

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating August 30, 2020

Communications with the editor should be sent to j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars.

Editorial

After the calendar, the Sunday Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for the Twenty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Jesus in Nazareth*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

The business-like proceedings of the San Antonio City Council would rarely find their way into these pages. But on Thursday August 18, immediately prior to a vote to place a tax referendum on the November election ballot, Councilwoman Adriana Rocha Garcia from Council District 4 spoke in favor of the action, giving a heartfelt statement that drew justifiable attention. The *San Antonio Report* (the renamed *Rivard Report*) posted her commentary in full. The text follows Tom Keene's poem.

Calendar

(Times are given in Central Time Zone)

Online

Tuesday August 25, 12:00pm-1:00pm, "Mental Illness and the Death Penalty," Kimberley Harrison (clinical psychologist, Austin). Register at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdTsBwDSkp5v9ERYcljNfjVXUPxVx0KIEdfv9JT-lyuNOfi9w/viewform>

Tuesday August 25, 6:30-8:30, Courageous Conversations tribute to John Lewis and C.T. Vivian, civil rights legends who died last month. On Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82576666573?pwd=UmlxaklwL1M3MFZuY2UyRVU5OXJ5dz09#success>

Meeting ID 825 7666 6573

Passcode 069256

In case of connection problems, call Johnnie Dorsey at 512-217-9616

Prior recommended video, by John Lewis:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_i2DSkAys-8&feature=youtu.be

Wednesday August 26, 6:00pm, Jewish Voice for Peace chapter meeting. Request Zoom invitation from Judith Norman, jnorman2@trinity.edu. Agenda: Christian Zionism.

Thursday August 27, 1:30pm-2:30pm, “The Protecting Places of Worship Forum,” hosted by American Jewish Committee, Community of Conscience, Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council, and Rice University Boniuk Institute. Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/protecting-places-of-worship-virtual-forum-tickets-113054591326>

Tuesday September 1, 6:00pm CT, “White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity,” Robert P. Jones (CEO, Public Religion Research Institute). Register at: https://faithinaction.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3f3NJFRaS5GqjnHOE3enhw?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=16921f70-4995-4fce-8561-857e3b7061dc

Saturday September 5, 2:00pm, Pax Christi San Antonio online meeting. For the Zoom link, contact Yvonne Dilling: yvonedilling@gmail.com. Agenda:

1) Discussion of transporting radioactive waste through Texas cities, Karen Hadden.

2) discussion of one of the Melaneyes Media videos, available at : <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/melaneyes-media-17744127474>:

Sunday August 16, 7:00pm, video, *The Lynching of Black America*.

Thursday August 20, 7:00pm, video, *Black History, San Antonio*.

Sunday August 23, 7:00pm, video, *The Case for Reparations*.

Thursday September 10, 12:30pm-1:30pm, webinar “Social Responsibility of Religious Communities: Asian Traditions,” Robert Hunt (Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University) and friends. \$15; register at https://secure.touchnet.net/C21403_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?PRODUCTID=1930&SINGLESTORE=true

Friday September 11, 8:00am, online presentation “Black People in America’s Minority Religions,” Mansa Bilal King (Morehouse College). Information: Hayley Helmstreet, jhj2@rice.edu. Register at:

https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20200911/event_id/110233

Saturdays September 12, October 17, and November 21, 10:30am-11:30am, SoL series, “Faith and Race—An Ongoing Conversation,” Bishop Trevor Alexander (Church of God in Christ, University of the Incarnate Word), Rev. Dries Coetzee (University Presbyterian Church), and Dr. Joshie Piper (University of the Incarnate Word). \$10 for all three sessions before September &, \$15 after. Register at:

<https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

Friday September 17, 7:00pm, “Homemade Citizenship: All but Inviting Injury,” Koritha Mitchell (Ohio State University). Lecture on the African American experience hosted by Trinity University. Register at:

https://trinity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_FoYRDwbAS3q0wkTsx7V6Cw

Sunday September 27, 9:30am, “Darwin, Race, Slavery, and the Tree of Life,” Bruce Yeager. Online, TBA: contact mmcgm63@gmail.com. Posted by St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston.

Wednesday September 30, 8:00pm, *Blood on the Wall - Humanizing the Immigration Debate*, on the National Geographic Channel.

Saturday October 3, Voice of the faithful is holding its 2020 Conference online, with Phyllis Zagano and Fr. Richard Lennan as keynote speakers. \$50. Register at <https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/weblink.aspx?name=votf&id=9>

In El Paso

Wednesday August 26 and **Friday August 28**, noon hour, death penalty vigils in front of the new federal courthouse at the corner of Magoffin and Campbell.

In San Antonio

Thursday September 10 is the date for The Big Give this year. See <https://www.thebiggivesa.org/>

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Notices

Online course, *Laudato Sí and Integral Ecology*, beginning September, 12 sessions, presented by the Ordo Fratrum Minores (Franciscans), headquartered in Rome. Information and registration: <https://laudatosi-school-77aa.thinkific.com/>

Video, *Immigration Nation - An Inside View of ICE & How it Operates*: <https://www.netflix.com/title/80994107>

Online Resource for families or small groups:

If you're needing some social interaction with depth, more than just listening to zoom webinars, longing for the social time that used to happen before and after Mass, consider using the *Maryknoll Weekly Reflection Guides*. Gather as family or small group and use these guides in Facetime, Skype, Zoom etc. This an easy online structure with prayer, an introductory theme, a link to the Sunday Readings and some reflection questions to guide group conversation. Using the SeeJudgeAct methodology, you will be led as a group to consider where, in light of the shared reflection, the Spirit is calling you this week. The Global Solidarity charism of the Maryknoll family will feed you spiritually for these challenging times. Find the Guides in both Spanish and English at: <https://www.maryknoll.us/home/resources/mission-spirituality/ordinary-time-2020>

Second Reading (Romans 12:1-2)

"I exhort you, then, brothers and sisters, through the mercies of God, to offer yourselves as a living, holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, whereby your worship would be with something spiritual." In this brief passage, Paul urges us to engage in living worship, worship that engages the mind, not merely externals. The externals are useful to stir up the mind, but mind or spirit is what the externals are useful for. As I write this, many of us have access to the externals only remotely over the internet because of the dangers involved in in-person worship, especially those of us vulnerable by age or underlying medical conditions. Some externals that potentially contaminate the air, such as congregational singing, are eliminated for the time being. So while there are conditions to be overcome to stir up the mind, it can be an opportunity not to be taken up with externals alone.

So "do not conform to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of the mind, so that you may examine what the will of God is, what is good, acceptable, and whole." We are in an age wherein people miss the hype of commercialism and mere rhetoric, hate speech that most would reject with a little reflection. The late Father Theodore Hesburgh, then-president of the University of Notre Dame, resigned from the United States Commission on Civil Rights, saying the U.S. government of the day "would rather sell something than do something." At the time, President Nixon was promoting school integration in as disruptive a manner as possible in order to provoke a racial backlash. Such are still the machinations of this age. Do not conform to them, but use the spiritual powers of the mind.

Third Reading (Matthew 16:21-27)

"Get behind me, Satan; you are my stumbling stone, for you do not think the things of God but human things." This is Jesus' well-known rebuke when Peter protested against Jesus going to Jerusalem to "suffer many things from the elders, high priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day." Peter had not really said anything evil; he simply had not recognized what Jesus saw was inevitable. The absence of evil, however, was insufficient. Jesus was insistent that he was to follow his calling rather than expend his energies avoiding what could not be avoided.

And "be raised on the third day": Mark had written "after three days," and Matthew changes the text to "on the third day." What was at issue was Matthew's preference for highlighting an allusion to Exodus 19:18: "for on the

third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” Being raised on the third day was to parallel being in the sight of all the people.

An old saying has it that there is no Resurrection without a Crucifixion. There must be a rising from the wrath of officials and other people—all of them all too human. “If anyone wishes to come after me, deny the self and take up one’s cross and follow me.” It is not possible to square such language with proper and respectable churches that are staffed by safe professionals who maintain chaplaincies for worldly forces.

Poem

Jesus in Nazareth

He came back to our village,
this bastard son of Mary,
this carpenter, now notorious
for healings and teachings.

He came with his rabble of
women and men hanging on
to his doings and words.
Who does he think he is?

Some of us went to him for healings.
We listened to his ramblings
about this Kingdom of God,
coming soon, already growing among us.

We elders hung back.
We knew this guy as a kid
coming to synagogue,
raising befuddling questions.

Some of his healings took
but a lot more didn’t.

Most of us knew him too well.
Off he went with his groupies.

Word came back about his troubles
with the Romans and temple chiefs.
The Romans dispatched him
in their Roman way.

Now, his minions disrupt our synagogues
with claims he is our urgently needed messiah.
imagine that: a crucified savior
and still making trouble.

Tom Keene

**Comments of San Antonio Councilwoman Adriana Rocha Garcia
Prior to the Vote to Put an Expanded Job Training Program
on the November Ballot**

(Introduction from the San Antonio Report, August 13, 2020, in Italics)

After hours of meetings over the past two weeks and a full month of work from a high-profile taskforce, City Council voted to put an ambitious workforce development and education initiative on the November ballot.

Before Council members took that vote, as is customary, most delivered passionate speeches to their colleagues and the public, defending their position. With tears in her eyes, Councilwoman Adriana Rocha Garcia (D4) recounted the circumstances that led to six deaths in her family from COVID-19. But the virus isn't the only culprit, she said: poverty is guilty, too.

Below are her remarks:

I want to start off by sharing a number that has been significant to me during this time, that number is the number six. Six of my family members have died as a result of COVID-19. Six cousins whose early economic circumstances combined with the lack of access to healthy habits at a young age contributed to

the underlying health conditions they developed as adults, thus complicating their ability to survive an unforgiving virus.

The matriarch of that family, my dad's sister, my Tía Rosa (*que en paz descanse*), worked really hard, physically hard, to provide for her family. Her husband, my Tío Mingo, and she traveled up north in their van every year to Wisconsin with their entire family of 10 children to pick crops, leaving behind their humble home in District 5, in zip code 78207, on the West Side of San Antonio on Queretaro, about two blocks from where my cousins are now buried.

When they'd come back to San Antonio, there was always a celebration with tamales and plenty of pan dulce. My Tía Rosa and my cousins would gather around the dinner table after washing the dishes and play games of lotería, where she often would tell stories of people who were advocating for the rights of folks who picked crops. I recall in her stories the names of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, who advocated for families like hers who worked the fields in *El Norte*.

Although there were ten kids to feed, they never went hungry, thanks to the hard work of my aunt and uncle, but they often ate what was readily available and cheap, many times a meal constituting of sugar-packed alternatives and empty calories, which is what they could afford. And if they got sick, they kept working because they couldn't afford not to.

Now, I must admit that I don't know how many families are still migrating up north to find work, but I know that a program like the one we are being presented today would've helped my Tía Rosa provide her children access to an education without disruption, access to health care, and access to an overall better quality of life. Perhaps an opportunity like this for skills training, certifications, and other academic degrees would've led to a family-sustaining-wage job that would've kept my cousins from developing the underlying health conditions that they had, including diabetes and hypertension. And perhaps, as a result, they would've had a better chance of surviving. But, here we are, a family mourning the loss of six of its members. Six lives lost in exactly six weeks.

Today, our vote to place this initiative on the ballot in November allows us to cast a vote to change the future of many families with a small step, and I'd like to thank the mayor, Councilwoman Rebecca Viagran, and the folks on the committee and the working groups for uniting together to begin what I think will be a ripple effect that can change the course of San Antonio's trajectory. And perhaps when the next virus attacks us unexpectedly, our action today will have given more San Antonio residents a better chance at surviving it.

Six votes is all it takes today for this council to positively affect the lives of many people who we will never know, but who we can keep from suffering from the effects of the economic oppression that has for so long held so many back.

Looking at my notes from about a year ago, when I met with Emily Donaldson from the *San Antonio Report* about a story regarding school boards, I read in my notes a reminder to tell her that the key to addressing anything is to work united and together.

In District 4, 90 percent of the population is economically disadvantaged, and the reality is that this stems from the fact that our district has a low level of educational attainment. Residents like the ones I represent will benefit from an opportunity like this, and as a result, the entire city will benefit. But we must work together to address the systemic issues – overlooked errors at best – that have allowed this unfairness to happen.

Community partners like Port SA have already stepped up to the plate, establishing internships for kids to see robots operate for the very first time, or learn about defending their country from attacks from behind a computer by teaching them about cybersecurity. The South San Antonio Chamber of Commerce is another community partner that has stepped up, investing money, time, and effort into the Alamo City Electrathon, where students can build and race their very own electric-powered car. Holt Cat, Toyota, and Cast STEM have also created opportunities for our kids to learn and have access to internships that lead to jobs in in-demand fields, and I appreciate their efforts to recruit from their own backyard.

Our community partners have stepped up, and this is our opportunity to step up, too. This is our individual opportunity to cast a vote today that allows every voter in San Antonio the opportunity to cast a vote in November to help people that they may never meet, but who may one day be or give birth to the person who develops the vaccine for a virus, a cure for a disease, or who may become the first person from San Antonio to achieve the previously impossible.

Integrating the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, I'd like to share the words of Our Lady of the Lake University Faculty Assembly President Karina Gil delivered on Tuesday. She shared "that the Sisters of Divine Providence had the radical idea to provide education to women and girls, at a time in history when that opportunity was only available to a few selected women. Their idea became a statement, and a statement became action." Their action, Gil stated, continued despite "global wars, the flu pandemic,

the Great Depression, and while many called for peace and fought for their civil rights.”

Gil reminded us that these women were a group who cared about what was happening around them and took a stand. She reminded us that here we are again in a year “when the world is dealing with a major pandemic that has affected many in our community disproportionately, a year in which many in our community are still fighting for their basic human dignity and civil rights and fighting to eradicate societal illnesses, and in a year when, globally, the concept of leadership has been questioned more than ever.”

Today, this is our Council’s opportunity to begin a legacy, to take the idea and make it a statement, giving our community the opportunity to place it into action this November. Thus, an idea becoming a statement, and a statement becoming an action.

So, thank you, Dr. Gil, for your inspiring words, which I found appropriate to integrate into today’s conversation.

In closing, I leave you with six words: *Sí se puede. San Antonio puede.*

Links

Pax Christi International

<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.

<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas

<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi Dallas

<http://www.Paxchristidallastx.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio

<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative
www.msjc.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee
<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center
<http://www.sanantoniopace.center>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty
www.txccedp.org

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio
www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/

Climate Change
www.creation-care.com

NowCastSA
www.nowcastsa.com/

Migrant Center for Human Rights
<https://Migrantcenter.org>