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# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE



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## Take Five For Social

### Justice



## Take Action!

Click the button below to sign a petition & send advocacy emails.

**Stop Solitary Confinement**

### JSRI Future Activities

JSRI staff and associates—working from their office in Mercy Hall and from home—will continue monitoring local, state, and federal administrative, legislative, and judicial actions regarding our priority issues and the impact of Covid-19; participating in advocacy communications with authorities; recommending resources on our website and by social media; research and writing for our publications; and activating our advocacy network.

### JSRI Recent Activities

#### March 24

Dr. Sue Weishar was a reader for the Master's thesis, *Coming to Terms with Racism: A Call to Conversion for White Christians*, of Loyola alumnus Rene Ronquillo.

#### March 25

Dr. Weishar organized and moderated a Zoom meeting between Mr. Hunter Thompson, the Immigration Aide for Senator Bill Cassidy, and Loyola Law School Professor Hiroko Kusuda, Loyola Coordinator for Student Engagement Daniel Harris, JSRI Associate Mary Baudouin, and Loyola students Caroline Budd and Crystal Roa.

#### March 25

Dr. Dennis Kalob was one of the presenters in a webinar on "Climate Change, Forced Migration, and the Catholic Church" sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (office of Migration and Refugee Services). The webinar can be seen [here](#).

#### March 27

Dr. Weishar was the guest speaker for a national Zoom meeting of the Call to Action Sub-committee on Immigration where she discussed strategies for becoming involved in immigrant justice issues locally.

#### April 14

Ms. Baudouin and Dr. Weishar participated in a national call of the Jesuit Office for Justice and Ecology on upcoming Congressional legislation on immigration.

#### April 16

The JSRI Advisory Board, chaired by Dr. Marcus Kondkar, participated virtually in their semi-annual meeting with the JSRI staff.

#### April 27

Fr. Kammer provided a virtual keynote for the St. Louis *Seeds of Justice* Spring Convening on how to do justice work in a divided country and Church.

## The Need to Pay Attention! Ending Mass Incarceration in Louisiana

By Sue Weishar, Ph.D.

Have you ever wondered how throughout human history unjust and inhumane institutions and practices became established and were perpetuated, such as slavery, the genocide of entire groups of people, or the coverture of women? How could so many people have been so blind, especially purported followers of Jesus Christ—a poor, itinerant laborer who clearly lived and preached a gospel of love, mercy, charity, and justice and who was always on the side of the poor and powerless? How could they not have known better?



This line of thought then often leads me to the following question—what evils are we blind to in today's world? To what injustices are we so indifferent that future generations will look back, shaking their heads that such shameful practices were widely tolerated? I think the widespread acceptance of mass incarceration in the U.S., and in Louisiana, in particular, will be seen in retrospect as shocking injustices, atrocities that future people of conscience will have a hard time comprehending.

It is important that members of the Loyola Community acknowledge that we live in a state that incarcerates more of its residents per capita than any other, in a country that leads the world both in absolute number of imprisoned people and rate of incarceration. In Louisiana, more men and women per capita are serving life without parole, which Pope Francis calls a "death penalty in disguise," than any place on earth. The collateral consequences of mass incarceration have been well documented, including its disproportionate impact on people of color. The entire social ecology of communities has been altered by high imprisonment rates which erode social capital, disrupting family and social relationships necessary for the well-being of society. We arrived at this disgraceful situation by enacting harsh state sentencing laws (like habitual offender statutes) and accepting the punitive and racially biased sentencing policies of "tough on crime" district attorneys who mercilessly sought the most extreme sentence lengths for offenders.

To end mass incarceration in Louisiana everyday citizens and voters, you and me, have to start paying attention. We can no longer be "seduced", as Pope Francis said in his 2013 Homily at Lampedusa, by a "culture of comfort" which makes us insensitive to the cries of others, resulting in a "globalized indifference" where others' suffering can be dismissed because "it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business!"

We can end mass incarceration in Louisiana by making it "our business" to follow closely what our elected officials are doing about it. For example, several important criminal justice reform bills are being considered in the current Louisiana legislative session that have great potential to unravel mass incarceration in our state if enacted, including:

HB 254, which eliminates Juvenile Life without Parole. (This bill is more urgently needed since SCOTUS ruled April 21 that judges do not have to hold special hearings to determine if juvenile offenders are beyond hope of rehabilitation before sentencing them to die in prison.)

HB 490 which allows persons with life sentences to apply for parole after serving 25 years.

HB 46 which puts limits on pre-trial incarceration.

JSRI also strongly supports other reform bills such as HB 68, prohibiting the use of solitary confinement in Louisiana prisons for persons with mental illness or impairment, and HB 604 simplifying the very expensive and complex expungement process for persons who have served their time.

Sign up here to receive JSRI Action Alerts on these bills. Let's refuse to be blind any longer to the grave injustice of mass incarceration.

**CLICK TO JOIN OUR ADVOCACY NETWORK**

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.

Please send feedback to [jsri@loyno.edu](mailto:jsri@loyno.edu)

## LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

As our number of enrolled students continues to rise, we need to make sure that each and every one has access to an exceptional educational experience. We can't do it without your help. [Give today!](#)

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