

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating January 7, 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, 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. Send comments on the newsletter to J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com.

Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for the Feast of Epiphany. Tom Keene's poem is *Epiphany*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. A press release from the Texas Coalition against the Death Penalty follows, summarizing events related to the death penalty during the year 2017. For their complete report, go to tcadp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Texas-Death-Penalty-Developments-in-2017-Year-in-Review.

We are planning a collection of three years of Third Reading commentaries, poems, and essays. Some commentaries and poems occur annually, such as those for this week, but most occur only once in the three-year liturgical cycle. Rather than repeat the cycle, starting next summer, the plan is to take up Second Reading commentaries and themes. Comments are welcome.

Calendar

Tuesday January 2, 3:30pm, film on western photographer Ansel Adams. This Spring the video series at Christus Heritage Hall will feature artists who promoted ecological consciousness through their works. Christus Heritage Hall, The Village at Incarnate Word, 4707 Broadway.

Tuesday January 2, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Common Sense Gun Legislation Forum, organized by Maestranza. Brick at Blue Star Arts Complex, 108 Blue Star.

There are numerous events during Dream Week in San Antonio. Consult the 2018 Dreamweek Schedule at Dreamweek.org/events

Friday January 5, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Religion and Its Relationship to the Trans Community—A Conversation. SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). RSVP at dreamweek.org/events/

Saturday January 6, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting, residence of Maria Tobin, 8715 Starcrest Dr., #27. (Go north on Starcrest from I-410; Starcrest becomes a divided road. The apartment complex is located between Hidden Drive and Granby Court, on the south-bound side of Starcrest. (It is possible to park at a church across the street.)

Monday January 8, 4:00pm-9:00pm, SoL Center, Building Bridges: Naming & Negotiating Differences. Economic and Socio-Cultural Divides Panel, 4:00-6:00; Sol Reception 6-7; Religious Differences Panel 7:00-9:00. University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (Park off Shook). Register at www.upcsa.org/registration/. The title needed in the online form is Building Bridges: Naming & Negotiating Differences.

Tuesday January 9, 6:30pm-8:30pm, film and discussion, "Sin by Silence," on the imprisonment of battered women who defended themselves. Panelists include Cathy Maston, Patricia Castillo, Doshie Piper, and Bill Bush. Alamo Drafthouse Cinema Park North, 618 Northwest Loop 410 (Park North Shopping Center).

Thursday January 11, 7:00pm-8:30pm, MLK Jr. Commemorative Lecture, Kathleen Neal Cleaver, human rights activist. Laurie Auditorium, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium, off Stadium Drive.

Thursday January 11, 7:00pm, to Saturday January 13, 12:00pm, From Conflict to Communion: 500 Years of Christian Reform. Multiple speakers. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr. \$40 + \$10 box lunch for Friday. For complete schedule: <https://ost.edu/events/conflict-communion-500-years-christian-reform/>. Register with Brenda Reyna at breyana@ost.edu or 210-341-1366, ext. 212.

Sunday January 14, 2:00pm, Wreath-Laying Ceremony in honor of the life and struggles of Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Plaza, intersection of E. Houston and N. New Braunfels.

Sunday January 14, 4:00pm, Citywide Interfaith Worship Service. San Fernando Cathedral, 115 Main Plaza.

Monday January 15, 8:00am, Early Morning Worship Program. MLK Academy, 3101 Martin Luther King Drive.

Monday January 15, 10:00am, 50th Anniversary MLK March, begins at 3101 MLK Drive and ends at Pittman-Sullivan Park, 1101 Iowa (3 mile route). Information at sanantonio.gov/mlk.

Monday January 15, 11:30am-3:30pm, MLK Commemoration Program. Pittman-Sullivan Park, 1101 Iowa.

Tuesday January 16, 6:00pm-8:00pm, Mayor Ron Nirenberg and State Senator José Menéndez, Cultural Conversations: From Community Trauma and Division to Hope and Action. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Dr.

Wednesday January 17, 5:30pm, Community Forum: Did Integration Ruin America? Hosted by the Alpha Phi Fraternity and the University of the Incarnate Word Ettling Center for Civic Leadership. 5:30 networking over food; 6:00 presentation and introduction; 6:25, 6:45, 7:05 Breakout sessions: Neighborhoods (Rev. Dr. Trevor Alexander), Judicial System (Dr. Doshie Piper), Workplace (Ogutodu Akinwale). Ettling Center, University of the Incarnate Word, 4301 Broadway.

Thursday January 18, 6:00pm-8:00pm, film about the death penalty: "The Last 40 Miles," followed by dialogue with film maker Alex Hannaford and with Kristin Houlé, Executive Director, Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty. Chapel Auditorium, Our Lady of the Lake University, 411 SW 24th St. More information from cwcs@ollusa.edu.

Thursday January 18, 7:30pm-9:30pm, Dr. Luke Peterson, "Knowledge and Power in Middle Eastern Studies," extent to which knowledge is deliberately fashioned for pre-determined purposes. Northrup Hall 040, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Park at Alamo Stadium, off Stadium Drive.

Saturday January 20, 5:30pm-10:30pm, Night of Hope Fundraiser for the Children of Gaza. St. George Maronite Catholic Church, 6070 Babcock Road. \$50.00; beneficiary is Middle East Children's Alliance (<https://mecaforpeace.org/>). Purchase tickets from <http://nightofhope2018.doatend.com/>.

Thursday January 25, 2:00pm-3:30pm, **in Austin**, Kimberly D. Russaw, Ph.D., "What Shall We Tell our Sons and Daughters," addressing violence against women as narrated in the Bible. Agard-Lovinggood Auditorium, 900 Chicon St., Huston-Tillotson University. Parking available on Chalmers Avenue. Information: Rev. Donald E. Brewington, debrewington@htu.edu.

Sunday January 28, 3:00pm-5:00pm, Annual Blessing of the Peacemakers and Announcing 2018 San Antonio Peace Laureates. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate.

Tuesday January 30, 4:00pm. Laurie Brink, O.P., Ph.D., "Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44): Interpreting gospel ethics in an age of polarization." Reinbolt Hall, Assumption Chapel, St. Mary's University, One Camino Santa Maria. Park in Lot D near the NW 36th St. entrance, or in Lot H near the Culebra Rd. entrance.

Third Reading (Matthew 2.1-12)

In the passage that describes what is traditionally termed *Epiphany*, Matthew blends several themes together. There is the infant Jesus, Messiah but very un-Messiah-like. There are the magi, representatives of foreign religion. There is Herod the Great, obsequious to Caesar but obsessed that there not be any alternative to his own petty tyranny. There are the high priests and scribes who know where the Messiah should be but who do not know the Messiah. The scene does not deviate from according centrality to the humble Messiah, but it does give a place of honor to the foreign religions, which point to the Messiah without knowing where to look, until the contours of nature and the potentate's fears show the way. And the Hebrew scriptures of the Jews are given respect.

Matthew wrote about fifteen years after Mark, using Mark's gospel and a Greek version of Jesus' sayings for source material. The narrative about the great star in the east came from a separate tradition that the early Christian bishop of Antioch on the Orontes (today Antakya, in Turkey), who wrote *en route* to his martyrdom in Rome, reproduced in a letter:

Now the virginity of Mary and her giving birth were hidden from the ruler of this age....How, then, were they revealed to the ages? A star shone forth in heaven, brighter than all the stars; its light was indescribable and its strangeness caused amazement. All the rest of the constellations, together with the sun and moon, formed a chorus around the star, yet the star itself far outshone them all, and there was perplexity about the origin of this strange phenomenon which was so unlike the others. Consequently all magic and every kind of spell were dissolved, the ignorance so characteristic of wickedness vanished, and the ancient kingdom was abolished, when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life.... (*Ignatius to the Ephesians*, Ch. 19, ca. 110 CE)

Superstition and spells are called into question when the appearance of simple humanity comes into view in an infant, and tyranny marked by ignorance trembles when such simple humanity receives the honor due it. God knew what appearance to take on and what kind of Messiah to become to change the perspective, if not, unfortunately, the course, of history.

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Poem

Epiphany

Did the Eternal Word that Judean night
leap down from bright celestial height
collapsing the light years of distance
into the micro-measurement of presence?

Or, like the shapeless zygote, from which we rose,
did Eternal Form reach itself into toes
and teeth, eyes, ears, fingerprints and face
to drink the mother-milk of our race?

Or, like the reverse of the universe's primordial explosion
into space and time, did Utter Extension find implosion
in an infant dropped from ancestor's dreams of destiny
down a maiden's womb into Bethlehem's epiphany?

What Patient Force sought to sire in minds the inconceivable,
that our hungry, death-strewn world now holds the unreachable,
that the fat and strong are cast down from their heights
and the frail and afraid rise in the Wind like kites?

Tom Keene
December 12, 2001

Texas Death Penalty Developments in 2017: The Year in Review

Kristin Houlé, Executive Director
Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty
December 13, 2017
khoule@tcadp.org

*Use of the death penalty continues to decline in Texas
U.S. Supreme Court rulings, stays from the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, and jury
rejections keep state's death sentences and executions near record-low levels*

(Austin, Texas) — Executions and death sentences remained near-historic lows in 2017, according to a new report from the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP). Texas executed only seven people in 2017, matching 2016 for the lowest number of executions in two decades, and jurors voted for death in only four cases. For the first time since 1985, Harris County was not responsible for any of this year's executions.

"Texas continues to move away from the death penalty, even in the counties that have used it the most," said Kristin Houlé, TCADP Executive Director and author of *Texas Death Penalty Developments in 2017: The Year in Review*. "Prosecutors, juries, judges, and the public are subjecting our state's death penalty practices to unprecedented scrutiny. In an increasing number of cases, they are accepting alternatives to this flawed and irreversible punishment."

Texas was one of just eight states nationwide to carry out executions in 2017 and accounted for 30% of all U.S. executions this year.

Over the last three years, Texas juries have rejected the death penalty in nearly as many cases as they have imposed it. For the third year in a row, there were no new

death sentences in Harris or Dallas Counties; together, those two counties have sent more than 400 people to death row since 1974 and account for 183 executions. Three other cases in which prosecutors sought the death penalty resulted in sentences of life without the possibility of parole. For the second consecutive year, no one was resentenced to death in Texas.

As use of the death penalty declines, its application remains geographically isolated and racially biased. Just six counties account for more than half of new death sentences in Texas since 2013. Over the last five years, 70% of death sentences have been imposed on people of color.

Decisions at the U.S. Supreme Court significantly impacted several Texas death penalty cases this year. In March, the Court ruled in *Moore v. Texas* that the state of Texas must use current medical standards for determining whether a person is intellectually disabled and therefore exempt from execution. Moore's claim received support from a broad coalition, including prominent Texans from across the political spectrum, faith leaders, intellectual disability organizations, medical organizations, and leaders of the legal profession.

The Supreme Court also ruled this year in the case of Duane Buck, who was condemned to death in 1997 in Harris County after an expert witness for the defense testified that Buck was more likely to be dangerous in the future because he is black. The Justices sided with Buck on February 22, 2017; his case was returned to Harris County after the federal courts granted relief. In October, he was sentenced to life after prosecutors and defense attorneys reached an agreement.

The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals (CCA) stayed six executions and remanded several other cases for consideration of claims related to intellectual disabilities and ineffective assistance of counsel, among other issues. Over the last three years, the CCA has granted 21 stays of execution. In contrast, from 2012 through 2014, the Court granted a total of three stays.

Four individuals received reduced sentences and were removed from death row in 2017; collectively, they spent more than 100 years on death row. Two other individuals died in custody, including Raymond Martinez, who was one of the state's longest-serving death row prisoners.

Since 2013, a total of 27 individuals have been removed from death row in Texas for reasons other than execution: reduced sentences (19); deaths in custody (7); or exonerations (1). More than half of these cases came from Harris County. During this same time, the State executed 53 people.

"The chorus of voices raising concerns about the death penalty is growing louder every day," said Kristin Houlié. "At this critical moment in our state's experience with the death penalty, concerned citizens and elected officials should take a closer look at the realities of this irreversible, arbitrary, and costly punishment and pursue alternative means of achieving justice."

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 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