

What Do We Mean By “Justice”?

By Carrie Monnette

“I am a human being. I am a human being.”

Sr. Helen Prejean’s voice echoed softly throughout the tent as she read from her new book, “The Death of Innocents,” during her talk at the 8th annual Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice at Ft. Benning, Georgia. But these words were more than just the cry of a dying man; they were the foundation of almost every message delivered under the big, white tent, no matter the issue.

Another year, another cold November weekend in Columbus, Georgia. November 16-18 found more than 16,000 people, including 700 Jesuit high school and university/college students, gathering to protest the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC), formerly known as the School of the Americas, at Ft. Benning. The weekend coincided with the anniversary of the murder of six Jesuits priests and their two women co-workers on November 16, 1989, at the Central American University in San Salvador, El Salvador.

Originally centered around remembering the Jesuit martyrs and bringing to light the unjust living conditions of many of the marginalized in Latin America, the Teach-In has expanded to encompass many other social justice concerns around the world: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; human rights violations in Columbia, Haiti and Africa; fair trade issues; the death penalty; poverty conditions in the developing world; the AIDS pandemic; and poverty and inequality among residents of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

More than 3,000 people attended the Mass Saturday night for the Feast of Christ the King. Fr. Provincial John McGarry (CFN) presided and offered his reflections during the homily. The offertory and procession included both a piece of clothing from Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was killed 25 years ago, and a candle lit in memory of Moira O’Donnell, executive director of the Ignatian Solidarity Network who passed away suddenly on October 9.

Fr. Charles Currie (MAR), president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), gave the opening address, in which he remembered both Teach-In founder Bob Holstein and O’Donnell. The Holstein and O’Donnell families, who were both present at the Teach-In, were recognized and thanked for their support.

In his remarks, Currie highlighted the purpose and value of the Teach-In, which calls participants together each year “in response to the challenge from Fr. Kolvenbach to ‘let the gritty reality of this world into our lives, so we can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively,’ something the Salvadoran martyrs did so well.”



Left to right: Br. Jim Boynton (DET), Fr. Gilbert Sunghera (CFN), Ben Krause (CHG), Tony Stephens (CHG), Joe Koczera (CHG), Jacob Martin (CHG), Fr. Bill Verbyrke (CHG), Chris Staab (DET), Tim McCabe (DET), kneeling, front row: Eric Styles (CHG).

Daniel Donohue, a first-time speaker and senior at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Ill., shared his experiences of discrimination because of his bi-racial heritage. The Teach-In, he said, “Opens my eyes to other issues that affect my fellow Latin Americans, and just other fellow human beings.” Social justice has long been a part of Donohue’s life; both of his parents are active in the empowerment of the poor and oppressed in suburban Chicago.

Each year’s gathering is based on the signs of the times and as such is unique; this year, the narratives shared by Hurricane Katrina survivors added a particularly personal and poignant tone. Michelle Ricard, a returning speaker and senior from Spring Hill College, called Hurricane Katrina the “biggest wake-up call of my life.” A native of New Orleans, Ricard mourned the loss of the city that was home. “And I was lucky,” she recalled. “My mother had to stand in line for hours only to walk away with some bars of soap, a toothbrush and some toothpaste.”

Joe Givens, also a New Orleans resident, works for the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO). After sharing his personal experience, Givens encouraged those gathered to see that the violence of poverty and injustice happens where they live, too.

“Look for the levees in your neighborhood, because we all have ‘em. It wasn’t just about those walls not being built high enough,” he said. “It was about how many hundreds of people didn’t have cars to get them out of the city, who were too poor to afford safety.”

Amidst the many calls for action were witnesses to the generosity of the Ignatian Family. Mary Baudouin, assistant for social ministries in the New Orleans Province, spoke on behalf of Fr. Provincial Fred Kammer (NOR). “We want to share our tremendous thanks for all of the generosity shared with us by you, our Ignatian Family. To date, we have received over \$750,000,” she said. [The total is now more than \$1 million.] “The generosity has been amazing! And we ask that you remember us as we move forward soon with the need for volunteers to help with the clean-up and rebuilding.”

Monnette is the assistant to the provincial for social and international ministries in the Detroit Province and a graduate of Boston College and Weston Jesuit School of Theology.

Robinson Leaving Jesuit Conference



British Robinson

British Robinson, national director of Social and International Ministries at the Jesuit Conference, is leaving to become the senior advisor for public-private partnerships in the Office of the Global Aids Coordinator at the U.S. Department of State. She joined the Conference in 1995 as a legislative associate and was promoted to national director two years later. Robinson assumes her new position on January 3, 2006.

“In 10 years of service to the Society of Jesus, British continually worked to bring people together, often across political and social divides, in true solidarity with those less

fortunate,” said Jesuit Conference President Fr. Brad Schaeffer (CHG). Robinson credits her success to working alongside colleagues guided by Ignatian spirituality. “The Society has given me so much—what a grace-filled journey it has been,” she said. “I am keenly aware that I would not have been offered such a position had it not been for the experiences and expertise I have gained during my tenure here at the Jesuit Conference.”

“We wish British Godspeed as she moves to her new work on behalf of persons suffering from Aids around the world. We thank her for doing a terrific job at the Jesuit Conference during her decade of fine service on behalf of the Church and the Society,” said Schaeffer. “She will be deeply missed but the strong foundations she leaves in her office will remain.”

Executive Director of ISN Passes Away at Age 33



Moira O’Donnell

Moira O’Donnell, executive director of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, passed away suddenly in her sleep on October 9. She was 33 years old. Her parents, Bob and Jackie, and her sister, Aimee, attended the 8th Annual Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice as a tribute to the work that captured Moira’s heart and passion. A graduate of Santa Clara University and Boston College, Moira felt strongly that she needed to

act in response to her faith. After graduating from college, she spent a year in the Vincentian Service Corps, teaching at St. Aloysius School in New York. She then worked with the homeless in San Francisco before coming to ISN. Moira’s life was indeed a testament to a faith that does justice. Hers was a life devoted to others, using her substantial intellect and talents to improve the world around her, especially the conditions of the poor and people often forgotten. She will be missed.