

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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Katrina and the Least Among Us

A ten year retrospective - Part 1

by Fred Kammer, SJ

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JSRI Upcoming Events

August 28

JSRI will host a press conference and rally for Immigration Reform with Katrina Immigrant Workers and Katrina Homeowners on the front lawn of Loyola at noon.

September 2

JSRI will host a free screening and discussion of [Big Charity](#) in Nunemaker Auditorium at 7:00 PM. [More information](#)

September 10-11

Fr. Kammer and Dr. Weishar will travel to Atlanta, GA for a meeting of the Advisory Board of the "Recovering the Human Face of Immigration" Project.

September 16

Fr. Kammer will meet with the Mission Committee of Christus Health in Dallas, TX.

September 20-21

Fr. Kammer and Ms. Baudouin will attend the Jesuit Volunteer Corps board meeting in Baltimore, MD.

September 22

Fr. Kammer will attend the

Katrina's tenth anniversary (August 29th) brings many important stories about levees, wetlands, demography, entrepreneurs, venture capital, corruption convictions, and resiliency. JSRI's interests and Gospel focus on the "least among us" cause us to examine in this issue what happened—or not—in terms of poverty, housing availability, and criminal justice. Next month we focus on public schools, health care, and new immigrants. The picture, like much of the past ten years, is a blend of good and bad, success and failure.

Poverty and Jobs. In brief, the income gap has widened, and New Orleans ranks second in income inequality among 300 U.S. cities.^[1] Poverty is entrenched, and the percent of children living in poverty in New Orleans, 38% in 2005, has risen to 39%.^[2] The racial income divide continues growing: white median household income in metro New Orleans, on a par with households nationwide, grew by 22% between 2005 and 2013 to \$60,553. That was three times the 7% growth rate of black median households (to \$25,102).^[3] The disparity in 2013 incomes between white and black households was 54%, compared to 40% nationally.^[4] This worsened despite \$71 billion dollars received by the State of Louisiana for rebuilding. Closely tied was the fact that employment rates for white men in metro New Orleans was 77%, compared with 57% for black men.

Pope Francis U.S. Visit

September 24-25

Pope Francis will address the U.S. Congress and the United Nations.

JSRI Recent Activities

August 21

Dr. Mikulich was the keynote speaker at the 2015 Cross-Systems Summit "Collaborating to Achieve Equity" hosted by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

August 10-12

Fr. Kammer and Dr. Weishar participated as executive committee members in a dialogue on "Recovering the Human Face of Immigration" with 25 religious leaders from across the country in Atlanta, GA at Ignatius House.

August 6

Dr. Weishar spoke about JSRI's report [Too Much for Too Many: What Does It Cost Families to Live in Louisiana](#) at the New Orleans City Council Hearing on the need to establish a living wage for New Orleans city contract workers.

August 3

JSRI co-hosted the [Catholic Teach-In on Migration](#) at Holy Name of Jesus School.



Photo Credit: Loyola University New Orleans

Housing Affordability. According to an August 11th report from the New Orleans Metropolitan Association of Realtors, average New Orleans home prices climbed an amazing 46% since Katrina. (Increases in Jefferson Parish increased only 1%.)[5] For renters, the median gross New Orleans rents grew from \$698 to \$925 between 2004 and 2013.[6] One-bedroom apartment rents rose 33% and two-bedrooms by 41%. A key driver of inflated costs are estimates that Katrina destroyed over half of the region's rental housing.[7]

In addition, public housing authorities took the opportunity to replace concentrated public housing complexes, even those untouched by Katrina, with mixed income apartments. However, the result is that there are 3,221 fewer low-income public housing apartments in the city.[8] In Orleans Parish, the percentage of those paying more than 50% of their income on rent and utilities—those termed "severely cost-burdened renters"—rose from 24% to 37% between 2004 and 2013. It should be no surprise, then, that the share of the metro poor living outside New Orleans has expanded from 46% in 1999 to 58% by 2013.[9] Even those with Housing Choice Vouchers, which tripled in number in Orleans Parish between 2000 and 2010, often found themselves consigned to high-poverty, low-opportunity neighborhoods by "discrimination against voucher users and differential access to rental housing opportunities generally on the basis of race." [10] In 2010, 90% of voucher users in metro New Orleans were black.[11]

Criminal Justice. Before Katrina, New Orleans led the nation and the world in incarceration—more than five times the national average in 2005.[12] Since then, two consent decrees are forcing reform in the police department and the jail; an Inspector General's office is holding criminal justice officials to account; our first independent Police Monitor was created; and constructing a new, smaller, and improved jail—holding two-thirds fewer people already—is the result of ongoing efforts by community members and local officials.[13] Violent crime is actually down in New Orleans by 17% since 2004, but the decrease has been less than that of the nation at 21%.[14] Innovation across the

criminal justice system has started, but comprehensive cultural change needs strong leadership from city and system officials for years to come.^[15] Orleans Parish still incarcerates at a rate twice that of the nation.^[16]

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