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A Prophetic Voice:

Guatemalan Cardinal Visits Distraught Mississippi Immigrant Families

by Sue Weishar, Ph.D.

JSRI Future Activities

January 17-19

Fr. Fred Kammer, S.J., and Ms. Mary Baudouin will lead the social justice retreat for Jesuit Volunteers of the mid-America region in Dover, Tennessee.

February 3-5

Fr. Kammer will deliver several talks on economic justice to students, faculty, and parents at Jesuit High School in Sacramento, CA.

February 22

Fr. Kammer will deliver the keynote on Environmental Justice at the Texas Mission Conference in San Antonio.

JSRI Recent Activities

December 20

Dr. Sue Weishar attended a press conference at the Catholic Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi, which featured remarks from Guatemalan Cardinal Álvaro Ramazinni. The cardinal's visit to Mississippi was sponsored by [Catholic Extension](#) and organized largely by Rev. Roberto Mena, ST, pastor of St. Michael the Archangel Church in Forest, MS.

December 21

Dr. Weishar received a Humanitarian Award from the Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants (LORI) at their annual awards banquet in Baton Rouge.

December 29

The last class of Café con Ingles (an ESL and community building program at St. Anthony of Padua Church) for the 2019 fall semester was held. Seven Loyola Service Learning participants and four other Loyola students volunteered as tutors for the program during the semester.

January 7

Dr. Nik Mitchell and Dr. Weishar attended the Vigil for Life: 10 Years of No Executions in Louisiana, an event hosted by LA Repeal in New Orleans.

January 9

Dr. Dennis Kalob spoke with a group of visiting college students from Manhattan College in New York City. The students came to our JSRI offices to learn about our work and about the social conditions in New Orleans.

Spring Semester

Dr. Dennis Kalob is teaching two courses this semester at Loyola: *Social/Political Inequality and Health and Society*.

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Early in his pontificate Pope Francis presented his vision of the Church in the world-- that of a "field hospital" for the wounded. In a 2013 interview with Jesuit journalist Antonio Spadaro, S.J., he said,

The church's ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel... The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. [1]



Cardinal Álvaro Ramazinni in Forest, MS on December 21st. Photo from Catholic Extension.

In early August the lives of hundreds of immigrants, including many from Guatemala, were thrown into darkness and despair when ICE agents raided seven chicken processing plants in central Mississippi. On December 21 and 22 Guatemalan Cardinal Álvaro Ramazinni came to accompany them in their darkness, and in his words, to "make sure that the people know they have dignity... are valued ... and that there is hope."

For more than 30 years Álvaro Ramazinni has stood in solidarity with the poorest of the poor, enduring death threats as a peace mediator, defending the rights of indigenous Guatemalans, and championing social and environmental justice. Before setting out to churches in Carthage, Canton, and Forest, Mississippi to conduct listening sessions with families affected by the raids and to participate in *posadas*, Cardinal Ramazinni spoke to members of the media at the Catholic Diocese of Jackson main office. His remarks [2] made clear why he has been described as a "Francis bishop before there was a Francis."

When asked by a reporter what he would say to Americans who justify the raids because the workers were here illegally, he made an important distinction between what is "legal" and what is "just":

Unfortunately, many laws...are not laid on a foundation... of justice... What is the most important thing? To enforce a law or to defend the value of justice?... I believe that we cannot uphold what is legal without its having its basis in justice. And so is it just for people to have better living conditions? Is it just that people have to immigrate because their own country doesn't provide what they need?

The cardinal went on to explain that a major reason that poverty was so widespread in countries like Guatemala is due to a world where a global economy exists but a "global solidarity" is lacking. He called for more companies to only buy exports from Guatemalan businesses that respect labor laws and for immigration reform in the U.S. "with a human face."

I asked him what he would say to people who claim to be Christians, for whom a core teaching is to respect and welcome immigrants, but nevertheless have hard-hearted attitudes towards immigrants. His response did not mince words:

I would use one single word: consistency. That is, consistency between the faith that we profess and the life that we live... I believe that this is the crisis of Christianity in America, because if you lived according to evangelical principles—and this in a country that calls itself majority Christian—there would have already been immigration reform with a human face.

For me, the whole problem of immigration as we are seeing it now demonstrates that there is a profound crisis of Christianity...Maybe it would be better for people to call themselves atheists. In other words, they would be more honest than to say "I am a Christian" and then not to recognize Jesus Christ in the immigrant.

[1] Spadaro, S.J., A. (2013, September 30). A big heart open to God: An interview with Pope Francis. America. Retrieved from <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>

[2] A complete transcript of the Cardinal's press conference will be published on JSRI's website soon.

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please send feedback to jsri@loyno.edu

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