Poverty and the Gulf South States
by the Rev. Fred Kammer, S.J., JSRI Director

One predominant characteristic of our region, despite decades of “New South” propaganda, is the reality and legacy of our poverty—of our elders, our families, our children, our education, our health status, our infant mortality, our life expectancy, and our future. Two of the five states of the Gulf anchor the bottom of the list of economic well-being—Mississippi is the poorest (50th) and Louisiana is just above it (49th). The others solidly populate the lowest segments, none rising above the median. Texas is 43rd; Alabama is 42nd; and Florida is 29th on the list of states by percentage of its people living in poverty. We get so used to being at the bottom of these kinds of lists that we seem to just ignore repeated reports, perhaps hoping that they will go away on their own.

After our introductory edition of the JustSouth Quarterly in the spring, we focused our attention on migration (summer 2009) and race (fall 2009) as ways to bring our work on research, advocacy, and popular education to a wider audience in the South and elsewhere. Now this issue’s primary attention is on poverty, the third of our focus areas as an institute. While poverty is our third key concern, it is intimately connected to both migration and race in the South.

As I discuss in my column on Catholic social teaching in this issue, since the days of the Jewish Scriptures, the emphasis of biblical justice was on widows, orphans, and strangers—groups that in current U.S. society and in our region comprise most of the poor. In contemporary societies, many women and children and today’s “strangers” (those who literally are immigrants, refugees, or who are “not like us” because of the color of their skin, their language, their disability, their tribe, or some other condition) continue to be most of the poor throughout the world. Whether I think back to Catholic Charities USA position papers on the “feminization of poverty” in the U.S. in the 1980s, discussions in international circles on the “pauperization of women and children” in the intense globalization in the 1980s and 1990s, or the realities of tens of millions of refugees worldwide and the “internally displaced people” of Katrina and Rita in this millennium, the “poor” of today and the biblical anawim look very much the same.

—Continued on back cover

POPULATION THAT LIVE IN POVERTY
Alabama ...........................................15.7%
Florida ..............................................13.2%
Louisiana ........................................17.3%
Mississippi ........................................21.2%
Texas .................................................15.8%

FAMILIES PAYING MORE THAN 30% OF INCOME TOWARD RENT OR MORGAGE
Alabama ...........................................29.6%
Florida ..............................................44.3%
Louisiana ........................................32.1%
Mississippi ........................................31.9%
Texas .................................................32.7%

Read Where Y’at, Fair Housing? by Alex Mikulich, page 9
Inequality in Alabama

There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people in the state, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Alabama society. The primary inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 307,270 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 89,432 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Alabama. Women in the state make only 74.1 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In addition, in 2007, white workers’ median wages were 26% higher than those of black workers. Second, in terms of education, while 23% of the white population has completed college and only 17.6% dropped out before finishing high school, the numbers almost reverse themselves for the black population, where only 14.3% have completed college and 25.2% dropped out before finishing high school. Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 6.91 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 13.73 per 1,000 births. For Hispanics, it was 7.69 per 1,000 live births.

Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Alabama, the unemployment rate is 6.8% for white workers, but for black workers it is 17.4%. By the second quarter of 2010, it is projected to be 7.6% for whites and 19.6% for blacks.
Inequality in Florida

There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Florida society. The key inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 906,853 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 505,874 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Florida. Women in the state make only 79.9 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In addition, when compared to white workers, black workers in 2008 made only 78.6 cents for each dollar earned by whites, and Hispanics made 82 cents for each dollar earned by whites. Second, in terms of education, while 27.5% of the white population has completed college and only 10.8% dropped out before finishing high school, the numbers almost reverse themselves for the black population, where only 15.6% have completed college and 22.9% dropped out before finishing high school. For Hispanics, 21.7% completed college, but 26.5% did not finish high school. Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 5.63 per 1000 live births, while that for black infants was 12.36 per 1000. For Hispanics, it was 5.17 per 1000 live births. Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Florida, the unemployment rate is 9.0% for white workers, but for black workers it is 14.6% and for Hispanics 11.6%. By the second quarter of 2010, it is projected to be 10.4% for whites, 16.9% for blacks and 13.4% for Hispanics.
Inequality in Louisiana

There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people in the state, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Louisiana society. The primary inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 271,975 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 91,585 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Louisiana. Women in the state working full time make only 67.3 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In addition, when compared to white workers, black workers make only 67.3 cents for every dollar earned by whites. Second, in terms of education, while 23.4% of the white population has completed college and only 16.5% dropped out before finishing high school, the numbers almost reverse themselves for the black population, where only 11% have completed college and 30.4% dropped out before finishing high school. For Hispanics, 18.4% completed college, but 30.6% did not finish high school.

Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 7.04 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 13.92 per 1,000 births, and for Hispanics, it was 5.65 per 1,000 live births. Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Louisiana, the unemployment rate is 4.6% for white workers, but for minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Louisiana, the unemployment rate is 4.6% for white workers, but for minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Louisiana, the unemployment rate is 4.6% for white workers, but for minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Louisiana, the unemployment rate is 4.6% for white workers, but for minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Louisiana, the unemployment rate is 4.6% for white workers, but for minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Louisiana, the unemployment rate is 4.6% for white workers, but for minority workers much more acutely than white workers.
WHO ARE MISSISSIPPI’S POOR?

- 228,572 are children (30.4% of kids)
- 59,164 are elders (16.9% of seniors)
- 313,881 are adults 18 – 64 (18.1% of adults)
- 293,875 are in female-headed families (44.2% of such families)

LOOKED AT ANOTHER WAY:

- 256,082 males are poor (18.6% of males)
- 345,535 females are poor (23.6% of females)
- 210,132 whites are poor (12.3% of whites)
- 371,883 blacks are poor (35.2% of blacks)
- 13,281 Hispanics are poor (24.8% of Hispanics)
- 10,843 immigrants are poor (19.1% of foreign-born)

WHAT ABOUT EDUCATION AND POVERTY?

- 351,940 people did not finish high school—32.7% are poor.
- 543,908 people finished high school—17% are poor.
- 559,454 had some college or associate’s degree—12.2% are poor.
- 357,046 people finished college or more—only 5.2% are poor.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSING AND POVERTY?

- The spending per year per elementary and high school aged student is $8,241.
- There are 26,542 Head Start slots in the state.

WHAT ABOUT HEALTH AND POVERTY?

- 18.1% of people in Mississippi are not covered by health insurance; Mississippi ranks 43rd among states in health coverage.
- The infant mortality level in the state is 10.74 per 100,000 births, ranking 50th among the states.
- The life expectancy of a child born in 2005 was 73.9 years.
- The number of Medicaid recipients in 2005 was 716,000.
- *Total population: 2,838,810.

WHAT ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT?

Unemployment is one of the most common causes of poverty. In August 2009, there were 121,490 unemployed workers in Mississippi (9.48% of the workforce). This was an increase of 25,614 unemployed workers—a dramatic 27% increase—since August 2008. Among women, unemployment was 7.5%; and among blacks 13.2%. For eligible unemployed workers in Mississippi, the average weekly unemployment compensation benefit is $196.61.

WHAT ABOUT INCOME IN MISSISSIPPI?

The median household income in 2008 was $37,790. 4.1% of households (44,959) had incomes in excess of $150,000. 223,923 households (20.4%), however, had annual incomes less than $15,000.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSING AND POVERTY?

Families are considered to be “housing burdened” when they pay more than 30% of their income for rent or mortgages. In Mississippi, 186,771 homeowners (24.6%) are paying more than 30% of their income for housing. 140,570 renters (52.5% of all renters) are paying in excess of 30% of household income for rent. In addition, while not always an indication of poverty, 192,616 families (15.2% of all families) are living in mobile homes in Mississippi. Further, 76,897 households (7.0%) have no motor vehicle.

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Inequality in Mississippi

There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people in the state, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Mississippi society. The primary inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 223,923 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 44,959 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Mississippi. Women in the state working full-time make only 74 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In addition, when compared to the median for white workers, black workers make only 61.5 cents for each dollar earned by whites. Second, in terms of education, while 22.3% of the white population has completed college and only 17.5% dropped out before completing high school, the numbers almost reverse themselves for the black population, where only 11.3% have completed college and 30.6% dropped out before finishing high school. For Hispanics, 13.9% completed college, but 44.9% did not finish high school. Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 6.91 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 15.54 years. Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Mississippi, the unemployment rate is 6.7% for white workers, but for black workers it is 13.2%. By the second quarter of 2010, it is projected to be 9.1% for whites and 17.9% for blacks.
WHAT ABOUT HEALTH AND POVERTY?

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WHAT ABOUT HOUSING AND POVERTY?

Second, in terms of income, we saw above that while 1,111,851 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 705,330 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Texas. Women in the state make only 78.3 cents for every dollar earned by whites; and Hispanics make only 64 cents for each dollar earned by whites. Second, in terms of education, while 32.4% of the white population has completed college and only 9.9% dropped out before finishing high school, the numbers are quite different for the black population, where only 18.0% have completed college and 17.3% dropped out before finishing high school. For Hispanics, only 10.3% have completed college, but an astounding 44% have not finished high school. Third, in terms of very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 5.78 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 12.29 per 1,000. For Hispanics, it was 5.62 per 1,000 live births.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSING AND POVERTY?

Families are considered to be “housing burdened” when they pay more than 30% of their income for rent or mortgages. In Texas, 1,367,162 homeowners (25.2%) are paying more than 30% of their income for housing. 1,299,301 renters (47.7% of all renters) are paying in excess of 30% of household income for rent. In addition, while not always an indication of poverty, 715,074 families (7.4% of all families) are living in mobile homes in Texas. Further, 507,926 households (6.0%) have no motor vehicle.

INCOME IN TEXAS:

The median household income in 2008 was $50,043. 8.4% of households (705,330) had incomes in excess of $150,000. 1,111,851 households (13.2%), however, had annual incomes less than $15,000.

WHO ARE TEXAS’ POOR?

Inequality in Texas

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**Primary Sources for State Profiles**

**Poverty statistics:** 2008 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, S1701, S1703.


**Quarterly Unemployment Rates by State, Race, and Sex from Economic Policy Institute, July 22, 2009, for second quarter of 2009; weekly unemployment benefits from U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Unemployment Insurance Data Summary, October 16, 2009.**

**Household income:** 2008 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, Selected Economic Characteristics.

**Housing:** U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey, Selected Housing Characteristics: 2008.


For Christmas 2009, please help us to shine the Light of Christ amid the darkness of poverty and hopelessness.

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Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Poverty

by the Rev. Fred Kammer, S.J.

Scripture and Poverty

Consideration of poverty in Catholic social teaching begins with the foundation that each person is both sacred and social, created in God’s image, and destined to share in the goods of the earth as part of a community of justice and mercy. From the time of the Deuteronomic laws, the covenant, and the prophets, there was special mention of the poor and their privileged place in the community. The Hebrew word for the poor is the anawim, the little ones, originally those “overwhelmed by want.” In the Old Testament, this group was primarily widows, orphans, and strangers (refugees, migrants, immigrants). They are poor and powerless. Their poverty was often the result of unjust oppression. As such, they comprised “Yahweh’s poor.”

The Lord frequently warned the Israelites about their duty to the poor: You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan (Exod 22:20-22). Their special status reflected a combination of powerlessness, poverty, and systemic exclusion from the community.

Care for the anawim became the test of Israel’s faithfulness. The word used to reflect the community’s duty to the poor is “justice.” Instead of being recipients of optional charity or pious generosity, the poor became the measure of Israel’s fidelity to the Lord. Their right treatment lay at the heart of biblical justice and righteousness. Not caring for the poor was infidelity to God, because people who forgot the poor no longer really believed in Yahweh revealed as God of the people, the community, dwelling among them and passionately concerned for their welfare, especially for the poor.

Jesus fulfills this tradition in his teaching and actions. His three “great parables”—according to Pope Benedict—are about justice and the poor: the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, and the dramatic judgment scene in Matthew 25. In this judgment drama, Jesus emphatically identifies himself with the poor and measures individuals and nations by our deeds of justice and mercy.

Preferential Love for Poor and Oppressed

Today, church commentators use anawim in a developed sense that explicitly includes four groups: widows, orphans, strangers, and the poor. All four suffer the interconnection of poverty, powerlessness, and exclusion and are alike in the oppression they often suffer. Believers are charged to see to it that the anawim are not without the means to meet their basic needs, nor are they to be excluded from the community or its decision-making by their lack of means. If the poor around us now are uncared for, we too cannot know the one who says, “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” This God-of-the-community gave creation to us as goodness to be shared as stewards—not owners. If we forget the poor, we have forgotten God and our own radical interconnectedness: to God as life-giver and to one another as sisters and brothers, the two great commandments of Jesus. Thus the Catechism now proclaims “a preferential love on the part of the Church” for those oppressed by poverty.

Responses to Poverty

The implications drawn out over the centuries are rich. As the U.S. bishops put it, The first line of attack against poverty must be to build and sustain a healthy economy that provides employment opportunities at just wages for all adults who are able to work. In this, they highlight the tradition’s emphasis on a “family wage.” The Catechism explains, Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community. Related emphases in Catholic teaching stress the importance of: (1) unions as a means to assure a fair wage, protect workers, and allow them to exercise their rights to participate in society and in the workplace; (2) employee benefits such as retirement benefits, unemployment compensation, workers compensation, and so forth; (3) rights to emigrate to find work; (4) the evils of workplace discrimination; (5) care for those who are unemployed or unable to work due to age, disability, and care of children; and (6) the right to health care.

Just as CST has understood poverty to be connected to powerlessness and non-participation in society, so our teaching on poverty has grown from simple assistance with a meal or shelter to encompass an array of necessary responses: advocacy for social and economic change; empowerment of individuals and groups; political participation and economic development so people can be “artisans of their own destiny”; micro-enterprise loans; and the importance of “property” for the poor in multiple senses of land, capital, education, and technological know-how.

3 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, No. 2448.
5 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, No. 2428.
Where Y’at, Fair Housing?

by Alex Mikulich, Ph.D., JSRI Research Fellow

As we say in New Orleans, to learn how a person is doing, it is an appropriate time to ask: Where Y’at, Fair Housing? Significant gains for homeownership have been won for people of color in the last 50 years. Due largely to the success of the Civil Rights Fair Housing legislation, African-American homeownership increased from one in three in 1950, to nearly one in two by 2000.

However, significant disparities between white home ownership and African-American homeownership persist and are associated with high levels of racial segregation. Some social scientists call residential segregation the “structural lynchpin” of American racial inequality. Housing location is critical to predicting access to quality public education, development of personal wealth, employment, health and safety, democratic participation, transportation, and child care.

Nationally, whites are more likely to gain home ownership, are able to acquire more home equity over a lifetime, and will own a home earlier in life than people of color. Studies indicate that the relatively higher proportion of initial wealth of whites is dependent upon inheritances and gifts. At age 25, nearly 40 percent of whites and less than 20 percent of nonwhites are homeowners, and by age 35, nearly 80 percent of whites are homeowners compared with less than half of nonwhites. More importantly, whites are 2.65 times more likely than nonwhites to achieve $50k in home equity, 3.9 times more likely to achieve $100k, and 6.15 times more likely to achieve $200k in home equity than nonwhites. The real estate mantra “location, location, location,” is also about the ways that home valuation is color-coded.

Even the wealthiest African-American suburban communities lack access to the opportunities available in predominantly white neighborhoods. People of color may find it increasingly difficult to translate economic gains, including homeownership, into neighborhood quality. Real estate steering and discrimination, exclusionary zoning and localism, and discriminatory lending practices compound and exacerbate the geography of racial wealth disparity.

A study by the Center for Responsible Lending demonstrates that African-Americans and Latino borrowers are more likely to receive higher-rate subprime loans than white borrowers, even when studies are controlled for legitimate risk factors. Institutional discrimination in housing and lending markets is one significant way that racial wealth inequality extends historic discrimination into the future.

Racial inequality and segregation are not only evident between cities and suburbs; increasingly, in the South “within-city segregation and within-suburb segregation contribute equally to overall metropolitan segregation levels.” Segregation may even be greater in suburbs and more difficult to change.

For example, the southern part of East Baton Rouge Parish and part of West Baton Rouge Parish have the highest median earnings ($32,631), the lowest percentage of adults without a high school diploma (8.8 percent) and the second-highest life expectancy (77.3 years) in Louisiana. This part of Baton Rouge is nearly 70 percent white, 23 percent African American, and 5 percent Latino. Yet neighboring north and central parts of East Baton Rouge have the lowest median earnings ($16,398), third-lowest life expectancy (72.7 years), and its population is 88 percent African American, 9 percent white, and one percent Latino.

As John A. Powell, executive director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University concludes, “Failure to ensure fair housing for all Americans will undoubtedly undermine efforts to promote integration in every other area of American life.”

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# Immigration at a Glance

by Anna Alicia Chavez, JSRI Migration Specialist

## Worldwide Immigration

| There are more than **200 million** people in the world who live outside their country of birth. | These **200 million** people make up 3 percent of the global population. | The number of the migrants worldwide would constitute the fifth most populous country in the world. | **49.6 percent** of the world’s migrants are women. Remittance flows back to their home country and families are estimated at $337 billion dollars worldwide, $251 billion of which went to developing countries. |

## U.S. Immigration

| **38 million** immigrants in the U.S. | **12 million** undocumented immigrants in the U.S. | **76%** of undocumented immigrants are from Latin America. | **59%** of undocumented immigrants are from Mexico. | **4%** of U.S. population is undocumented. | **5.4%** of U.S. workforce is undocumented. | **73%** of undocumented immigrants have U.S. citizen children. | **1.5 million** children under age 18 live in the U.S. as unauthorized immigrants. |

## Immigration Pop. in the Gulf South in 2007

| **Gulf South:** 7,599,847 total immigrants. | **Louisiana:** 143,267 total immigrants; 65,000 estimated undocumented immigrants. | **Mississippi:** 49,483 total immigrants; 35,000 estimated undocumented immigrants. | **Florida:** 3,440,918 total immigrants; 1,050,000 estimated undocumented immigrants. | **Texas:** 3,828,904 total immigrants; 1,450,000 estimated undocumented immigrants. | **Alabama:** 137,275 total immigrants; 100,000 estimated undocumented immigrants. |

## Migration Facts

| The ratio of average income in the five richest countries to the 5 – 10 poorest countries was 9 to 1 in 1900, 30 to 1 in 1960, and 100 to 1 in 2004. | Close to 550 million workers around the world live on less than one U.S. dollar a day, while almost half of the world’s 2.8 billion workers earn less than two dollars a day. | In Haiti, the average per capita income is $400 per year. Nearby in the U.S., an unskilled day laborer can earn that much in less than one week. | Mexico has lost more than two million agricultural jobs since the approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and the reduction of Mexican governmental farm supports. | In the last 20 years, the Mexican minimum wage has decreased by 70 percent in real terms. | More than 4,000 immigrants have died crossing the U.S.-Mexico border since the mid 1990s. |

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*Source: International Organization for Migration*

*Source: Pew Hispanic Center*

*Source: Adapted by the Rev. Edward Arroyo, S.J., from the Migration Policy Institute*

*Source: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB). Catholics Confront Global Poverty,*
CURRENTLY THERE ARE 1.5 MILLION FOREIGN-BORN YOUTH LIVING IN THE U.S. WITHOUT LEGAL DOCUMENTATION. THESE YOUTH HAVE GROWN UP IN NEIGHBORHOODS ACROSS THE U.S. AND ATTENDED U.S. ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS. MANY OF THEM EVEN GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL WITH HONORS. DUE TO THEIR LEGAL STATUS AS undocumented immigrants, however, they do not have easy access to higher education. (See American in Name, below.)

Many states prohibit undocumented students from attending college or university. Other states force them to pay out-of-state tuition even when they meet and exceed all the requirements for in-state tuition. They cannot vote, drive, or work. In addition, in the present hostile climate toward immigration, they most often live in constant fear of apprehension by authorities and deportation.

These youth may be your peers who sat next to you in class or the cafeteria from elementary through high school. They may have attended the same church you did. Today is a great opportunity for you to stand in solidarity with all undocumented youth and advocate for the Dream Act!

The “Development Relief and Education for Alien Minor Act,” known as the DREAM ACT, is a piece of bipartisan legislation introduced March 26, 2009, at the federal level in both the House (H.R. 1751) and the Senate (S. 729). This bill allows undocumented children and young adults who entered the U.S. when 16 or younger and who have lived in the U.S. for five years to apply for conditional permanent residency if they maintain good moral character and earn a high school diploma. After six years of conditional permanent residency, they could apply for lawful permanent residency (LPR). By allowing students to apply for conditional permanent residency, we give them a path to higher education, lawful employment, and service to the U.S.

American in Name* by Unnamed Student

Like most Americans, I love my country, and do whatever it asks of me. Every year, like most Americans, I contribute thousands of dollars to programs like Social Security and Medicare. At the end of the year, like most Americans, I file state and federal income taxes. And as soon as I could, I signed up for the Selective Service.

Unlike most Americans, I am an undocumented immigrant. This means that I will never be eligible for Social Security, Medicare or hundreds of other government services. I file my taxes not with a Social Security number, but with an individual tax identification number which is a special number assigned to undocumented immigrants by the I.R.S. so we can pay taxes. And while I can never serve in the military, the selective brochure tells me that yes, even undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are required to enroll. I don’t mind doing these things. I consider them American to do so.

I’ve lived in the U.S. since I was two years old. I was educated in the American school system, embraced American culture as my own, and came to call this country home. I speak English better than I do Spanish.

But America is not where I was born. Officially, I am considered a Mexican national living in the U.S. without papers or documentation. My only country of citizenship is Mexico. Ironic, considering I don’t even remember Mexico. I have no friends or closely connected family in Mexico; everyone I know is here. My entire life is here.

Despite not being able to legally work, drive, or vote, I have succeeded throughout my life. During high school, I was president of the National Honor Society, scored admirably on the SAT, and graduated valedictorian of my class.

I was accepted at both the University of Arizona and Arizona State University with full tuition scholarships. Stanford also accepted me; but, because I was not a citizen, I was not eligible for any federal aid and therefore could not attend. So I stayed in Arizona.

College was rough. In 2006, Arizona voters prohibited state universities from providing scholarships to undocumented students. I don’t resent Arizona voters, they are simply misinformed. If they knew who we were and what we did to get to where we are today, I strongly believe that they would be much more sympathetic to our cause. Eventually, through the grace of a wide variety of private individuals and organizations, many of us were able to graduate.

I decided on law school shortly before my graduation. I didn’t know if undocumented students could even attend law school or practice, so I applied everywhere in the hopes that I would be accepted somewhere, anywhere. Two days ago, I received an acceptance letter from a tier 1 law school and with it a full tuition scholarship. They were impressed with my academics, LSAT, and most of all my personal statement which talked about the challenges I overcame as an immigrant student. I am now working toward becoming an immigration and civil rights lawyer in the U.S. I’m doing this to help myself, my community, and my country. I want to insure that the justice and equality promised by the constitution are readily available to all.

If the last 20 years have taught me anything, it is that undocumented students are the very concept of the pursuit of life and liberty. We represent what makes this country great. And like most Americans, we love our country, and are willing to do whatever it asks of us.

*This story, provided by Texas Dream Act Coalition, is the personal story of an unidentified and undocumented student.

The DREAM Act is the only hope for over 1.2 million students who want nothing more than to obtain residency and give back to the only country they know and love. We invite you to take action and help make this dream come true.

You can e-mail your representative at: http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/alert/?alertid=13182316&type=CO
And your senators at: http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/alert/?alertid=13182421&type=CO

For more information on the Dream Act and ideas on how you can stand in solidarity and advocate for the passage of the Dream Act, visit http://www.txdreamactalliance.com
By the end of this summer, President Obama had publicly committed to push for the passage of an immigration reform policy as early as the fall of 2009; however, at the time of this writing, with the health reform legislation taking up the center stage in Congress, there is little hope of any immigration reform happening this year. Even so, many pro-immigration reform advocates along with the U.S. bishops are confident that reform is indeed on its way, and thus are busy at work preparing for it. They have been participating in delegations to Capitol Hill, meeting with legislators, and giving testimony to make their position known. Bishops have also been writing pastoral letters to help the church understand the relevance of immigration reform, Catholic Social Teaching on this subject, and our Catholic responsibility to stand in solidarity with the immigrant community.

At the local level, pastoral agents are encouraged to follow in the bishops’ footsteps to prepare for the day, that will certainly come, when we will collectively need to “make a loud noise unto the Lord” and before our lawmakers, to make known our support in favor of a positive, comprehensive immigration reform policy. In the coming months, Catholics and all people of good will are invited to use their privilege as citizens of a democratic nation to call upon their members of Congress and ask them to vote in favor of a comprehensive immigration reform policy.

We also invite you please to check out the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) Justice For Immigrants Campaign at http://justiceforimmigrants.org/ On this website, you will learn more about current immigration issues and how you can work in collaboration with your faith community to put your faith into action on behalf of a just and humane immigration policy that will reflect the strong value system of our nation whose history includes the embrace of the stranger in our midst.

Poverty and the Gulf South States from page 1

Since poverty, race, and migration in this region will be this institute’s work for years to come, it seemed best at this early point to just take a closer look at some poverty facts about our Gulf South states—who is poor, what groups are poor and poorest, how poverty and health collide, how education or the lack thereof connects to poverty, the realities of unemployment and its recent surge, household income, housing implications, and just a “dash” of inequality for good measure. Poverty statistics for each state are presented in a single snapshot, one page that could be reproduced (you have our permission!) for local community groups, for talking with legislators, for discussion in classrooms or at church, and even for prayer.

If you find it helpful, please let us know. If you have suggestions for future articles, please let us know that too.