

JPIC REPORT



A publication of the OMI Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation Office

From the Director:

Speak, move, act
in peace, as if you
were in prayer. In
truth, this is prayer.

- Francois Fenelon
(1651-1715)

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Two thoughts intersect in my mind as I write this piece, and they come from very different directions. The first strand is from the recent Sunday liturgies, and the second is from my current location in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

Recently, the readings in the Sunday liturgy have focused our attention on what I have termed, “The school of discipleship according to Luke.” In numerous parables, actions, and sayings from the gospel, we have been invited to consider the differing aspects of discipleship and their application in our lives.

Luke has reminded us that each of us is capable of remaking God in our own image; as recounted throughout the scriptures, “worshipping the golden calf”. At the same time, we are told that the depth, immensity and creativity of God’s compassionate mercy and love go beyond all of our expectations and projections. So should the horizons of our openness and the depths of our compassion and love be measured.

Secondly Luke, reinforced

by Pope Francis, tells us that the preference for and privileged position occupied by the poor and marginalized in the mission and life of Jesus must be allowed continuously to inform our choices and actions. This teaching is offered as we seek daily to build and deepen a right relationship with God, each other, and with the earth.

In Dar es Salaam, at a conference entitled “Towards Transparency: Making the Global Financial System Work for Development”, I have been listening to reports on how the global financial system has been organized and sustained to protect the privileges of those who make the rules for the financial system, and how that system has been historically skewed to exploit the poor and vulnerable of the world. In many ways, it expands another discipleship theme that Luke records when he reminds us that there will be difficult and challenging questions along life’s journey, and that there is a cost to discipleship.

For a very long time, we have been inundated by accounts of how

developed countries have been the primary drivers of development in the African continent through their generous foreign aid and assistance. This has often been reinforced by the stories, pictures and accounts of numerous NGOs and foundations who have labored with tremendous dedication to respond to the many human needs that beset parts of the continent.

What has been left out of this account, according to many speakers at this event, is the tremendous amount of wealth in human and natural resources that has been extracted from Africa over the years to the enrichment of “the developed world”. A May 2013 joint report from the African Development Bank and Global Financial Integrity found that “between 1980 and 2009, the economies of Africa lost between \$597 billion and \$1.4 trillion in net resource transfers away from the continent”. This massive transfer of wealth takes place through a number of illicit mechanisms, like capital flight and money laundering, which have

Continued on page 2

The OMI Justice and Peace/ Integrity of Creation Office coordinates the advocacy efforts of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate on behalf of the interests of the poor and abandoned in the U.S. and in more than 65 countries where the Oblates are in mission. These efforts include acting as a resource for province membership, supporting the community organizing efforts of Oblates in the United States, and coordinating the Faith Responsible Investment Program to insist on just practices and policies by corporations in their global operations. We also advocate with the U.S. government and other international institutions on a variety of justice and peace issues.

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News & Happenings

Antonio Ponce, OMI Joins the OMI JPIC Office in Washington!



The Oblate Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation Office in Washington is delighted to welcome Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI to the JPIC team. Fr. Antonio, who arrived in the office at the end of July, has been spending the first few months getting to know the issues and people involved in the work. After an initial orientation in Washington, Fr. Antonio attended the week-long Earth Spirituality program at the Oblate Ecological Initiative in Godfrey, IL. His reflections on that experience can be found on p. 6 of this newsletter. In August, Fr. Ponce represented the US JPIC Office at the annual international JPIC meeting and retreat in Aix-en-Provence.

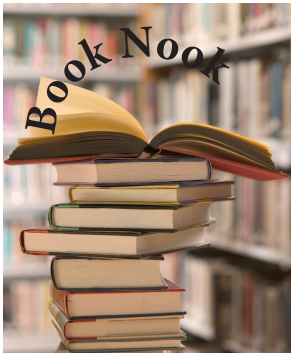
He plans to focus on developing more robust JPIC ministries at the grassroots level in the US. You may be seeing him soon in your parish!

From the Director, (continued from p. 1)

existed for years. A little known fact, however, is just how much money is transferred through mechanisms like transfer pricing, tax havens and secrecy jurisdictions, and into accounts that are intentionally hidden from public scrutiny. The latter are hardly unique to the African continent but exist across the global financial system.

Perhaps this is too complex a consideration for many of us? Yet it is a reality with which we are asked to and must be willing to wrestle if we are to respond to the full depth of discipleship in our time. Walter Brueggemann, the American Hebrew Testament scholar, puts it this way; “What God does best is to trust us with our moment in history”.

Resources



Gandhi & Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence

This book by Terrence J. Rynne is an original exploration of the life of Jesus and the teachings of Gandhi—one that puts nonviolent action at the very heart of Christian salvation. The author is the founder of the Marquette University Center for Peacemaking and a teacher of Peace Studies at Marquette. The book has been well received by religious leaders and peace advocates alike.

“A sharp reminder of the strength of and critical need for embracing the way of nonviolence as a way of life.” —Desmond Mpilo Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize Recipient and Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town

“This fascinating book must be read by all those who wish to save this world from disaster.” —Arun Gandhi, President, M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, University of Rochester, New York.

“An extraordinarily sophisticated account of Gandhi’s teaching. I highly recommend this book.”—Stanley Hauerwas, author of *The Peaceable Kingdom*

“Well-organized and clearly written, lending itself to a wide readership, layperson, student, and scholar alike.”—Religious Studies Review

“Melting Ice, Mending Creation: A Catholic Approach To Climate Change”

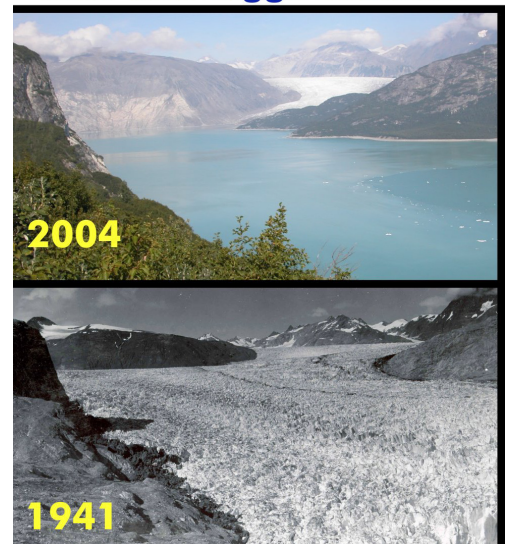
Feast Of St. Francis Education Initiative for 2013 from the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change www.catholicclimatecovenant.org

Pope Francis has emphasized the need more fully for all of us to care for and to protect God’s Creation. With this in mind, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change developed an education program for the Feast of St. Francis in October. *Melting Ice, Mending Creation: A Catholic Approach to Climate Change* highlights the Pontifical Academy of Science’s Working Group (PAS) statement, *Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene*. The program combines this statement with other teaching tools, including the work of science photographer James Balog, who has documented the dramatic collapse of glaciers around the world.

Melting Ice, Mending Creation: A Cath-

olic Approach to Climate Change is a one and a half hour program appropriate for youth groups, college and universities, parishes, and others. Educational kits appropriate to each of these groups are available for free download to use throughout the year. Parish leaders, youth, campus ministers and others are encouraged to set aside a date and participate in this nation-wide effort. This is the second year that the Coalition has produced a Feast of St. Francis education program. This past year featured the Academy Award-nominated short documentary *Sun Come Up*, with over 20,000 Catholics across the country participating in the project.

Muir and Riggs Glaciers



2000 feet of ice have been lost from Riggs Glacier in Alaska since 1941; Image created by Robert A. Rohde / Global Warming Art

The Coalition will provide all of the necessary resources with which to promote your event and encourage further engagement on these issues by your audience. All program materials are free of charge.

Two interns joined the OMI JPIC Office this summer, each for a month. Bro. Terence Chota joined us from San Antonio where he is completing his studies at Oblate School of Theology. His reflection on this experience can be found below. Erin Court, a Junior at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, was raised in San Antonio, where he first met the Oblates. Erin is active in campus ministry at Wesleyan and is now looking closely at the University's investment portfolio, having learned about our faith-consistent, activist shareholder work at the JPIC Office.

Reflections on a JPIC Internship

By: Terence Chota, OMI

During my month-long internship with the OMI JPIC Office in Washington, DC, I attended great meetings, and had many discussions with the JPIC staff exploring their different work areas. These include Human Trafficking, water and sanitation, the death penalty and, more broadly, corporate responsibility. While these are large and complex topics, the professional staff helped me to digest the issues. The staff talked about the influence of JPIC on public policies and corporations in very concrete ways, making this work understandable. On a global level, JPIC works on issues influenced by the World Bank, IMF and the United Nations, as well as the US government and corporations.



Br. Terence Chota, OMI outside the US OMI JPIC Office in Washington, DC

Why is the JPIC work important? From a theological point of view, salvation is not just a promise of the future, but it begins now, and here on earth. For this reason, JPIC does not remain indifferent to the evil in the world but strives to investigate, sensitize, educate and promote just policies.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren" (no. 1397).

In this regard, Catholic social teaching is derived from the truth of what God has revealed to us about God's self. As believers of a triune God, whose very nature is communal and social, we are invited to be responsible for each member and every living thing in our world. God the Father sent his only Son Jesus Christ and shares the Holy Spirit as his gift of love. From the salvific mission of Christ, we are all destined to live in communion with God. Therefore, we who are made in God's image share this communal, social nature. We are called to reach out and to build relationships of love and justice.

Recommendations for future JPIC Interns:

- That there be an Oblate intern every summer who can help out in the work being done at JPIC. The intern must come not only to learn, but also to contribute to the work of the office.
- A minimum of 2 months experience should be accorded to every intern. The first month can be for data collection and learning about JPIC. During the second month, the intern can work on a specific project associated with the JPIC vision.

Reflections on Exploring the Sacred Universe

By: Fr. J. Antonio Ponce, OMI

From August 4th to the 11th, I joined a group of eight people who came to participate in the Oblate Ecological Initiative program “Exploring the Sacred Universe” Earth Literacy, in Godfrey, IL. They came from all over the U.S.: Seattle, Washington; Alberta, Canada; San Fernando, California; St. Louis, Missouri; Sand Springs, Oklahoma; and northern Maine. The Earth Literacy program invites participants to learn and reflect on ‘The Story of the Universe’ and discern their role and responsibilities as human beings in this story.

During the week in Godfrey, we spent time in sharing with one another, contemplating the beauty of that special place, and listening to presentations about how everything came to be and the many changes that have occurred and continue, as part of the evolutionary process of the Universe. We also took some time to visit and harvest vegetables from the Community Supported Garden. We cooked and shared them among ourselves in a wonderful, delicious and healthy lunch.



Participants, left to right: Antonio Ponce, OMI, Jason Rossignol, OMI, Maryann Greenwald, SSND, Norm Comtois, OMI, Paulette Zimmerman, SSND, Carol Ann Prenger, SSND, Santy Sandoval Lucie Leduc, and Maxine Pohlman, SSND

For me, this program gave the opportunity to reflect and ponder on how precious, majestic and yet fragile is the home we live in, this home we call Earth. It also helped me to become more aware that I am a small part of a big family, a family that is made up of all the living things that dwell on this planet. In addition, it helped me to be more conscious about the importance of being respectful towards creation and using wisely all the resources Earth provides us with. It was an intense, yet enriching experience.

Many thanks to Maxine Pohlman, SSND, and Norm Comtois, OMI, for leading us all so thoughtfully through this experience.



Delighting in the delicious produce of the Community garden at la Vista.

Stop Human Trafficking at Super Bowl XLVIII

By: Mary O'Herron

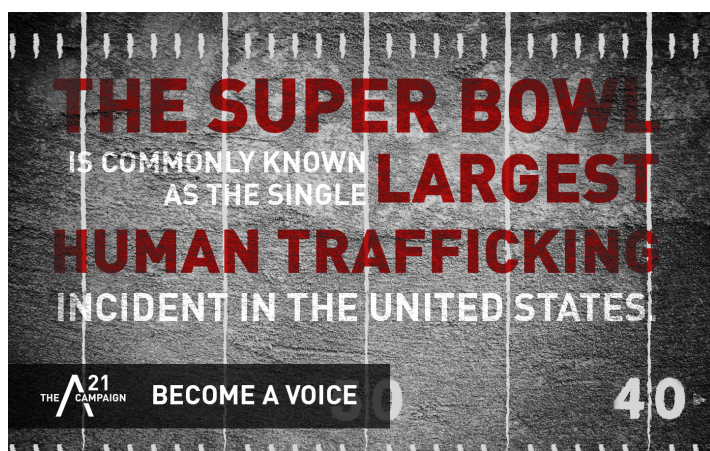
Super Bowl XLVIII will be held on February 2, 2014 at the MetLife Stadium in Rutherford, New Jersey. At large sporting events such as this, there is often a marked increase in human trafficking for both labor and sex. Indeed, it is estimated that profits from the sex trade around the Super Bowl are the highest of any time during the year. This calls for strong efforts to curb this exploitation, especially where children are involved.

Great efforts are underway, thanks to the Tri-State

Coalition for Responsible Investment (TriCri.org) - a member of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) - which is working with the New Jersey Coalition against Human Trafficking. They are training about 200 volunteers to contact nearly 500 hotels in the metropolitan area of NY (200 in New Jersey and 300 in New York). Throughout October, these volunteers have been contacting the hotels to see if their personnel are aware of the issue of increased trafficking around large sporting events. Where needed, free training will be offered in November to hotel staff to increase awareness, and to explain what to do if trafficking is suspected. Because the metropolitan area around New York is so big, this is the largest effort to contact hotels around a sporting event so far.

ICCR offers its members a toolkit to help work against human trafficking at these events: <http://members.iccr.org/document/celebration-without-exploitation-ht-toolkit>

Thanks to Sr. Pat Daly, OP, and Margot Morris, at to the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment (<http://www.tricri.org/>), for the information presented here.



Remembering the "March on Washington", August 28, 1963

By: Mary O'Herron

I was at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. I travelled overnight on a bus from New York along with many others; folks took turns standing or sitting on the floor throughout the ride south. Tom, my husband,



A young Mary O'Herron and friends; Image courtesy of the Manhattanville College Special Collections.

whom I was just getting to know, came also, so we both have memories of that day.

I had just graduated from Manhattanville College where I had been encouraged to look at issues like segregation, and to do something to make changes. I credit what I learned there to opening my heart to the hurts of others.

I remember being relieved and delighted that people were so peaceful, pleasant and courteous as we walked toward the Lincoln Memorial. In addition, bystanders seemed pleased to see us as we went by. Near the Memorial by the Reflecting Pool, we listened to speeches. I remember being very touched by the dream described so poignantly by Martin Luther King.

Obviously, I was interested in the welfare of our struggling brothers and sisters of color who had very restricted opportunities in the early 1960's. Where discrimination wasn't the law, it was often more subtle but also clear. One never saw people of color in certain jobs, and in others, only people of color. Much has changed; much still needs to change.

After I was married, I focused on my family and other rather selfish endeavors, and I was less interested in my hurting fellows. Happily, that began to shift when I started to work in the Oblate (Continued on page 15)

Yes to Development; No to African Land Grabs

By: Bhati Jacques

Since 2009, people in Cameroon have opposed a 282 square mile lease agreement for an industrial palm oil plantation that would mean loss of their ancestral lands. Herakles Farms, a New York based company, was awarded the lease in Mundemba Division from the Cameroon government - without the consent of the people. According to a February 2013 report by the Cameroon Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, the concession allocated to Herakles Farms covers 56 villages. Opposition to the palm oil plantation project grows daily as people learn about the negative effects it would have on their livelihoods and their environment. AFJN* has joined national and foreign organizations in calling for the cancellation of this project.

Well-informed people in the area are not willing to let the government lease their ancestral land without their consent and proper compensation. This inheritance is a place of generational memories with historical, traditional, religious and political significance. In addition, the terms of the lease are not economically reasonable, being set far below what the land is worth. The Cameroon government agreed to a payment of US\$1.00 per year, per hectare (2.47 acres) for developed land, and \$0.50 per year, per hectare for undeveloped land, for 99 years.

According to eleven respected international scientists, the project presents serious negative environmental threats to protected areas, among them, the Korup National Park, Bakossi National Park, Banyang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary, Nta Ali Forest Reserve and Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve. The controversial Herakles Farms concession is home to rare biodiversity and is “one of the largest surviving tracts of lowland forest in the Gulf of Guinea” (from: An Open Letter about the Environmental and Social Impacts of a Massive Oil Palm Development in Cameroon). This area is more than four times the size of the District of Columbia and 1/36th of the Republic of Rwanda.

The “land grab” problem is larger than Herakles Farm

Herakles Farms is part of a global trend known as “land grabs”, which are driven not by the economic

development or food security of local communities, but rather by the food insecurity of nations whose populations depend on food imports. Land grabs also serve as a profit opportunity for investors. Simply put, states have turned to offshore food production to feed their people, and private investors see profits in meeting the food needs of an increasing world population. There is also a lot of money to be made from the growing demand for bio fuel and other commercial bio-based products. In this model of economic ‘development’, land is seen as an asset subject to financial speculation. “As a result, fertile agricultural land is becoming increasingly privatized and concentrated. If left unchecked, this global land grab could spell the end of small-scale farming, and rural livelihoods, in numerous places around the world.” (*Seized: The 2008 land grab for food and financial security, Grain Briefing*) Equally alarming is the fact that ‘land grabs’ are often ‘water grabs’.

For these reasons, Africa Faith and Justice Network believes that this trend is worse than colonialism. The economic crimes of colonizers, which consisted of exporting resources from Africa to their homeland, has now shifted to a rush to take over large swaths of land, an effort facilitated by local authorities. The immediate impact of land grabs on local communities is the displacement of people from their native land, taking away a steady livelihood that has supported them for generations.

Local voices against the Herakles Farms project

The Cameroonian people in general do not have to be convinced that they need economic development, but they want a development plan that adds value to their livelihoods. During a meeting last summer in Koto Village, in which AFJN participated, Chief Mbama said that he, like others upon hearing about the project, was neither for nor against it. However, after he attended an informational session organized by the Réseau de Lutte contre la Faim (RELUFa), Greenpeace and others, it became clear that Herakles Farms’ takeover of their land was not a reasonable option. He also learned much about the short-term solutions to one of the immediate problems facing his village, which is food insecurity. Now, as part of his governance strategy, he

has mobilized his people to achieve food security by increasing the current level of production. To achieve this, he has issued a decree against morning hours drinking, and has urged his people to pick up their farming tools in the morning and head to work. In addition, he joined the awareness campaign to prevent Herakles Farms from taking over their land. Should there be any agreement, it must be signed by the representatives of the youth, the women and men of his community, and only then can he also sign. Finally, he believes that leasing land to Herakles Farms for 99 years is signing up for slavery on their own land and he is not about to do that.

Although the company promises benefits such as jobs, hospitals, schools and roads, the community feels these are not worth mortgaging their inheritance from their ancestors, which they have the obligation to pass on to subsequent generations. It is a fact that no compensation comes even close to covering the projected losses that the Herakles Farms palm oil plantation would cause. This is also the conclusion of the February 2013 report by the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife. Mr. Nasako Bessingi, the executive director of the Struggle to Economize Future Environment (SEFE) and one of the local leaders advocating for the cancellation of this project, dismisses Herakles Farms' offer to build roads, saying that it has no such mandate. Road building is the task of the government.

Investors are welcome, including Herakles Farms, but they must respect Cameroonian laws, said Mr. Bessingi. The people opposed to the questionable Herakles Farms



Bhati Jacques helps process palm oil nuts grown by local farmers whose livelihood is threatened by an industrial palm oil plantation.

project want development, but not another large-scale palm plantation, largely for environmental reasons.

Popular opposition to the project has led the government of Cameroon and Herakles to reopen negotiations on contract conditions, especially about the amount of land involved, and to establish a grievance mechanism for the local community. At the same time, the government has suspended a local NGO for providing educational resources to local people about their land rights. Essentially, the situation remains unchanged, with Herakles still present in Cameroon and local opposition growing.

More information available at www.afjn.org or <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/>

The **Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) is a community of advocates working for responsible U.S. relations with Africa. AFJN stresses issues of peace building, human rights and social justice that tie directly into Catholic social teaching. AFJN works closely with Catholic missionary congregations and numerous Africa-focused coalitions of all persuasions to advocate for U.S. economic and political policies that will benefit Africa's poor majority, facilitate an end to armed conflict, establish equitable trade and investment with Africa and promote sustainable development. AFJN Policy Analyst, **Bahati Jacques** was able to travel to Cameroon to see the impact of land investments with support from the **U.S. Province Missionary Oblate Sharing Fund**. While in Cameroon, Bahati stayed with Oblates where he spent time engaging Oblates scholastics (students) about the problems posed by corporate agriculture investments.*

Human Rights Updates

By: George K. Ngolwe

Closer to Comprehensive Immigration Reform?

Despite years of protests and promises, the United States continues to face the reality of a broken immigration system. Families are still being divided; migrant workers continue face exploitation. Our undocumented immigrant brothers and sisters are being denied basic human rights. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus remind us that we will be judged by how well we fulfill our responsibility to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to cloth the naked, and to welcome the stranger (Matthew 25:35).

As a justice and peace office for a religious community, the Oblate JPIC Office stands in solidarity with all migrants on both sides of the US/Mexico border. We applaud the US Senate, who on June 27, 2013, voted to pass a Comprehensive Immigration Reform bill. This was an historic bipartisan bill with support from Senate Democrats, Republicans and Independents. While the Senate bill is not perfect, it is definitely a step in the right direction. **The Senate Immigration bill, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act,” or S. 744, has important provisions including a path to legal status and citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants, a mandate for family unity, worker rights protections and increased border security.**

For the Missionary Oblates, this support for immigration legislation represents a long history of serving immigrant communities throughout the United States. In California, Missionary Oblates like Brother Lucio Cruz OMI are deeply involved with immigrants through the parish-based group that he coordinates. The group, a dedicated team of volunteers from several parishes, offers citizenship classes to immigrants. The parishes participating are Santa Rosa, Mary Immaculate and St. Ferdinand in San Fernando. Other Oblates, like Fr. Jim Loiacono OMI, a pastor at



At the April 10, 2013 “TIME IS NOW” rally on Capitol Hill to push for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Our Lady of Refuge Catholic Church in Eagle Pass, Texas serve at the frontlines, where immigrants face the harsh reality of the US/Mexico border.

The Oblate JPIC initiative believes US immigration policy should be undergirded with compassion and respect for human rights. We believe comprehensive immigration reform will restore the rule of law, unite families, and allow for fair treatment of all workers. We are encouraging people of faith to contact their Members of Congress, especially in the House of Representatives, to support immigration reform legislation consistent with the principles of justice. The Oblate JPIC Office offers immigration reform resources that you can use in order to take action on the issue in 2013. Please sign up for action alerts and weekly updates at www.omiusajpic.org, and link with us on Facebook.

We support the call for action by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that Congress pass an immigration bill to include earned citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Please visit www.justiceforimmigrants.org to send an electronic message to your member of Congress to encourage him/her to support comprehensive and just legislation on this issue. 2013 is a crucial moment to pass this needed legislation. **Take action and amplify your moral voice!**

Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty

Renewing the Culture of Life: The Death Penalty, Restorative Justice and Catholic Social Teaching comes from Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty. This booklet shares Church teaching against the death penalty, referencing recent papal statements and the Scriptures. It is a great resource for distributing after Mass, and is available in English and Spanish. More information available at:

<http://catholicmobilizing.org/>

For Whom the Bells Toll is a program coordinated by People of Faith Against the Death Penalty to encourage congregations to ring their bells at 6:00 pm for two minutes on the day of an execution in the United States. A Banner may be displayed on the day of the execution, if bells are not available. The goal is education to the faith community about the death penalty. More information is available at: <http://www.salsa.net/peace/article32.html>

Cities Against the Death Penalty: On November 30th, hundred of cities across the globe will light up to celebrate “Cities for Life - Cities Against the Death Penalty”. The aim is to mobilize cities to demand a stay of all executions worldwide. More information is available at: <http://nodeathpenalty.santegidio.org/>



Daniel LeBlanc, OMI, recently elected Chair of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development at the UN in New York, addressed the UN General Assembly at the VI High-Level Dialog on FFD held October 7-8, 2013. Fr. Daniel was one of thirteen civil society representatives to speak the first time non-governmental speakers had ever addressed the UN General Assembly.

The Garden at 391: Bees, Cotton and

Three Part Harmony Farm has more than tripled its growing space this year. The farmer reported that, “In addition to adding two new backyard plots, we’ve also doubled the growing space at our site that grows produce for donation only [at the Oblate property in Brookland]. Yes, there are more than three plots, located in northeast Washington, DC.”

“In addition to the sites in the city, my business partner, Zachari, and I were invited to be part of a collective of young, black farmers growing sweet potatoes and winter squash in Preston, MD along with Blain

Snipstal, currently at 5 Seeds Farm & Apiary. This sacred, historical site was an extremely important place for Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. I’m very proud and humbled to be part of this project.”

You can find photos at:

<https://www.facebook.com/threepartharmony>

Farming at the 391 site was going gangbusters until September, when deer discovered the tasty crops of beans, squash, tomatoes and other vegetables thriving in the moderate summer weather. The deer reportedly don’t like cotton, the one experimental crop to have flourished. The farmer is exploring fencing options, with hopes for next year.

Armando Mathew; Presente

By: Fr. Seamus Finn, OMI

One of the last emails that I received from Armand Mathew OMI said simply, “Great email this AM chief. Keep the ball rolling.” The email in question was urging folks to call their US senators on an upcoming vote about closing corporate tax loopholes. The persistent organizer, long time supporter of Valley Interfaith, never missed an opportunity to remind us all about full and active participation in the many different places along life’s journey.

For more that 25 years I, and many others, were the beneficiaries of the reservoir of boundless hope and energy that flowed from this remarkable person. Into his tenth decade, in late June, he slipped his smallish mortal coil to join the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. He often referred to that coil as “having a lot of miles on the engine” but determined to press on while there was “gas in the tank.”

It was a journey marked by so many different stages from his family roots in the Midwest, to his formation work in San Antonio, Mission and Sarita TX; a very memorable stint with the JPIC team in Washington DC, that was followed by an inspiring decade with Kids Voting USA at UT in Brownsville.

To his passion for social justice and advocacy for the poor he brought a great love for “correct usage” and clear writing, a lifelong commitment to learning and a love and loyalty that were rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Adelante!**



Fr. Armand Mathew, OMI at an event for Kids Voting USA. The voter education initiative for students has been very successful in engaging students and their parents in local and national elections.

University of Texas, Brownsville President, Juliet V. Garcia had this to say in fond memory of Fr. Mathew, who helped launch the Center for Civic Engagement at UTB in 2001:

“Padre dedicated his life to being an advocate for social justice and challenged each of us to join him in the battle against indifference. He was humble and of kind heart; he had unlimited courage and stamina. He loved without limit and condition, and taught us to try to live a life that made a difference in the lives of others. He lent us his courage and expected us to do the same for others. He never gave up on a cause he believed in, nor would he let us give up either. Knowing him, we have known an angel among us.”

JPIC Network Reflection

By: *Santy Sandoval*

My name is Santy Sandoval and I am president of the Social Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Committee, a ministry of the Oblates in San Fernando Valley.

I was born in Santa Ana, El Salvador. When I was sixteen, I immigrated to the United States to be reunited with my mother, whom I hadn't seen since I was thirteen. My sister Paz immigrated a few years later. It was hard to adapt to this new life and learn English, but I worked hard and did well in my studies. After high school, I was able to attend college for a while, but soon, I had to go to work to take care of my family. It was hard to give up my dreams of becoming a professional, but without doubt, God has blessed me with so much, and I am grateful...for my family, my job, and for the opportunity to serve my community and the ministry of Social Justice.

I have always wanted to serve others and my church. I grew up being active in the church, but after a while, the prayer groups and youth groups became static and repetitive, and my faith was in crisis. I like being creative, dynamic, and serving others, especially the less fortunate. I know that the love of God is dynamic, and I felt He was calling me to do something more in my spiritual life.

When I heard about the Social Justice Ministry and their objectives, I felt like I had finally found the answer to my prayers. The projects and programs offered by the Social Justice Ministry motivated me and have filled me with joy in my personal life.

For me, social justice is the personal encounter with the face of Christ in the faces of the people who suffer; the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the undocumented. Listening to their stories of how they have suffered, I am challenged to serve my community with love, humility, and compassion. The model that we follow in our Ministry is based on the example of God with his people, specifically in the liberating action of God narrated in Exodus. Exodus tells the story of the Hebrew people and their oppression in Egypt - a foreign land. In the midst of their suffering, God listens to their cries



Santy (on right) with JPIC Committee Members making tamales for a fundraiser

and takes action by breaking into time, space, and history to reveal himself to the suffering people. (Exodus 2: 23-24 and 3: 7-10) The Exodus event did not end with the Promised Land, it continues in the faces of our people nowadays.

Through the Social Justice Ministry, I have seen suffering and injustice present in the lives of so many families in our community. With the problems much greater than our resources, together we seek help from our JPIC partner institutions. The impotence of not being able to help all the people challenges me to work with patience and determination. The strength that I encounter in serving my community in the midst of difficulties comes from God. Ever since I began this work, I have grown in my life of faith; my personal encounter with God is through the faces of those we serve: undocumented people, the sick, the poor and the oppressed.

I give thanks to God, and to my advisor, Bro. Lucio, for trusting in me, and giving me this responsibility as president of the Committee. The ministry of Social Justice has changed my life. I hope that God will continue to bless us all.

Get involved. Contact the San Fernando Social Justice Committee at: justiciasocialsfv@gmail.com

Garment Factory Collapse in Dhaka: Investors Respond

By: Fr. Seamus Finn, OMI

Just about six months ago, the worst garment factory disaster in history took place in Rana Plaza, Savar, on the outskirts of Dhaka in Bangladesh. In the midst of the mid-morning rush hour, an entire eight-story building, containing small businesses, apartments and factory floors, collapsed claiming 1,129 lives and injuring 2,515.

We know that such incidents are not always avoidable, but the circumstances surrounding this horrific incident leave little doubt that the collapse could have been prevented. The building was constructed in violation of a number of codes and ordinances, it was unsafe, and there were clear warning signs just the day before about its dangerous condition. The investigations carried out in the intervening months have firmly established all these findings.

As images of searchers digging frantically, many with their bare hands, turned into pictures of tearful relatives and friends, their pain and cries touched millions. The global response to the disaster, widely reported in the media and through social media outlets, was swift. Reactions ranged from outrage and anger directed at the factory owners and anyone connected with the shoddy construction work; to yet another torrent of indignant questions directed at retailers who use these factories for the supply of the ready-made garments (RMG) carried in their stores; to profound sorrow and sadness about the lives



The Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh

lost, families destroyed and dreams crushed on that fateful day. Some relatives, we are told, continued to scratch through the rubble long after any hope of finding someone alive had passed.

Speaking at his daily Mass at the Vatican Pope Francis said, “A headline that really struck me on the day of the tragedy in Bangladesh was ‘Living on 38 euros a month’. That is what the people who died were being paid. This is called slave labour. Today in the world this slavery is being committed against something beautiful that God has given us – the capacity to create, to work, to have dignity.”

The Oblates joined hundreds of other faith-based and socially responsible investors across the world in responding to the disaster. Working through the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, investors

issued a statement of sympathy and solidarity with the mourning relatives of those killed, followed by a demand for a thorough and transparent investigation into the collapse.¹ Furthermore, the group demanded a systemic response, not only to the production of RMG in Bangladesh, but in all countries where production takes place. The statement avowed that nothing less than a comprehensive, systemic response guaranteeing the safety and security of all such factories would be acceptable. The 200 strong coalition of institutional investors represented more than \$3.1 trillion in assets under management from Canada, US, Australia and Europe.

Retailers from the industry sector responded immediately to the disaster and to the advocacy by

1. ICCR document available at: www.iccr.org/news/press_releases/2013/pr_bangladeshletter051613.php

concerned stakeholders by creating two different mechanisms to address the fire, safety and security issues in factories in Bangladesh. One is called the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and boasts more than 82 signatories. The other is the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety Initiative, which has about 23 members. Their membership generally breaks down along geographic lines with most of the members of the Accord coming from Europe, and members of the Alliance coming from North America. Many of the corporate signatories are household names. You can see the list of signers on the websites of the different agreements.

In their May 16th letter, investors called upon all retailers to “join the multi-stakeholder initiative - the Accord on Fire and Building Safety - that includes the International Labor Organization (ILO), non-governmental organizations, trade unions and companies.” The Accord, which calls for the implementation of “plans with measurable goals

to address all aspects of fire and building safety in a timely manner,” is the stronger of the two proposals. In our analysis, the fact that the Accord is legally binding, has multi-stakeholder involvement, calls for full disclosure of suppliers and is a unified approach with a large number of global companies involved, make it the better response.

Investors still continue to work with the companies in the Alliance though, and have urged the two organizations to collaborate as much as possible. Better and safer working conditions are more likely if their codes and inspection plans are harmonized, and if they are firm in demanding that both the government of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association take their responsibilities seriously.

The extent of this calamity has pushed companies and these two umbrella groups to move quickly. They have each developed an organizational and governance structure, hired staff, clarified their

goals and objectives and set out an ambitious public timeline for the implementation of their plans.

Both groups have committed to an aggressive inspection process that will document all the repairs and improvements needed in the factories with which they contract. This is to be followed by a plan to make the necessary improvements and to calculate the budgets needed to complete the work. Much of this work will need to be completed in coordination with local and regional government officials who are responsible for compliance with building codes and inspections.

Meanwhile the vigilance of all stakeholders, from customers, to investors, to retailers must be paramount if further calamities of this proportion are to be avoided. The Oblates and more than 100 concerned investors have written to at least 20 other companies who have production in Bangladesh, and who have signed up with neither the Accord nor the Alliance.

Remembering the March on Washington... *(Continued from page 7)*

office of the National Coordinator and later the OMI JPIC Office. I credit the Good God for opening my heart again, thanks to the Oblates!

Fifty years later, this August 28th, my husband Tom and I participated in the anniversary March, which was a source of renewed inspiration both from other participants, and the speakers. A good example: As we walked toward the Lincoln Memorial, we met a retired couple who came from Minnesota – one with a walker – and who were beyond enthusiastic. They had maintained interest in social issues throughout the years. Others were very aware of the historic nature of the day and hoped

they might be around for the 100th anniversary. For instance, we met a woman with her little grandson who thought he might be glad he was there 50 years from now.

Much has changed for the better in 50 years, but people of color still struggle disproportionately in this country, and that needs to change. I came away with a deeper awareness of freedoms I have had all my life that others do not share simply because of skin color.



Border Reflections...

By: Patti Radle

In July of 2012, I visited the Oblate border Parish of Our Lady of Refuge in Roma, Texas. I wanted to visit Fr. Bob Wright, OMI, and to witness the challenges of priests and lay people serving the churches in the area. Those who serve the church in this region struggle constantly with the question of how to be the message of Christ, a message of love and understanding, in the face of the many threats and difficulties brought on by the existence of a political border.

How do we make ourselves the agent, the being, of Christ's love in crossing the walls of inhumane politics?

While I spent much time thinking of what I wanted to write in my reflections on this visit, to express what I felt standing at the edge of the Rio Grande, watching someone fishing on the other side, much less than a football field's length away, it all boiled down to this poem:

At the Rio Grande Just Below the Chapel of St. Joseph and St. Jude at Salineno

You flow so innocently, so beautifully, so unsuspectedly.

You could not be the one who has taken the lives of hundreds of children,
men and women seeking survival.

You could not be the one who has seen bodies, water bottles, and dolls
washed up on your shores.

You could not be the one who has torn families apart,
who has washed away dreams of jobs and food on the table.

You are innocent. You are beautiful. You are not to be suspected. You are blind.
But all your waters could not fill a basin big enough to wash the hands of the guilty.
Guilty of silence. Guilty of saying no to shelter. Guilty of saying,
"illegal" to the hungry, to the desperate, to those willing to suffer and risk for love of family.

You are so innocent.
Humanity, we have crucified our self
and we have turned these flowing, innocent waters,
into the deep infested incision in our side, assuring death.

By Patti Radle