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JustSouth Monthly

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Choosing Sanctuary

Excruciating Choices for Immigrant Families

by Sue Weishar, Ph.D.

Poverty Awareness Month

Take up Pope Francis' challenge to go to the peripheries by participating in [Poverty Awareness Month](#) in January. Celebrate this month using online and print materials, including a calendar, reflections, and a pastoral aid. Materials are also [en Español](#).

One month after Donald Trump became president following a campaign that relentlessly scapegoated immigrants, [DHS announced](#) it was scrapping Obama administration policies that limited deportations to people who pose a public safety threat and recent border-crossers. Instead, virtually anyone in the U.S. without authorization would be a priority, including immigrants who have lived here for decades, have no criminal charges, and are the parents of U.S. citizens. As a consequence of such aggressive immigration policies, the arrest of undocumented immigrants living in the interior of the U.S. [has increased 37 percent since Trump's inauguration](#), despite evidence that unauthorized border crossings have plummeted to a 45-year low.

JSRI Future Activities

January 1

Pope Francis invites all to participate in the World Day of Peace. The theme is "Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace."

January 5-7

Ms. Mary Baudouin and Fr. Fred Kammer will co-lead the social justice retreat for mid-America Jesuit Volunteers in Texas.

January 13

Fr. Kammer will do a presentation on the social realities of the South for the Commission on Ministries of the Jesuit Province.



Jose Torres with family and faith leaders on the steps of First Grace Methodist Church. Leticia Casindo stands to his immediate left.

At a press conference on Nov. 15 on the steps of First Grace Methodist Church in New Orleans, [Jose Torres](#), a 32-year-old construction worker from El Salvador, who along with tens of thousands of other undocumented immigrants helped rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, announced he had had enough. To expose the cruelty of a system that separates parents from their

January 25

JSRI staff will meet with Fr. Jean Denis Saint Félix, Secretary for Social and International Ministries of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.

February 3-6

Dr. Nik Mitchell and Dr. Alf Bustamante will participate in the 2018 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington, D.C.

JSRI Recent Activities

December 8

Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Weishar participated in a meeting of Louisianans for Prison Alternatives in New Orleans.

December 4

Dr. Weishar spoke in support of NOPD's Ethical Policing Is Courageous program at a meeting of the City Council's Criminal Justice Committee.

November 28

Dr. Weishar participated in a meeting of the Board of Directors of Seashore Mission/El Pueblo in Biloxi, MS.

November 27

Dr. Weishar lectured on Immigration Laws and Policies to graduate students at Tulane's School of Social Work.

November 14, December 5

Dr. Weishar participated in planning meetings of the Greater New Orleans Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition.

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children and a political narrative that blames immigrants for our nation's ills, Torres declared that he was taking sanctuary in First Grace rather than being separated from his wife and two young daughters by complying with an order of deportation based on a first offense DUI charge that had been expunged. He told the dozens of supporters and members of the media:

"I am tired of being treated like I am disposable... Tired of [ICE] playing with my liberty and my life... I have lived here 14 years, working shoulder to shoulder with others who love this city."

With tears in his eyes and his voice shaking, he continued,

"Immigration knows that both of my daughters have chronic conditions and that my youngest daughter has suffered from seizures from birth... but they don't care... For these reasons and on behalf of the millions of undocumented families in this country. I have decided to take sanctuary."

(An [ICE policy from 2011](#) restricts enforcement actions in "sensitive" locations such as churches.)

Leticia Casindo, another immigrant leader and like Jose a member of the Congress of Day Laborers, also spoke:

"Our lives have never been easy... but especially since Donald Trump became president, our community has fallen into a nightmare... Our families are being separated, our children are suffering-- they are not being allowed their right to a family because this administration has decided to make us a scapegoat to distract from the true problems that plague this country... It is sad to leave for work in the morning with fear in your heart, sad when every day your children ask if they will see you again that afternoon..."

In the face of increased suffering of a subgroup of society, Ervin Staub, Holocaust survivor and renowned researcher on the psychology of mass violence, [has observed](#) that bystanders frequently remain passive and silent. Bystanders' passivity not only make them increasingly less likely to protest the subjection and humiliation of others, their reticence also encourages the perpetrators to continue in their persecution and reduces the likelihood that other bystanders will respond.

Across the U.S., people of faith and good will have refused to be passive bystanders as immigrant families are torn apart. The Greater New Orleans Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition, which helped organize Torres' press conference, is seeking communities of faith to work together to build a sanctuary movement for immigrants and other threatened communities—call 504-957-7783 for information.

Also please consider joining the following efforts. At this critical historical moment, silence and passivity are complicity.

LOCALLY: join JSRI's [Action Alert list](#), volunteer to accompany [Congress of Day Laborers](#) members to ICE check-ins, support immigrant families struggling with the aftermath of deportation of loved ones with NOLA Village (call 504-575-6333) and Mujeres Luchadores (call 480-522-053). NATIONALLY: The [Jesuit Campaign for Hospitality](#), USCCB's [Justice for Immigrants Campaign](#) and Catholic Relief Services' [Share the Journey](#).