal calls Christians to re-member Jesus as host and guest who challenged social and religious patterns of exclusion. When Jesus offered healing, welcome, and meals, He recognized—and celebrated—the gifts of the many excluded members of His society. Jesus calls His followers to remember Him in a meal where no one is excluded and to live the memory of this meal throughout society by confronting boundaries of exclusion that foster distanced relationships between the relatively privileged and oppressed.

and the Boundary of Whiteness

Christian worship, as re-membering, reaches new possibility when we are so present with the oppressed that we hear their cries and know their suffering as God does. At these crossroads of community and marginality, we may be transformed by God's hospitality into a deeper humanity and realize our divine possibility.

As the theologian Christine Pohl explains in her *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Eerdmans, 1999), historical Christian practices of hospitality recover and renew their biblical meaning and inspiration when hospitality with vulnerable strangers is practiced: i) in a larger communal context of Christian faith and community; ii) at the margins or edges of society; and iii) by members who maintain an awareness of their need and dependence on each other and are open to welcoming vulnerable strangers.

Yet as Pohl and many other theologians and practitioners of hospitality warn, there are many pitfalls to hospitality when it lacks a communal and marginal context. There is a troublesome tendency for Christians who are located at the center of prevailing social arrangements to be unaware or uncomfortable with their own vulnerability and to insist on being hosts, thereby maintaining relationships of dominance and oppression. Without the context of community and marginality and without mutual recognition and care where both hosts and guests are aware of their mutual need and dependence upon each other, the possibility of a transformational relationship is very thin, if possible at all.

In U.S. society, our attention to external, geographical boundaries is heightened by threats that we perceive in the world today. These threats are real, and Catholic social teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of nation-states to secure national borders and protect people from legitimate threats.

However, within the U.S., we may miss how internal social boundaries that we create within ourselves and within society can thwart recognition of our own humanity and the possibility of hearing, much less practicing, the hospitality of the Eucharistic table. This is especially true in relationship to newcomers in our land, people who seek work to provide for their closest kin here and abroad.

The latest anti-immigrant movement against Latino peoples repeats past patterns of U.S. white cultural exclusion. This is systemic, social sin. This new movement includes private, citizen-rancher patrols that promote a white nationalism, such as the Minutemen and those so-called Tea Parties that vilify Latino newcomers through their slogans and even terrorize new immigrants in practice.

The stories of how ethnic European peoples endured great hardship when they escaped religious, political, or economic oppression to find liberty in the U.S. are woven into our national self-understanding. European immigrants crossed not only the geographical U.S. border but also the boundaries of alienation and exclusion to become assimilated into the U.S. American way of life.

Too often, however, the predominant telling of our immigrant history omits how Europeans constructed the internal boundary of whiteness. In his profound analysis of the "souls of white folk," W.E.B. Du Bois illuminates the creation of whiteness, the work of European Americans to set themselves apart, as "super human," worshipping whiteness and oppressing the darker peoples of the earth.¹ Du Bois' analysis unpacks the interrelationship between the personal and social construction of white superiority and how this superiority denigrates darker skinned peoples humanly, socially, politically, and economically.

Du Bois' ultimate insight, yet to be appreciated by North American whites or North American white Christianity, concerns how whites "devour" our own humanity as we set ourselves above and apart from others. This devouring, in Du Bois' analysis, concerns how white racism is wrapped up with other forms of oppression, including capitalism and militarism. Indeed, in his famous address to Clergy and Laity Concerned at New York City's Riverside Church, exactly one year before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King developed Du Bois' insight by describing how the triple evils of racism, militarism, and consumerism fueled the devastation of Vietnam and America.

The American historical construction of whiteness is a problem not only for understanding the truth of U.S. history and identity, but, more importantly, from the perspective of Catholic social teaching, for understanding and practicing the intimate connections between God's hospitality with and for us and for recognizing our shared vulnerability and humanity with newcomers in our midst.

In his "Hymn to the Peoples," Du Bois prayed:

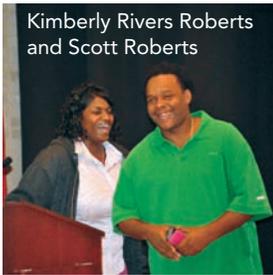
*Save us World-Spirit, from our lesser selves!
Grant us that war and hatred cease,
Reveal our souls in every race and hue!*²

Ultimately, justice for immigrants is about recognizing how the gifts of newcomers interconnect us in our shared vulnerability and humanity, the place where we may yet be transformed into new life through God's hospitality.

1 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk," in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Washington Square Press, with an introduction by David Levering Lewis, 2004), chapter II.

2 Ibid., DuBois, *Darkwater*, p.212.

A Compelling Experience



Kimberly Rivers Roberts and Scott Roberts



Kim Bobo



Dr. Manuel Vásquez



Dr. Katrine Camilleri

From October 28 through November 17, JSRI staff hosted a compelling series of events for students, faculty, staff, and the wider community as part of our annual conference titled “People on the Move and the Common Good—Migration, Poverty, and Racism, Converging Concerns for Our Future.” Seven separate events moved participants from the experience of the “internally displaced people” of Katrina’s New Orleans in the first week to the migrating peoples of the South in the second to the plight of immigrant peoples of the United States in the third to the internationally displaced in the last week.

More than 400 people participated in one or another of the conference events made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. (Other students, faculty, or community activists heard speakers in classes or meetings arranged to complement the main events.) The key events were:

- (1) the award-winning documentary, *Trouble the Water*, and discussion with the film protagonists **Kimberly Rivers Roberts** and **Scott Roberts**;
- (2) a panel on Katrina and its aftermath featuring **Dr. Allison Plyer** of the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, **Liz McCartney** of the St. Bernard Project, and Loyola students **Kimble Wright** and **Macede Jackson**;
- (3) a lecture by **Dr. Manuel Vásquez** of the University of Florida on migration trends in the Southeast (see Dr. Vasquez’s article on page 6);
- (4) a panel on local opportunities to accompany migrants with **Martin Gutierrez** of Catholic Charities, **Anna Chavez** of the JSRI staff, an audio “Dream Act Story” from *This American Life*, and Loyola student **Molly Thomas**;

- (5) a talk by **Kim Bobo** of the Chicago-based Interfaith Worker Justice on justice for immigrant workers in the U.S., along with a testimonial from representatives from the New Orleans Worker Center for Racial Justice;
- (6) a panel on international opportunities for immersion and service with **Fr. Tom Greene, S.J.**, Loyola professor and JSRI associate, **Justine Diamond**, alumna (’07) working with the Hispanic Apostolate of the Archdiocese, **Josh Daly** of University Ministry and the Ignacio Volunteers, and students **Margaret Sands**, **Marie Briard**, and **Luis Baker** from the Loyola Center for International Education; and
- (7) a final talk on the plight of refugees and asylum seekers by **Dr. Katrine Camilleri**, internationally honored advocate with Jesuit Refugee Service Malta.

Various conference activities were co-sponsored by the Center for the Study of New Orleans, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Loyola’s Office of Mission and Ministry as part of Loyola Week, and the Center for International Education. Loyola’s Women’s Center also sponsored a companion film series on Women on the Move to complement the conference.

Of 130 completed evaluations of various events, 128 participants rated events “excellent” or “good” and overwhelmingly affirmed the events’ impact on their knowledge of migration realities, appreciation of the plight of refugees, and resolve to learn more and become more involved. As the nation enters into what will assuredly be an intense and heated debate over immigration reform legislation, our attendees hopefully will participate with enhanced solidarity with people on the move.

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Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Social Structures

by the Rev. Fred Kammer, S.J.

In 1986, the U.S. bishops wrote:

Whether the problem is preventing war and building peace or addressing the needs of the poor, Catholic teaching emphasizes not only the individual conscience, but also the political, legal and economic structures through which policy is determined and issues are adjudicated.¹

The frequent acknowledgement of the reality of social, economic, political, cultural, and religious systems and structures and the power which they exert over our ability to live Gospel values marks one of the most critical insights in CST in the last 50 years.

Sinful and Graced Social Structures

Theologians and bishops describe “sinful social structures” as those which dehumanize individuals and groups, devalue human life, break up families, alienate races, escalate violence, and spread poverty. These systems and institutions socialize us, promoting and reinforcing values and behaviors that we would call “sinful.”

Theologians also now speak of “graced social structures” as those which promote life, enhance human dignity, encourage the development of community, and reinforce caring behaviors.

More obvious sinful structures have origins tainted with values, intentions, or activities that we call sinful. Consider, for example, child prostitution rings, criminal syndicates, and slavery. The novel development in CST is that even well-intentioned institutions can become sinful when they produce unintended ill effects or slowly become destructive of human values or human life.

Some examples

Consider these examples: we have schools that do not teach; prisons that do not rehabilitate; cities that do not work; governments that are unresponsive to people’s real needs; an agriculture system that pays farmers not to grow while many people go hungry; a health care system that leaves out 44 million people; an immigration system that brutalizes people and tears up families; and an economic system that is making some people very, very rich and billions of other people poorer. The repeated message of the church is that the situation is getting worse, not better. In fact, the social, economic and political systems are working so badly that Latin American bishops have felt compelled to speak of “institutionalized violence” as the end-product of the status quo.

Human Responsibility

In his 1987 encyclical, Pope John Paul at first accepts the analysis of sinful social structures. His term is the “structures of sin”; but his analysis ties these structures much more tightly to individuals “who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove.”² The pope lays out four ways individuals remain responsible for sinful structures, as:

- (1) creators, supporters, or exploiters;
- (2) accessories through complicity or indifference;
- (3) accessories through fatalistic avoidance; and
- (4) accessories through consecration of the status quo.

Churches, of course, are the most articulate exponents of consecration of social structures, both in the world and within the churches themselves. The pope attributes structures of sin to two powerful forces: “desire for profit” and “thirst for power.”

The Responses

If the systems are not working, then our faith response has to be structural as well as personal. We must do justice as well as charity. Specific action directed toward the injustice of institutions includes reforming existing institutions, strengthening graced institutions, and developing new institutions and structures.

Pope John Paul underscores the urgency of connecting action for justice to faith in a term clearly reflecting his Polish background, the *duty of solidarity*. Solidarity is his term for the structural response demanded by Gospel love and involving fundamental economic and social changes. In a blunt assertion, he says, “Solidarity is undoubtedly a Christian virtue.”³ He explains:

This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all.⁴

This solidarity takes concrete form, the pontiff says, in personal decisions, decisions of government, economic decisions, public demonstrations by the poor, sacrifice of all forms of imperialism, and in a variety of other concrete actions, both personal and structural.

1 *Economic Justice for All*, No. 259.

2 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No. 36.

3 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No. 40.

4 *Ibid.*, No. 38.

Latino Immigration

by Dr. Manuel A. Vásquez

The following is an excerpt from the November 3, 2009, address on Latino Immigration in the South of Dr. Vásquez to the People on the Move Conference sponsored by JSRI on the Loyola University campus.

The widespread devastation and dislocation produced in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina is a reality *sui generis*, producing a population shift that has few parallels in U.S. history. In what follows, I will summarize some of the key findings of the emerging literature on Latinos in New Orleans.

Immigration from Latin America to New Orleans is not new. In fact, there were two relatively established Pre-Katrina Latino communities. One consists of Nicaraguans who came to the city as early as 1905, following the establishment of the Louisiana Nicaragua Lumber Company in the city. The other is composed of Hondurans who arrived starting in the 1920s, through connections with the United Fruit Company, which has been based in New Orleans since 1901. The Nicaraguan community expanded in the 1980s and 1990s, as two new waves of immigration came, one as a reaction to the Sandinista Revolution (1979) and another in the wake of Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

population increased by 45 percent, while the African-American population decreased by 10 percent (Lee et al., 2008). Sociologist Elizabeth Fussell, who has conducted the most detailed and rigorous studies of the Latino influx into the city, estimates that 9.6 percent of Orleans parish is now Latino.

Who are these new Latinos in New Orleans? Fussell uses the term “Hurricane Chasers” to describe them, since they are a mobile “rapid response labor force” that came to fill the growing demand in the construction sector, as the city began to rebuild.

Forty-four percent of the immigrants that Fussell surveyed were Mexicans, 21 percent Brazilians, 14 percent Hondurans, 12 percent Guatemalans, and 7 percent Salvadorans. She also found that these five national Latino groups exhibit significant commonalities: they tend to be “younger, more often single, and less embedded in a social network than other immigrants” (Fussell, 2009a and b). However, Fussell also found important differences among these groups, as reflected in Table 1.

While there are many differences worth highlighting in Fussell’s data, Brazilians are the group that best embodies the “rapid response” labor force label. They are younger and more likely to be single men than both Mexicans and Central Americans, who are more likely to use their long-standing community networks in the region and the New Orleans to bring their families. This is particularly the case for Central Americans: they are far more likely than the other two groups to have siblings who are also migrants. The duration of the Brazilians’ current trip is also much shorter; this may be because a more than one third of these immigrants have their work papers. Thus, they have more flexibility to move in response to changes in the job market. The fact that a greater proportion of Brazilians are authorized to work, together with their higher levels of education, may explain why they earn far more than Mexican and Central Americans. Fussell also hypothesizes that Central Americans and Mexicans often rely on established networks to secure employment, a fact that may

Table 1: Profile of Three Latino Groups in Post-Katrina New Orleans

	Mexicans	Central Americans	Brazilians
Age	29.8	2.4	28.2
Years of Formal Education	9.1	7.2	9.7
Single	73.7	42.9	77.8
Sibling a Migrant	47.4	57.1	33.3
Duration of Current Trip (years)	4.0	4.0	1.6
No Documentation	94.7	92.9	66.7
Manufacturing/Construction	100%	92.8%	88.9
Weekly Wages	\$668.53	\$551.00	\$859.11
Monthly Remittances	\$1,282.35	\$576.92	\$859.11

Adapted from Fussell (2009b: 463)

The 2000 census reported 15,000 Latinos in New Orleans, about 3.1 percent of the city’s population (485,000). Most scholars agree that the census severely under-counted the New Orleans’s Latino population (Donato et al., 2007). In the aftermath of Katrina, *The Times-Picayune* estimated that approximately 100,000 Hispanics came to hurricane-affected communities in the span of four months after Katrina. By 2007, the city’s Latino

in New Orleans

limit their job prospects. In contrast, Brazilians operate for all intents and purposes as their own contractors. As Fussell (2009a: 389) put it, Brazilians (and Mexicans to some extent) are “more likely to be unencumbered by ties to any pre-Katrina New Orleans conationals.” This “freedom” from the moral and financial obligations that accompany ethnic labor networks enables them to look for better paying jobs.

The Latino community in New Orleans has not only grown rapidly but is also becoming highly differentiated. The big question now is whether the “hurricane chasers” will settle permanently in the city. This is a crucial issue, in light of the shifting racial configuration in post-Katrina New Orleans. The changing racial composition of the city may be what was behind Mayor Ray Nagin’s desire, expressed in October 2005, to keep the city from being “overrun with Mexican workers”

(www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=5221123). A few months later, in January 2006, Nagin asserted that New Orleans should remain a “chocolate city”

(www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/news/t-p/stories/011706_nagin_transcript.html). While many Hispanic groups criticized Nagin’s comments, some believed that the mayor reflected more widespread sentiments among New Orleans residents.

The results of Fussell’s survey in Table 2 give us a sense of the future of the Latino presence in the Crescent City.

The majority of Nicaraguans and Brazilians say that they intend to stay in New Orleans for more than a year or permanently. Here the contrast with Mexicans may reflect the proximity of their home country, which makes it somewhat easier to go back and forth. The scholarly literature tells us that the longer immigrant single men stay in a particular place, the more likely they are to bring their families from their countries of origins or to form new ones. Thus, the future of the Latino community in New Orleans will depend on the sustained availability of jobs as the city’s reconstruction continues in the midst of a national economic recession.

For the full text of the address of Dr. Vásquez, see the “Reports” section of the JSRI website at www.loyno.edu/jsri/reports/index.htm

Table 2: How Long do Latinos Plan to Stay in New Orleans (in %)

	Mexicans	Nicaraguans	Brazilians
12 months or until work ends	27.3	23.4	17.5
More than a year/permanently	38.5	55.3	66.7
Don’t Know	34.3	21.3	15.9

Adapted from Fussell (2008)

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The Measure of Poverty

by the Rev. Fred Kammer, S.J.

In their 1986 book-length pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, the U.S. Bishops reminded us of the importance of confronting poverty in these words:

*Dealing with poverty is not a luxury to which our nation can attend when it finds the time and resources. Rather, it is a moral imperative of the highest priority.*¹

But what does it mean to speak of poverty in the United States? Drawing on the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, the bishops explained it this way, “By poverty, we are referring here to the lack of sufficient material resources required for a decent life.”² Then, in the next sentence, they acknowledge the complexity of the question, “We use the government’s definition of poverty, although we recognize its limits.” And a footnote introduces elements of the national debate about what we call “the poverty line.”

The current poverty line measure was developed in the Social Security Administration in the early 1960s by research analyst Mollie Orshansky. It was based on surveys in the prior decade regarding American families and their food consumption. The poverty level was set at three times a subsistence food budget, based on the experience that families at that time spent one-third of their income on food. The poverty line is still calculated on that basis and adjusted for family size. The 2008 measure is \$17,163 dollars for a family of three.

In four decades, however, food costs have declined dramatically as a percentage of the average family budget, now being only 17 percent.³ Other costs such as child care, housing, health care, education, and transportation now consume a much larger part of the average family budget. Additional factors also have contributed to debate about the official poverty line: it only considers actual cash income, not other resources such as food stamps/SNAP, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), housing subsidies, and a variety of federal and state health programs; and it does not reflect the variations in cost-of-living, especially housing costs, across the country.

In the early 1990s, Congress asked the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to tackle the question of the adequacy of the Orshansky standard (which she herself questioned). Based on the work of an expert panel, NAS released recommendations for a new measure in 1995. Those recommendations included:

1. a new poverty threshold based on median spending by a family of four on food and clothing and shelter, and a multiplier to reflect other family needs; this too is then adjusted for family size;

2. an income definition that includes cash (after taxes), tax credits, and in-kind benefits, but subtracts expenses such as child care that reduce available family income;
3. subtraction of medical out-of-pocket spending (MOOP) from income; and
4. adjustment of the poverty threshold to reflect the significant disparity in living costs across various regions attributable to differences in the cost of housing and utilities.

In 2009, legislation was introduced in both houses of Congress—the *Measuring American Poverty (MAP) Act of 2009*—to require the Census Bureau to develop a modern poverty measure. Some states and cities also are looking at measures of poverty for their populations.

In a recent release, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) carried out the calculations under two versions of the NAS standards—one with the regional adjustments for housing and utilities and the other without it—and compared them to the current poverty standard. Under this scenario, there are a number of interesting results:

1. Using the NAS measure, the national poverty rate increases by 1.6% over the current poverty level, from 12.5% to 14.1%.
2. All states’ poverty level increased except Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia.
3. Poverty rates increased by more than 3% in Kentucky, *Mississippi*, and South Carolina.
4. When the regional adjustment for housing and utilities is applied, however, poverty rates *decreased* for 26 states, including *Alabama* (-2.7%), *Arkansas* (-3.1%), *Louisiana* (-2.5%), *Mississippi* (-2.8%), and *West Virginia* (-2.9%).
5. With the housing and utilities adjustment, the greatest increase in the poverty line would be in California (+8.1%).⁴

A look at the Gulf South states under the three measures shows variations in the percentage of the population “in poverty” in the chart:⁵

Of course, measuring poverty is only useful if there is a resolve on the part of policy-makers, community leaders, government, non-profits, businesses, voters, and the poor themselves to do something about the level of poverty, however measured. Income measures alone also can lead to a narrow view of responses that focuses only on economic remedies that result in measureable income improvements.

U.S. AND GULF SOUTH POVERTY RATES: THREE MEASURES

	U.S.	Alabama	Florida	Louisiana	Mississippi	Texas
Current Poverty Line	12.5%	15.2%	11.7%	17.1%	21.1%	16.4%
NAS Recommended Measure	14.1%	17.7%	14.4%	18.4%	24.8%	18.6%
NAS Measure with Regional Adjustment	14.1%	12.5%	14.5%	14.6%	18.3%	16.4%

A New Paradigm

Some argue that simply “tweaking” a monetary measure of poverty fails to grasp the breadth of human life, the wider impacts of poverty, and the necessarily broad range of essential responses to poverty. They call for a paradigm shift in our measures of poverty. While there are a variety of such measures, the one which has gained acceptance on an international scale is the *Human Development Report* and its Human Development Index adopted by the United Nations Development Programme in 1990. The focus here obviously is more on “human development” than “poverty,” drawing on the work of economist Mahbub ul Haq at the World Bank in the 1970s.

...Dr. Haq argued that existing measures of human progress failed to account for the true purpose of development—to improve people’s lives. In particular, he believed that the commonly used measure of Gross Domestic Product failed to adequately measure well-being.⁶

The index developed by Dr. Haq and others focuses on three key dimensions—a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. This is a narrower focus than the full-blown human development categories, but covers key measurable markers.

For each dimension, there is a respective “index” built on certain indicators and together these indices lead to an overall human development index. The report explains the measures used in the U.S. context:

A Long and Healthy Life is measured using life expectancy at birth, calculated from mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, and population data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

Access to Knowledge is measured using two indicators: school enrollment for the population age three and older, and educational degree attainment for the population 25 years and older. Both indicators are from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

A Decent Standard of Living is measured using median earnings of all full- and part-time workers 16 years and older from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.⁷

The overall approach shifts our attention from “how the economy is doing” to “how the people are doing.” In this context, the definition of poverty shifts from a lack of income or material goods to “a lack of basic capabilities for sustaining a tolerable life.”⁸ The U.S. report explains further:

Human poverty is often closely related to a lack of money and material goods. But the loss of dignity that accompanies income poverty also stems from a sense of powerlessnessness to change one’s living conditions, a lack of autonomy and control over many crucial decisions, and a feeling that one is marginalized or excluded politically, socially or psychologically—and thus deprived of participation, choices, and opportunities.⁹

The human development approach has now been applied to the U.S. context in the *American Human Development Report 2008 – 2009* and, most recently, has led to two lengthy state reports, one on Mississippi¹⁰ and the other on Louisiana.¹¹ The index approach combines an array of key human-centered indicators through the three dimensions into a single number. For the U.S., that number is 5.06, ranking 12th among 177 nations now measured by the system. Within the U.S., it is broken down in turn by state and congressional district, as well as by gender, race, and ethnicity. The human development approach also provides a range of additional information on economic, political, social, military, and environmental issues.

The authors of the U.S. report note that the country has made great progress over the past decades on a variety of fronts and possesses enormous resources to do so. Yet, over 25 years from 1980 to 2005, *in terms of the human development measure we have dropped from 2nd among the top ranked countries in the world to 12th!* Our progress did not match that of other nations who have been more determined and efficient in transforming improved national income into improved health and education outcomes.¹²

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The Measure of Poverty, continued

Rank		HD Index	Health Index	Education Index	Income Index
	United States	5.06	5.0	5.0	5.1
24	Florida	4.96	5.2	4.9	4.8
35	Texas	4.57	4.8	4.4	4.5
47	Alabama	3.98	3.6	4.1	4.2
49	Louisiana	3.85	3.3	4.1	4.1
51	Mississippi	3.58	3.3	3.8	3.7

Among the individual states, Connecticut (scoring 6.37) and Massachusetts (6.27) rank first and second. States in the South generally rank low because they have low life expectancy, poor education, and low incomes. *Alabama* (3.98), *Louisiana* (3.85), and *Mississippi* (3.58) rank among the bottom five. A more detailed look at the Gulf South states and their ranking (among the 50 states and the District of Columbia) is illustrated by the chart above.

The **Louisiana** state report, based on pre-Katrina data, had other significant data and comparisons:

1. Among African Americans, considering the 39 states with a sufficiently large population of African Americans to include in the analysis, Louisiana ranked last on the overall human development index (and last on the health index). [p. 8]
2. 80 percent of Louisiana's current residents were born in the state, the highest proportion in any state in the union. [p. 9]
3. Louisiana has one of the highest rates of households headed by single women, and such households make up the majority of the poorest families. [p.30]
4. The infant mortality rate for African Americans in Louisiana is approximately the same as rates today in Bosnia and Russia. [p. 34]

The **Mississippi** report also highlights some key factors in the human condition there:

1. African American babies die in Mississippi at more than twice the rate of white babies. [p. 13]
2. On the state ranking, Mississippi was last, with the lowest life expectancy of any U.S. state, the highest rate of adults 25 and older who have not completed high school or earned a high school equivalency degree, and one of the lowest levels of personal earnings from wages and salaries. [p. 4]
3. Although whites have higher well-being scores than African Americans in every U.S. state, Mississippi—along with Louisiana, Alabama, and Nebraska—is among the four states with the largest disparities between the two groups. [p. 5]
4. In terms of income, Mississippi is on par with countries such as the Czech Republic and Trinidad and Tobago. [p. 12]

As you can imagine, the use of a wider range of factors in considering “poverty” lends itself to consideration of a wider range of responses in pursuit of the common good and the well-being of the “least among us.”

On March 2, 2010, the Commerce Department announced that it was preparing a more complex Supplemental Poverty Measure “based upon new data and new methodologies” to be released in the fall of 2011 “to provide an alternative lens to understand poverty and measure the effects of anti-poverty programs.” It would be released in addition to the current U.S. poverty measure.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, 1986, no. 170.
- 2 Ibid., no. 173.
- 3 Dorothy Smith, Center for Law and Social Policy, *Measure by Measure: The Current Poverty Measure v. the National Academy of Sciences Measures*, November, 2009, p. 1.
- 4 Ibid., p. 9.
- 5 Ibid., p. 5.
- 6 The American Human Development Project of the Social Science Research Council, *The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008-2009*, p. 10. Cf. <http://www.measureofamerica.org> (accessed 1/29/10).
- 7 Ibid., Executive Summary, p. 3.
- 8 Ibid., p. 19.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Sarah Burd-Sharps, Kristen Lewis, and Eduardo Borges Martins of the American Human Development Project, *A Portrait of Mississippi: Mississippi Human Development Report*, 2009. Cf. <http://www.measureofamerica.org/mississippi/> (accessed 1/29/10).
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 *The Measure of America*, p. 13.

undocumented immigrant from El Salvador, was detained during a worksite raid along with 2,000 other workers. Miguel arrived home to find his two-year-old brother by himself. He did what he instinctively knew to do, stay home and take care of his brother. Miguel, at six years old, was left alone to fend for his young brother and himself for a week before his grandmother arrived from out of town. Miguel's teacher said that this incident completely changed this little boy. He had gone from a "happy boy" to "absolutely catatonic." Due to a lack of concentration, his attendance and his grades plummeted; and Miguel was unable to advance to the third grade.⁴

In 1999, nine years after fleeing his country and applying for political asylum, a Guatemalan man finally got a court hearing and was denied asylum based on the ruling that conditions in Guatemala had improved since his application and he was now able to return to his country. He decided not to abandon his wife and children and to stay in the country illegally. Then one day, after several more years passed, he was arrested by ICE agents and ordered to be deported. Shortly thereafter, ICE returned to arrest his wife, who was left to run the family business. She was charged and prosecuted for employing two undocumented immigrants. Today, she is incarcerated and the couple's two U.S citizen children are living with someone else.⁵

In a recent trip to an immigration detention center, I visited with a young indigenous man who had entered the U.S. with a work visa eight years ago. He managed to get a social security number and with time, even after his visa expired, he married a woman from Mexico and settled in a small rural town in Mississippi. They had two children. As an infant, one of the children became very ill with pneumonia and developed a chronic weakness of the lungs. Recently, while on his way to Mass at the local parish, the young man



was picked up by an undercover police officer and sent to a nearby detention facility. His wife, who is the sole caretaker of the sick child, is now struggling to make ends meet and most probably will face eventual deportation as well. This young man has lived as a

law abiding resident, albeit undocumented. He has paid his annual income taxes and Medicare each year. His most pressing concern is the health care of his U.S. citizen child whom he fears will not get the proper care he requires in Mexico.

On this same visit to the detention center, we talked with a group of more than 20 male detainees. Some had been apprehended in a worksite raid, some at home, and others were simply pulled over for no other reason than their skin color. More than half of them said they have U.S. citizen children depending on them at home. These children's lives will now be forever disrupted with the most probable deportation of one or both of their undocumented parents.

In the present legal system, where a U.S. citizen child must be at least 21 years old in order to petition for permanent residence for their non-citizen parent, these children have no recourse to protect themselves from the loss of their parent other than to give up their birthright and leave their country in order to keep the family together. In many cases, parents, knowing well the hardships that await the child in their developing home country, will sacrifice their parental rights for the sake of the child's future well being by deciding to leave the child in the care of a friend or family member.

With the increasingly effective "enforcement only" tactics exercised by ICE, stories such as the above are a common occurrence within the immigrant community. As our faith tradition reminds us, "A basic moral test [for our society] is how our most vulnerable members are faring."⁶ These hundreds of thousands of children are the most vulnerable victims of a system that is broken and in dire need of overhaul. Today, as never before, comprehensive immigration reform is an absolute moral imperative; and, as people of faith, we are called to put our faith into action and advocate for the sake of the millions of citizen and non-citizen children of immigrants and their families.

Catholic tradition holds the family and marriage as the "central institutions in society"⁷; and the way in which our society organizes itself—its legal, political, social, educational, and economic systems—must never undermine family or marriage. On the contrary, all other societal institutions should be at the service of the family and marriage. The U.S. bishops recognize well that our present day immigration system is severely flawed. In their recommendations for comprehensive immigration reform, they urge care for immigrant families, stating that the government must do everything

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," Pew Hispanic Center April 14, 2009, www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf (accessed on Sept. 29, 2009).
- 2 The National Council of La Raza and the Urban Institute, *Paying the Price: Impact of Immigration Raids on America's Children*, Oct. 2007, pp. 16-18.
- 3 J. Kremer, K.A. Moccio and J.W. Hammell, *SEVERING A LIFELINE: The Neglect of Citizen Children in America's Immigration Enforcement Policy*, Dorsey and Whitney LL, March 20, 2009, p. 67, www.dorsey.com/probono_severing_lifeline/ (accessed September 20, 2009). For a more complete list of common after-effects see the document pp. 48-67.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p10.
- 5 Kelley, Kevin, "U.S. Immigration system is 'fundamentally broken,'" *The Catholic Key*, Diocese of Kansas City, October 2, 2009 http://catholickey.org/index.php3?gif&mode=view&issue=20091002&article_id=5871 (accessed on October 4, 2009).
- 6 U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Themes of Catholic Social Teaching", www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml (accessed on Oct. 2, 2009).
- 7 *Ibid.*

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The Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI) of Loyola University New Orleans was formally established as a collaborative undertaking of the New Orleans Province of the Society Jesus and Loyola University New Orleans through a Memorandum of Understanding signed on November 28, 2007.

As part of the College of Social Sciences, JSRI exists to promote research, social analysis, theological reflection, and practical strategies for improving the social and economic conditions in the Gulf South with a particular focus on issues of race, poverty, and migration. The institute is intended to further the mission of the Society of Jesus to promote the faith that does justice, to apply Catholic social teaching to the concrete realities of this region, and to enhance the academic and service missions of Loyola.

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For the Sake of the U.S. Children of Immigration

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possible to make the proper accommodations to ensure timely and permanent unification of the family. Along with this provision, it will be necessary to include safeguards for the human rights of the U.S. citizen children of undocumented immigrants.

For the sake of the children of immigration, all of us must put our faith into action to end the pervasive suffering and hardship that thousands of immigrant families are subjected to. Call or write to your members of congress asking them to vote for a comprehensive immigration reform that protects U.S. citizen children and provides increased opportunities for legalization for the undocumented.