

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating February 17, 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 section, the Sunday reading reflections are based on the lectionary selections for the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time. Tom Keene's poem is *Wild Forces*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.



An article by Joseph Sorrentino, based on interviews in Mexico with Central American refugees en route to the United States, was brought to our attention by John Dauer. We are grateful to Mr. Sorrentino for permission to republish it; it had first appeared in *Deutsche Welle*.

Photo by John Dauer

Calendar

In Austin

Monday February 18 (and following Mondays), 3:00pm-4:00pm, discussion of Fr. James Martin's book on the Catholic Church and the LGBT community. Building a Bridge Book Club. CSC Community Room (connected to campus chapel), St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Sign up at <http://vit.ly/BBBookClub>. Parking permit: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main-campus-united-states>

Thursday March 7, 5:00pm-6:30pm, Jeff Sellen on his book on environmental sustainability and management, *Don't Tread on Me: Property and Conflict in the American West*. Fleck Hall room 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. RSVP: JeffSellen, Eventbrite. com. Parking permit: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main-campus-united-states>

Wednesday March 13, 5:00pm, Michael E. Lee (Fordham University), Revolutionary Faith: Oscar Romero as a Model for Christianity Today. Jones Global Event Center, Ragsdale Center. St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Parking permit: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main-campus-united-states>

In Dallas

Tuesday February 19, 5:30pm-6:15pm, Anthony Elia, Alida Liberman, Dayna Oscherwitz, Jeremy Spracken, "When "Great" Works Aren't Good. Roundtable discussion on the ethics of collecting, preserving, and teaching works of art, literature, and cinema that are ethically problematic. Owen Arts Center, Greer Garson 3531, Screening Room, 6110 Hillcrest. Information: Aria Cabot, acabot@smu.edu

Thursday February 21, 5:00pm, Florence Kelley (New York University), The Second Coming of the KKK (1920s). Texana Room Fondren Library, Southern Methodist University, 6414 Robert S. Hyer Lane.

Thursday February 21, 5:15pm-7:00pm, Rachel Ball-Phillips, Mahatma Gandhi: The Man, the Myth, the Memory. Meadows Museum, Jones Hall, southern Methodist University 5900 Bishop Blvd. Information: Melissa Morris, melissamr@smu.edu

Thursday February 21, 6:30pm-8:30pm, "Forced Flight Surviving Migration," introducing new organizations: Human Rights Initiative and International Rescue Committee in Dallas. Room 123, Fondren Science Building, Southern Methodist University, 3215 Daniel. RSVP at <https://humanrightsdallas.eventbrite.com>

Wednesday March 27, 12:00pm-1:30pm, Mark Chancey (Southern Methodist University), Policy, Politics & the Bible in Public Schools: Is There a Space for Religious Literacy? Hughes-Trigg Forum, Southern Methodist University, 3140 Dyer St. RSVP by March 24: <https://whoozin.com/NFC-JVW-MGTE>. Information: Bora Laci, blaci@smu.edu

In El Paso

Fridays February 22, 12:00pm-1:00pm, peace vigils. In front of Federal Courthouse, corner of Campbell and San Antonio.

Saturday February 23, 9:00am-5:00pm, and **Saturday March 2**, 9:00am-5:00pm, Restorative Justice Training. #30. Register with Tepeyac Institute, 872-8420.

Sunday February 24, 2:30pm-4:00pm, panel with Jesus Chavez and others, "Gerrymandering and Social Justice: Toward Fair Redistricting in Texas." Maud Sullivan Gallery, El Paso Public Library Downtown, 501 N. Oregon.

Tuesday February 26, 6:30pm-8:00pm, Border gathering and public witness with Hope and Bishop Mark Seitz. At the Anapra Fence, New Mexico. Information: (915) 872-8400, ext. 200.

Thursday February 28, 12:00pm-1:00pm, death penalty vigil. In front of El Paso County Courthouse, 500 E. San Antonio.

In Houston

Wednesday February 20, 6:30pm, green film, *Divide in Concord*, on banning bottled water in a small town. Rice Media Center, Auditorium #100, use campus Entry 8. Doors open and refreshments 6:30, showing 7:00. Information: arts@rice.edu

Thursday February 21, 7:00pm-9:00pm, panel on spirituality (“spiritual but not religious”) and public action: Ashley Clemmer (Ruthko Chapel), Sean Fitzpatrick (Jung Center), moderated by Elaine Howard Ecklund, Ph.D. (Rice University). Jung Center, 5200 Montrose.

Friday February 22, 8:00am-9:00am, Tony Brown (Sociology, Rice University), “Disaffiliation among emerging adults: Implications for life satisfaction, moral relativism, and support of social justice.” Lovett Hall 402, Rice University (use Entrance C). Free, but register at https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20190222/event_id/20202. Information: Hayley Hemstreet hjh2@rice.edu.

Saturday February 23, 10:00am, Stephanie Frank, “Visible and Invisible Minorities: Negotiating Religious Difference.” Hines Center for Spirituality and Prayer, 500 Fannin St., #110. Information: tolerance@rice.edu

Sunday February 24, (:30am, Mary Lee Webeck, “Enemies of the State: Hitler’s Euthanasia Program.” St. Philip Presbyterian Church, room 201, 4807 San Felipe.

Thursday February 28, 4:00pm-5:30pm, Nayan Shah, “Seeking Asylum, Precarity and Bodily Defiance at the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands.” Location to be determined. Info: rsvpcswgs@rice.edu. Free; no RSVP required.

Thursday February 28, Maria Cristina Garcia, “U.S. Immigration Policy and the ‘America First’ Ideology: A Historical perspective.” RMC/Lev Student Center, Farnsworth Pavilion, alumni Dr., Rice University.

Friday March 1, 8:00am-9:00am, Bradley Johnson, “Cape Town’s Running Out of Water: Christian Communities Thinking Through the Implications of the Anthropocene.” Lovett Hall, room 407, Rice University (use Entrance C).

Saturday March 2, 9:00am-3:00pm, and **Sunday March 3**, 12:30pm-3:30pm, Paul K. Chappell, Peace Literacy Forum and Training. Dominican Center for Spirituality, 6501 Alameda Rd. Light lunch served. Suggested donation \$40. (Catherine Foley, stbsjg@yahoo.com).

Sunday March 3, 9:30am, Sheldon Rubenfeld, MD, “Bioethics after the Holocaust.” St. Philip’s Church, room 201, 4807 San Felipe.

In San Antonio

Tuesday February 19, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Green Sacred Texts (environmentalist passages in the Bible). \$10. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Register at <https://www.upcsa.org/registration/>

Wednesday February 20, 6:00pm-8:30pm, Carol (survivor of human trafficking) and Brenya Twomasi, J.D., "Modern Day Slavery: A Conversation with A Survivor of Human Trafficking." University Center, Conference Room A, St. Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria.

Thursday February 21, 3:00pm-6:00pm, pre-immigration symposium. Keynote speaker, Sarnata Reynolds, "Building a Lifeline: A Proposed Global Platform and Responsibility Sharing Model for the Global Compact on Refugees." Sarita Kenedy East Law Library, Law Alumni Room, St. Mary's University, 1 Camino Santa Maria. Information: pmartinez46@stmarytx.edu.

Tuesday February 26, 7:00pm, Marie Dennis, "Active Nonviolence: A Paradigm Shift to a More Peaceful World." Student Engagement Center Ballroom, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway. Marie Dennis was a primary organizer of the 2016 Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace co-sponsored by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and Pax Christi International.

Thursday February 28, 12:00pm-1:00pm, death penalty vigil across the street from the Bexar County Courthouse, 100 Dolorosa.

Thursday February 28, 7:00pm, screening, "The African-American Response to Fascism." Temple Beth-El, 211 Belknap Place. Free; RSVP at temple@beth-elsa.org, 210-733-9135.

Monday March 4, 6:00pm, 14th Annual Dialogue and Friendship Dinner. Keynote speaker, Abdulhamit Bilici (former editor *Zaman*, newspaper in Turkey), "Free Press and Democracy: An Exiled Editor's View." University of the Incarnate Word Rosenberg Skyroom, 847 E. Hildebrand. \$45; RSVP at www.dialoguedinner19.eventbrite.com.

Tuesday March 19, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Green Sacred Texts (environmental passages from diverse traditions). \$10. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Register at <https://www.upcsa.org/registration/>

Tuesday April 9, 7:00pm-9:00pm, screening of "Lindy Lou, Juror Number 2," documentary on a juror in a capital punishment case. Discussion led by Kristin Houle and SamMillsap. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). Free, register at <https://www.upcsasorg/registration/>

Second Reading (First Corinthians 15: 45-49)

The way the Lectionary extracts the reading from *First Corinthians* makes what Paul is getting at quite opaque. He is talking about the resurrection of the dead. Before the reading, he says, "Something is sown in decay, it is raised without decay; something is sown without honor, it is raised in glory; something is sown in weakness, it is raised in strength; a natural body is sown, a spiritual body is raised." From there, the reading takes up the contrast between the "first Adam" and the "last Adam." It is possible to respond to such a reading by setting one's sites on an escape from this world, but Paul was not writing to people who were worried about their own condition in this world. They had lost loved ones to death and were concerned about the deceased. The passage has nothing to do with escapism.

In my years as an educator, I learned early on that young people have trouble coping with death, more so than those of us who have lost a number of family members and friends. I remember in particular when a student named Frankie died. He had arrived as a freshman in collage, able to walk, but much misshapen. His classmates joked about him and avoided getting to know him. Over the course of a few years, he gradually lost the use of his muscles, as his disease progressed. By the time he was in my upper division social theory class, he was wheelchair bound, unable to use his hands, and barely able to talk. As his physical powers diminished. He transformed his classmates, who had taken to pushing his wheelchair for him and inviting him to study groups and parties. When he died, no doubt rising in spirit, they were devastated.

Third Reading (Luke 6.27-38)

It is a principle of criminal law, at least as we know it, that victims of crime as well as their family and friends are not to serve as prosecutor, judge, or jurors in the case in which they have been victimized. The point of the law is that the state, as a neutral party, should administer justice, that uninvolved jurors should decide upon guilt, and that not even the appearance of revenge should taint decisions to prosecute, convict, or punish. The establishment of such a system of justice rather than one of blood revenge and duels is an important step in civilizing humanity.

This passage from the Sermon on the Plain in Luke's gospel, which parallels the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, would have a follower of Jesus who is victimized accept the mistreatment. Where there is an effective rule of law, "turning the other cheek" and similar behavior is not hyperbole or an exaggerated ideal, but eminently practical. The implication is that civilized people should actually behave this way.

But there is more. The Christian should endeavor to be at peace with someone who would perpetrate some injury. Offering the other cheek or a second garment can disarm. It might establish a relationship, as might giving to someone begging for a handout.

The stance of a disciple of Jesus contrasts that of those who seek to walk about carrying guns and looking at the world as someone ready to take aim.

Poem

Wild Forces

Tiger, tiger, burning bright in the forests of the night.
William Blake

*Beautiful, wild forces dwell in us. Let them turn
the mills within and fill sacks that feed even heaven.*

Francis of Assisi

All of us in pain,
all of us in poverty,
all of us prisoners,
all of us tortured,
all of us terrorized,
all of us refugees,
all of us homeless,
all of us cold and hungry,
all of us lonely and afraid.

May we unveil and own
these powers within
and kindle the fires
that heal, whole and holy.

Tom Keene and Muse
January 25, 2019

In Mexico, Migrants Must Choose between Bad and Worse

Article and photos by Joseph Sorrentino who lives in CDMX (Jan. 2019)



While President Trump claims there's a crisis on the US side of the US-Mexico border, the real crisis is on Mexico's side, where thousands of Central Americans live in a state of uncertainty. And it's only getting worse.

Manuel Laba Alvarado sits on the bed he shares with his 13-year-old son, Jairo, in Tochan, a small shelter in Mexico City for Central American asylum-seekers. The bed is small, the bottom one of a set of worn bunk beds, and really only big enough for one person. Although Jairo is a small boy, it's still a tight fit.

"There is not much space," admitted Alvarado, "but it is not so bad." Like an increasing number of Central Americans, he's seeking asylum in Mexico but, like many of them, he's unsure he can stay. "I have family in Honduras," he said, "three more children. I earned 215 pesos per day (about €10, \$11) ... working in construction as a general helper [here]. This is only enough to survive. I cannot send money to my family."

According to Claudia Leon Ang, the advocacy coordinator at the Jesuits' Service to Migrants in Mexico City, most Central Americans don't want to live in Mexico but, she said, "They can't get to the US and can't go back [to their home country]." They are, in essence, trapped.

It's estimated that between 400,000 and 500,000 Central Americans enter Mexico irregularly each year; that is, not through an official entry point. They pay 20 pesos to take a raft across the Suchiate River, which forms the border between Mexico and Guatemala.

The majority are fleeing the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador), which consistently rank among the world's most violent. Most of that violence is perpetrated by two gangs, Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street, which murder, kidnap and rape with impunity. They also demand "renta," extortion money, from businesses, and people often pay renta just to be allowed to live in a neighborhood. When asked what would happen if someone refused to pay, Jonathan Arnoldo Varias, a Salvadoran living in Tochan, formed a gun with his hand and imitated pulling the trigger several times.



Manuel Laba Alvarado felt he had to take his son with him to Mexico to protect him from the gangs.

Before 2014, hundreds of Central Americans could be seen riding the freight trains they call "[La Bestia](#)" (The Beast), hoping to make it to

the US. But in August of that year, Mexico's president, Enrique Pena Nieto, implemented "Plan Frontera Sur" (PFS). Although he claimed that PFS was designed to protect migrants, what it actually did was stop them from boarding La Bestia while doing nothing to slow the number crossing into his country. They instead found alternate routes and ways to make it through Mexico.

For Alvarado and his son, that meant walking as many as 12 hours a day. "We walked for three or four hours," he said, "and then we would rest." When asked if it was

difficult, Jairo shook his head and said, "I did not tire." There are grave risks for any Central American traveling through Mexico — advocacy groups that work with migrants estimate that 80 percent will be assaulted, 60 percent of the women raped — but Alvarado felt he had to take his son. Gangs forcibly recruit boys as young as 10.

'The gangs will kill you'

Until Donald Trump's increasingly cruel immigration policies, most Central Americans planned to cross into the US, where many hoped to apply for asylum. But, aware that there's almost no chance of that happening now, they're viewing Mexico as a country of destination. In 2015, 3,400 Central Americans applied for asylum in Mexico. There were 14,000 in the first six months of 2018 alone. But it's not clear if Mexico is really a viable option.

"Most Central Americans [entering Mexico] don't have much education," said Francisco Senties, who works at Casa Refugiado in Mexico City. That means they really only have two options when looking for a job: work for minimum wage, which is 102 pesos a day in Mexico City, or work in the informal economy.



People cross the Suchiate River on rafts. Those with backpacks are Central Americans heading north.

That is, if they can get work. "They hear us speak and can tell from our accent we are migrants," said Joel Linares Lizana. "Sometimes you cannot get work because of this." And, added Edgar Galeas Morena, "Sometimes here, you work and then they do not pay you, or they pay you less."

Oscar Molina Molina faced another challenge. "I am 69 years old and it is hard to get work," he said. He has lived at Casa Tochan for five years, ever since he lost his apartment when he could no longer pay his rent. He does maintenance at the shelter in exchange for room and board and has a small workspace where he makes keychains that sell for 30 pesos. Each one is inscribed with a few lines about people who have lived at the shelter. He sells some to visitors. A return to his home in El Salvador is impossible. "The gangs," he said, "they will kill you."

Promise of the USA

Despite the dangers, some Central Americans have decided they have to return to their home country.



Oscar Molina Molina sells the keychains he makes for 30 pesos (€1.40, \$1.58).

Varias, who has a wife and three children in El Salvador, is one of those. "I must return," he said. "I cannot earn enough here to support my family. It is impossible. It is very dangerous in Salvador ... but there are no other options."

Discrimination and insufficient pay aren't the only problems migrants face. Many said Mexico was almost as dangerous as their home countries. A 2017 study by Doctors Without Borders found that Central Americans, "... are trapped and exposed to more violence in Mexico due to ever tighter and more callous United States border control policies." Regardless of those policies, many migrants still dream of making it to the US.



Carlos Cuellar dreams of making it to the US.

Carlos Cuellar worked in Brooklyn as a roofer for 10 years before being deported back to El Salvador in 2012. Threats from gangs have forced him to repeatedly attempt to reenter the US. Despite being deported four more times, he's determined to try again.

"I cannot earn enough [in Mexico]," he said. "I have my mother, four sisters and daughter [in Salvador] and I cannot earn enough to help them. When I cross the border, I'll be excited, because that is my dream, to make money, money to help my family. I will think, 'Good. Now I can help my family' and then I am going to order a big meat lovers' pizza and eat it all."

Originally published in "Deutsche Welle"

Contact author Joseph Sorrentino: joso1444@usa.net

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/