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Volume 5, Issue 3

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

A social justice newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order St. Francis



Special Interest Articles:

- Focus of our June issue: Our Franciscan Life
- Human Trafficking: Growth of a Movement among Women Religious



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Sr. Cecilia Marie Morton, Sr. Donna Wilhelm, Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, Jennifer Dillon,
Sr. Marjorie White, Sr. Rose Grabowski, Sr. Shannon Fox
—Social Justice Committee

Our Franciscan Life: Living in a way that would make human beings more human and this world a better place in which to live.

by Sister Donna Wilhelm

Do you remember the first issue of *We Commit Ourselves*? It was January 2015 and the title of the newsletter was taken from the Chapter Commitments and Deepest Desires from our 26th General Chapter.

Since then we've met in Chapter again, recommitted ourselves to refounding, and most recently many of us have been enriching our understanding of our Franciscan call by participating in sharing groups while reading *Build With Living Stones* (BWLS).

This June issue will attempt to help us continue to explore the practical ramifications of that call.

The opening introduction of BWLS states that Franciscans live "their faith in Christ in a way that would make human beings more human and this world a better place in which to live." But what is "ours to do"? Our Deepest Desires give us some general direction.

This issue of *We Commit Ourselves* will focus specifically on **four aspects of**

social justice that are relevant today and which may help to answer the question both individually and as a congregation.

They are:

- Racism,
- Immigration,
- Income Inequality
- The Environment

We hope that these few offerings will help continue to energize the efforts in which we are already involved... or perhaps lead us to explore something new! ■

Human Trafficking: Growth of a Movement among Women Religious

By Anne Victory, HM: President, US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking and
Director of Education, Collaborative to End Human Trafficking, Cleveland, OH

It was 2000, the turn of the century, when the first US legislation addressing human trafficking—the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000—was enacted. That was NOT the beginning of the crime—only evidence of a deepening understanding that slavery had never vanished from the United States, despite the Emancipation Proclamation and 13th Amendment of the US Constitution in 1865.

People are enslaved today, sold for profit and pleasure, around the globe and right in our neighborhoods—a shock to many. The International Labor Organiza-

tion estimates that about **40.3 million** people are enslaved somewhere in the world right now, and that human trafficking is a \$150 billion global enterprise that includes commercial sex and forced labor.

Today all states also have anti-trafficking laws and are working to find effective ways to both strengthen and enforce them.

Across the globe, congregations of women religious have been intentionally addressing the issue for the past twenty

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Human Trafficking...continued from p. 1

“Stemming from our Franciscan values and the fact that all life is interconnected, members, vowed and non-vowed, are encouraged to be engaged in ministry with those living on the margins of society and struggling to live with dignity.”

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter

or so years, providing education, advocating for victims and for more stringent legislation, and serving the complex needs of the women, men, and children who are suffering the traumatic effects of human trafficking.

On a national level, **US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking** is a collaboration among US congregations of women religious working on the issue of human trafficking across the country.

USCSAHT is a member of the international Talitha Kum network, a project of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG).

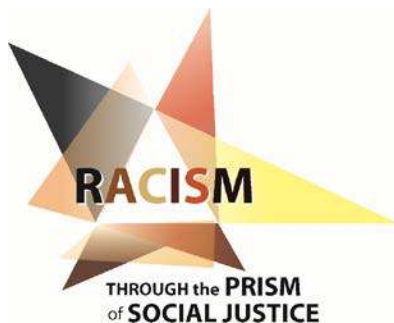
Members of USCSAHT presently include 101 congregations, 13 partners/coalitions, and 14 individuals who are supporting the work to combat human trafficking in their local areas and collaborating with one another across the nation to address this complex issue. USCSAHT provides educational resources, advocacy, and support for the complex needs of survivors.

In the greater Cleveland, OH area, the Collaborative to End Human Trafficking began its work as an initiative among seven local congregations of women religious. The organization has evolved from the initial “steering committee” to an independent 501.c.3 organization with a Board of Directors. Some members of the original steering committee serve as members of the board.

The Collaborative’s mission, articulated by the original steering committee—“*to educate, and advocate for the prevention and abolition of human trafficking while connecting services on behalf of trafficked persons,*”—continues to serve the organization well. To date, the Collaborative has given over 2,400 presentations and displays reaching over 105,000 individuals, not counting the 18,000+ reached by two live-stream events with WKYC the past two Januarys.

The kernel of collaborators has grown from the tiny group of about 15 individuals representing the local religious congregations and a few lay colleagues to a group

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Racism through the Prism of Social Justice

JCWR Third Convocation

by Sister Dorothy Pagosa

From March 25-27, 2019, the **Justice Conference of Women Religious** (made up of Justice Promoters of Women’s Religious Congregations) held their third convocation in St. Louis, MO. The topic was *Racism through the Prism of Social Justice*.

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Patricia Chappelle and Anne-Louise Nadeau from Pax Christi USA gave presentations on “Breaking the Silence: Racism and White Privilege.”

They began by sharing the definition of racism as “Personal Racial Prejudice + the Misuse of Power by Systems and

Institutions.” © Srs. Patricia Chappelle and Anne-Louise Nadeau. Power can be positive or misused.

Misused:

- Authority over (obey)
- Have control over
- Have command over
- Determine the outcome
- Force people to be/do
- Negate/deny the other

Srs. Patricia and Anne-Louise went through the history of racism and oppression of people of color: Native American, Black, Asian, etc. They showed how

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Human Trafficking...continued from p. 2

of over 50 area organizations, agencies, and businesses.

Led by the Collaborative, "Greater Cleveland Coordinated Response to Human Trafficking" includes law enforcement, the courts, the US Attorney's Office, the four health systems in Cleveland, social service providers, some of the local hotels and universities, the

Department of Children and Family Services, the Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center and many others.

Members of GCCRHT commit to a common mission to weave a safety net for victims and those who are vulnerable to being trafficked by sharing resources and best practices that each has to offer to achieve this goal

Despite these efforts over the past 19 years, there is much more to do to achieve the vision of a world without slavery.

All are invited to participate with, support, and pray for USCSAHT and the work being done at every local level to address this grave violation of human rights.

No one should be sold! ■

"We embrace our immigrant roots and identify with the struggle of all people to find a home in this world."

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26th General Chapter

See page 7 for Resources and **Red Flags** for identifying human trafficking...

The **Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis** is one of the 101 Congregations of Religious that are members of *US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking*. **Sister Linda Szocik** is the congregation's representative.



Racism through the Prism of Social Justice JCWR Third Convocation... continued from p. 2

systemic racism impacts all systems: legal protection, education and schooling, politics, economics and jobs, social, religious institutions and family.

Four workshops were held that participants could choose to attend:

- How to be White Allies: Srs. Patricia Chappelle and Anne-Louise Nadeaus
- The Racial Wealth and Income Gap: Meg Olson, *Network*
- White Privilege: What Do I Do With It?: Marcelline Koch, OP
- Wrestling with the Legacy of White Supremacist Colonial Christianity: Jennifer Reyes Lay, Assistant JPIC Director, Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word

The prayers prepared for this convocation called us all to recognize racism and to repent of it. The last prayer and closing ritual called us to commit to work to end racism in our own lives and in systems.

May we keep living out of that commitment! ■

Editor's Note: Sister Dorothy served on the Steering Committee for this event.



What's Happening at the Border? – Is it really an Invasion? *by Sister Jane Blabolil*



It's very hard to listen to any news-cast of late that doesn't mention the "problem" at the border.

Several things are new: The numbers are increasing; the migrants are coming not only from the "northern triangle" of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala but also from Brazil, and even Cuba. (Many of these last few groups are people who have money and can afford smart phones and funds for a motel).

Those ministering to the migrants are exhausted and have fed thousands for three years with not one cent of government money.

Besides El Paso which frequently factors in the news, other cities such as McAllen and Tijuana/San Diego also face this huge influx of people seeking asylum and are in immediate need of food, water, clothes and a place to stay.

Our cousins, the **School Sisters of St. Francis**, live and work both in the city of El Paso, Texas and immediately across the border in the Mexican city of Juarez.

This area known as "The Pass to the North" since it was named and claimed on April 30, 1598, by Juan de Oñate who took formal possession of the area for King Philip II of Spain, and still is a largely Mexican (Mexican –American)

populated area. Sister Fran Hicks, SSSF who with five other of her sisters has ministered in El Paso/Juarez for the past 15 years, spoke with me recently by phone.

In her words, the situation has "totally, completely broken out of control." The week of May 6th alone people who had been detained were released into El Paso on their own resources. They could not leave the city until they had a bus ticket to a relative or friend's home.

One reason for the recent influx of even more migrants is the need to attempt the crossing before the extreme heat of the southwestern summer begins, and the ever fluctuating policies of the Trump administration.

The week of May 6 both the Border Patrol and ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) brought recently processed and released immigrants to the various charitable centers where a change of clothing, something to eat, a chance to shower and help in procuring a ticket to a family or friend's home were obtained.

Fran says that on Tuesday of that week 901 migrants were released to them – on Wednesday 954 – on Thursday 1041.

Recently an empty warehouse about the size of a Costco store, 125,000 square feet

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Volunteers welcome Central American migrant families to an El Paso motel where they will be housed and fed for a few days before going to be with family members elsewhere in the U.S.

Annunciation House is using two motels to house a growing number of migrant families arriving at the border.



Migrants gather inside the fence of a makeshift detention center in El Paso, where a surge has been overwhelming Border Patrol and the U.S. immigration infrastructure. (Sergio Flores for the Washington Post)

What's Happening at the Border? continued from p. 4

was purchased to help to meet the increasing and continuing demand.

Many religious communities of women are helping to staff the various charitable centers (one of which, Annunciation House, our community is supporting with our Birthday donation this year. And in mid-May our congregation, through the Social Justice Fund, sent an additional \$1,000 grant to help with emergency needs).

So what can we do if we cannot go to the border to lend a hand?

Fran very clearly invited us to do the following:

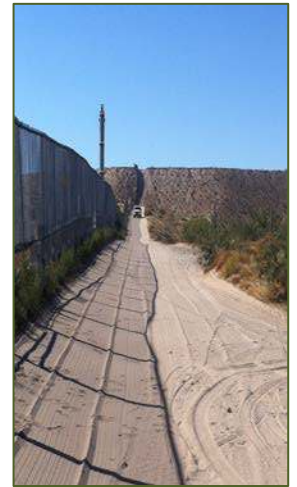
- Believe in the power of prayer and pray daily for our government and for the immigrants as well as for the countries from which they came.
- If you are able – fast one day a week and educate yourself to see

why the violence, extortion and utter poverty force these people to risk the journey – not for a better life but just to live!

- In her words, “Bombard Congress to reform the immigration act.”

Every day those on the border are living out the Gospel mandate of Matthew 25: “*I was hungry and you gave me to eat – a stranger and you welcomed me.*”

Let us add our own AMEN! ■



The Issue with Tissue: How Americans Are Flushing Forests Down the Toilet

Report by Jennifer Skene & Shelley Vinyard

(National Resources Defense Council – NRDC)

Tissue products such as toilet paper, paper towels, and facial tissue are cheap and convenient—but they cost the planet a great deal. The vast majority of these tissue products are made from wood pulp, and in the United States that wood pulp comes largely from the boreal forest of Canada.

Our demand for tissue is devastating the boreal, with serious consequences for Indigenous Peoples, treasured wildlife, and the global climate. We already know of options for more sustainable tissue production—specifically by using recycled materials and responsibly-sourced alternative fibers. Yet, major companies have largely failed to adopt them.

This report provides an overview of the major tissue brands and reveals the worst corporate offenders driving boreal degradation. It describes the impact of virgin pulp sourced from the old growth forests like Canada’s boreal forest and the United States’ strong reliance on tissue products.

It also includes a scorecard for consumers ranking major tissue brands according to their impacts on forests. Finally, this report outlines existing solutions that companies can adopt to make their brands more sustainable.

Read the **full report** from the NRDC by clicking on this link: [The Issue with Tissue Report](#)



It is time to reexamine current norms of tissue production and consumption. It is also time for companies to act more as global citizens and usher the world into a more sustainable paradigm. Fortunately, solutions promoting healthy forests and a healthy planet already exist. Companies and consumers simply need to embrace them. ■

The Economy is Booming — But for Whom? *By Sister Dorothy Pagosa*

The Unemployment Rate in the U.S. in April 2019 was 3.6%. It is considered full employment.
— *Bureau of Labor Statistics*

That sounds absolutely terrific... however:

- **A**ccording to Forbes Magazine (February 2019) [Gabriel] Zucman's calculations show that the top 0.1% of the U.S. population possesses close to 20% of the wealth in the country— more than the bottom 80% of the population combined. When expanded to the top 10%, the share of the pie continues to grow: they own more than 70% of wealth in the country, or twice that owned by the bottom 90%.”
— *Natasha Bach*

- **“W**orker wages in the United States have largely stagnated since the 1970s. But the top 1 percent of U.S. income earners have more than doubled their share of the nation's income over the same span.

Corporate executives head about two-thirds of America's

top 1 percent households. As of 2016, the ratio between S&P 500 CEO and average U.S. worker pay stood at 347 to 1, over eight times as wide as the gap in 1980.”

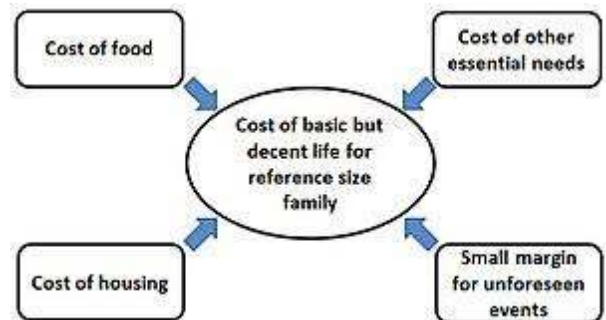
— *Institute of Policy Studies:
February 2019*

We knew this in our gut. People are working more and more jobs just to get by. Health care expenses, especially as it pertains to prescription drugs, are skyrocketing.

What are we to do?

Francis stood with those who suffered from an unfair economy – even back then. We can do no differently. Workers are fighting for minimum wages of \$15 per hour. That would come to \$31,200 per year. For a family, this would still be below the poverty line for working 40 hours per week.

Let us stand with workers struggling for a living wage. ■



Quotes Worth Pondering

- ✧ *“How wonderful it is that no one has to wait, but can start right now to gradually change the world! How wonderful it is that everyone, great and small, can immediately help bring about justice by giving of themselves.”*
— *Anne Frank*
- ✧ *“I urge you to celebrate the extraordinary courage and contributions of refugees past and present.”*
— *Kofi Annan*
- ✧ *Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”*
— *Martin Luther King, Jr.*



Human Trafficking: RESOURCES

To find out what's happening regarding human trafficking in your area and/or to get involved, check the following links:

- www.sistersagainstrafficking.org
- [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)
- [national hotline](#): Can help guide you in identifying what you are observing

Identifying Human Trafficking: Red "flags" to watch for

In general, the person...

- ☞ May not speak for themselves; they defer to a controlling individual; can appear submissive, afraid, or nervous, and avoids eye contact; shows signs of physical or mental abuse.
- ☞ Has inconsistencies in their story or has a well-rehearsed story; suddenly has new, expensive clothing, jewelry, and other items.
- ☞ Has a tattoo that could, in fact, be a traffickers branding; has multiple hotel card keys, credit cards, or cell phones; is not in possession of his/her U.S. international identification documents.

Their living or working conditions may be such that the person:

- ☞ Works long or unusual hours, with little or no payment.
- ☞ Has restricted freedom of movement due to threats or physical barriers, i.e., bars on windows, locks on the outside of the doors; lives with multiple, unrelated people in small quarters.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. In addition to the above, there are other red flags to watch for. A minor might:

- ☞ Be in the presence of an older "boyfriend" or "girlfriend."
- ☞ Have new jewelry, a new hairdo, polished nails, or new clothing that their parents or guardian did not pay for.
- ☞ Wear inappropriate clothing for their age, or for the weather.
- ☞ Have sporadic or poor school attendance.

*"The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil,
but by those who watch them without doing anything."*

—Albert Einstein

*"Our Franciscan
spirituality inspires and
guides us
in responding to any
needs calling out to us."*

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Remember:

**June 20th
is
World Refugee
Day**



REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources, etc.

Note: The **next issue** of *We Commit Ourselves* will be published in **August**.

Please send any items for inclusion in this next issue to **Sister Shannon Fox** by Wednesday, **July 24th**.

~ Your Social Justice Committee