

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

A social justice newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order St. Francis



Special Interest Articles:

- Many Journeys—One Family
- Blessed are the Peacemakers



Individual Highlights:

- National Migration Week 3
- Migration Facts 3
- A “pilgrimage” to Charleston 4
- Migration “Talking Points” 6
- A Resource 7
- Message from the Social Justice Committee 7

Sr. Cecilia Marie Morton, Sr. Donna Wilhelm, Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, Jennifer Dillon, Sr. Marjorie White, Maxine Smith, Sr. Rose Grabowski, Sr. Shannon Fox
—Social Justice Committee

Many Journeys – One Family

by Sister Dorothy Pagosa

“**M**any Journeys—One Family”...this is the theme for National Migration Week (January 8–14).

It can also be considered the theme of this newsletter. We are One Family under God no matter where we live or the color of our skin.

In these articles you will read about some journeys

—either physically or psychically—that some of our sisters have taken.

You will read about a journey to Charleston, where memories of our past revolts, racism and Southern hospitality are ever present.

You will read about a conference we helped sponsor called “Blessed are the Peacemakers”—a

positive reminder of our role in the world right now.

Then we look at the journeys our brothers and sisters have made to the U.S. from other countries, some too young to remember their former country.

We are One Family under God and are called upon to make our voices heard at a time when others forget this mandate. ■

Blessed are the Peacemakers

by Sister Jane Blabolil, with Sister Betty Gulick

Maria Shriver in her “Sunday Paper” often uses the phrase: “*I’ve been thinking...*”

Many of us in the Cleveland area have been thinking about violence – domestic, racial, criminal, addiction-related and not only here but in every corner of our nation and our world. So what gives me/us hope particularly as the people of God who long for a world of justice and peace? Can we claim to be among those whom the Gospel calls “the peacemakers”?

On Saturday, September 30th a day-long

symposium, “Blessed are the Peacemakers” took place at John Carroll University here in the Cleveland area.

Inspired by the April 2016 *Non-violence and Just Peace Conference* held at the Vatican, this Conference was sponsored by the Diocesan Social Action Office, area peace and justice groups, and several religious orders including our own, SSJ-TOSF.

Several hundred people gathered to explore creative solutions through peace building and active non-violence but perhaps even more importantly

through person-to-person sharing from the perspective of different backgrounds and experience.

Opportunities for education, dialogue, and active engagement rooted in the Catholic Peace Tradition were the order of the day. The event was free for students and opened the doors to their active participation.

Marie Dennis, the opening Keynote Speaker and co-president of Pax Christi International spoke on “integrating Gospel Nonviolence into the Life and Mission of the Church.” Our response to

Continued on p. 2



Blessed are the Peacemakers... continued from p. 1

world crisis is often to respond with military force. As she stated: “We are well prepared to win the war and woefully unprepared to win the peace.”

Her strong belief is that the Catholic Church (which means ALL of us) “...could make a tremendous contribution to sustaining peace by investing its significant moral, educational, financial, research and advocacy capacity in promoting effective nonviolent strategies for preventing war and protecting vulnerable communities.”

After her presentation we moved to various areas to participate in one of six workshops offered (see below). The afternoon offered the opportunity to attend a second workshop.

The workshop on seeking authentic relationships in a world wounded by violence drew me (Jane) and about 100 others to listen and to share with Dr. Elizabeth T. Vasko, Associate Professor of Theology from Duquesne University. Some of her salient comments included:

- *“I believe love in a world wounded by violence looks like community. When I think of community I think of various different people with different skin colors, ages, experience, and stories coming together.”*
- *“In this oneness, the wounds of the world and the differences of individuals are acknowledged because of love.”*

As we look to our own understandings of and desires for “community” such

statements offer abundant opportunities for reflection and hopefully, action.

Sister Betty Gulick, who attended the morning workshop, “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Social Justice through Resettlement,” offers the following reflection:

The two speakers shared information on the resettlement process for refugees and our role in welcoming the stranger among us in the Cleveland and Akron area. They shared how we as a community can get involved in volunteering our time in the process. The agencies are always in need of people who can help with transportation or teaching them the English language or helping to set up a home for them.”

Even the lunch hour was put to fruitful use. We were invited to sit at a table with others who had a similar interest in the theme at hand. Sister Betty enjoyed lunch with two women who were very involved in sharing information on the death penalty. My luncheon companions and I focused on the theme of “Racism.” I couldn’t help calling to mind Jean-François’ definition of “Eucharist” and truly felt that we had shared around the table of the Lord.

The day culminated in the celebration of a Mass with an offering of a collage of Peace Symbols created throughout the day by participants. We all felt the flow of energy which filled us with a desire to be those Peacemakers that the world so desperately needs. ■

Workshops and Speakers at the Event

- **Conflict Migration and Climate Change** – Dr. Kim Lamberty, Catholic Relief Services
- **What Becomes of Cain and Abel’s Mother? Seeking Authentic Relationships in a World Wounded by Violence** – Dr. Elizabeth Vasko, Duquesne University
- **Student Perspectives on Peace Building and the Criminal Justice System** – Students, John Carroll University
- **Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Social Justice through Resettlement** – Molly Rehak & Andrew Mathay, Migration and Refugee Services, Catholic Charities
- **Do Sweat the Small Stuff** – Deacon Shelby Friend and Dr. John Shields
- **Nuclear Disarmament in the Just War Tradition** – Dr. Steve Colecchi, International Peace and Justice, USCCB. ■

National Migration Week: January 8–14, 2018 “Many Journeys — One Family”

by Sister Dorothy Pagosa

Pope Francis has called upon all of us to “Share the Journey” of our brother and sister migrants.

From January 8th to the 14th we are invited to dwell upon the journey of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus from Bethlehem to Egypt to protect the child and keep their family intact.

This is part of our faith. Would we deny that same protection for our brothers and sisters fleeing war-torn areas, epidemics of cholera (Haiti), and natural disasters?

I have been blessed to meet migrants seeking asylum in the U.S. who are escaping torture and sex trafficking. I pray that their asylum applications (and in a few cases, this has occurred already) will be approved. They are not

“terrorists.” They are “terrorized.”

One of the sad situations happening right now is the termination of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). Children were brought to the U.S. when they were very young. This is the only country they know.

Many have been true heroes during recent disasters and fine members of the United States. They had to renew every five years and pay \$500 each time. Their backgrounds are checked for any illegal activity. They do not know the country they were born in.

What can you do?

• **Action #1** – Call the White House at (202) 456-1111 and leave a message demanding that the Administration #DefendDACA

• **Action #2** – Call your Senators and Representatives at (202) 224-3121. (Please call this line 3 times to be connected with your 1 Representative and your 2 Senators)

Sample Script:

"My name is ___ and I'm your constituent from [City, State]. I support the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and demand that it be reinstated. DACA has given nearly 800,000 young people the opportunity to pursue their dreams. I urge you to do everything in your power to protect DACA and stand in solidarity with immigrant youth."

• **Action #3** – Tweet @WhiteHouse, #Support the DACA students who want the same future as we do. ■



“We continue to influence our public officials to pass legislation that supports the human rights of all through email campaigns, public meetings, letter writing, phone calls, etc.”

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter

Migration Facts

Immigration Reform

Position: The Catholic Bishops and the Church support humane immigration reform. We must reform our broken system that separates families and impedes due process.

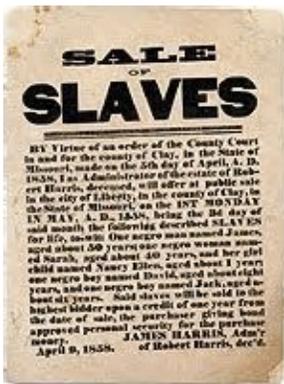
Facts:

- Since 2010, 3.6 million immigrants have become naturalized US citizens.
- Unauthorized immigrants also pay a wide range of taxes, including sales taxes where applicable and property taxes – directly if they own and indirectly if they rent. Estimates state that unauthorized migrants pay an estimated 11.64 billion dollars every year in state and local taxes.
- It can take upwards of a decade for legal permanent residents to reunify with immediate family members from Mexico, the Philippines, and other countries. (Congressional Research Service)

Continued on p. 5

A "pilgrimage" to Charleston

by Sister Donna Wilhelm



At the *Old Slave Mart Museum* with our hostess, *Christine King Mitchell*

I suppose I am writing *this* because of the racial tension that exists in our time. I believe we can identify the roots of that tension in the peculiar institution of human slavery as it existed in our country.

I'm a bit of a Civil War buff. I have tried over the years to get inside of that conflict because I hope that knowing and experiencing more of the culture of the North and the South might help me to see ways, even simple ways, to create a common culture of justice, respect, and the ability to value all of the unique cultures of our nation.

Over the years I've tried to do that by reading, by taking opportunities to experience some of the cultures that shaped the reality of our nation, and by visiting places like Sojourner Truth's home, the cemetery at Gettysburg, and The Underground Railroad Museum.

For many years my bucket list has included a visit to Charleston, SC. This past October Sister Francis Therese and I, along with Sister Maryann, a Notre Dame friend of mine, traveled to Charleston.

Charleston, we found, is a city of contrasts, paradoxes, beauty and

great tragedy. It is the home of lovely gardens and real "Southern hospitality." It is a place where a visitor can sense, can feel, and taste culture(s) that are integral parts of our national soul. We are daughters and sons of the North or the South.

Our pilgrimage to Charleston gave us insight into how our experiences are unique.

Charleston has the distinction of being central to the story of American slavery. Forty percent of all of the enslaved persons from Africa who were removed to the United States came through the Charleston harbor. At its peak, when there were 4 million enslaved persons in the U.S. 10% lived in South Carolina. And at that time 57% of the state's population was comprised of enslaved Africans. Slavery in South Carolina was especially cruel, not in small part due to the fact that enslaved persons outnumbered the free.

The old city is wrapped in a cloak of natural beauty: Moss covered oaks line streets, most of the oldest finest homes have magnificent gardens, and if not for the cars and other trappings of modern culture it is very easy to close one's eyes and imagine the cobblestone streets filled with carriages and to experience life as it was in the early 19th century.

We visited many historic and cultural sites on our three-day pilgrimage. On the last day the remarkable contrasts that have shaped the soul of this city became clear. The poignancy of the cultures that have existed in it for hundreds of years was obvious.

On that last morning we visited the Confederate Museum which is owned and operated by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Charleston Chapter. Every possible nook and cranny of the one-room museum is filled with Southern memorabilia from the Civil War years. Its treasures include cannon, cannon balls, uniforms, insignia, flags, and most telling, the diaries of simple enlisted men.

Just a 10-minute walk away, we arrived at the Old Slave Mart Museum. It, too, was a revelation. This museum contained another kind of memorabilia.

We stood on the very floor where enslaved persons were bought and sold and viewed shackles and whips and read the stories of persons snatched from their homes to provide cheap labor for the numerous rice plantations that once existed in greater

Continued on p. 5

A “pilgrimage” to Charleston *continued from page 4*

Charleston. The Museum itself sits on Chalmers Avenue, one of the few remaining cobblestone streets in the town. These streets, we learned, were constructed of stones laid four feet deep!

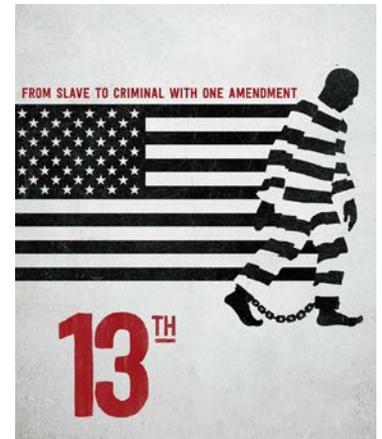
We were welcomed to the Slave Mart by Christine King Mitchell, a Georgia-born woman of enslaved African ancestry. Strikingly, she invited us to call to

mind the hundreds of magnificent mansion homes that we enjoyed in the historic district.

Then, she held up both of her hands, palms out, and said, “Remember, all those buildings, all of the streets, were built by these hands.” With that realization, every time I saw one of the beautiful mansions I was reminded of the people who built them.

Knowing that truth, I realized, gave me a glimpse of how near and how distant we can be from one another, and of how essential it is that we tell the whole story.

For an excellent review of the institution of slavery in the U.S. you might want to watch “13th,” a documentary that can be found on Netflix. ■



Migration Facts *continued from page 3*

Unaccompanied Children and Families from Central America

Position: Unaccompanied children arrive at our borders without their parent or legal guardian with them. In recent years, many of these children were from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Most are fleeing grave violence, gang recruitment and are seeking to reunify with family in the US.

Facts:

- In FY 2015, Mexico deported 165,000 Central Americans. The number detained in Mexico has tripled in the past four years amid growing pressure and economic support from the US to stem the flow. (The Guardian).
- 73% of unaccompanied children who had legal representation won their immigration case in the United States, compared to 15% who were unrepresented. (American Bar Association)

Immigrant Detention

Position: Immigrant detention is a growing industry in this country, with Congress allocating as much as \$2 billion a year to maintain and expand it. Due to mandatory detention laws people who are not flight risks or risks to national security and are extremely vulnerable, such as asylum-seekers, families, and victims of human trafficking, are being held unnecessarily in detention.

Facts:

- In FY2015 the Department of Homeland Security detained 406,595 immigrants compared to 486,651 in FY2014; it is required that 34,000 beds are available each day. (Department of Homeland Security).
- Alternatives to detention programs can cost as low as \$10.55 per person per day, as compared to \$164 per person per day for detention. (GAO)

Refugee Protection

Position: USCCB is the largest private refugee resettlement agency in the United States, helping to resettle more than one million refugees in the US since 1975.

Facts:

- The top five populations resettled during FY2015: Congo, Syria, Burma, Iraq, and Somalia.
- 12,000 Syrian refugees resettled in the United States since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011. (Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration)
- According to the United Nation’s High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 66 million persons were displaced in the world at the end of 2015. (UNHCR)

Continued on p. 6

Migration Facts *continued from page 5***Human Trafficking**

Position: Human trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of subjecting that person to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. The Catholic Church objects to this practice as an affront to human dignity.

Facts:

- Estimates vary, but as many as 17,500 persons are trafficked into the United States annually.
- Although sex trafficking remains a serious problem, the two largest trafficking cases in the United States involved labor trafficking, in Guam and in New York (Long Island).

National Migration Week: Talking Points *continued from page 5*

- Catholics are called to stand with new American immigrants as our brothers and sisters. This is who we are. This is what we do
- We belong to the same Church no matter where we're from. Our Catholic identity isn't based on where we live but on our faith in Jesus Christ. We're one family, and the Catholic Church is always our home.
- In Pope Francis we have a leader from Argentina, a country of immigrants. He is the son of immigrants and a native Spanish speaker. These issues are close to his heart.
- Immigration is about real people who are trying to find a better life and a new beginning. As Pope Francis stated, "Each migrant has a name, a face and a story."
- Welcoming immigrants is part of the Catholic Social Teaching and reflects the Biblical tradition to welcome the stranger.
- The Catholic Church has been welcoming immigrants to the United States since the nation's founding and has been integral in helping integrate into American culture.
- In addition to welcoming and caring for those in need, the Church continues to uphold the centrality of family reunification as a critical component of our immigration system.
- America is a better country due to the contributions of immigrants.
- Forced displacement of people is at the highest level since World War Two, with more than 65 million people displaced around the world.
- Refugees are the most rigorously screened population coming into America. This screening happens before they ever set foot in our country.

Source: Justice for Immigrants, USCCB



Resource You May Find Interesting

“Stemming from our Franciscan values and the fact that all life is interconnected, members, vowed and non-vowed, are encouraged to be engaged in ministry with those living on the margins of society and struggling to live with dignity.”

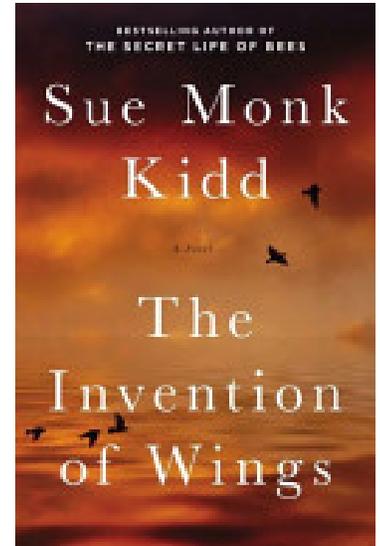
SSJ-TOSF Congregational
Commitments
26th General Chapter



Interested in learning more about the experiences of enslaved and free persons in the early 19th century?

Look for *The Invention of Wings*
by Sue Monk Kid.

This book is described as an “exquisitely written novel that is a triumph of storytelling and one that looks with unswerving eyes at one of the most devastating wounds in American history, through women whose struggles for liberation, empowerment, and expression will leave no reader unmoved.”



Message from the Social Justice Committee:

**We wish each Sister and Associate
a Blessed Christmas**

and a New Year of 2018

filled with

Justice, Peace and Hope for our World.

REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- “Sightings”
- Brief write-ups of your activities, suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources, etc.

Note: The **next issue** of *We Commit Ourselves* will be published in **February ‘18**.

Please send any items for inclusion in this next issue to **Sister Shannon Fox** no later than Friday, **January 26, 2018**.

~ Your Social Justice Committee