

# Testimony

## A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating April 15, 2018

Pax Christi San Antonio does not solicit donations; however, anyone wishing to join should make a donation to Pax Christi U.S.A. and notify Maria Tobin, [matob@aol.com](mailto:matob@aol.com), to receive email messages sent to members. 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.

Please do not respond to this newsletter's address; but send comments on the newsletter to [J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com](mailto:J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com).

### Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Easter. Tom Keene poem is *Sanctuary: An Easter Meditation*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. After the poem is a February 12 article about the militarization of Honduras; it was first published by *Tikkun*, an online magazine. See <https://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/about> for information on the magazine.

Every day two South Texas detention centers release asylum-seeking mothers with children and bring them to the San Antonio bus station or airport so that they can continue their journeys and live with relatives in the United States. Contrary to the claims of media ideologues and certain demagogue politicians, these people are not doing anything illegal. They are not smugglers, murderers, or rapists. They are people who have been threatened or victimized, and they are seeking safety through a process that is prescribed by law. Our local Interfaith Welcome Coalition, a group of volunteers, prepares two hundred backpacks for them every week, each containing bottled water, food, hygiene supplies, and a blanket. Grant funds for these supplies are running out; if you can, you might send a check made out to the "Interfaith Welcome Coalition" and send it to the Coalition, % University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell, San Antonio 78212.

### Calendar

#### In Austin

**Thursday April 12**, 12:00pm-2:00pm, Deliberative Dialogue on Immigration. Participate in dialogue, with results to go to Congressman Lloyd Doggett. Study text in preparation: [https://www.nifi.org/sites/default/files/product-downloads/immigration\\_america\\_g\\_0.pdf](https://www.nifi.org/sites/default/files/product-downloads/immigration_america_g_0.pdf). Fleck Hall, Room 305. RSVP encouraged: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/center-for-ethics-deliberative-dalogue-immigration-tickets-3669514468>.

**Friday April 15**, 12:00pm-1:00pm, discussion; The Gamer's Dilemma-Are we comfortable with children killing an average of 100,000 people in video games by the age of 18?" Recommended reading:  
[https://iainews.iai.tv/articles/the-gamers-dilemma-is-virtual-murder-morally-wrong-aid-827?utm\\_content=buffer890be&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://iainews.iai.tv/articles/the-gamers-dilemma-is-virtual-murder-morally-wrong-aid-827?utm_content=buffer890be&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer)  
Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

**Tuesday April 24**, 6:00pm-7:00pm, environmental justice panel with professional activists. Moody Hall 204, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

**Tuesday April 24**, 6:30pm-8:30pm, film by Martin Doblmeier, "An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story." Prothro Theatre, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas Austin.

**Wednesday April 25**, 9:30am-5:00pm, live streaming conference "Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, Washington, DC (8:30am-5:00pm Eastern Time Zone). To register to view the live stream:  
<https://catholicismobilizing.org/event/rj-conference>. Scroll down on the site to a form.

### **In Dallas**

**Tuesday April 10**, 6:00pm-7:00pm, Prof. Nilssen (Nord University, Norway), "Feeding the World in a Time of Climate Change." McCord Auditorium, 3225 University Blvd. More information at <https://www.facebook.com/events/598434610548424/>

**Monday April 16**, 11:30am-1:30pm, Dave Woodyard (Catholic Charities Dallas), Faith and business. Great Hall of Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Hall, 5901 Bishop Blvd. RSVP: [www.smu.edu/faithandbusiness](http://www.smu.edu/faithandbusiness).

**Wednesday April 25**, 9:30am-5:00pm, live streaming conference "Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, Washington, DC (8:30am-5:00pm Eastern Time Zone). To register to view the live stream:  
<https://catholicismobilizing.org/event/rj-conference>. Scroll down on the site to a form.

### **In Houston**

**Sunday April 15**, 9:30am, Leslie S. Ginzel and Julie Falcon, Beacon Law, a service for homeless people. St. Phillip Presbyterian Church, room 201. 4807 San Felipe St.

**Wednesday April 18**, 12:00pm, D. Mitra Barua, "Governance or Government: Comparative analysis of the Buddhist-Muslim violence in the Chittagong-Rakhine region." Ryon Engineering Laboratory, Mechanical Laboratory 209, Campanile Rd., Rice University.

**Wednesday April 25**, 9:30am-5:00pm, live streaming conference "Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, Washington, DC (8:30am-

5:00pm Eastern Time Zone). To register to view the live stream:  
<https://catholicismobilizing.org/event/rj-conference>. Scroll down on the site to a form.

### **In San Antonio**

**Tuesday April 10**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Lauren Turek, Ph.D., “Religion, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement.” SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook): \$20. Register at <http://www.upsa.org/registration>.

**Friday April 13**, 1:30pm-**Saturday April 14**, 5:0pm, interfaith conference “Religion and Climate Change: Taking Our Planet Back.” Featured speakers are Sr. Linda Gibler, Oblate School of Theology; Douglas Melnick, City of San Antonio; Rear Admiral “Len” Hering, Center for Climate and Security (Washington, DC); and Gerald Durley, Providence Missionary Baptist Church (Atlanta). Chapman Center, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Details at [https://events-trinity.edu/events/religion\\_and\\_climate\\_change\\_conference](https://events-trinity.edu/events/religion_and_climate_change_conference). Free; required registration from the website.

**Saturday April 14**, 9:00am-12:00pm, Rev. Dr. Mitzi J. Smith, “Womanism, Biblical Interpretation, and Social (In)Justice.” Whitley Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Drive, \$40. For information: Thelma at 210-341-1366, ext. 230.

**Sunday April 15**, Sisters of the Incarnate Word mark the tri-centennial of San Antonio. The more I read article after article and see story after story of s an Antonio as the place of the battle of the Alamo the battle of Concepcion, Military City, the place of soldiers, the more convinced I am that we also need other stories, the stories of the compassion that built our city and carries our city forward. Incarnate Word history is some of those other stories; we didn’t kill anyone we tried to heal, we didn’t conquer, we tried to educate”—Sr. Martha Ann Kirk. See the full schedule at [www.sa300ccvi.org/festival](http://www.sa300ccvi.org/festival).

**Tuesday April 17**, 10:00am, Sona Manusyan, Ph.D. (Yerevan State University, Armenia), “What and Who Make Societies Ready for Peace: How Can Psychology Join the Conversation Today.” Student Engagement Center, Room 2030, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

**Tuesday April 17**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Ed Westermann, “Genocide.” SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$20; register before April 10 at [www.upcsa.org/registration](http://www.upcsa.org/registration).

**Thursday April 19**, 6:30pm-7:30pm, Peacebuilding Symposium with four visiting Fulbright scholars; former Congressman Charlie Gonzales moderating. University of the Incarnate Word, Rosenberg Sky Room, 847 E. Hildebrand. *To RSVP visit:* <http://bit.ly/2FDg9oQ>.

**Tuesday April 24**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Sarwat Hussain, “Causes and Implications of Rohingya Genocide.” SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$20; register before April 17 at [www.upcsa.org/registration](http://www.upcsa.org/registration).

**Wednesday April 25**, 9:30am-5:00pm, live streaming conference “Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, Washington, DC (8:30am-5:00pm Eastern Time Zone). To register to view the live stream: <https://catholicismobilizing.org/event/rj-conference>. Scroll down on the site to a form.

**Thursdays May 8 and 15**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, movie screenings and discussion series on religion and government. May 8: *Trembling Before G-d*, on experiences of Orthodox Jews who are homosexual. Discussion led by Rabbi Samuel Stahl. May 15: *Theologians under Hitler*. Discussion led by Dhawn Martin, Ph.D. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$15. Register by April 24: [www.upcsa.org/registration](http://www.upcsa.org/registration).

**Monday June 18**, 4:30pm to **Wednesday June 20**, 8:30pm, Summer Institute: Downward Mobility. Presentations by Shane Claiborne, Robert Elsberg, David Haas, and Sue Mosteller. Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate dr. \$85 registration; meal plan and lodging available. For information: <https://ost.edu/continuing-education/>, or (210) 341-1366 X 406.

### **Third Reading (Luke 24:35-48)**

The reading picks up the narrative of Jesus appearing to two disciples on their way to Emmaus; after he disappears during the breaking of the bread, they go back to Jerusalem to report to the disciples what had occurred. The disciples in Jerusalem are described as “the eleven and those gathered with them.” Jesus appears again, and they were afraid because they thought he was a ghost. Jesus sets about proving his physicality, that he was no ghost.

Somehow it seems that many Christians believe, at least in practice, that Jesus went away and became a ghost, despite the testimony of the gospels and the doctrine of the *First Letter of John* that anyone who does not love his brother or sister who can be seen cannot love God who cannot be seen (1 John 4:20). A ghost, at least in imagination, can be seen, but not fed or touched. Ghosts seem to be very much like some prayers, don’t they? There are words, but nothing happens in the physical world.

The Easter narratives are tantamount to a critique of religion, at least religion of a kind. The disciples do not pray that Jesus come; he comes anyway. He does not limit himself to the spiritual or ghostly realm, where spirituality of a kind would contain him. Unlike an imagined ghost, he does not appear where he is not present, but is present rather than being an appearance. Whenever religion would be the endeavor of a puppeteer pulling the strings of a deity, Jesus would cancel the show and ask for bread.

## Poem

### *Sanctuary: An Easter Meditation*

News item, San Antonio, Texas, April 8, 1985

A hundred cheering Sanctuary supporters at the Greyhound bus station welcomed convicted refugee worker Jack Elder as he arrived to begin a 150-day sentence at a half-way house. The well-wishers walked Elder to nearby St. Mary's Catholic Church, where pastor Bill Davis led a thanksgiving prayer service and hosted a breakfast for Elder and his supporters.

Epiphany, Somewhere in the memory of the Sanctuary community,  
April 8, 1985

As the curved universe enfolds into itself,  
eventually this event forecasts,  
indeed, prophecies,  
the inevitable turning under,  
the incessant subversion.

Laurita says it in her own way,

"Listen to me, people!"

Her tossing braid,

long, dark, silver-stranded,

is a clue to the revving of internal motors.

"Now that the city elections are over

we need to talk to some people

about making San Antonio a sanctuary.

And then we want to make some changes at the White House."

Yes, Laurita,

America as sanctuary.

Imagine America:

not as oppressor of the poor,

not as number one arms seller,

not as great grain merchant

holding hungry bellies hostage,

but the home of hearts

whole enough

not to fear our freedom,

nor to turn away the stranger,

so recently executed,

of whom Father Bill spoke,

in retelling the story of Emmaus.

Tom Keene  
April 8, 1985

## **Defending Hope and Freedom against Fear and Repression in Honduras**

by David A. Sylvester  
February 12, 2018

TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS – You may have seen the photographs of the violent protests here in the capital of Honduras when the right-wing candidate Juan Orlando Hernández installed himself as president two weeks ago after manipulating the November election in his favor. For hours, the opposition demonstrators appeared like dark forms in the grey haze of tear gas as they faced off against three types of police and soldier.

But you probably never saw a more important event the next night: an interfaith vigil and demonstration calling for national dialogue and a peaceful return to a constitutional government. In spite of the confrontations of previous day, more than 500 Hondurans streamed onto the Avenida La Paz directly in front of the bunker of a U.S. Embassy and freely shouted in defiance to those in the building, with an appeal to the lines of police and soldiers guarding it and, perhaps equally important, to strengthen hope in each other.

Speaker after speaker railed against the stolen presidential election, the crisis of militarization in Honduras, and the disaster of this slow social strangulation supported by the United States. In the street, Hondurans sang and danced and cried with grief for the wounded and dead at the hands of the military. For a moment, even surrounded by the machinery of repression, the gathering became a cathartic fiesta of freedom.

By all accounts, this moment of free speech and assembly was possible because of the presence of a delegation of some 50 interfaith and peace activists, largely from the United States. We stood between phalanx of police and army soldiers in front of the U.S. embassy and the crowds of Hondurans on the street.

The police and military did not attack with tear gas and long wooden clubs called *garrotes* as they had attacked the demonstrations the day before. Apparently, the newly installed government, dependent on the U.S. government aid, decided it was unwise, or at least bad public relations, to attack the peaceful presence of U.S. citizens.

Most remarkable of all, we witnessed what is really possible in Honduras, the kind of dialogue, in embryo, that could heal this wounded, battered and traumatized country; a national dialogue that includes all segments of the society and searches for solutions to the endemic poverty, violence and social inequality so prevalent in Honduras.

Instead of being silenced by fear, many chanted the demand to end the repressive government of Hernández, known by his initials, JOH, and pronounced “Hoh.”

“Fuera JOH! Fuera JOH!”  
 (“Out, Hernández! Out!”)

At times, the speakers appealed to the soldiers standing in the shadows between the shrubs on the sidewalks and the concrete facade of the embassy.

“You are our brothers!” shouted one speaker from the street. “You have children and families! You have hearts like ours!”

The crowd roared in response:

“No matarás! No matarás”

(“Thou Shalt Not Kill! Thou Shalt Not Kill!”)

Occasionally, a few of the police responded to comments of the crowd with smiles and nods of heads of some of the demonstrators, and for a moment, it held the promise of reconciliation.

For most of the vigil, however, they stood stiff and impersonal behind face shields and helmets glistening in the street lights.

Underlying the joy and anger, there was ever-present grief. A white sheet was draped across the street with the names of those murdered and assassinated during the repression in protests since the November election.

Candles were lit in the street and on the barrier in front of the police lines. One woman held up the photo of her son, trying to shout his name when I asked above the noise, but only was able to say, “My son, my son...” before breaking down in tears. I could only listen, share her grief and give her my presence with the implicit message: “*No está sola!*”

Our delegation was unusual in that we were responding to an emergency appeal put out by Father Ismael Moreno, known as Padre Melo, one of the best known progressive leaders in Honduras, for international support during the week of national protests before the installation of Hernández. Melo is a Jesuit priest and director of radio station Radio Progreso, Honduras’ version of Democracy Now!, and located in historically progressive region about 320 kilometers northwest of the capital.

Since last December, Melo and the station staff has been receiving serious death threats. First, the station was knocked off the air for almost a week in the capital after the destruction of its transmitting antenna there during a night-time act of sabotage.

Two weeks later, just before New Year’s Eve, posters appeared one morning on the walls of the town of El Progreso naming Melo and others “*El eje del mal en la perla del Ulúa.*” –The ‘axis of evil’ in the “Pearl” of the River Ulúa, using a previous name for the town based on the nearby river.

Then an equally serious death threat came on Jan. 20, within a week of the inauguration and just before our arrival. At night, pamphlets were thrown out of vehicles and left in public areas of the town claiming to identify *El círculo del terror de la Alianza* – “the circle of terror of the Alliance” in Progreso. It showed the faces of 12 leading members of the opposition *Alianza* arranged like a clock, with Melo’s face the largest and at the twelve o’clock position on top.

This campaign of vilification evoked deeply painful memories from the decades of repression, death squads and assassinations in Honduras and throughout Central America. Last year, Berta Caceres, an internationally known environmental activist in Honduras, was [murdered in her home](#) at 1 a.m. by intruders suspected to be linked to an elite U.S.-trained military intelligence unit. This murder, in spite of security guards assigned to her by the government, [sent shock waves](#) through progressive community in Honduras and internationally.

There are [numerous reports of a military plot](#) or [links to U.S.-trained soldiers](#).

Recognizing the imminent danger for all in the opposition coalition, the *Alianza*, Melo issued his urgent appeal for international support. Though the last-minute organizing of two Berkeley-based nonprofits, [SHARE](#) and the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, [a delegation was organized](#) and the 50 faith and peace activists — five times larger than expected — arrived at the airport in San Pedro Sula on Wednesday, Jan. 24, four days after the last death threat.

Jose Artiga, director of SHARE and a good friend of both Caceres and Melo, remembers that they used to joke, in a macabre way, wondering who would be killed first. "It turned out to be Berta," says Artiga. "Now my single goal is this: Can we keep Padre Melo alive?"

At first, we didn't know what to expect as we arrived at the San Pedro airport and went through two check-points of questioning by customs officials. But we emerged into the main airport lobby to the cheers of a small crowd of supporters who opened their signs of protest and stretched out a black cloth bearing the faces of two dozen recent victims of the murder campaign targeting activists since the Nov. 26 "electoral coup," as it's been called.

Melo, a small bear of a man, came forward, beaming, and shaking hands and hugging us. He is shorter than many of us *norteamericanos*, and his relief was visible. To hug me, he laid his head on my chest like a son, a gesture of humility and gratitude for our presence here.

Certainly, a week of my time in the town of El Progreso is nothing compared to living under the threat of beatings or death, as Melo, the radio station and much of the population must live with day and night. Over 15 members of the station have received death threats, some repeatedly.

During a time of repression, death came come quickly, at night, as it did for Caceres and also, in 2014, for [Carlos Mejia Orellana](#), the marketing manager for Radio Progreso. Or it came come slowly, as it did for some of the victims whose beaten faces stare out at us from the photographs at the airport.

During our week, we stayed close to Melo, the staff at Radio Progreso and attended some of the opposition protests as witnesses. We accompanied human rights observers between the two sides in some of the many road blockades, called a *toma*, or a taking of the street. Sometimes, we witnessed negotiations and other times, we witnessed the charge of police against the demonstrators.

Over the years, I have traveled to Central America for different reasons, but this was the first time that I was with a U.S.-based delegation directly intervening in a power conflict with whatever authority, or privilege, we could muster when the lives of the people who became our friends depend on the conflict's resolution.

I returned home with a troubled conscience, knowing how little we could actually do in the face of the disastrous policies of our government toward these countries. As we all know, the United States has aided, defended and profited from the horrific civil wars in Central America for 40 years — bloodbaths that have stained the American conscience with shame and dishonor. The U.S. is now adding to this disgraceful legacy with its anti-immigration policies for those fleeing exactly those countries where U.S. policies have weighed heaviest.

Even though the American public discourse seems curiously silent on these realities, especially for the often overlooked Honduras, the reality of U.S. influence is a well-known international scandal. In 2005, British playwright Harold Pinter minced no words about the U.S. support for the right-wing dictatorships in Central America and elsewhere. In his address for the Nobel Prize for Literature. [Pinter said:](#)

”Hundreds of thousands of deaths took place throughout these countries. Did they take place? And are they in all cases attributable to US foreign policy? The answer is yes they did take place and they are attributable to American foreign policy. But you wouldn’t know it.

“It never happened. Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn’t happening. It didn’t matter. It was of no interest. The crimes of the United States have been systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless, but very few people have actually talked about them. You have to hand it to America. It has exercised a quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide while masquerading as a force for universal good. It’s a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis.”

Our delegation intends to provide eyes and ears to witness and remember. To Padre Melo and the journalists at Radio Progreso, our brief presence tells them: “*No están solos.*” You are not alone.

*David A. Sylvester is a Bay Area writer, teacher and contributor to Tikkun. A Roman Catholic, he is also a member of Beyt Tikkun and has traveled to El Salvador as an election observer in 2009 and to Iraq in 1998 on a humanitarian mission with Voices in the Wilderness. In 2006, he served three months in a federal prison camp for civil disobedience at the U.S. army base at Fort Benning to protest the U.S.-training of Central American military troops.*

## 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](http://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>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)  
<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty  
[www.txccedp.org](http://www.txccedp.org)

*Dialogue Institute of San Antonio*  
[www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/](http://www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/)

Climate Change  
[www.creation-care.com](http://www.creation-care.com)