

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating October 4, 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-seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *our goddess-god*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. After the poem is a statement of principles for the 2020 election, issued by Pax Christi USA. It does not explicitly endorse any candidate, but the principles are clear enough to inspire decisions.

Calendar

Times are given in Central Daylight Time)

Online

Sunday September 27, 9:30am, "Darwin, Race, Slavery, and the Tree of Life," Bruce Yeager. Information: contact mmcgm63@gmail.com. Posted by St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston. Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86564638381?pwd=MTBtSF16eVhoTUF3SXJ2VIBWd0N2QT09#success>

Monday September 28, 3:00pm (4:00pm ET), webinar "Confronting Institutionalized Violence with Gospel Nonviolence," Art Laffin, Msgr. Ray East, and Marie Dennis (all Pax Christi USA). Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84589772330?tk=ZyuaZ_GxiUO2LG8oxXvgIJvrZzwI5KMLnIST7A2yNzs.DQIAAAATsf-KhYwUFVld29NRIQzNndXa0VRaU9Ia1ZBAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA&pwd=M2V2VU9wRlhYYUIrUGMyYzErcGRXZz09

Tuesday September 29, 12:00pm-1:00pm, webinar “Overturning Wrongful Convictions in Texas,” Christopher Scott (House of Renewed Hope) and Mike Ware (Innocence Project of Texas). Register at:
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfG9LHysup1Fv1RPTewUben6UpvMvMEPwWXUxB5F87qxnbanw/viewform>

Tuesday September 29, 1:00pm (2:00 ET), panel webinar “‘I’m Catholic How Should I Discern?’ Conscience Discernment, and voting...,” Daniel DiLeo (Creighton University), Jill Rauh (US. Conference of Catholic Bishops), Brenna Davis (Ignatian Solidarity Network). Register at:
<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/5501571765996250636?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=e3fbe67d-392d-469d-bc0b-711e9cfe1aa9>

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

Wednesday September 30, 8:00pm-9:30pm, panel "Elections 2020: Justice Signs of Our Times," Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, Association of Marianist Universities, and the University of Dayton. RSVP at:
<https://files.constantcontact.com/bbbab666001/ba04b139-eb5c-4984-87d5-9b97c000b265.pdf>

Saturday October 3, 2:00pm, **Pax Christi San Antonio meeting**, online. Contact Tony Blasi for the link: J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com. The chapter has a number of business items to attend to this month.

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>

Monday October 5, 3:30pm-4:30pm, webinar “Why Scientists Need to Talk about Religion to Address Race and Gender Disparities in Science” Elaine Howard Ecklund (Rice University) and Brandon Vaidyanathan (Catholic University of America), moderated by David R. Johnson (University of Nevada, Reno). Register at: <http://bit.ly/science-religion-diversity>

Monday October 5, 4:00pm-5:30pm, Faiths in Conversation: Islam Religion in Society,“ Iman Dr. Khalil Abdur-Rashid (Harvard University), reponse from Hussain Rashid. Register at:
<https://35468.blackbaudhosting.com/35468/packagetickets?tab=3&txobjid=44b9c877-6897-4881-9fd8-760c4f9507f0>

Monday October 5, 6:30pm (7:30 ET), “are Nuclear Weapons an Absolute Evil?” Archbishop Joseph Mitsuaki Takimi (Nagasaki), Drew Christiansen, sj (Georgetown University), Maryann Cusimano Love (Catholic University of America) Hirokazu Miyazaki (Northwestern University), and Gerard Powers (University of Notre Dame). Register at: <https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/events/2020/10/05/are-nuclear-weapons-an-absolute-evil/>

Tuesday October 6, 12:00pm-1:00pm (1:00pm-2:00pm ET), Ta-Nehisi Coates (New York University), “Racial Equity and Housing Justice during and after COVID-19.” Register at: <https://bit.ly/32yRqi6>.

Wednesday October 7, 4:00pm (5:00pm ET) "Showing Up: The Radical Work of Commitment in Uncertain Times," Sr. Colleen Gibson, SSJ. 20th Annual Anne Drummey O’Callaghan Lecture on Women in the Church, at Fairfield University. Register at fairfield.edu/cs

Saturdays October 17 and **November 21**, 10:30am-11:30am, “Faith and Race—An Ongoing Conversation,” Bishop Trevor Alexander (Protestant chaplain, University of the Incarnate Word), Rev. Andries Coetzee (University Presbyterian Church), and Dr. Doshie Piper (University of the Incarnate Word). \$7.50 for both discussions, before October 12; \$10.00 after. Register at: <https://upcsa.org/sol-center-registration/>

Tuesday October 20, 2:00pm, webinar “Immigration and Asylum: Mission and Solidarity at the El Paso-Juarez border,” Hedi Cernaka (attorney and Maryknoll missionary). Register at:
https://mission.maryknoll.us/elpasajuarezborder?utm_campaign=2020%2010%20Webinars&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=95731585&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9OPwT20QEBVfhKli3Fc8g90QlqIFSoLjl-UIkk53l7-Zl4hZwjW_YQu5XJIMwQ8dl37zZ5cguv7MonU1dzQxy9wEAB6g&utm_content=95731585&utm_source=hs_email

Tuesday October 20, 1:00pm (Part I) and **Tuesday October 27**, 12:00pm (Part II), "Texas's 'Future Dangerousness' Special Issue," Gretchen Sween (Austin, Texas, attorney). Register at:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScTGdhjmus1Z8VVPE2EivDhFmmNERaWSZzeyuHs6XrJgXF_hw/viewform

In Houston

Tuesday September 29, 12:00pm, "Justice Over Equity with Houston Coalition Against Hate." Join Houston Coalition Against Hate Executive Director Marjorie Joseph for an introduction to a network of 65+ organizations, institutions, and individuals who are committed to reducing hate and increasing belonging in our city. Ms. Joseph and Assistant Director Liz Peterson will offer an overview of the Coalition's history and development along with a look at the context of hate in Houston and efforts to respond. Additionally, they will share the Coalition's new Justice Statement and discuss ways organizations, institutions, and corporations can join the movement for justice over equity. Register at:

https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ETxxVQYdTEGdBpCZpjQORA

Notices

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 (Philippians 4: 6-9)

The reading comes near to the conclusion of Paul's short letter to the Philippian church. There were two rival female leaders of the church, and he had urged them to "agree in the Lord." He also asks the rest of the church to help them do so and to rejoice in the Lord. This seems to be the lead up to the Eucharistic celebration.

"Do not be anxious, but make your requests known to God in every prayer and petition with thanksgiving. And the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will watch over your heart and your mind in Messiah Jesus." (Phil 4:6-7)

There is a tendency to wait until having some great anxiety in mind before resorting to prayer. Christianity is not magic; it does not get from God whatever we cannot bring about ourselves. Prayer should come before problems, preparing us for them. Appreciating what we have already received, in a spirit of thanksgiving, prevents problems and needs from controlling us.

Third Reading (Matthew 21: 33-43)

This Sunday's gospel is the parable of a householder "who planted a vineyard and placed a wall around it and dug a winepress in it and erected a tower; and he rented it out to tenant farmers and journeyed away." When he sent a slave to collect the landlord's share of the harvest, the tenant farmers killed the slave. They did likewise with a second delegation and even the householder's son. Patently Matthew has Jesus aim the parable at the Temple authorities, whom Jesus characterizes as avaricious and treacherous.

By the time Matthew was composing his gospel, the Temple and Jerusalem authorities were things of the past. A more primitive version of the parable (*Gospel of Thomas* logion 65) leaves out an exchange between Jesus and the authorities that Matthew places after the parable: "'Then when the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenant farmers?' They say to him, 'He will put the wicked to an end and lease the vineyard to other tenant farmers....'" The addendum is obviously meant to refer to the role of Christian church functionaries.

The parable presupposes the first century economy, in which there were no banks, stock markets, and stock and bond portfolios. Savings took the form of land and slaves. The householder in the parable is described as foregoing field slave ownership and, instead, leasing his fields out. It is an interesting exercise to consider what the equivalent situation would be in our economy. There are still people who invest in property and collect rents, often through retirement plans rather than directly. But there is far more to it than that. We have enormous corporate entities that operate enterprises with investors' funds. This is true of the private sector—manufactures, for example—as well as the public sector, where the funds in question have been taxed by a government.

So who are the equivalents of the avaricious and treacherous tenant farmers? Chief executive officers, especially ones who control enough shares of a corporation to be beyond the control of other stockholders, may enrich themselves well beyond their worth to the corporation. In doing that, they enable city managers, non-profit executives, and university presidents to argue that to obtain talented executives such as themselves extraordinarily high compensation packages are necessary. The avarice of such people is evident, but are they treacherous? Many who have worked in a large entity have seen the injustices perpetrated on employees who dare point out that the policies and practices that enrich the CEOs weaken the effectiveness of the entity itself. There is no limit to the lengths CEOs (and those who sell out to them) will go to discredit their critics, especially when the critics are right.

Poem

our goddess-god

Never can we reduce
the divine to one gender
but include in our scanty understandings
all and any genders,

all the full-of-wonder
ways of being we know
and may never know,

ceaselessly reminding ourselves
how in our wheels of conceptions
we are single spokes
running from rims that are nowhere
to axels that are everywhere.

Such is our journey.

Tom Keene and Muse
September 15, 2020

Statement of Principles: Elections 2020

Pax Christi USA

A Liberating Vision

Our commitment to follow in the footsteps and example of Jesus — born to a people suffering oppression, forced to cross borders as a refugee, devoted to supporting the struggles of marginalized peoples, persecuted and violently killed by the ruling Empire — guides our discernment of the current *signs of the times*, and leads us to affirm the following.

Land Acknowledgment

Pax Christi USA wishes to acknowledge and honor with gratitude the land and waterways and the Indigenous Peoples, past and present, who have stewarded Turtle Island, a territory that includes what is currently known as the United States of America. We recognize and uplift the understanding that much of this land continues to be unceded and that many Indigenous Peoples Nations currently lack federal recognition.

Acknowledgment of the Legacy of Slavery

Pax Christi USA wishes to acknowledge the despicable actions of the transatlantic slave trade that paved the way for current anti-Black racism. The labor of enslaved African people built the physical structures and generated the wealth still enjoyed by many of this country's institutions and families. We recognize that while many Catholics were abolitionists, still others profited from this shameful practice, and white people continue to benefit from its legacies to this day.

Acknowledgment of the Role of the Catholic Church

Pax Christi USA wishes to acknowledge and repent for the role of the institution of the Catholic Church in the process of colonization and its complicity in the sins of anti-Black racism, enslavement, and segregation. We commit ourselves to follow the leadership of Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, including those within the church, and to support them with intention, time, and money in the struggle for collective liberation.

On Racial Justice

Racism penetrates every aspect of life in the United States, seeding the terror that continually threatens and kills people of color while perpetuating white supremacy, and leaving all of humanity disfigured. The historical reality—readily apparent in policing, the prison system, education, and highlighted in the racial inequities heightened during the pandemic—indicts our society as one in which Black lives have not mattered. We assert that Black lives matter and that the violence inherent in systemic racism is an affront to the God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies all, and calls us together as one family. **As a community of conscience, we stand together and fully support the divestment of resources away from policing and toward education, healthcare, and community investment designed to serve people. We support reparations for the suffering inflicted on Black people because of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and targeted mass incarceration.**

On (Im)migration

Across the world, migrants and refugees are fleeing poverty, violence, and environmental devastation due to climate change and resource extraction, to seek a safe place for their families. We recognize the role that the government of the United States of America and U.S.-based corporations have played and continue to play in creating the conditions that millions of people in the Americas

and around the world are forced to escape. The racist fear-mongering and “blaming the victims,” as well as the cruel policies to detain immigrant children, separate families, and dismantle the asylum system are stains on our nation’s soul. **As a community of conscience, we stand together and fully support the right of people to migrate and seek refuge, citizenship, and justice, as well as the right of people not to migrate and live in safe conditions in their communities of origin.**

On Climate Change

Our world is in a climate crisis. As Pope Francis stated in *Laudato Si’*, we cannot ignore the Earth and her people’s desperate and urgent cries for environmental justice. As heat waves, wildfires, famines, melting glaciers, and rising sea levels sprawl across the globe, the poorest and most vulnerable are being disproportionately affected. Climate change not only forces people in poor and struggling countries to migrate, but fuels poverty, food insecurity, displacement and violence in communities around the United States. **As a community of conscience, we stand together and call on the United States to declare the climate crisis a national emergency by recommitting to the Paris Agreement, reinforcing the Clean Air Act, investing in clean energy sources, and pursuing a comprehensive justice approach as expressed in the U.S. Green New Deal.**

On Militarism

During this election cycle we must resist identifying strength as military might, marshal our resources and summon our moral courage to say “no” to a bloated military budget which robs people of the education, healthcare, housing, and jobs that they deserve. The human needs of communities in the U.S. and the world are held hostage to the greed of the Pentagon and a war economy that makes the entire world increasingly more insecure. Excluding Social Security benefits, almost half of our federal budget goes to military-related spending, including debt payments for prior wars. **As a community of conscience, we stand together and call for the abolition of nuclear weapons, a federal budget which prioritizes the promotion and funding of nonviolent solutions to conflict, the transformation of the war economy, and the radical transformation of U.S. foreign policy, as well as an immediate halt of U.S. interventionism in other countries. In addition, we call for an end of the militarized repression of social justice demonstrators in the U.S. and the militarization of the southern border.**

On Nuclear Disarmament

Seventy-five years after the appalling atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States, the whole earth remains under the threat of nuclear weapons. Weapons of mass destruction do not make the world safer; they create a climate of fear, distrust and hostility. Yet, signs of a growing nuclear arms race receive a fraction of attention from politicians, policymakers, and the public. Military spending to develop weapons that are lighter and more destructive siphons precious resources that could be used to meet basic human needs around the world. As Pope Francis declared during his visit to Hiroshima in 2019, “even the possession of nuclear weapons is immoral.” The presence of even one nuclear weapon is a crime against the dignity of human beings and the future for our common home, and it threatens us with the unimaginable destruction of everything we hold dear. **As a community of conscience, we stand together with the *hibakusha* (survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) in calling on the United States to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and fully support the extension of the New START Treaty.**

On Palestine

The United States of America continues to provide financial and political support to the government of Israel in its occupation of Palestinian land, an occupation illegal under international law. Meanwhile, the Israeli military continues displacing, killing, and terrorizing Palestinians, denying residents of the West Bank and Gaza their human rights to medical care, to clean water, to electricity, and to mobility. **As a community of conscience, we stand together and fully support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement to pressure the leaders of Israel towards a just peace in this conflict, and we join in solidarity with the Palestinian population.**

On COVID-19

COVID-19 is wreaking havoc around the world, threatening livelihoods and lives, and more drastically exposing the inequities in the healthcare system. The pandemic has unmasked structural racism, along with health and economic disparities that have long remained unaddressed in our society. In the United States alone, the administration’s lack of leadership to put in place a nationwide plan to contain the virus has claimed more than 190,000 lives (as of 9/8/20).

Tragically, Indigenous Peoples and other communities of color have been particularly impacted and traumatized. **As a community of conscience, we stand together with those who have been hard hit by COVID-19, and we urgently support a nationwide plan to ensure that the rights of people of color and other vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, low-income communities, and persons with pre-existing health conditions, are guaranteed.**

On Healthcare

Social determinants remain a leading cause of health disparities in the United States. Inequities within healthcare services highlight the racist and classist ideals that were woven into the creation of this system and remain present today. Individuals from all backgrounds are deserving of quality preventative and reactive care. Illnesses do not discriminate and neither should our healthcare system in order for all people to live healthy lives. **As a community of conscience, we stand together and call for the establishment of a universal healthcare system in the United States that is guided by the principle of its recognition as a basic human right. This system must provide quality healthcare to all people, regardless of their race, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, and/or immigration status.**

On LGBTQ+ Equality

The LGBTQ community, especially transgender people, remains one of society's most marginalized populations, a vulnerability which intersecting issues of race, class, residency status, and ability only intensifies. Discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity remains all too common for LGBTQ people in the United States, who still lack federal non-discrimination protections in areas like housing, social services, and healthcare. LGBTQ people face high levels of violence and experience homelessness at higher rates, in large part due to their exclusion by religious family members. **As a community of conscience, we affirm the right of LGBTQ people to equality, which includes an end to criminalization laws, passage of non-discrimination protections and other laws necessary for legal equality to be realized, and a culture and religious transformation to celebrate every person's sexual orientation and gender identity as being made *imago Dei*.**

On Mass Incarceration and the Death Penalty

The United States has the highest per-capita incarceration rate in the world, clear evidence of a “throwaway culture,” as Pope Francis describes it in his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. The U.S. criminal justice system upholds and perpetuates a racial caste and economic disparities by criminalizing poverty, addiction, and mental illness. Jim Crow laws morphed into the targeted mass incarceration of Black people and other people of color, while racialized migrants fleeing violence and oppression fed by U.S. foreign policy are caged in prisons (‘detention centers’) at the U.S. Southern border and other prisons around the country. **As a community of conscience, we stand together to support the creation and implementation of restorative justice practices rooted in respect for human dignity, healing, accountability, repair, and restoration; we call for an end to immigration incarceration and for the abolition of the death penalty.**

On Education

Since its initial formation, the framework for the education system in the United States has been established under a structure that promotes a euro-centric understanding of the purpose of life, rendering invisible cosmologies of Indigenous Peoples of this land and the peoples of the Global South which emphasize humans’ interdependency and the centrality of Mother Earth. In addition, there has been an intentional erasure of key historical facts that have impeded the advancement of the journey towards reparations, atonement, and ultimate unity. This must change. There is an urgent need for a recommitment to public education, one that accurately and transparently teaches students about historical events in the United States and various cultural perspectives, as well as the history of the global world. **As a community of conscience, we stand together and call for the establishment of an educational system that provides students with historically accurate curricula, individualized attention, a safe environment free from violence and the presence of police in schools, and access to technology and opportunities that will allow them to be respected and acknowledged when performing the role they choose in their communities.**

On Homelessness and Housing

Affordable housing has been an ongoing crisis in the United States, exemplified for instance by discriminatory laws like redlining. This has resulted in growing rates of homelessness and wealth inequality. There must be systemic solutions to the primary issues leading to homelessness, including the transformation of the

current “sick economic model,” as Pope Francis calls it, one that “disregards fundamental human values,” as well as addressing domestic violence, mental illness, addiction, and the need of universal healthcare. Long-term, permanent solutions are necessary in responding to this growing injustice. **As a community of conscience, we support the call by Pope Francis for all people to be ensured land, housing, and work, and we stand together and call for the enactment of policies that ensure affordable and accessible housing, assistance programs, and liveable wages while ending the criminalization of homelessness.**

On Gun Violence

On average in the United States, 100 people are killed every day due to gun violence, resulting in over 36,000 lives sacrificed annually and millions more forever traumatized in deference to the gun lobby. The disproportionality of gun violence is evidenced by Black people being ten times more likely to be murdered with a gun than their white counterparts, and women five times more likely to die if they are a victim of domestic violence when their abuser has access to a firearm. Individual and community trauma resulting from gun violence is devastating. **As a community of conscience, we stand together to call for common sense legislation that reflects how much we love our children and each other; this includes such reasonable measures such as universal background checks, a ban on assault weapons, and the recognition that gun violence is a national public health emergency.**

On Labor

Central to Catholic Social Teaching are the ideas that there’s dignity in all work and that workers have a right to fair wages and the ability to join unions. This is particularly important as inequality grows in our society and so many are unable to support their families on one job. The pandemic has highlighted the need for workers to have a collective voice on the job, whether it be to fight for personal protective equipment (PPE) and sick time, or to ensure safe conditions to return to work. **As a community of conscience, we stand together and support the passage of the first increase to the federal minimum wage since 2009, a federal paid sick leave law, and a reduction in the barriers that exist to forming unions, all of which are rooted in respect for human dignity and work.**

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.sanantoniopeace.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>