

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating May 26, 2019

Pax Christi San Antonio does not solicit donations. Thoughtful comments, however, may be sent to the editor at j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com, with the understanding that permission to publish them is implied. 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 Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for the Sixth Sunday of Easter. Tom Keene's poem is *Take, Eat, Drink*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

After losing a case before the United States Supreme Court over refusing a Buddhist spiritual advisor to be present in the execution chamber of a death row inmate, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice has decided to disallow any chaplains or spiritual advisors in the chamber. One can sign onto a letter protesting this action at <https://forms.gle/2X1qiWrqwwESr4cz5>. I have drafted a statement on the matter, which follows the poem. It has been shortened as an op ed that will appear in the San Antonio *Express News*.

Calendar

In Austin

Monday June 3-Thursday June 6, 9:30am-1:30pm, Church History course, sponsored by Catholic Diocese of Austin. Fleck Hall 206, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. \$60. Register: <https://secure.acceptiva.com/?cst=98ad94>

Monday June 10-Thursday June 13, 9:30am-1:30pm, Ecclesiology course, sponsored by Catholic Diocese of Austin. Fleck Hall 206, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. \$60. Register: <https://secure.acceptiva.com/?cst=98ad94>

Saturday June 15, 10:00am-12:00pm, 787 Studio—Community Experience. Fatima Mann, Community Advocacy and Healing Project. \$5.00 suggested donation. Register at <https://www.austinseminary.edu/page.cfm?p=4663>. McCord Guest Center Room 203, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 100 E. 27th St.

Monday June 17-Thursday June 20, 9:30am-1:30pm, Morality course, sponsored by Catholic Diocese of Austin. Fleck Hall 206, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. \$60. Register: <https://secure.acceptiva.com/?cst=98ad94>

In El Paso

Fridays, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Pax Christi joins Border Peace Presence in front of the Federal Courthouse (corner of Campbell and San Antonio).

Monday May 20, 6:30pm, "What is Zen Buddhism?" Bobby Kankin Byrd, at Interfaith Alliance meeting. Both Sides/No Sides Zen Community, 2718 Campbell St.

Friday May 24, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Focus on Climate Strike. Corner of San Antonio and Campbell.

Saturday May 25, 8:30am (gathering at 8:00am), march to the Border Patrol Headquarters/ICE Detention Center. Begins at corner of Edgemere and Hawkins. Sponsored by the Border Network for Human Rights. This is change from a previous announcement.

In San Antonio

Saturday June 1, 9:00am-1:00pm, Water Saver Saturday. Register for one of the following: Series 1 Sustainable Landscape Design, Composting. Series 2 Rain Water Harvesting, Gardening with Native Plants. Series 3 Permaculture, home Efficiency. Series 4 Water Conservation in Your Vegetable Garden. Palo Alto College Performing Arts Center, 1400 W. Villaret Blvd. Free; register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/watersaver-saturday-tickets-60710169752?utm-medium=discovery&utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&aff=esli&utm-source=li&utm-term=listing>

Saturday June 1, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Tom Wakely, 16406 Ledge Point St. Informal presentation by Rick McClatchey of Americans United.

Monday June 10, 4:00pm-Wednesday June 12, 8:30pm, Daniel P. Horan, ofm; Alana Levandoski, David Haas, Meg Hunter-Kilmer, and Ron Rolheiser, omi, Summer Institute 2019: Fear and Faith. Examines fear as a factor in stoking hatred. \$75-\$290. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology. Lodging available in Oblate Renewal Center. Information: Noemy Colon, ncolon@ost.edu, or 210-341-1366, ext. 212.

Sunday June 23, 4:00pm-6:00pm, 50 Years of Hope: A Pride Interfaith Service. 50 years after the Stonewall Riots. Madison square Presbyterian Church, 319 Camden St.

Second Reading (Revelation 21:10-14, 21-23)

This excerpt from the book of Revelation, the title in Greek of which translates as *The Revelation from Jesus, Messiah*, continues a description of heaven. A messenger or angel brings the author "to the great high mountain, and he showed me the holy city...." This is an allusion to Ezekiel 40:2, which describes a vision in which there was a

“structure like a city opposite me.” The Ezekiel passage goes on to elaborate numerous measurements of various features of the city and Temple within it. As it frequently does, *Revelation* subverts the Hebrew Bible passage it alludes to: “And I saw no sanctuary in her, for the Lord God Almighty is her sanctuary, as is the lamb” (Rev. 21:22). What lesson one should draw from such imagery as that presented by *Revelation* is ambiguous and uncertain, but one possibility is the importance of distinguishing between the Lord God Almighty and the imaginings we use to refer to the Lord.

Third Reading (John 14.23-29)

“Get up, let us go out from here.” This is how Jesus concludes his discourse a few verses after the excerpt in the gospel reading. It is the fateful night of the Last Supper, and Jesus keeps talking about leaving. His disciples do not understand, but he says they would come to understand because he would send an advocate and comforter, a Paraclete, who would enable them to comprehend what was happening. In his only statement in the New Testament, or anywhere in recorded history for that matter, Judas-not-Iscaiot asks, “Sir, what has happened that you are about to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” Good question! The gospel reading for the day is the reply Jesus gives.

Jesus is talking about those who would *not* be his disciples: “If some love me and keep my word, my Father will love them, and we shall come to them and make a dwelling with them.” (The Greek is in the singular—some *one* who would not be a disciple—but I render it in the plural because of the English “pronoun problem” that results in gender-exclusive discourse.) The question and response is a scriptural support for Christians’ openness to other faith traditions and the doctrine of “baptism by desire.” The reason why the Father will come to non-Christians is that “the word that you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me.”

“I leave you peace....” One who is insecure in the faith of Jesus will not be at peace at the very moment when Jesus seems absent and faith is most needed. Be sure in the faith and be at peace. There is no reason to war against what is good in other religions. “I give you my peace; not as the world gives do I give it to you.” In antiquity peace came through domination; it is known in history as the *Pax Romana*, the peace of an empire that would brook no opposition. The *Pax Romana*, however, is not the *pax Christi*. Precisely because the *Pax Romana* was insecure, the empire had to build up and maintain a military force occupying and oppressing the known world. That was not to be the kind of security that Jesus wanted to inspire. But there is more!

An insecure person is ill-at-ease in the presence of a secure person. An insecure peace is particularly insecure in the presence of a secure peace. So, “Get up, let us go out from here,” secure in our peace, and render the insecure quasi peace that the world gives particularly insecure.

Poem

Take, Eat, Drink

He would leave them,
these friends and relatives,
these men and women.
So, he gathered them
for one last meal.

Soon I'll be gone, he said.
I ask you to do this again so
when my body is dis-membered,
you can re-member me."

Take this bread, made from grains,
crushed and ground to powder,
mixed with life-giving water, living yeast,
to rise in the baking fires.

Take this wine, made from grapes,
also crushed but left to ferment,
to transform themselves to spirits.

This bread embodies me for you. Eat.
This wine is for you my spirit-filled blood. Drink.
Let me come alive in you as food, air,
sunlight live on in you,
as friends and lovers are held in memory.

Do this, not alone, but with one another,
because meals are meant to be shared.
Do this in love, with hugs and kisses of peace.

Tom Keene
April 24, 2017

No More Spiritual Advisors in Execution Chambers. Reconsider!

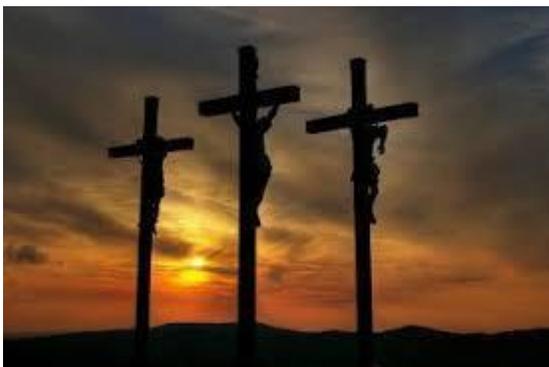
Anthony J. Blasi

Until recently, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice allowed prisoners on death row the solace of the company of their spiritual advisors in their final moments of life. When he was scheduled to be executed in March 2019, Patrick Murphy, a Buddhist

for about a decade, requested the presence of his Buddhist spiritual advisor, who had been visiting him in prison periodically for years. The Department turned down the request on the grounds that only chaplains who were employees of the Department could be present in the execution room and that no Buddhist chaplain was in the employ of the Department. Mr. Murphy's attorneys saw this as an instance of religious discrimination, and the U.S. Supreme Court, reversing lower courts' rulings, agreed and issued a stay of execution. The Texas Department subsequently decided that henceforth no spiritual advisors at all will be allowed in execution rooms in the future, irrespective of denomination, tradition, or philosophy.

If allowing people the companionship of spiritual advisors when they are being executed was something to be valued and permitted prior to March 2019, it remains so after that date. Along with birth, coming of age, conversion, and marriage, death is for many an essentially religious event. An infant may be welcomed into a faith community. An adolescent may be made aware of responsibilities in such a community. A conversion and a marriage may both be awakenings to the significance of shared life in such a community. Death is a realization of an absence in such a community, an absence that may change the lived reality of everyone else. Such rites of passage are obviously not solipsistic quirks of individuals but marks of the presence of a community reflected in a consciousness. When individuals, no matter how flawed, reach out to a community at the point of death, even at the moment of an execution, it is in part an acknowledgement of the life of a community in an individual but, more importantly, one individual's affirmation of the community itself. Moreover, the affirmation of a community in a society is indirectly an affirmation of the society itself, on whose behalf the agencies of law provide peace and security. This merits being preserved, as a right of the individual as well as a foundational freedom of society itself and its laws. It is a matter of the "free exercise" of religion.

It should be noted that the decision to disallow the companionship of spiritual advisors in the execution room did not come about because the Texas Department of Criminal Justice did not have a Buddhist chaplain in its employ; that situation existed prior to the Supreme Court's ruling. The Department could have employed Mr. Murphy's Buddhist advisor on a temporary basis, and at much less expense than that of litigating a sequence of court cases. No, the decision came after the Supreme Court decision. It has at least the appearance of retaliation in response to a successful recourse to the courts. The seeming object of what has the appearance of retaliation is not only Mr. Murphy, but his faith community and faith communities in general. This circumstance should not stand.



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>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)

<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

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/