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JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on **FAITH DOING JUSTICE**

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Fighting Invisibility

Centering Agency in a Social Justice Classroom

by Ashley Howard, Ph.D.

JSRI Future Activities

November 17

Dr. Nik Mitchell will participate in a panel discussion, "Preparing for the Job Market", at Louisiana State University for a graduate student workshop.

January 5-7

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

JSRI Recent Activities

November 10-11

The JSRI Advisory Board met at Loyola University.

November 9

Dr. Mitchell lectured at Louisiana State University on "Race, Space, and Education in New Orleans".

November 8

Dr. Sue Weishar and Univeristy Minister Ken Weber accompanied a group of Honors and service learning students to the weekly meeting of the Congress of Day Laborers at First Grace United Methodist Church in New Orleans.

As an educator, I endeavor to teach my students the horrors of the carceral state while complicating narratives of victimization with those of human agency. Providing authentic and minimally edited first-hand accounts is a challenging prospect. How do we amplify the experiences of incarcerated people without dabbling in voyeurism? How can we move beyond a structural understanding of incarceration to one with personal impact? Put simply, we must provide the space for the people affected to speak for themselves.



This semester a group of Loyola University Honors students have attempted to do just that in collaboration with Solitary Watch and the Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center. Guided by the Honors program's motto "scholars for justice in the heart of New Orleans," students processed in-depth questionnaires completed by men incarcerated in Louisiana. The men told profound, heartbreaking, and at times humorous stories—the narratives as

November 8

Dr. Weishar and Dr. Mitchell participated in a meeting of the Louisiana Youth Justice Coalition at the Mid-City Library in New Orleans.

November 5

Fr. Kammer presented two workshops at the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice in Crystal City, VA.

November 4

Fr. Kammer presented a workshop on the Scriptural roots of social justice at Holy Trinity Parish in Washington, D.C.

November 3

Fr. Kammer chaired a meeting of the Board of Directors of Ignatian Solidarity Network in Crystal City, VA.

November 1

Dr. Weishar attended a planning meeting of the Greater New Orleans Interfaith Sanctuary Committee Steering Committee.

October 20

Dr. Weishar and Dr. Mitchell presented workshops on "Immigration Through the Lens of Faith" and "The Necessity of Activism and Advocacy in Pursuit of Institutional Change Goals", respectively, at the Symposium for Systemic Change held in Baton Rouge.

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complex and human as the men themselves. While the men's experiences are their own to share, the students' reflections below demonstrate the pedagogical and personal power of story-telling.

- "Simply seeing the handwriting humanized them; they were no longer a concept or a statistic. By processing these surveys, our class learned the realistic, personal, harsh details of life in solitary confinement— not just glimpses of it on Netflix shows."
- "One man put at least one exclamation point in almost every answer, sometimes accenting particularly outrageous statements with three or four. Another filled every space allotted with small script, writing over the text of the questions when necessary. It was easy to see how much they wanted to be heard...It was simultaneously rewarding and sad to see piles of surveys on the table, knowing that each one was a person's voice and testimony."
- "Words hold power, and the sheer amount of words that these surveys contain drive home a clear message: life is hell for those on the inside of a 6' by 9' cell."

Clarity and understanding are but first steps. The most important question an engaged scholar can ask, however, is "so what?" Armed with this knowledge, what are you prepared to do? Here too the students eagerly linked their emotional connection with their commitment to live out the characteristics of a Jesuit education.

- "As future world leaders, educators, and learners, this project opened doors to real-world narratives that allowed the class to see first-hand social injustices."
- "As a Christian, I believe that there is a duty to stand up for the poor and the afflicted and to deliver them from their troubles in any peaceful way possible...We are to follow Jesus's example in caring for the poor and oppressed and bring healing where it is needed."
- "Reform begins with people, informed people. As Loyola Honors students, it's in our DNA to seek a more just world. Now that we're informed, it's our job to inform, and that's not a hard task."

Prisons are not solutions for social problems. For activists and abolitionists to dismantle the system, they must place the fundamental humanity of each person at the center of their work. Ultimately this is what any liberal arts education, and especially a Jesuit education, must empower students to do: engage in action; seek justice; and most importantly strive for *magis*.

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