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JPIC REPORT



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

Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.

- Pope Francis

From the Director:

Migration, an issue as old as humanity itself, is a global concern for societies and governments, and challenges our faith in many ways.

The migration of people from one place to another is as old as humanity itself. But, especially in recent decades, the movement of people has increased so dramatically that it has become a universal experience. In 2013, the United Nations estimated that there were about 238 million migrants globally. For many years, the motivation for migration was mainly a scarcity of food and shelter. Today, the causes of migration have become much more varied and complex. Often, motivating factors are socio-economic in nature: the presence of violence, or cultural, religious and family issues. In most cases, it is due to an economic system that, in the words of Pope Francis, generates exclusion and inequity (EG # 54). For these reasons, the issue of migration is now a global issue that affects millions of people, especially the poor and marginalized, and represents a major challenge for modern civilization. This issue has divided societies and political leaders, has put the migration and refugee programs to the test, and presents a great challenge for faith communities. The issue of migration will not disappear; on the contrary, it will remain a controversial and difficult one, and will continue to occupy our attention.

Migration, an issue that challenges and divides

Who does not remember the recent wave of Central American unaccompanied migrant children who flooded the southern US border, overwhelming the system and provoking mixed reactions? Images come to mind of volunteers from places in Texas like Brownsville, Laredo, and Mission that went out to meet the immigrants to provide them with urgently needed support. At the same time, one cannot forget the images of protests that reached us from California when local residents blocked the highway to buses transporting undocumented migrants, mostly Central American women and children. "My house is not your house", "You are not welcome here", read some banners. On the one hand we witnessed a response of solidarity and support, and on the other, manifestations of rejection.

This wave of immigration not only generated heated discussions and opposing reactions from civil society, but it also caused division among political leaders. Most politicians acknowledge that the immigration system is outdated and does not respond to today's needs; they see that the system itself is broken and needs to be fixed. But when it comes to proposing concrete solutions, there is little agreement. In the absence of such agreement, President Obama, through an executive order, sought to grant legal status to the parents of millions of children

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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...

Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI has stepped in as the new Director of the JPIC Office in Washington, DC. In addition to managing the on-going work of the office, which includes collaboration with other faith-based and social justice organizations in Washington, Fr. Antonio has been doing JPIC outreach work with local Oblates and seminarians. He is currently focusing on developing a grassroots network among Oblates and local organizations in the areas where they minister. (Please see the article on p 13, which talks about this outreach).



Fr. Antonio is originally from Jalisco, Mexico, and worked in California for 10 years, where most of his family were living. He was a parishioner at Mary Immaculate, one of the Oblate parishes in Pacoima, where he got to know some Oblates and the work they do. Inspired by their charism, Fr. Antonio left California to enter the Oblate seminary in Tijuana, Mexico. Since then, he has studied and ministered in various countries, including Guatemala, Mexico, Canada and the USA.



Fr. Bill Davis, OMI has been helping local groups in Laredo decrease the use of plastic bags. He appeared in an educational video to prepare the community before implementation of a ban on the thin plastic bags that have littered the landscape. The ban went into place on April 30th. At Fr. Bill's request, the JPIC Office drafted testimony in support of the ban. Cities large and small, across the country, have passed plastic bag bans that have been very successful. If you are interested in marshaling arguments for a plastic bag ban in your area, contact us and we would be happy to send you information. Email: gngolwe@omiusa.org



Christina Herman, Associate Director of the OMI JPIC Office in Washington, DC, has been appointed to a new position with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) as Program Director for Climate Change and Environmental Justice. Christina has worked for the Oblates for the past nine years, and has handled the communications for the office (this newsletter, the website, action alerts, etc.), as well as Asian human rights issues and corporate engagements on water, climate change, toxic chemicals, and global access to medicines. She is grateful for the opportunity afforded by the Oblates to work on issues that affect communities in important ways, and looks forward to staying in touch with the global Oblate network.

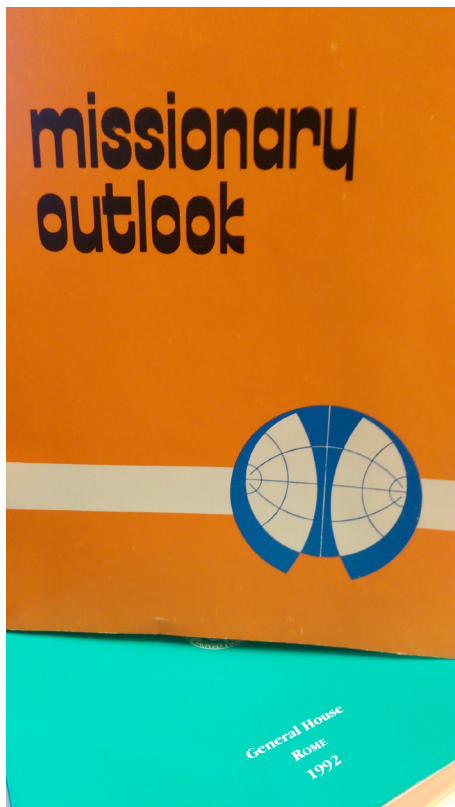
The Oblate JPIC vision and Cardinal Francis George OMI By: Séamus P. Finn, OMI

(The recent death of Cardinal Francis George OMI caused me to ponder his influence on the JPIC ministry of the congregation and led to the realization of the important role that he played in writing the text of “Missionary Outlook”. He attended the Chapter of 1972 as provincial from the Central US province and was therefore intimately involved in the deliberations that produced the text. Later as vicar general for the congregation, Cardinal George carried a number of different portfolios including oversight of the Justice and Peace service established in Rome from 1980 until 1986.)

The 50th anniversary celebration and remembrance of the historic Second Vatican Council continues to enrich and challenge the church and individual Catholics across the world. Each of the documents from the council has left its mark and we can only marvel at the ways in which they remain as the touchstone for how we understand our baptism and vocations and for how we engage with the world, with other faiths and even with non-believers. These documents initially were the starting point for many of the changes that were part of the renewal of the oblate congregation and a little later for a reconsideration of our missionary charism and outlook.

In 1965, “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” was proclaimed and set the vision and agenda for the reflection on mission that was to follow in multiple venues. The Oblate General Chapter of 1972 produced three very concise orange covered documents and the one entitled “Missionary Outlook” reflected and was clearly influenced by the pastoral constitution and by the lived experience of those present at the chapter. I was first introduced to these documents in late 1972 and must admit that the spirit and vision of MO has been a dominant influence in my life and ministry.

While referencing the reality that some of the conversations among those at the chapter were very difficult, the following texts emerged in “**Missionary Outlook**”:



With renewed zeal we will seek out, befriend and respect as brothers the abandoned poor with their many faces...

We will strive to be ever more effectively present in vital international bodies and in key forums of world opinion, where the destiny of the poor is planned and decided.

Wherever we live and work, we will become increasingly sensitive to the plight of those countries of the Third World who are seeking new social and economic models which respond to their own needs and cultural aspirations.

Since the equitable development of all peoples is a major issue of our day, we pledge our fraternal collaboration toward changing the structures of power and of economic domination by every means compatible with the Gospel.

We strongly pledge our fraternal support for our fellow Oblates who feel themselves obliged in conscience to take a clear and definite stance in favor of the oppressed, the victims of injustice, war or violence.

We have treasured and wrestled with the vision articulated in “**Missionary Outlook**” We are grateful for the insight and fervor that Cardinal George brought to the articulation and meaning of that vision and to its realization in the oblate community. We count on his continued presence to help us and people of faith everywhere to make it real in our lives.

From the Director: *(continued from p 1)*

who live legally in the country. A federal judge in Texas, however, blocked his action, initiating a legal dispute that questions the very authority of the President and puts on hold his executive action.

While this is a real issue in our country, the international situation is not much different. In the last few months, we have heard reports about hundreds of migrants losing their lives in an attempt to reach Europe. Just a couple of weeks ago, it was reported that more than eight hundred migrants, including women and children, perished when their ship broke apart in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. It was after this tragedy that the political leaders of the European Union began to appreciate the urgency of the problem. In the meetings, they agreed to strengthen the rescue efforts and increase the budget to address what many call “a real humanitarian crisis.” In the opinion of many, however, this is a very small step to a big problem, for it does not attack the roots of the problem. The same challenges we face as Americans, unfortunately, are the same for the many other countries of the world.

A pastoral challenge

In one of my visits to an Oblate mission center, I participated in some liturgical celebrations. What caught my attention, in particular, was the cultural diversity of the parishioners. I was especially impressed by the way the Oblates are accompanying them in their faith. Services were offered in four languages, which demands that our men learn new languages. In most of our ministries, in one way or another, we minister to migrants. Whether they are newcomers, or people who have lived here for several generations, they highlight the immigration issue. In accompanying them, we face many pastoral challenges. In conversation with an Oblate about his work in a community with many migrants, he said that one of the great challenges is to listen to them, to experience their joys and frustrations. “Their sharing with me is ‘Holy Ground,’ he explained.” Certainly there are many levels on which immigration issues can be addressed, and each has its importance and place. For us, however, as a church, and as Oblates, we have received the call to view migrants through ‘eyes of the Crucified Christ,’ so we might experience their suffering, while supporting and encouraging them as brothers and sisters in need.

The issue of migration will continue to challenge us, as it has done for generations; it will generate disagreements within society, and will be a major preoccupation within our faith communities, as it should be. Admittedly, we do not have all the answers to such a complex issues, and our limitations are many, yet our faith will always call us to act with empathy, solidarity and love toward our migrant brothers and sisters. We cannot be indifferent to their needs; we must let their stories touch and question us, so that we might recognize migrants as indeed our “neighbors,” our brothers and sisters. Jesus, our model, himself identified with those who were rejected by the society of his day.

At the United Nations...

Daniel LeBlanc OMI, the Oblate representative at the UN, Chairs the NGO Committee on Financing for Development (FfD). He has been active in negotiations in New York towards the final document for the FfD UN Conference to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015. He is also part of the Addis Coordinating Group (ACG) of the Global Social Economy Group (GSEG) (more than 300 organizations worldwide following the financing for development issue) which he and others began to organize in 2007. Interested in what is happening at the UN? Check out VIVAT International, an organization through which the Oblates and other religious congregations engage the UN.



Call to End Immigrant Family Detention in the US

By: George K. Ngolwe

Since 2014, hundreds of migrant mothers and their children have entered the United States seeking asylum. Coming primarily across the US-Mexico border, children and mothers are fleeing extreme gang violence, judicial corruption and poverty in their home countries. Others are traveling to join family members already in the United States. Upon crossing into the US, these undocumented mothers and children are being arrested and locked up in immigrant detention facilities located primarily in Texas and Pennsylvania. Many of these detention centers are private prisons that are making huge profits - and dividends for shareholders - by incarcerating marginalized immigrant families.

Over a thousand women and children are believed to be in detention centers in Karnes City and Dilley, Texas. Rather than offering the protection these families need, officials are locking them up. These detentions often cause desperation and fear in migrant families, and can be traumatic. People of faith believe that detaining children on the basis of their parents' immigration status is morally reprehensible.

Faith communities, including through the Missionary Oblates JPIC Office, have responded by sending cards and letters of support to detained families. Faith leaders have shown solidarity by sending spiritual reading resources to detention centers, and holding prayer vigils and mobilization rallies at the Dilley Detention Center. Religious communities have also launched campaigns urging the Obama Administration and Congress to end the detention of immigrant children and mothers. Recently a coalition of more than 100 faith organizations, immigrant rights groups and NGOs called on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to reconsider putting families and children into these prison-like detention centers.

In March 2015, US Catholic Bishops and Evangelical Lutheran bishops visited the Dilley Detention Center



Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI in Brownsville with the Guadalupe Greens, who collected clothing for child migrants last summer.

in Texas where they visited young Central American migrant mothers with children. The US Catholic Bishops Conference has rightly said that family detention is counter to Catholic teaching; they remind us that the morality of a society should be determined by how it treats the most vulnerable within it. What is more, the detention of migrant mothers with children weakens the family, the fundamental unit of society.

Momentum questioning this policy and the significant financial impact on taxpayers is mounting. Last February, the US District Court for the District of Columbia ruled that these families could not be detained in order to deter other families from coming to the United States. Some US Senators also are beginning publicly to question the practice of detaining mothers and children.

Family detention runs contrary to values of human dignity, due process and human rights. It is important that the US Department of Homeland Security introduce alternatives to incarcerating families. There are several ways to help end the practice of family detention. Support "Action to End Family Detention" by visiting www.endfamilydetention.org. Sign the petition and spread word of the campaign through social media [#EndFamilyDetention](https://twitter.com/EndFamilyDetention)

A Farm Grows in Brookland

Gail Taylor hopes that Three Part Harmony Farm in D.C.'s Brookland neighborhood becomes the city's first commercial farm since the 1930s. • by Kimberly Burge

ON A TWO-ACRE parcel of land in Washington, D.C., tucked behind the provincial house of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Gail Taylor offers a visitor dragon's lingerie.

"It kind of looks like fishnet stockings—that's how it got the name," Taylor says, holding up the heirloom snap bean, its pale yellow-green hull mottled with purple.

Across the aisle, Jack Be Little miniature pumpkins hide under leafy canopies. There are tomatoes and mustard greens, eggplant and legumes, lettuce and squash. "We're doing a lot of intercropping and companion planting now," Taylor says. So asparagus lies next to parsley, both behind a bed of raspberry bushes. Flowers also abound, with bursts of hot pink blossoms and purple clover that beautify the landscape while attracting pollinators.

For nearly 100 years this area, owned by the Oblates, a Catholic religious order, was only a grass field, a place where the priests would sometimes play soccer. In 2011, Taylor approached an Oblate priest and requested use of the land. "They were amenable and excited," Taylor says. "They're ecologically forward thinking, and they lead the Catholics in creation care."

The space has become a location for Three Part Harmony Farm, the urban agricultural project Taylor established in D.C. She hopes it will become the first commercial farm in the District of Columbia since 1939, producing locally grown food to be sold in stores and farmers' markets. First, there are some hurdles that the 36-year-old farmer must clear.

Taylor came to Washington in the late

1990s to work in social justice organizations. During a period of unemployment in 2005, she began volunteering at a farm in Upper Marlboro, Md. She enjoyed the work and began to think about a career change. The farm offered her a job the following spring, and she spent the next five years learning farming techniques.

After this apprenticeship, the logical next step was to think of establishing her own farm. At the same time, Taylor was in the process of forming an intentional community in the District's Petworth neighborhood. "I decided if I was going to make a long-term commitment to living in the city," Taylor says, "then I needed to commit to farming in the city, even if that means, for the first few years, developing a property where I can't make money."



Gail Taylor, the farmer in charge of the urban farm on the Oblate property.

While she envisioned a market farm in the city, lawyers for the Oblates investigated D.C. laws and found that if the order housed a farm that sold its products, it would be threatening its nonprofit 501(c)(3) tax status. They would also be responsible for the taxes on the assessed value of the land—an amount estimated at \$50,000 for this two-acre spot. The venture, for now, had to remain noncommercial, the food produced shared between Taylor’s community, the volunteers who work on the farm, and the Oblates, who have a particular fondness for the potatoes that Three Part Harmony grows.

Unwilling to give up her dream of a working farm, Taylor shifted back into activist mode. She took the problem to D.C. city council member David Grosso, who lives near the area and who toured the farm. Grosso, along with city council member Mary Cheh, introduced the D.C. Urban Farming and Food Security Act of 2014. The legislation identifies vacant properties suitable for urban agriculture, provides a tax abatement for private land owners who lease their land to urban farmers and a tax credit for fresh produce donated to food pantries, and ensures that tax-exempt entities will not lose their tax-exempt status if grounds are used for urban farming or community gardens.

The D.C. council unanimously passed the legislation in December; at press time, it awaited the mayor’s signature and funding to be fully enacted.

While this legislation will make it more financially feasible for people to grow fresh produce in the city, Taylor acknowledges that urban farming on a commercial scale is still a bit of a hard sell.

“SOME THINGS ARE very easy,” Taylor says. “Should we have healthy food? Yes. Should our kids have gardens at their schools and learn what kale plants look like? Yes. Is using space in the city for growing vegetables the best, most efficient use of our space? A lot of people aren’t sure. That’s harder to convince them of. How many people could live on this property if we built a building here? But urban planning and what we do with our space in our city isn’t just about farms and making sure we have local produce. It’s about parks and green space. It’s about taking up asphalt and concrete. It’s realizing the quality of life isn’t just about having condos and liquor stores and places that pay a lot into the tax rolls.



Garden beds at 391, looking toward the USCCB headquarters

“There’s that thing you can’t measure. How is your life impacted when you feel this soil under your fingernails? Seeing the plants and the birds and the animals—I don’t know how you can place a value on that.”

Taylor has to laugh at the approach many people make to farming in the city. “We’re all so disconnected from the land,” she says. “We don’t have a clue what it takes, especially when you talk about urban farming. People have a lot of misconceptions. They come up with strange ideas. Like, ‘There’s this industrial wasteland site here, nobody wants to do anything with it. Let’s have a community garden here!’ Really? We can’t grow food there! It shows how little we value farming, only taking land no one wants, not thinking of the toxicity of the soil and the vegetables that would be grown.

“People need to understand the realities of growing vegetables. Soil is the most valuable part, and you

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A Farm Grows in Brookland *(continued from p 7)*

don't just develop it overnight. In a city garden space, you can't just truck in \$25,000 of topsoil, grow some carrots, and call it a day. It's a long-term investment."

After three seasons of working the land behind the Oblates, Taylor estimates that 2015 will be the first season the farm will be able to grow food with the soil sustaining and feeding itself.

FOOD AS MEDICINE. Food as culture. Food as the future. This trio inspired Three Part Harmony Farm. When she speaks in public about her work, Taylor brings along bulbs of garlic, cotton bolls, and ears of corn to illustrate their interconnectedness.

"Garlic as medicine was an important crop at the farm where I used to work. It can cure you of every ailment, including people standing too close to you," Taylor says with a chuckle.

As a young farmer who is also African American, Taylor has grappled with the culture and history of farming and what she chooses to grow. "Everybody's identity influences them as a farmer," she says. "For me, the story of who I am, what I decided to grow, and who I grow for comes from my family story. First, being forced to labor in the fields, then later fleeing as quickly as possible to get higher and higher levels of education so they never have to touch dirt again."

Growing cotton, for Taylor, represented this ancestral struggle. No one sat her down and explicitly explained that her grandfather, who could not read or write, picked cotton. To avoid that life, her father went into the military, serving and nearly dying in the Vietnam War, so he could go to college and earn a degree. Now Taylor and her cousins have progressed even further, with graduate degrees. Her vocational shift to farming required an internal examination of the sort of farmer she wanted to be. "Part of being a black farmer is doing the things our ancestors did every day, but waking up and fighting for my right to work in dignity," Taylor says.

"Part of being a black farmer is doing the things our ancestors did every day, but waking up and fighting for my right to work in dignity."

"I didn't know if I could handle growing cotton," she adds. "I'm trying to establish myself as a different sort of farmer, a 21st-century farmer, growing vegetables without chemicals, without pain and suffering, without trauma. We had a barbecue at our house and in conversation I said I don't know if I could pick cotton. And a friend told me, just embrace it. You're choosing to grow something that has meant so many different things to people. Just claim it. It's yours now. So that's what I did." Now Taylor grows half a row of cotton, for decoration at home and special functions, and "for my grandpa," she says.

THREE PART HARMONY Farm is part of Seed Keepers, a people-of-color-led seed-saving collective that maintains the culture, knowledge, ancestry, and actual seeds grown from North Carolina to New York City. The collective is based at Tierra Negra Farm in North Carolina; members maintain seed banks and educate one another in farming practices.

The future of corn in particular concerns Taylor because of the wide influx of GMO (genetically modified organism) corn. Because corn is pollinated by its seeds blowing in the wind, it is especially susceptible to cross-pollination and contamination with GMO seeds. "Food sovereignty has everything to do with people being able to choose what they eat and farmers being able to choose what they grow," Taylor says. "The companies promoting GMOs are the opposite of that. Their main interest is making money



and getting the most people to buy their product, and the chemicals you also have to buy to make them grow. They're making it harder for people who don't want to buy their product to then be outliers. And they're doing this all over the world."

To resist this sort of takeover, Taylor again combines her dual vocations as farmer and activist. In 2012, she helped establish a cooperative, the Community Farming Alliance, which is aimed toward women, people of color, and gender-nonconforming people—"basically all the minority farmers who don't get access the way other farmers do." Members pool their resources and energy to buy seeds and soil in bulk, and to support each other's efforts. They also bridge the rural-urban farming divide. "We really wanted to be intentional about saying that we're in the city now," Taylor says, "but we want to maintain partnerships and especially build on our connections with black farmers in the mid-Atlantic and the South."

Farming has also enriched Taylor's Christian faith in unexpected ways, especially as she thinks about the gospel parables originally directed at an agriculturally

based audience. Take, for example, the story of the mustard seeds, a revelation she shared at her ecumenical, lay-led church in D.C.

"When I was small, I always heard this story about how something small becomes something big," Taylor explains. "I also think, for me, it's a story about knowing what saving seeds is all about and how that can inform my faith. This is the first year we've committed so much space to growing seeds [for future seasons] as opposed to just food. With seeds, you need to wait a long time. There were many weeks I would come to see each stage, from the flowering stage to making the seeds to waiting for them to dry. I was thinking, That's a lot of lettuce we could have harvested in that time. But we didn't. We waited and let that space be saved for the seeds."

"If [farming] were just about money," Taylor says, "then this is the wrong career. I think we're creating a beautiful, healing, inspiring space every day. And we get that benefit that is intangible. All of us do. We're creating this space that's magical and you can't explain it and you can't put a monetary value on it."

*Kimberly Burge is a Sojourners contributing writer and freelance journalist in Washington, D.C. Her first book, *The Born Frees: Writing with the Girls of Gugulethu*, will be published in August by W.W. Norton.*

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Practical Ways to be Eco-Friendly ~ and Save Money and Your Health!

Use a cloth towel instead of paper towels

Fix all car leaks

Carry your own cup

Properly store all toxic products and go to toxic roundups (call your city for information)

Sweep instead of using a hose/water

Get involved in your local government

Buy nontoxic cleaners

Reduce, reuse and recycle

Use organic pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers

Pick up the trash in your gutters (it goes directly to the ocean)

The March Continues: A Personal Reflection on Selma

By Fr. Jack Lau, OMI

Fifty years ago, the entire world saw images of Alabama's state-county and city police beating unarmed citizens who gathered non-violently in the city of Selma, Alabama on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The veil of indifference was lifted in a country that had preferred the status quo to justice-equality and the pursuit of happiness for all.

I grew up in a white, interfaith, middle class suburb of New York City in the 1960s. I remember the nightly news, and seeing images of the civil rights and the anti war movements playing out before us on city streets. I saw, but did not understand fully what segregation meant. In 1975, only ten years after Selma, I went to college at the University of Alabama. People didn't talk a lot about

what had happened, yet the walls of segregation/separation were still present. Everyone "knew his/her place" and I just followed.

It was with this background, along with the experience of having been the Pastor of St. Francis Xavier in Overtown/Miami, Florida in the late 1990s that I walked into the unfolding turmoil and injustice in Ferguson, Missouri in October. I walked in profound respect and awe of those who had had the courage to stand up and speak out 50 years ago.

A week before the 50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday, I received a call from Rabbi Margaret Klein of Temple Knesset Israel in Elgin Illinois, who asked me to consider going to Selma with her husband, Simon, who was hoping to go. We have

been very close friends for over 25 years. We decided to drive down on Saturday - 9 hours - walk on Sunday and return on Monday, all the while staying with my sister and Mother who live an hour away from Selma.

We left early on Sunday morning and took county back roads to avoid getting caught in any traffic jams at the interstate exit. This gave us the opportunity to see the beauty of the country-side, as well as the horror of the clear-cut forests



laying bare the red clay soil to erosion. When we arrived, we could feel the energy in the air. We were warmly welcomed at the local Walgreens, where we met an African-American Methodist Bishop in his magenta clerics, and had the chance to share about where we had come from and our reason for this journey. We parked our car on the outskirts of the city and walked to Temple Mishkan



Jack Lau, Simon Klein on the infamous Pettus Bridge

Israel. Simon and I were participating in the 50th Anniversary Prayer and Service sponsored by the “RAC” (Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism) and Temple Emanuel of Greensboro, NC. The Temple Mishkan Israel was dedicated in 1900, and in its day had a congregation of 120 families. At present the Temple is rarely used, and has only 10 members.

Like the small Catholic community in the south, the Jewish community largely remained silent to the plight of the African-Americans and the social injustice of the Jim Crow laws, which made voting nearly impossible. Yet as the movement progressed through the prophetic leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., things changed. Dr. King invited both Jewish and Catholic leaders to participate in the movement, and this called the entire nation to take notice and wake up from its slum-

ber. The Jewish community saw the movement as a new Exodus, while in the Catholic community, we moved out of our parochial stance to the inclusive teachings of Jesus and political action.

The Temple was full to capacity. We gathered in song and prayer, and then were challenged by the preaching of Rev. William Barber, President of the NC NAACP and founder of the Moral Monday Movement. Fifty years ago, the Voting Rights Act was signed, allowing all citizens to register to vote and vote with ease. Today those laws are being rewritten to limit those registering and the days and times to vote. We are in a state of regression, and the chasm of segregation and income disparity is only growing. Pope Francis in the Exhortation Gospel of Joy, #54 writes: “Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, en-

couraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting.” And while we see the slipping away of voting rights, we saw this week how the justice department of Alabama continues to claim ‘States Rights’ as they block the judgments of the federal courts in regards to equal rights. Our work is not done!

Peter Yarrow of “Peter, Paul and Mary” shared with us the music that galvanized a nation, along with stories of joining Martin Luther King on marches, especially as they gath-

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Several thousand people gathered to remember the events in Selma 50 years ago.

The March Continues: A Personal Reflection on Selma *(Continued from page 11)*

ered in the City of St. Jude, Alabama. St. Jude was a city founded by Fr. Harold Purcell in the 1930s for the well-being and advancement of the African-American Community, and was a center of activity in the civil rights movement.

The main speaker for the service at Temple Mishkan Israel was Dr. Rabbi Susannah Heschel, daughter of Abraham Joshua Heschel, a noted philosopher and Rabbi of the 20th century. She challenged the Jewish community to re-establish itself as a prophetic community of faith, prepared to address issues of race, human rights, Middle East policies, and gender inequality and injustice. As the gathering prepared to march toward the Bridge, all the Rabbis and Clergy were invited forward. A clergywoman and I came forward, and were invited up on the bima/alter for the final song and commissioning; a powerful moment, for sure.

Before leaving, I was able to spend a few minutes talking to women who had heard the call for volunteers out in California and took a bus to join in the march to Montgomery. Then, it was a slow walk to the bridge along with 80,000 others. Block after block was full of people joining in song and spirit as we remembered the hap-

penings of “Bloody Sunday” 50 years ago. As we walked, there was also a festive spirit that we are not alone and that hope is alive. People were taking many photos and often stopped Simon and me for a photo with them; him, looking like a Jewish scholar and me wearing our cassock and cross, the orange Indian prayer shawl and a yarmulke. Yes, inclusive and welcoming to all!

As we approached the Edmund Pettus Bridge named after a Confederate General, U.S. Senator and Grand Knight of the Klu Klux Klan, I was overcome by the sacrifice of so many, most of whom were poor and people of color who gave our nation a lesson in civics: that all people are created equal and are endowed with unalienable rights, Liberty, Justice and the pursuit of happiness. I then bowed down to touch the pavement where 50 years ago, blood flowed.

As we drove back to the novitiate, I was grateful for the opportunity to join my friend Simon and the Jewish Community once again in an action of conscience and solidarity where the law of Love, compassion and respect shines out as a beacon of Hope for all the world to see.

Resources

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Visiting Oblate Ministries

By: Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI

As the new director of the Oblate JPIC Office in Washington, DC, I have focused on continuing the work in the nation's capitol, as well as expanding the office's interests and efforts by outreach to Oblate sites in the US and Mexico. To this end, over the past six months, I have travelled several times to Southern Texas - Laredo, Roma, Eagle Pass, Brownsville and San Antonio – as well as to Buffalo, NY, Lowell, MA, California, and La Morita in Mexico, making contact with Oblates and their local colleagues in each of these places. I have organized activities and given talks to share about the JPIC ministry in the US Province. As another very important aspect of this outreach, I have listened to Oblates and their associates to learn about what is going on in each place to help determine how the JPIC Office might be a better resource to people in each of these areas. I plan to continue visits of other Oblate places with the same goals in mind.



Fr. Antonio Ponce OMI with the Pre-novices in Tijuana, Mexico



Visiting a nature center with the Greens of Guadalupe in Brownsville. This group was formed in response to one of Fr. Darrell Rupiper's two-week workshops a decade or more ago.

Please be in touch if you are interested in support from the JPIC Office for work you are doing in your Parish, or if you want to connect more closely with us. Email Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI at aponce@omiusa.org or call us at 202-529-4505

Photo to the left: Visiting a Refugee House for migrants in Saltillo, Mexico

Catholic Teaching Confronts “Right to work”

By: James Reinke

The state of Wisconsin passed a “right to work” law this Lent. Given what the church has taught since 1891 promoting the right of workers to form unions, and Pope Francis’ strong advocacy against this materialist and consumer-driven economic system where profits mean dehumanization, I expected something substantial from the local church resisting this proposed legislation. The Wisconsin Catholic Conference’s brief testimony to a Senate committee can be found on line. They sought a thoughtful balance and did not advocate against the legislation. I find their efforts quite disappointing and was initially very critical. However, there is a frequently used metaphor of a frog being placed in gradually warming water that seems to apply. When you drop a living frog into hot water it immediately either jumps out, or at least tries to. However, when you place that frog in water that you only now gradually heat up, that frog doesn’t try to jump out and is cooked. The story suggests we have become the frog, and are already in hot water.

The church continues to teach the importance of workers being able to form unions, given the legally and economically restricted imbalances in negotiating power between capital and labor. Unfortunately, this teaching is not very well known. The United States Catholic conference summarizes it:

“The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is

more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of

With a focus on what Pope Francis writes, as well as the metaphor of the frog, let’s evaluate how the church, as we the pilgrim people of God, have responded to this crisis.

In paragraph 51, Pope Francis makes the urgent case for the church’s



unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.”

This message about the economy and worker rights has not been well proclaimed from the pulpit. Additionally, we seem to have lost a language that meaningfully supports working men and women—a language that can lead to action and agitation with and on their behalf—because we see ourselves in their struggle. Just five paragraphs in Pope Francis’s *The Joy of the Gospel*, numbers 50 through 54, set a strong background for the necessity of union organization and offer an explanation for what has made us “indifferent” to what was previously an inspiring message.

“grave responsibility” in discerning the “signs of the times”. He writes: “in this exhortation I claim only to consider briefly, and from a pastoral perspective, certain factors which can restrain or weaken the impulse of missionary renewal in the church...” He writes that we must pursue an “ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times”. He adds: “This involves not only recognizing and discerning spirits, but also—and this is decisive—choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil.” He proposes an “evangelical discernment”. He says, “...it is not the task of the Pope to offer a detailed and complete analysis of contemporary reality”. Rather

it is the “grave responsibility” of the local church—the people of God—to diligently discern the spirits. As a church, as the people of God, we have to be involved—or as he says, have the “smell of the sheep” in order to read the “signs of the times” and evangelize.

In paragraph 53 he writes: “just as the commandment ‘thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills.” He says that we have created an economy that fosters a “disposable” culture. He is clearly talking about the capitalist economy of the United States. Any number of American Catholics have stepped up to dismiss what the Pope has written. From what I can tell, many dioceses in this country have begun efforts to initiate the new evangelization. However, I have not been as successful in finding dioceses that are striving to implement the “evangelical discernment” he is calling for. This is where we, as the frog in quickly warming water, come in. Both as a church and as a nation we generally seem blind, deaf, and numbed to any information suggesting the “exclusion and inequality” that leads to death fostered by our economy. We have been numbed to the hazards we live, breathe, foster, and float in. We fail to see our brothers and sisters in crisis.

The Pope writes: “Today everything comes under the laws of competition and survival of the fittest where the powerful feed upon the powerless.” Is there anyone in the United

States that could deny that everything in this economy comes under the law of competition? In comparison to other developed countries, this, the wealthiest country in the world, offers only a paltry safety net (do a little research if you do not believe this. Compare us to Scandinavian countries, or to Singapore).

“Today everything comes under the laws of competition and survival of the fittest where the powerful feed upon the powerless.” - Pope Francis

Apparently, the accepted economic deal was that in exchange for a great opportunity for self-improvement there would only be a minimal safety net. People just had to work hard. Unfortunately, due to the inequality of economic distribution, that opportunity has diminished. Additionally, there also seems to be a very dark underside to this law of competition. Somehow, the successful wealthy have been raised up as a virtuous model—apparently sprung from Calvinist predestination. They appear charmed, favored, even graced. Their actual place in the social order as being dependent on others and circumstances—e.g., legislation, employees, climate, transportation systems, luck, infrastructure, etc. — is forgotten. They are given a status they do not deserve. In exchange, the common good is dismissed. Instead, as the Pope says, “the powerful feed upon the powerless” and it goes little noticed.

Consequently, “Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and discarded.” Walker’s right to work legisla-

tion just adds one more layer to this economy of exclusion. Again, could anyone question the imbalance in negotiating power between capital and labor from the start? Unionization proved to be a boon in humanizing the workplace. The 40 hour workweek, over-time pay, concern for safety, and many other improvements only came with pressure/coercion from unions. In that struggle, many died. However, the influence of unions has been on a steady decline over the past few decades.

With globalization of the economy and capital’s search for the strongest quarterly gains, working men and women have become more and more subject to the vicissitudes of profit. Many of us seem to count ourselves very fortunate when we have found a work niche that provides security and the promise of a decent retirement. We have very little sense of the brother and sisterhood of labor. We buy into the American myths of self-determination and personal achievement and then, like the rich, don’t see our dependence upon others. We have pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We fail to see that we are being treated like a commodity to be used, and discarded when no longer needed—but, all along, hoping that our children can do at least as well as, preferably better than, we have.

Denial reigns. We fail to question politicians’ and economists’ hyperbolic rhetoric of justification and exceptionalism. Thus, the Pope writes, “In this context, some people con-

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Catholic Teaching Confronts “Right to work” (continued from p. 15)

tinue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world.

This opinion, which has never been confirmed

by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.” The church has warned us over and over of the hazards inherent in this free market economic system. These writings, as well as the misery of the poor and excluded, have inspired many to pursue a different course. Dorothy Day and the Catholic worker movement are just one example. Meanwhile, how do the rest of us live with this commodification and exclusion? Francis writes: “To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, *as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own.*” (Italics added) Our news media fails to truly inform us of the plight of the poor, marginalized, and discarded. Unfortunately, we also

We buy into the American myths of self-determination and personal achievement and then, like the rich, don’t see our dependence upon others.

hear very little from the pulpit that could help make these nameless and numberless excluded brothers and sisters known. In our numbed and deadened state, the Pope suggests

that we are anesthetized, perhaps even “thrilled”, by what the market offers us to purchase. Perhaps shopping, accumulating, and setting up a beautiful home serves to prevent the majority of us from scrutinizing the “signs of the times” and doing the evangelical discernment which is the “grave responsibility” of missionary disciples?

The Pope writes that we have “a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power”. Apparently, we have been numbed to indifference towards most economic and state actions that further diminish worker dignity.

All this ties together in the “confrontation” between Catholic teaching and the state over “right to work” legislation. Pope Francis currently exemplifies that teaching stating, “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Union organizing is a necessary condition for labor to overcome the imbalance in negotiating with capital. What would appear to be obvious seems far from it. Certainly the governor and a majority in the Wisconsin leg-

islature saw no problem — as well as those who voted for these people. The Pope calls this further stacking of the odds against labor an example of the “globalization of indifference”. In this materialistic, capitalist economy we are all commodities. This brings us back to the metaphorical frog slowly boiling to death. The Pope writes that we have “a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power”. Apparently, we have been numbed to indifference towards most economic and state actions that further diminish worker dignity. We, not just labor, are that frog slowly heating up and cooking. The Pope says that we settle for the personal and family compensation that comes from this market — not recognizing

ourselves in our brother and sister workers. The media didn’t draw real lines. Not much came

from the pulpit or the bishops. The local church failed to do its “evangelical discernment”. The unions protested, along with some allies. But basically the state’s residents and outside observers, like myself, just continued swimming in the slowly heating up pot of water. The proposed legislation could not generate in us the urgency it required. Will we frogs learn anything from this?