Mass on the Border: Encounter, Hope and Love
Dear friends in the Lord,

St. Ignatius mentioned that our manner of living is ordinary, without fuss. That is certainly true when it comes to the change of provincials. We have no pageantry like the proclamation of a new pope; no "habemus Provincialem." A new provincial simply takes over at a designated day and time, July 31 in our case.

Yet, I cannot let the naming of Fr. Thomas Greene as the next provincial go by without mention. As I mentioned in the letter to the province announcing Father General’s decision, this is a cause for great joy for us. Father Greene brings with him great experience and many gifts that will make him a real gift to the Society in the U.S. Central and Southern Province. The article in this magazine details those. But, in the light of the topics raised in this issue, I want to highlight one particular dimension of his experience and passion.

The article by Fr. Harrison and Bishop Holley emphasizes our commitment to reconciliation, something at the core of the mission given to the Society at its recent General Congregation. That mission has been lived out in so many ways, in Fr. Romero’s work in the Amazon, in the work of Fr. Tom Clark and the parishioners of Immaculate Conception Parish in Baton Rouge to heal the wound of racism, in the work with refugees and asylum seekers in the Encuentro Project in El Paso, and in the labors of one of the alumni of the Colegio San Ignacio, Michael Fernández, in the areas around San Juan.

Father Greene’s whole life and ministry, beginning before his entry into the Society, have shown a deep commitment to that ministry of reconciliation. From his work with Boys Hope Girls Hope, to his labors in Belize on behalf of prisoners and other marginalized persons, he not only proclaims but lives that ministry. In some ways, rather than trying to define “reconciliation,” as Jesuits may be wont to do, we can look to his witness and ministry for a concrete example. He will lead us well. I know you join me in seeking God’s blessings on him and his labors.

You also are in my prayers, since your help to us in so many ways makes our mission and ministry possible in all the places mentioned in this issue. May the Lord greatly bless all of you as 2020 unfolds.

Gratefully in the Lord,

Ronald A. Mercier, SJ
Provincial

MESSAGE FROM THE PROVINCIAL

Queridos Hermanos en el Señor,

San Ignacio mencionó que nuestra manera de vivir es sencilla, sin alboroto. Y eso es cierto cuando se trata del cambio de los provinciales. No contamos con un evento como la proclamación de un nuevo papa. No hay un “habemus Provincialem.” Simplemente, un nuevo provincial comienza su mandato el día y la hora designados. En nuestro caso será el 31 de julio.

Sin embargo, no puedo dejar de mencionar el nombramiento del P. Thomas Greene como el próximo provincial. Como señalé en la carta a la provincia anunciando la decisión del Padre General, dicho nombramiento ha sido un motivo de gran alegría para todos nosotros. El Padre Greene trae consigo una vasta experiencia y muchos dones que convertirán su labor en un verdadero obsequio para la Compañía en la Provincia USA Central y Meridional EE.UU. Un artículo de esta revista brinda mayores detalles al respecto. Pero, a la luz de los temas planteados en este número, quiero destacar una dimensión particular de su experiencia y pasión.

El artículo del P. Harrison y del obispo Holley enfatiza nuestro compromiso con la reconciliación, algo central en la misión dada a la Compañía en su reciente Congregación General. Esa misión ha sido vivida de muchas maneras como en el trabajo del P. Romero en el Amazonas, en el trabajo del P. Tom Clark y en la labor de los feligreses de la Parroquia de la Inmaculada Concepción en Baton Rouge para curar las heridas del racismo; asimismo, se refleja en el trabajo con refugiados y solicitantes de asilo en el Proyecto Encuentro en El Paso, y en las labores de uno de los ex alumnos del Colegio San Ignacio, Michael Fernández, en las zonas aledañas a San Juan.

La vida y el ministerio del Padre Greene, desde antes de su ingreso a la Compañía, han mostrado un profundo compromiso con el ministerio de la reconciliación. Desde su compromiso con el programa Boys Hope Girls Hope, mediante su trabajo en Belice en nombre de los presos y otras personas marginadas, no sólo ha proclamado, sino que ha vivido ese ministerio. De algún modo, en lugar de tratar de definir la reconciliación como acostumbran hacer los jesuitas, hallamos en su testimonio y ministerio un ejemplo concreto. Él será un buen guía, y sé que te unirás en mi búsqueda de que tanto él como sus tareas reciban las bendiciones de Dios.

Ustedes también están en mis oraciones, ya que las diferentes maneras en que nos ayudan hacen posible nuestra misión y ministerio en todos los lugares mencionados en este número. Que el Señor los bendiga grandemente en el transcurso de este nuevo año 2020.

Con gratitud en el Señor,

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Cover: Hundreds turned out at the Border Mass on the Rio Grande on All Souls Day to pray for the people who lost their lives seeking to create a better life in the United States.
HEN TOM GREENE was a junior at Jesuit High School in New Orleans, then-president Fr. Harry Tompson, SJ, told Tom’s mother that he would one day be a Jesuit. Young Tom laughed off the prediction.

“I wasn’t religious,” he says. “I had no desire to be a priest. I dismissed the idea pretty easily.”

But then, Tom Greene’s life hasn’t turned out quite the way he thought it would. He thought he would be an attorney, a husband and father, the usual expectations. Instead, at 56, he’s a Jesuit priest, preparing to be provincial of the USA Central and Southern Province. As provincial, he will be responsible for overseeing the Jesuits and the Jesuit mission within the province.

He will assume his new responsibilities on July 31, 2020.

A native New Orleanian, Fr. Greene graduated from Jesuit High, Loyola University New Orleans and Loyola School of Law. He worked for the district attorney’s office before going to work for a law firm in Lafayette, La.

He was working his plan. But he found himself easily distracted. He was becoming increasingly negative, even cynical.

“I would sit at my desk and stare out the window and wonder how I really felt about it all,” he said. “Did my work really make a difference in anyone’s life? How could I be doing so well professionally and yet so poorly personally? I needed a break.”

He quit his job and set off on a road trip to Alaska. “I figured by the time I got back, my head would be clear, and I’d know what I was meant to be doing.”

Three days into his trip, he decided to stop for coffee in Wyoming. He stayed for two years. He got a job teaching at a public school for low-performing students, the children whose social, behavioral or educational needs could not be met in traditional school settings. Earning minimum wage and working with children unable to articulate their needs or control their sometimes-violent impulses, he was incredibly happy. He knew he was on the right path and decided to pursue a master’s degree in special education to continue this work.

He committed to working for two years with low-income children at Boys Hope Girls Hope in St. Louis, which was founded by Fr. Paul Sheridan, SJ.

“I would bring the kids to an inner-city parish, and I was always impressed by the priest,” Fr. Greene recalls. “He was involved in the neighborhood, doing good things, providing hope, serving as an anchor.

And I remember thinking, ‘Why is the Church involved in this stuff?’”

Greene began a period of introspection and discernment. He studied theology and volunteered at a homeless shelter. He lived simply. Very slowly, he began to realize that what he wanted out of life was a vocation.

“One day I had this crazy thought that maybe I should be a Jesuit,” he says. “It just seemed so absurd. I tried to push it away, but it kept coming back. The question began to haunt me and kept me up at night. I realized I had to put this question behind me.”

He entered the Jesuits in 1997, at the age of 34. “Ever since, it’s been an incredible ride,” he says.

Father Greene completed the usual path of Jesuit formation: a master’s degree in philosophy from Loyola University Chicago and a Master of Divinity degree from the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley, Calif. He also earned a master’s in conflict resolution at Creighton University.

His regency, however, was a little different. Instead of working in a Jesuit high school, as most regents do, Fr. Greene provided legal counsel to asylum seekers and unaccompanied minor immigrants through the Cabrini Center for Immigrant Legal Assistance in Houston. Over the years, he would provide legal representation of detained immigrant children and asylum seekers in Chicago and New Orleans, as well.
Following his ordination in June 2007, Fr. Greene was one of the founding members of the Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola University New Orleans. He began doing advocacy work with the state legislature on behalf of immigrants.

His expertise in immigration issues led to an assignment in 2014 as the secretary for social and international ministries at the Jesuit Conference of the United States in Washington, D.C. In that role, he continued his advocacy work, this time with federal lawmakers and other national and international organizations. He also worked closely with Jesuits and lay collaborators working in social apostolates around the world.

“I was able to see the Society of Jesus and its work on a worldwide level, and it was an incredible experience,” he says. “Frequently, I would think about the thousands of lives around the world impacted by Jesuits and colleagues working in schools, social centers and refugee camps and just be amazed at the power of that dedication. If everyone did that contemplation, the world would be a lot more hopeful.”

Father Greene was four years into this assignment when he was called on to lead the formation community in St. Louis. He served as the rector (superior) of Bellarmine House of First Studies at Saint Louis University from 2014 to 2017.

“Formation work was really pivotal for me,” he said. “I’d never been a superior before. I learned a lot … and I don’t think anyone got seriously hurt!”

Father Greene currently serves as Jesuit superior of the Jesuit Community of Belize, Central America, and as provincial assistant for international ministries. “I love the ministry in Belize,” he said. “The people there are so hungry for all the things the Society of Jesus has to offer. It’s also a great opportunity right now for us to reimagine our role in the Belizean Church by examining how we can empower lay leadership in the Church, particularly by way of the Spiritual Exercises.”

The Jesuits in Belize administer two parishes, a parish school, a retreat house, a high school and junior college. Jesuits are active in spirituality ministries, including training lay people and religious in Ignatian Spirituality. Father Greene has worked closely with the local Jesuits, the diocese, other religious and the staff at the parishes and schools to assess the needs of the Belizean Church and consider the roles Jesuits might fill.

His assignment in Belize has been the first in which Fr. Greene was able to do direct pastoral ministry. He says Mass, leads retreats, gives talks, visits the sick and the imprisoned.

“I love my day-to-day ministry in Belize,” he says. “It will be hard to leave. Few Jesuits enter the Society because we feel called to a life of administration. I’m not sure what God sees in me, but this whole Jesuit life has been a mystery to me. Despite my shortcomings, I have enjoyed every assignment and stage of formation.”

Father Greene succeeds V. Rev. Ronald A. Mercier, SJ, who has served as provincial of the Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province since its creation on July 31, 2014. Following Fr. Greene’s installation next summer, Fr. Mercier will begin a sabbatical.
Recent Jesuit Publications

New Devotional Edition of The Spiritual Exercises
Father Sean Salai, SJ, has developed a new devotional edition of The Spiritual Exercises. This deluxe edition, with leather cover and ribbon marker, is filled with quotes and prayer prompts and contains step-by-step guides suitable for independent use over any time period. Available at Amazon or TAN books.

Exploring Jesuit Educational Foundations
In his latest book, Fr. Claude Pavur, SJ, promotes the spirituality of docta pietas (learned devotion) and its centrality to Jesuit formation. *In the School of Ignatius* was published by the Institute of Jesuit Sources and is available on their website: jesuitsources.bc.edu.

Making the Case for Animals in Heaven
In *All God’s Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animal Ethics*, Fr. Christopher Steck, SJ, draws on early Church traditions, contemporary biblical and theological scholarship and Church teaching to develop a comprehensive Catholic theology of animals, including supporting the idea that animals will join people in heaven. Available on Amazon.

La Fragua: Central America’s Jesuit Theater

Reflecting on the Real Presence

“Can Francis Change the Church?”
In 2011, Fr. Thomas Sweetser, SJ, interviewed a broad range of American Catholics about their relationship with the Church. A few years later, Fr. Sweetser returned to the same people to find out how their attitudes may have changed with Pope Francis. The answers are enlightening for the Church’s future. *Can Francis Change the Church?* is available on Amazon.

Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat Jubilee
The Society of Jesus in November celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES) at a Jubilee Congress in Rome. More than 200 Jesuit and lay delegates from 62 countries gathered at the Jesuit Curia to remember and give thanks for the past 50 years of the Jesuit commitment to “the faith that does justice.” Together, they sought to envision what this work might look like in the future, particularly in light of the Universal Apostolic Preferences, introduced by Superior General Arturo Sosa last year.

Both Fr. General Sosa and Pope Francis addressed the delegates. Pope Francis urged, “Share your hope wherever you are, to encourage, console, comfort and revive. Open the future, inspire possibilities, generate alternatives, help to think and act differently. Take care of your daily relationship with the risen and glorious Christ and be workers of charity and sowers of hope.”

Learn more about the Congress and this important work of the Society at www.sjesjesuits.global/.
Immaculate Conception Church, the Jesuit parish of Baton Rouge, La., recently underwent a renovation. The year-long project added a spacious and light-filled foyer to the front of the church and two sacristies to the rear. The sanctuary was opened up to include choir space and a baptismal pool on either side of the altar. New benches, flooring, lighting, wood finishes, and a stunning stone background to the sanctuary gave the 66-year-old church a much-needed facelift.

“Our theme during the renovation has been ‘Renovate the Church: Renovate Ourselves,’” said Fr. Thomas Clark, SJ, pastor of Immaculate Conception. “The church renovation is complete. Our own renovation is a work in progress, because God is not finished with us yet!”

The Immaculate Conception community celebrated the reopening of its church with three events in December.

- On Dec. 1, neighboring churches gathered for an Interfaith Praise and Worship Service featuring the Southern University Gospel Choir.
- On Dec. 8, Most Rev. Fernand Cheri, OFM, the Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, celebrated a festive Mass, followed by a banquet in the church Activity Center.
- On Dec. 15, Most Rev. Michael Duca, the Bishop of Baton Rouge, celebrated the Mass of the Blessing of the Church with a grateful and jubilant church family. The Mass of Blessing was followed by a reception with gumbo for 300!
All you need to know about the third degree of humility,” wrote Fr. William Cain, a Jesuit playwright, “is that when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Pedro Arrupe walked toward the blast.”

Walking toward the blast is what Christ does. But the ethos encapsulated by this short phrase – walking toward the blast – could well describe the efforts of many people working at the U.S.-Mexico border. It was this phrase that came to mind during the Border Mass on All Souls Day, Nov. 2, 2019.

It was a typical liturgy, but on the border itself – literally, on a temporary bridge right over the Rio Grande. It’s the same place that’s been pathologized by the nation’s political discourse and subject to endless policy changes.

It’s the space that’s become a touchstone for the nation’s politics, media coverage and, most importantly, the marker across which countless people hope to cross.

That’s where we had Mass.

The Mass was for the binational and tri-state (New Mexico, Texas, Chihuahua) community taken hostage by people who do not know them. Because it was All Souls Day, the Mass was especially for the many who have died trying to reach and cross this river and create a new life.

I attended the Mass as part of the Encuentro Project in El Paso. The Encuentro Project is an inter-congregational program that welcomes groups, immersing them into the immigration issues that have come to occupy an increasingly larger space in the American imagination. The USA Central and Southern Province is one of the sponsors of the Encuentro Project.

While educational, a stay at Encuentro is meant primarily to facilitate encounter, to meet real people whose lives are affected by the country’s policies. Father Rafael Garcia, SJ, a member of this province, is the director; Marist Brother Todd Patenaude is program coordinator; and Heidi Cerneka is a Maryknoll Lay Missioner and an immigration attorney who works on asylum cases as a part of Las Americas Refugee Asylum Project.

A group of seven Jesuits, including myself, participated in the program. I am grateful that our stay coincided with the Border Mass.

For me, there was one wonderful surprise that summed up the trip. It was one of God’s surprises. It is stunning to me how radically Christ dives into the nerve of conflict, how Jesus’ mission is anointed by the Father.

I couldn’t get it out of my head: The way Christ walks toward conflict and pain is wondrous.

I found myself surprised like this many times during my stay at Encuentro. Consider the Border Mass itself: three Catholic bishops – one of whom, Bishop Mark Seitz of the El Paso Diocese, just wrote a remarkable pastoral letter on immigration – consecrated the Eucharist at a site that has been a place of hope for people coming, of fear for those supporting a militarization of the area, and of mission for those dedi-
Meeting people who have dedicated their lives to helping migrants made me marvel at the way Jesus approaches the margin. When I asked Heidi Cerneka where she finds God, she replied, “Where don’t I find God?” Then she told me a story: A mother and daughter who traveled through Guatemala and Mexico told her that “there’s always someone willing to share food with you. We never went hungry.”

Her response reminded me of Jesuit journalist Fr. Antonio Spadaro’s description of Pope Francis’ piety: a spirituality of faces. Cerneka found God in a testimony from these two women. They risked everything by crossing, because everything was already at risk in their home country.

Despite great hardship and all the obstacles, what they testified to was God’s goodness enfleshed through chance encounters with someone willing to break bread.

We also met Anna Hey, deputy director and immigration attorney for Diocesan Migration and Refugee Services. As a child, Hey’s mother suddenly found herself in the deportation process after the death of her husband, a veteran. They went to the diocese for help and received it. Hey said she never forgot that, and now she’s a part of that help.

Encuentro connected us with people working to help the most vulnerable of migrants. They radiate courage and zeal. Despite the enormous setbacks and challenges to their work, there was no sense of defeat. It made me think about the necessary element for looking at the situation on the border without despair: a love made personal for the people who are seeking to cross, and a love for the people of El Paso and Juarez who continue to do what they can to help. That love was unmistakable in the people on the ground giving their lives to those seeking asylum.

Visiting this binational community gives hope. This community suffered a hate crime that claimed 22 lives and yet continues to help those who have nothing. This community hasn’t stopped giving, hasn’t stopped trying to help, fueled by a resilience that’s characteristic of el pueblo fiel (the faithful).

A visit to Encuentro allows one to experience how hope enlivens the courage of those seeking to cross. It allows an encounter with people who, like Abraham, risked their lives by leaving their home, yearning to be “free to worship him without fear” (Lk 1:74).

One Encounter with Grace

Father Garcia serves as chaplain at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility. He says Mass at two foster home-like facilities for unaccompanied minors, where they are held and cared for as they await reunification with a family member. One boy there asked for Baptism and First Communion. He was escorted to Sacred Heart, the Jesuit parish in El Paso, along with some of the other children. They celebrated Mass together, and everything that we believe that happens under the signs of the sacraments happened. Then they celebrated with the parishioners in the pastoral center.

I hope you see something beautiful in that, because this kid did.

 Appropriately, the second reading for the Border Mass was from the first letter of John: “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (1 Jn. 2:1).

Those who do not know Jesus Christ do not know these people, many of whom flee out of fear for their lives, but keep hoping. The Encuentro Project offers a chance to know the children of God and, through them, God Himself. On the border, one can meet people who have elected to walk toward the blast and encounter the face of Christ.

A Texas native, Jorge Roque, SJ, is a Jesuit Scholastic of this province, currently in First Studies at Saint Louis University.
I encountered *Navidad Nuestra* during my first stretch as a visiting artist with *Teatro la Fragua*, the Jesuit theater company in Honduras, founded by my brother, Fr. Jack Warner, SJ. *Navidad Nuestra* opened for me a Shakespearean mirror into the nature of the real Honduras. And, almost immediately, that mirror revealed the central role that immigrants play in the Nativity story.

Jack established *Teatro la Fragua* in 1979 as a way to awaken people’s creativity to find solutions to real issues. Of course, a theater wasn’t the obvious choice. In addition to the artistic and logistical obstacles, imagine the elevator speech that had to be concocted to tie together three seemingly disparate topics: Jesuit? Theater? Honduras? Yeah, it was a longshot.

But magic happened a few years on, when Jack’s genius harmonized the Jesuit-theater-Honduras dissonance by choosing to stage biblical stories. He suddenly had a wealth of material: the stories obeyed Shakespeare’s first law of theater (to mirror nature), and Jack could access multiple copies of scripts.

Out of this prophetic clam shell, *Navidad Nuestra* emerged.

*Navidad Nuestra (Our Christmas)* has since matured into a part-play, part-festival, part-lessons-and-carols celebration that *Teatro la Fragua* has mounted every year since.

**The Migrant, Holy Family**

In my cradle-Catholic upbringing in the United States, no teacher or nun, no priest or parent ever associated Christmas with immigrants. But the first time I saw the Nativity story from a Honduran perspective, I felt a Nativity that took place on the frontiers, far beyond the comfort and familiarity of home.

In fact, once the story gets going, our protagonists – Mary, Joseph and Jesus – never see home again, and spend the rest of the story displaced, seeking shelter or running from the law.

None of these stories is *about* immigrants; they weren’t written as and haven’t been observed over the centuries as “immigrant stories.” That separation from contemporary news makes them excellent lenses through which to view current immigration: the stories are politically agnostic and focus instead on people experiencing forced displacement.
The immigration in *Navidad Nuestra* is not a response to our current political climate; it is a reflection of the nature of the human condition through the lens of the Gospel.

The point: We are a people on the move, a species of immigrants, and our sacred scriptures emphasize that.

Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph and Mary and Jesus, Peter and Paul were all driven from home. They were all immigrants, and their experience as immigrants remains central to their role in our faith. That faith does not simply respect immigrants or demand justice for immigrants. As people of faith, we pray that immigrants will accompany us.

Honduran audiences were way ahead of me in recognizing this. For decades, audiences to *Navidad Nuestra* have seen Hondurans uprooted and on the move in the Christmas story. María is shaken to receive news of her pregnancy, and travels to the mountains to spend three months with her cousin Isabel. José and María journey to Bethlehem and find no place to stay. Migrant farmworkers are mystified that God might share the news first with them. Mysterious strangers cross borders to see the child.

Then the local tyrant declares war on infants, and José and María find themselves again suddenly displaced and on the road, broke and weary as they flee the tyrant’s fury. At the end, José and María return to their homeland, but not to their home, since it no longer offers refuge. Instead, like so many Hondurans, they remain displaced, vulnerable to the poverty, violence, oppression, persecution or natural disasters surrounding them.

This depiction didn’t spring out of the vapor. Long before *Teatro la Fragua* took up the biblical accounts, artists had explored the human experience behind the narratives. From the beginning, painters and minstrels and storytellers have portrayed images of immigrants in the Christmas story.

*Navidad Nuestra* joins that tradition. The script follows the nativity stories in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew almost verbatim. It then expands on those scriptural sources, adding carols, dance and fragments of three older nativity dramas from Spain, France and Honduras. In the process, *Navidad Nuestra* reminds its audiences that the Nativity story has always been a story of immigrants.

**A Familiar Tale**

The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear a son, whom she will name Jesus. This disruption in Mary’s life would prove to be, in playwriting parlance, the “inciting incident,” and would displace her from home, from her everyday life, from belonging.

This disruption led immediately to displacement, to a migration without which we would have no Visitation story and no *Magnificat*. In *Navidad Nuestra*, the actor playing the Evangelist speaks directly from Luke’s gospel:

*In those days, María went in haste into a village in the hill country of Juda, and entered the house of Zechariah and hailed Elizabeth.*

In the telling by *Teatro la Fragua*, María goes to a recognizably different locale, and *la Fragua*’s stage directions fill out the picture of the Visitation:

*María visits her cousin, who lives in a remote village in the mountains. Naturally, as in any typical Honduran village – or any remote village anywhere – the house is surrounded by animals (pigs, chickens, cats, frogs, sheep, goats, whatever) and guarded by a dog.*

This depiction of the journey to “a remote village” mirrors actual Honduran experience – Honduran audiences recognize the rural life depicted on stage. Due to the social upheavals of the last 40 years, many peasants from the interior highlands of Honduras have moved into the fringes of the cities. As a result, whether the play is performed in the city of El Progreso or in a mountain village, the audiences see their own families, split between rural and urban settings. They recognize their own regular but arduous travel, undertaken to attend to daily life: family, jobs, crops, churches, schools or markets.

Migration is a part of life for a Honduran audience and for this Honduran retelling of the Nativity story.

After María returns home from visiting her cousin, she and José comply with Caesar’s decree and head out on foot to Bethlehem, a hundred miles away, a grueling, dusty, dangerous journey for a woman close to term.
As they come into Bethlehem, Navidad Nuestra borrows a fragment of a 19th-century shepherd’s play by Fr. José Trinidad Reyes, the first Honduran playwright. The visual cue comes from Bruegel’s Numbering at Bethlehem, itself set in 16th-century Flanders. A young woman from Bethlehem speaks:

As I was passing by the inn
A beautiful young girl arrived,
Big with child and near her time;
An older man accompanied her.
In the courtyard of the inn
They knocked and called for help.
A sinister-looking, hoarse-voiced man,
Noting at a glance that they are poor,
Cuts them off and answers harshly:
“Beggars should look somewhere else;
Here the only king is gold.”

This scene pulsates in a world of poverty and border walls and razor wire. Hondurans watching this play see the parent, the sibling, the child they have lost to migration. These families recognize a world where the only king is gold.

The story continues as, on a bare stage, María and José act out, simply, through mime and dance, the arrival, the search for shelter, the first labor pains, the birth, as three actors retell the most well-known text in the history of literature:

And it came to pass that while they were in Bethlehem, the time arrived that María should give birth. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

This short phrase, this no-room-in-the-inn part of the Christmas story, has been appearing in the arts for as long as we have records. The image on stage mirrors first-century Palestine, 16th-century Flanders, 19th-century Honduras … and 21st-century Honduras. The universality of the nativity story jumps from the stage.

And then: There were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock.

Shepherds often bring some comic relief to the nativity stories. Teatro la Fragua mines this comic tradition. Strangers enter upstage, with lots of light and a big choral section. Shepherds get freaked out by voices from the sky. Sheep scatter in a wooly frenzy. The kids love it. But, as always, La Fragua digs deeper, and their audience accompanies them. The audience sees a group of intelligent but impoverished people “living in the fields” and watching over their flocks.

How many of our assumptions do you and I need to peel away before we can feel what the shepherds felt?

Navidad Nuestra peels away a lot of assumptions, and audiences shed even more. “Living in the fields” would not, to most Hondurans, sound like a line from a piece of romantic poetry. “Living in the fields” would mean living in the fields, somewhere in an abandoned banana camp or in the mountains, trying to avoid detection by the company muscle or the paramilitary gang.

But God appoints these migrant farmworkers to lead us to the truth: Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings, which shall be cause of great joy to all people.

And with that, the angels reveal the divine plan in which God shares the message first with the outcasts of the empire, with people living on the deepest fringes of the frontier, and tells you and me to abide by their message, to accompany them.

And then the emotional arc veers back to a harsher scene.

How to share the story of Herod? How to illustrate his leading role in displacement and migration, in first-century Palestine and today – and throughout history?

You and I don’t see much of Herod in the States. But La Fragua takes Herod seriously. Deadly seriously.
Navidad Nuestra introduces Herod as a comic figure, a buffoon with arbitrary power (a borrowing from the Medieval tradition). He appears as a hybrid paramilitary commandant, drug dealer and pimp, whose thinking is slow and who has to rely on his herald for protocol when the Magi visit. This petty tyrant is insecure and narcissistic, he doesn’t like aliens, and he stumbles repeatedly in his dealings with the urbane Magi.

But the light bulb finally glows when he realizes that the Magi have news of a NEW KING! Herod goes reptile, and the stage directions explain:

Herod, the empire’s puppet-king, must have been the same animal as imperial puppets throughout the world. Matthew gives us no clue as to the exact tactics he used to exhort his troops to commit history’s most infamous massacre; but it is logical that they would have been more or less the same tactics used by his ideological descendants today.

The stage directions note the “horror and unintelligibility” of the massacre. Those descriptions may look passé to our refined sensibilities, but in Honduras, the mirror reflects real life. The following scene depicts actual events in Honduras:

SOLDIER (tossing a baby into the air): Death to the subversive child!
SOLDIERS: Kill him!
(The SOLDIERS all raise their bayonets to snag the prize, and freeze in this final pose, holding it long enough to make sure that the horror of this moment fully sinks in to the audience.)

In Honduras – as in most of the world, and in every era – people have experience of some kind of state-sanctioned slaughter. Such genocides occasionally pop up in our news feeds, but they are more likely to go unnoticed and undocumented. But let there be no doubt: the Herods of our world continue to displace people forcibly, turning peasant farmers and school-teachers and working mothers into refugees.

Navidad Nuestra includes numerous other images of people on the move. I’ve barely mentioned the Magi, the exotic and eccentric travelers from distant lands, or the protagonists’ return from Egypt. Or the scene of commoners fleeing the massacre, a dance entitled Flight of the Wetbacks, choreographed to a song – Caminos Verdes by Rubén Blades – that speaks directly of the undocumented immigrants trying to cross the river from Colombia to the more prosperous Venezuela.

Immigrants are everywhere, and ours is not the only river.

Migration and the Arts

Theater has a power that economics and technology and law will never have. Theater – like all the arts – puts the viewer inside the characters on stage. The character stops being a “them” and becomes a “me.” We feel what the characters feel, we see the story from the inside, from within.

This “within-ness” in Navidad Nuestra anticipates the Jesuits’ Universal Apostolic Preferences, or in fact, illustrates one outpost where the preferences appeared in early, rough-draft form: “a Church that goes out, a Church of the frontiers, a field hospital where wounds are bandaged, a Church where hearts are healed and love is once more made possible.” (Universal Apostolic Preferences, Society of Jesus).

Navidad Nuestra ends joyfully, with the Holy Family back in Nazareth, accompanied by music and carols. The musicians pick up the pace, and the song transitions to the punta, a traditional Carib dance rhythm. The actors invite the audience to join in the dancing, while Jack watches silently from behind the bleachers. The celebration keeps going as long as the musicians’ repertory of villancicos – Spanish-language Christmas carols – lasts.

At some point and on cue, the actors invoke the chant that ends every Teatro la Fragua performance:

Earth, air, fire and water;
We are all Teatro la Fragua.

Indeed, we immigrants are all Teatro la Fragua.

Mike Warner is a contributing writer with Teatro la Fragua. He lives in Charlotte, N.C., where he writes and presents on images of immigrants in the arts.
Creating Change: Michael Fernández-Frey and Caras con Causa

By Mary Baudouin

“I had a vocation to serve others, but I had no idea ten years ago where it would lead me.”

~Michael Fernández-Frey

This call to serve eventually led Michael Fernández-Frey to Saint Louis University, where he was honored in November as one of three 2019 Opus Prize finalists. While in St. Louis, he spent a week inspiring and interacting with students and faculty by telling the story of his work back home in Puerto Rico.

The Opus Prize recognizes individuals working to address persistent and pressing social problems. Each year, the Opus Prize Foundation chooses one American Catholic university to help it present the world’s largest faith-based, humanitarian awards for social innovation: a $1 million prize and two $100,000 prizes.

Saint Louis University (SLU) was the Opus Foundation’s university partner in 2019. As soon as he arrived on the SLU campus, Michael knew he was among kindred spirits. During the awards ceremony that capped off the week’s activities, he challenged the audience: “You can make the choice to live an extraordinary purpose-driven life. You don’t need to be a missionary, although we can never have enough missionaries, but you can also make change where you are.”

Michael Fernández-Frey has dedicated his life to making change for and with the people of Puerto Rico, where he was born. He now serves as the founding director of...
Caras con Causa, a nonprofit organization serving economically poor families in communities bordering the Bay of San Juan. Under his inspirational leadership, Caras con Causa is committed to children’s education, restoring the wetlands after Hurricane Maria in 2017, and organizing communities to protect themselves against the destruction of their homes by the government.

Caras con Causa also has roots in Colegio San Ignacio, the Jesuit middle and high school in San Juan. Michael is a graduate, former teacher and current board member. He credits his commitment to service and social justice to the formation he received there. “I received a formidable Jesuit education,” he said. “It’s how I learned about being a person for others.”

In 2007, as associate coordinator of the school’s Community Service Office, Michael developed the Magis Program, a service-learning capstone curriculum for 12th graders grounded in the Jesuit value of “the faith that does justice.” With Michael’s vision, the program guided students in conducting social analysis in San Juan and creating and implementing more than 20 new service projects that ranged from building homes to planting mangroves, and from studying contamination and doing community clean-ups to teaching art and music in poor and violent neighborhoods.

One of the poor neighborhoods he accompanied students to was Vietnam, where Michael helped to establish Caras con Causa’s first after-school tutoring program, Vietnam Estudia. It was a modest beginning. “It was one tutor in a private yard under the shade of a mango tree,” he says now.

Today, that tutoring program has expanded considerably, with neighborhood parents and Colegio students volunteering to work with 35 students most afternoons.

Caras con Causa has expanded in other ways as well. It now has 11 professional staff members who recruit and train more than 150 volunteers each year. Caras con Causa volunteers have offered more than 4,500 hours of community service. It has expanded after-school programming to four sites.

It was through his work in the Vietnam neighborhood that Michael first learned about government officials expropriating land and homes from residents in poor neighborhoods. Beginning in 2012, the community was dealing with a takeover of waterfront land and housing in an area where they had lived for many years. With plans to develop a multi-million-dollar tourist complex that would include a luxury hotel, housing and recreational areas, the city began buying up housing and relocating residents. Then it moved on to demolishing residents’ homes and businesses, including a community center run by an order of Catholic women religious.

Led by Michael and community leaders organized through Caras con Causa, residents fought back and ended the demolitions. Community leaders demanded an investigation into what turned out to be illegal expropriations that led to a year-long legal battle over protecting this “Special Community” which should have been exempt from such expropriation maneuvers. A court decision eventually sided with the Vietnam community.

In order to assist Vietnam residents in their fight, Michael enrolled in law school at the University of Puerto Rico. He obtained his Juris Doctor in 2013 after attending classes at night while teaching, running the Colegio’s Community Service Program, and starting Caras con Causa during the day.

Volunteers and staff from Caras con Causa plant coastal trees. The reforestation efforts are part of an Urban Roots project and students will monitor the trees’ health going forward.
He left Colegio San Ignacio in 2012 to become the full-time director of Caras con Causa, but he continues his loyalty to the school by serving on their board. He continues to be a voice for the importance of the school’s commitment to the “faith that does justice.”

As the executive director of Caras con Causa, Michael directs all operations of the organization, including strategic planning, fundraising and extensive collaborations with public and private universities and schools, community-based nonprofits and private entities. Recognizing the need to develop his managerial skills in order to grow, Michael went on to pursue a Master’s in Public Administration, which he received from Rutgers University in 2017.

Michael is so much more than a man with multiple degrees. He is a valued leader in the community, one who recognizes that social change does not come about from the top down but from the bottom up. His friend and mentor, Fr. Mario Alberto Torres, SJ, who was in the administration of Colegio during Michael’s tenure, describes Michael as a “servant leader: Michael doesn’t have any qualms about suffering with the people or getting his hands dirty. He can keep the vision, but still roll up his sleeves to do the work.”

Patrick Jones, a Saint Louis University Opus Prize student ambassador who visited Michael and Caras con Causa as part of the Opus selection process, saw these same leadership qualities in Michael. “Michael is such an incredible leader,” Jones said. “Everywhere we went people knew Michael. Still he has unwavering humility.”

Michael’s leadership and commitment were put to the test in the days after Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico in September 2017. He vividly describes wading through chest-deep water in the communities served by Caras con Causa to touch base with people, bring them food, medicine and water, find out what they needed, and simply make sure they were still alive. He suffered from rashes and infections from the days spent in that infested water, and also suffered the “wrath” of his loving wife who was desperately worried about him.

Instead of throwing up his hands in despair after the storm, Michael and the communities he worked with got down to work expanding the reach of Caras con Causa. The story of how the Connect Relief project came to be is a perfect example of Michael’s creativity and tenacity.

Michael and a group from the entrepreneurial project Propel B1 had been working to develop a virtual platform designed to address a community’s needs after a disaster. Shortly before Hurricanes Irma and Maria struck, Michael convinced the Banco Popular Foundation to invest $15,000 in a seed fund to test the platform’s application. In fact, while Hurricane Irma was passing over Puerto Rico in late August 2017, Connect Relief was trying to reach the U.S. and British Virgin Islands to launch the application. Knowing that Hurricane Maria was forming and heading toward Puerto Rico, Michael and the team worked frantically to finish developing a mobile application and train community leaders in how to use it. It was finished three days before Hurricane Maria hit.

Between September 2017 and January 2018, Connect Relief trained more than 600 volunteers to use the mobile application to identify the needs of communities, shelters, schools, non-profit organizations and individuals. The project makes use of social networks so that information on needs is kept up to date and they are able to connect donors, aid organizations and volunteers with the greatest needs on the island.
Connect Relief was able to assist 70 municipalities, 277 communities, 93 non-profit organizations, 471 health brigades and 278 humanitarian missions – clear evidence of how the platform enabled effective coordination of resources and volunteers.

Still, Michael and Caras con Causa have recognized that hurricane “relief” was just one way to respond to the ravages of storms and other environmental threats to the island. Especially after Hurricanes Irma and Maria, Caras con Causa considers ecology to be vital for the economy, public health and quality of life of Puerto Rico. They are developing a new generation of leaders who share and act on this belief.

Together with local schools, community organizations and volunteers from around the world, Caras con Causa is working to “reforest” area marshlands. The reforestation of mangroves and other coastal species is an important step in helping to stem damage and flooding from future hurricanes.

The organization has planted more than 500 trees, and they are currently germinating more than 2,000 red, white, black and button mangroves in their Vivero Antillano nursery.

Caras con Causa staff have also taken the educational component of reforestation to area schools so that students can learn about the ecological history and significant environmental challenges of Puerto Rico.

Caras con Causa hosts student and volunteer groups from around the world to help them understand the island’s complex crossroads between development and environmental health. Participants in the ecotourism programs learn about the environmental hazards affecting Puerto Rico’s beaches and mangroves and help with the reforestation projects. They also have opportunities to meet and advocate next to local workers and activists for environmental improvements.

The ecotourism initiative is social entrepreneurship: visiting groups pay fees to Caras con Causa for their service immersion experiences.

Michael and Caras con Causa continue to look for ways to provide innovative educational opportunities for the youth of the San Juan region. Their latest project is the establishment of the Rosalina C. Martinez School, a free public alliance (charter) K-12 school that has as its goal “the human development of students and their families through a comprehensive curriculum focused on a framework of sustainable development.”

The school will have a special focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education. It is currently working to install science and technology laboratories.

This new school is a big goal, but one that is quickly being realized in spite of all of the difficulties that Puerto Rico has faced over the past years. It is a dream spurred on and sustained by Michael Fernández-Frey’s daring entrepreneurship.

As Fr. Torres says, “Michael is a visionary. He has a bold vision, is able to articulate it, and sell it to people from rich banks and poor communities. He knows how to make visions practical and how to empower people to carry out their visions.” —Fr. Alberto Torres, SJ

Mary Baudouin is the provincial assistant for social ministries for the Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province.
Choose a Life of Prayer and Service through the Ignatian Volunteer Corps

By Sr. Amy Diesen, OSF | Regional Director, IVC-St. Louis
He heard the call through the father of a Jesuit novice.

“I want that!” exclaimed this father whose son was entering the Society of Jesus. “I want that kind of life, a life of prayer and service. God has blessed me throughout my life. I am retired now; I want to give back for all the blessings I have received. But … I don’t want the vows.”

At that moment, Fr. Jim Conroy, SJ, a Jesuit of the Maryland Province, knew that he must find a way to engage adults who are retired and have a desire to serve and deepen their faith. The release of the documents of Vatican II motivated him to find a way to encourage the development of the lay vocation as a disciple of Christ. The father of that Jesuit novice revealed to him the incredible potential that retired people have to engage in lay ministry.

Father Conroy teamed up with Fr. Charlie Costello, SJ, and went on to establish the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC). IVC was born out of one person’s spoken desire to follow the way of St. Ignatius of Loyola in praising and reverencing God while serving others.

IVC is an opportunity for lay men and women to participate in the work of discipleship. It is different from other volunteer opportunities in that it includes a reflection process modeled after the teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola that is an integral part of the IVC program. Service corps members volunteer with a partner organization whose mission is grounded in service with those who are poor or marginalized. They commit to serving one or two days each week for ten months. This significant commitment is required so that service corps members develop relationships with the clients and staff of their service sites.

Most participants recommit year after year, becoming essential members of their service sites’ communities as well as their local IVC community.

The reflection process for service corps members includes both regular one-on-one conversations with a spiritual reflector and monthly group meetings with other IVC members. These individual and communal reflection opportunities help service corps members unpack and interpret what they have experienced at their service sites: how they saw God and how they have been moved by those who are poor and living on the margins of society in their own cities.

The tagline for IVC is “Experience Making A Difference.” Its meaning is twofold:

1) The experience and knowledge a retired person offers to those needing assistance can make a tremendous difference in their lives. Jim, a retired human resources manager, mentors men and women who are seeking jobs. He provides insights into how to prepare for and be successful in a job interview.

2) The experiences that retired service members have while engaging with those who are poor changes how they perceive people suffering from poverty. Charlie, a retired finance professional, found himself invited into the home of someone who had come to the food pantry for food and other essentials. He witnessed in that person’s home more generosity and hospitality than what he was accustomed to in his own neighborhood. His first-hand experience made a difference in his own recognition that people with less often give more of themselves than those with abundance.

IVC is guided by the spiritual principles of St. Ignatius Loyola. It becomes a spiritual home for those who want to be close to those who are poor and grow in their relationship with God. At a recent IVC meeting in St. Louis, members were asked to share what was most significant about their participation in IVC. The overwhelming response was that they are a community of people in love with God, falling a bit more in love with each opportunity they have to serve and be with those who are suffering.

IVC gives retired women and men an opportunity to use their gifts and talents to help their vulnerable neighbors and build the Kingdom of God.

IVC currently has 22 regional offices throughout the United States, including three in the Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province: Denver, New Orleans and St. Louis.
Reflections on Reconciliation

W hen the leaders of the Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province and Saint Louis University established the Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation (SHMR) Project in 2016, they recognized that the reconciliation component presented the greatest challenge. The Catholic faith compels us to work toward reconciliation, and reconciliation is central to Ignatian spirituality. But we recognize that reconciliation means different things in different contexts and in different faith traditions. Understanding, accepting and addressing those differences is part of the challenge, and the call.

Below we share the reflections of two people about what reconciliation means to them, personally and within their faith traditions.

Bishop Gregory Holley is a descendant of an enslaved person owned by Jesuits. He is pastor at Grace Fellowship Church in St. Louis and serves on the Working Group formed to address Saint Louis University’s historic ties to slaveholding.

Father Jeffrey Harrison, SJ, is an educator and amateur historian who assisted in the research of Jesuits’ history of slaveholding and tracing the family lineages of the people held in slavery in the central and southern part of the United States.

These are just two perspectives on reconciliation. During this season of Lent, we invite you to consider the question of what is necessary for reconciliation to occur, and in particular, what is required of us to promote racial reconciliation in our country.

Reconciliation Begins with Recognition

By Gregory G. T. Holley

Reconciliation is the restoration of friendly relations through God. When Satan causes humanity to desire that which does not honor God and to trespass against God’s will then Satan becomes our God. He has taken humankind into darkness and hell and has put up a wall too high for them to return to themselves, and now a life of hardships and spiritual/physical poverty awaits them.

Satan is a hard taskmaster, and the way of a sinner is hard. As time goes on, the wall gets higher and wider, as the stones of sin are added day after day. There seems no hope for reconciliation.

Satan comes to steal and destroy the gifts of God that we are to one another. Satan works to separate us from God, which causes us to be further alienated from each other.

Sin sets us further back from reaching the love and understanding that will set us free from fear and suspicion. When we don’t celebrate our diversity and use it to advance our God-given mission on earth, then Satan has won.

When a group of people have been deceived by Satan and let his spirit influence their behavior to lord over other groups, then they have usurped God’s place. They create their own man-made laws and standards to justify it and even make legal a gross sin.

Satan causes us to degrade and devalue God’s gifts to one another. He deceives us to despise God’s designs when they do not look like us.
God our Father has seen the hate in His earthly creation. He has seen humanity’s errors and the sins committed to advance selfish pursuits.

Damaged and injured people will continue to damage and injure others, so the wall of sin grows even higher between God and our neighbor. Thanks to God for sending Jesus Christ to reconcile us back to him and to each other.

In order to reconcile with each other, first one must recognize the separation and assume responsibility. Then one must express regret or sorrow for those actions and demonstrate a resolution to not repeat it again.

Only through sincere repentance can renewed trust and fellowship ensue. Then the wall will come tumbling down like the walls of Jericho, and we will have the gift of fellowship and the benefits and blessings that each one has to offer.

Amen.

What Reconciliation Requires of Us

By Jeffrey Harrison, SJ

If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

Throughout the Gospels, those who were most soul-stirred by the person of Jesus were people who believed their sinfulness cut them off from God’s love. From Peter’s seaside plea that Jesus depart from him to the up-a-tree Zacchaeus, they recognized that their sinfulness had led them away from God. Unexpectedly, this very recognition is the indispensable pivot for the journey back. Jesus’ most persistent message is that no one – not tax collector, prostitute, leper – is alien to God’s love. The recognition of sinfulness is itself a result of God’s grace. Thus begins the turn towards reconciliation, a journey with three main stages: remorse, repentance, and reconciliation.

Remorse is the emotional response to the acknowledgement of having sinned. I feel an uneasiness, a distress, even a deep sense of guilt. I reproach myself. This leads me to examine my actions and try to figure out what went wrong, how I deceived myself. Thus I aim to do better, to learn how to avoid past mistakes.

This understanding is a key component of repentance. I move from a sense that something is wrong to comprehension of what is wrong and a plan to change. All of this, whether I realize it at the time, operates through God’s grace; both direct and indirect. Just as I may be able to clean and bandage a small cut on my own, deeper hurts require greater assistance and knowledge than I possess. Physical trauma sends me to the doctor’s office or the emergency room. Spiritual trauma sends me to the church and the sacraments.

Acceptance of personal sin is the price of admission into the community of the church. I cannot restore myself to health alone. Christ instituted the church so sinners can reconcile with God and neighbor.

Reconciliation requires community. To heal the damage my sinfulness has caused, I must reconnect.

This is why Jesus drew the “sinners” back into community. He crossed the artificial barriers drawn by the powerful and meant to distinguish the righteous (themselves) from the rest. By allowing myself to enter into, and allowing all to enter into, community, we begin to restore God’s kingdom fractured by sin.

In God’s eyes we are all sinners, all self-deceived, all unrighteous, all in need of reconciliation.

Jesus makes clear that I cannot be reconciled until I recognize that I can only be connected to God through my connections with my neighbors. Lent gives me the grace and courage to cross the lines that separate me from my true self, my neighbors and God. The 40-days’ journey gives me God’s own strength to roll back the stone which keeps me from love. Reconciled, we rise to new life.
Daniel Everson, SJ:  
_Cura Personalis_ in the Classroom  
*By Claire Peterson*

Daniel Everson, SJ, recognizes his students at Arrupe Jesuit High School in Denver are doing more than going to class. They’re figuring out what kind of person they want to be.

“The young people that I teach, they’re navigating big questions,” Everson said. “Do they want to be academically engaged? Do they want to be a person for others? Do they want to be a person of faith?”

As a freshman theology teacher, community service coordinator, baseball coach and liturgical music coordinator, Everson recognizes he, too, is doing more than teaching. “To be a role model for them is the most fulfilling thing I’ve ever done.”

A Jesuit high school alum and the son of a theology teacher, Everson chuckled about the many connections within his vocation. “I was baptized in Jesuit Hall, in that little chapel at the corner of Grand and Lindell Boulevards,” said the St. Louis native. “I like to think that sealed my fate.”

In December 2010, at a Come and See Retreat at Jesuit Hall for the Dominicans, Everson chatted with Jesuits in the cafeteria line. One encouraged him not to forget the Jesuits during his discernment. More than two years later, Everson returned to Jesuit Hall for another Come and See, this time with the Jesuits.

“That was when it dawned on me, after evening prayer, that I was probably sitting in the same chapel where I was baptized. I was home.”

His assignment at Arrupe Jesuit isn’t Everson’s first time in front of a classroom. After university studies, he joined the Alumni Service Corps (ASC) and taught at De Smet Jesuit High School in St. Louis. “For the first time in my life, all of my work and energy was geared toward other people succeeding.”

Opening his grade book and seeing 110 names of students he wanted to thrive came with challenges and rewards. “I was working as hard as ever,” he recalled, “and it was all for others. That brought me more joy than pursuing my own success.”

While a student at St. Louis University High School, Everson learned from Fr. Dick Hadel the full meaning of “cura personalis.” When students got revved up about the St. Louis Cardinals going to the World Series, “Fr. Hadel could acknowledge that Spanish class was not the only thing going on in their lives.”

Everson also remembers Hadel’s compassionate response to a student acting out in class, taking time to understand what was going on in the student’s life to compel him to misbehave. It’s an approach Everson now takes, especially given the multiple stressors students at Arrupe might face.

“Poverty has its way of intruding and interfering,” he explained. “But we try to assume there’s a good explanation for issues that arise. We try to ask, ‘What’s happening in their life that might be causing this?’”

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“Poverty has its way of intruding and interfering,” he explained. “But we try to assume there’s a good explanation for issues that arise. We try to ask, ‘What’s happening in their life that might be causing th
After three decades of service in Brazil, Fr. David Romero, SJ, muses that no two days are the same. One day, he could be corresponding with Jesuits across the globe from his office in Manaus, and the next, he might be making his way to visit rural communities in the Amazon region.

Father Romero serves as the delegate for the Apostolic Preference of the Amazon region. Each day, he feels honored to be directly living out Pope Francis’ appeal in Laudato si’: to care for our common home. He enjoys advocating for the protection of the Amazon with his partners in mission.

Father Romero finds the Society of Jesus’ new Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs), which include caring for the planet, to be as inspiring as the Holy Father’s encyclical. “All of these have been confirmation that I’m in the right place at the right time,” he said. “This gives me energy, focus and enthusiasm.”

Father Romero’s hometown of New Iberia, La., is a world away from the Amazon region, but his home fostered in him the love for nature he embraces today. “I grew up in south-central Louisiana on the Bayou Teche where I developed a great love and respect for the outdoors, nature and God’s creation.”

He was also encouraged by the Bishops’ Synod for the Pan-Amazon region, which promoted “the value of learning from the traditions and customs of the indigenous people in caring for our ‘common house.’”

Father Romero’s assignment requires regular travel, which connects him to the image of Ignatius as a pilgrim. “Whether I’m on a plane or a bus, I feel very much accompanied by the Lord,” he said. “I put my travels in his hands, and it usually works out for the best.”

His journeys have also engendered a deep appreciation for people, their cultures and traditions. While his trips do not always go as planned, he remembers with appreciation the moments of graceful accompaniment that have risen out of canceled flights. “The posture of listening,” he said, “is giving value to other persons, their history, journey, culture and difficulties.”

As the regional superior, Fr. Romero accompanies his 34 Jesuit brothers in the Brazilian Province. He ministers to lay colleagues and other religious, and he feels particularly pulled toward the ministry of accompanying those in border regions.

Romero helped to develop a ministry for Haitian immigrants who were seeking refuge after the 2010 earthquake that killed hundreds of thousands of people. “The travelers arrived exhausted after several days of travel through Ecuador and Peru to Brazil,” he said. “Even though I was with them just a short while, sharing bread and some coffee, it was a powerful experience to accompany the Haitian migrants on their journey through the frontier zone.”

Father Romero’s pursuit of the service of accompaniment has taken him throughout Paraguay, Peru, Bolivia and Brazil, in urban and rural regions, living in densely populated cities and small villages. He looks forward to helping lead a retreat for his fellow Jesuits in St. Louis this June. “I look forward to reconnecting with Jesuits, as well as sharing the perspective from Brazil on the Spiritual Exercises and the UAPs.”
Dear Friend,

Each year we share with you an overview of the funds raised during the past year and how your generous donations support the mission of the Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province. We call this the gratitude report, because it is our opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks for your kindness and generosity. Your gifts of time, prayer and finances have a real impact on the works of the province. We appreciate your support and keep you in our prayers.

This year is a time of transition for the Central and Southern Province. Father Ronald A. Mercier, SJ, will complete his time as provincial at the end of July 2020, at which time Fr. Thomas P. Greene, SJ, will become provincial. Father Mercier was the first provincial of the USA Central and Southern Province of the Society of Jesus when it was formed through the union of the former Missouri and New Orleans Provinces. His leadership has been exemplary.

At one of our earliest staff meetings as a new province, Fr. Mercier used the Latin phrase “Ab esse ad posse valet illatio” to illustrate a point. This severely tested my knowledge of Latin so at the conclusion of the meeting I looked up the meaning. The translation is, “From the fact that something exists, it follows that it is possible.” If you already knew that, give yourself bonus points. During the past five and a half years, Fr. Mercier has worked tirelessly to form the new province and led us through a critical process of discernment as new Universal Apostolic Preferences were developed. He has done so with kindness and great patience. He has maintained an exhausting schedule. His leadership in dealing with difficult issues has been unwavering. We are grateful for his time as our provincial.

So, if the question is “Can a strong leader be kind and lead more by example than directive?” I would say the answer is “Ab esse ad posse valet illatio.”

I give thanks for Fr. Mercier and for all our wonderful benefactors.

Sincerely,

John Fitzpatrick
Assistant for Advancement

Borrador de carta para el Informe de Gratitud

Querido (a) amigo (a),

Cada año compartimos con usted una descripción general de los fondos recaudados durante el año pasado y cómo sus generosas donaciones han apoyado la misión jesuita de la Provincia USA Central y Meridional. A esto lo llamamos el Informe de Gratitud, ya que es nuestra oportunidad de expresar nuestro sincero agradecimiento por su amabilidad y generosidad. Sus donaciones de tiempo, sus oraciones y aportes financieros han tenido un impacto real en las obras de la provinicia. Apreciamos su apoyo y lo mantenemos en nuestras oraciones.

Este año será un momento de transición para la Provincia Central y Meridional. El padre Ronald A. Mercier, SJ, culminará su mandato como provincial a fines de julio de 2020, momento en el cual el P. Thomas P. Greene, SJ, se convertirá en el nuevo provincial. El P. Mercier ha sido el primer provincial de la Provincia Central y Meridional de la Compañía de Jesús tras ser creada por la fusión de las antiguas Provincias de Missouri y Nueva Orleans. Su liderazgo ha sido ejemplar.

Como nueva provincia, en una de nuestras primeras reuniones de personal el P. Mercier usó la frase latina “Ab esse ad posse valet illatio” para explicar un punto. Esto puso a prueba severamente mi conocimiento del latín, así que al final de la reunión busqué el significado. La traducción es: “Por el hecho de que algo existe, se deduce que es posible.” Si usted ya lo sabía, se ha ganado unos puntos de bonificación. Durante los últimos cinco años y medio, el P. Mercier ha trabajado incansablemente para formar la nueva provincia, y nos ha conducido por un proceso crítico de discernimiento a medida que se desarrollaron las nuevas Preferencias Apostólicas Universales. Lo ha hecho con amabilidad y gran paciencia. Ha mantenido un horario agotador. Su liderazgo en el tratamiento de problemas difíciles ha sido inquebrantable. Estamos agradecidos por su tiempo como nuestro provincial.

Entonces, si la pregunta es ¿puede un líder fuerte ser amable y liderar más con el ejemplo que con las directivas?, diría que la respuesta es “Ab esse ad posse valet illatio.”

Doy gracias por el P. Mercier y por todos nuestros maravillosos benefactores.

Sinceramente,

John Fitzpatrick
Auxiliar Provincial de Promoción
2019 ANNUAL REPORT
STATISTICS

SOURCES OF REVENUE:

- Grants: $59,855
- Planned Gifts: $929,052
- Gifts from Organizations: $353,610
- Gifts from Individuals: $1,633,418

GRAND TOTAL: $2,975,935

Funds Used for Mission and Ministry:

- Formation: $810,670
- Care of Elderly and Infirm: $312,331
- Works of the Province: $1,224,329
- Jesuit Archives & Research Center: $125,700
- International Missions: $423,876
- Other: $79,029

ANNUAL GIVING LEVELS

- Companions of St. Ignatius Loyola: $5,000+
- Companions of St. Francis Xavier: $1,000-$4,999
- Companions of St. Peter Faber: $500-$999
- Companions of St. Aloysius Gonzaga: $100-$499
- Companions of St. Stanislaus Kostka: $36-$99
OUR FUNDING PRIORITIES
How You Help

Your gifts to the Jesuits USA Central and Southern Province go directly to supporting three primary areas:

CARE FOR ELDER AND INFIRM JESUITS

EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF NEW JESUITS

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS
CARE FOR ELDER AND INFIRM JESUITS

Jesuits dedicate their lives to building up the Kingdom of God. When they reach the stage of their lives when they can no longer serve in active ministry, the province has an obligation to care for them.

This province has two health care facilities: the St. Alphonsus Rodriguez Pavilion in Grand Coteau, La., with 16 Jesuits and the Fusz Pavilion in St. Louis with 25.

The individual care senior Jesuits receive is demonstrated by the lengths province staff recently went to when one of the Jesuits required special care for dementia. The Jesuits and staff in Grand Coteau were concerned for his safety because of his habit of wandering the grounds. They assessed his condition and decided to move him to a specialized facility. His brother Jesuits and the staff supported him through the process, even replicating his old room and including gear from the Jesuit high school where he served for many years to provide some continuity. He is doing well in his new home.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF NEW JESUITS

Jesuits have a centuries-old method of forming Jesuits to become faith leaders. This intensive 8-to-13-year Jesuit formation journey includes:

- **Novitiate | 2 Years**  
  A time of learning, community, prayer and apostolic service, at the end of which each Jesuit pronounces vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

- **First Studies | 3 Years**  
  The newly vowed Jesuit studies philosophy and theology and deepens his Jesuit identity through other ministerial work that strengthens or challenges his gifts.

- **Regency | 3 Years**  
  The Jesuit brother or scholastic moves into active Jesuit ministry, usually teaching at a high school or university.

- **Theology Studies | 3 Years**  
  Jesuit scholastics prepare for ordination through theology studies. Jesuit brothers also study theology to enhance their effectiveness in ministry.

- **Priestly Ordination**  
  A Jesuit is ordained a priest only after completing this lengthy training, but he has been a Jesuit from the time of his entrance to the novitiate.

The U.S. Central and Southern Province has more than 70 men in various stages of formation. This blessing comes with the financial challenge of approximately $40,000/year to form one Jesuit.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

Father Harold Rahm, SJ, known as the “Bicycle Priest,” died Nov. 30, 2019, at the age of 100. In 1964, he was “invited” by his provincial to travel to Brazil to explore ways Jesuits might be of service. This temporary assignment became his life’s work. Father Rahm worked in Brazil to help staff the Centro Kennedy Mission in São Paulo, which worked to improve lives through education and human development. He worked with alcoholics and drug addicts and founded *Amor-Exigente* (Tough Love).

His service and compassion continue through the *Instituto Padre Haroldo*, a center in his name in Campinas, Brazil. The center offers therapeutic treatment of alcoholics and drug addicts.

Father Rahm was a great example of the work Jesuits do in international missions. As pastors, teachers, spiritual directors, mediators and administrators these men dedicate their lives to spreading the Gospel, primarily to the poor, the neglected and the uneducated of the countries in which they serve.
IN LOVING GRATITUDE FOR OUR COMPANIONS

“Love consists in sharing What one has And what one is With those one loves.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Steve and Schezy Barbas
Tampa, Fla.

Many people can attest that Ignatian retreats can be life altering. Steve Barbas is certainly one of those people. It was during a retreat in Grand Coteau, La., while in law school that he decided to ask the love of his life to marry him. Thankfully, Schezy Luque said yes, and together they have helped create a family and a community in which the greater glory of God shines brightly, in no small part because of their presence.

A Tampa native, Steve attended Jesuit High School and Loyola University College of Law in New Orleans. He returned to his hometown and helped found a successful law firm which has grown to serve clients throughout Florida. A grateful man with an easygoing nature, Steve has a long record of giving back to the Jesuits and their works in all ways: with his time, talent and treasure. He is currently the chairman of the board of trustees at Jesuit High and has served on the board of the Jesuit Social Research Institute, based at Loyola New Orleans.

“I owe the Jesuits a debt of gratitude for playing so many important roles in my life,” Steve said. “In order for their good work to continue, it’s important to support the province in the formation of new Jesuits and the care of older Jesuits who, in retirement, need our care and support.”

Mark and Mary Jo LaBarge
St. Louis

Mark and Mary Jo LaBarge are founding members of the Belize 2020 Committee, a collaboration of volunteers in Belize and the United States who work to help the Jesuit apostolates in Belize. Their contributions are immeasurable, not just as donors, but as hands-on volunteers. They give freely of their time and reach out to others to enlist their help. They embody everything you could hope for in volunteers.

Mark graduated from St. Louis University High School, but his association with the Society of Jesus pre-dates that. He vividly recalls his father inviting Jesuits to their home for dinner and remembers with great fondness the likes of Jesuit Fathers David Wayne, Edward O’Brien and Tom Jost. He didn’t realize it at the time, but that was the beginning of a life-long connection to the Jesuits.

Members of St. Matthew the Apostle (Jesuit) Parish in St. Louis, Mark and Mary Jo started the Christmas adopt-a-family and winter coat programs at the parish. It was also at St. Matthew’s that they met Fr. Matt Ruhl, S.J. Mark helped with the “Revitalization 2000” campaign to rebuild the gymnasium at St. Matthew’s, then continued to support Fr. Ruhl’s work as he served in the Jesuit parishes in Belize City and Punta Gorda, Belize. The LaBarges travel to Belize several times each year to help where they can.

For a complete list of our benefactors, visit www.JesuitsCentralSouthern.org/SupportUs
Robert Luchi, MD
Kansas City, Mo.

Dr. Robert and Mrs. Jean Luchi were married for 65 years when Jean died on Sept. 26, 2019, after suffering from Alzheimer’s Disease. At her memorial service, Dr. Luchi expressed sadness combined with a sense of peace, saying, “Although Jean is gone, I know she is where she always wanted to be ... with Jesus and our son Robert.”

Married in 1954, Dr. and Mrs. Luchi had a long and rewarding life together. Robert, Jr. was born in 1955, in Okinawa, Japan, while the Luchis were stationed there with the United States Navy. Robert was the oldest of their four children and became a Jesuit in 1983. Sadly, Fr. Robert Luchi, S.J., died in June 22, 2007, after a lengthy illness. During his illness, he was cared for by family members and the dedicated staff at Jesuit Hall in St. Louis.

Dr. Luchi supports the USA Central and Southern Province both financially and with his time. He is always willing to meet and greet fellow donors and to recruit new volunteers to support the cause. He remains grateful for the care his son received during his illness and to the donors who made that care possible. His consistent donations to the province help ensure that other Jesuits receive the same care and compassion.

Skeeter and Stephanie Morris
Mobile, Ala.

Influence, inspire, ignite. These words, found on banners lining the beautiful Avenue of Oaks on the campus of Spring Hill College in Mobile, succinctly describe the effect Jesuits have had on the lives of Edward “Skeeter” and Stephanie Morris, benefactors of the Jesuit province since 1986.

Stephanie’s journey with the Jesuits began in her childhood with her father’s professorship at Spring Hill. The couple was married in St. Joseph’s Chapel, and in the 50 years since, the Morrises have been blessed with six children, many grandchildren and an even larger Jesuit family.

For more than 30 years, Skeeter has organized a weekend retreat for men in what has become an annual gathering. The tradition has woven many Jesuit guides into the fabric of his life, his prayer and his thought process.

The Morrises are inspired by the students of the Spring Hill Sodality, who they say “are on fire to bring encouragement to our world” because of their Jesuit formation. The couple’s comfortable home on Mobile Bay is a favorite gathering spot for the students.

“We will be forever grateful for the Jesuit witnesses who have influenced our lives,” says Skeeter. “As beneficiaries of their lasting bequest, we want to support their mission of finding God in all things.”

Robert and Margo Murphy
New Orleans

Now retired, Bob and Margo Murphy are gratefully enjoying the fruits of a God-centered life. A New Orleans native, Bob is a graduate of Jesuit High School. He was a professor of business at Xavier University in New Orleans, had an accounting practice and served in the Louisiana Air National Guard. Margo worked as a nurse for the Veterans Administration in New Orleans. After their two children — Robert and Roxanne — were born, she became a home health care nurse.

Already supporters of Jesuit High School, the Murphys began to donate to the Jesuit province when their son entered the Society of Jesus. They recognize the need for the province to provide training for young men in formation and are proud to support that work.

The Murphys’ son, Robert, is now a Jesuit priest of this province. Bob and Margo have lived a life of giving to others and to their family, volunteering at their parish, St. Edward the Confessor in Metairie, La., in many ways, including as lead couple for Marriage Encounter and with their children’s activities. Bob currently volunteers with the St. Vincent de Paul Society chapter of St. Edward’s, helping to provide food to the poor once a month.
We remember with gratitude all that God has done through their lives of service to God and God’s people.

Father Harold Rahm, SJ
Father Harold Joseph Rahm, SJ, died Nov. 30, 2019, in Campinas, Brazil, where he had served as a missionary for more than half a century. He was 100 years old, a Jesuit for 82 years and a priest for 69 years.

Originally a member of the former New Orleans Province, he is especially remembered for his work in the Segundo Barrio in El Paso, Texas. He arrived in El Paso in 1952 as the associate pastor of Sacred Heart Parish. He frequently walked or biked throughout the Segundo Barrio, the low-income, predominantly Hispanic neighborhood in which the parish is located, making himself available and reaching out to those in need. He founded Our Lady’s Youth Center, an outreach program for at-risk, low-income young people.

He left El Paso in 1964 to work as a missionary in Brazil. He continued his work with young people, founding successful programs to treat and prevent drug addiction. He retired from active ministry around the time of his 100th birthday in February 2019.

Brother John Puza, SJ
Brother John Puza, SJ, is best remembered by his Jesuit brothers and former students for his offbeat sense of humor and ability to connect with challenging students.

Born in McAdoo, Penn., he entered the Society of Jesus in 1965, at the age of 32. He spent most of his Jesuit life working in schools. Prior to completing his bachelor’s degree, he worked at Jesuit High School in Tampa from 1968 to 1973, where he managed the bookstore and did other odd jobs. He also taught theology at Jesuit High School in Shreveport, La.

Once he completed his degree in education, Br. Puza began his career as an elementary school teacher, which he loved. He taught in the Mobile (Alabama) Public Schools, at a Catholic grade school in Dallas and at St. Ignatius School in Grand Coteau, La. He also served at Strake Jesuit College Preparatory School of Houston and Belen Jesuit Preparatory School in Miami.

Brother Puza died Dec. 30, 2019, in Grand Coteau. He was 86 years old, a Jesuit for 53 years and in final vows as a Jesuit brother for 36 years.

Father Luke Byrne, SJ
Father Luke J. Byrne, SJ, will be remembered by his brother Jesuits and colleagues for his faithfulness and his desire to share God’s gifts with the faithful, especially young people.

A native of Kansas City, Mo., he served at both Rockhurst High School (as president) and Rockhurst University (campus minister and chaplain). He served as pastor of St. Francis Xavier Jesuit Parish in Kansas City for five years. He also served the Kansas City – St. Joseph Diocese as a member of the Commission for Priestly Life and Ministry.

In St. Louis, he served the former Missouri Province as assistant for pastoral and international ministries. He was a retreat director and superior at White House Jesuit Retreat for eight years. He also taught at Kapaun High School in Wichita, Kansas, both before and after his ordination to the priesthood.

Father Byrne died Jan. 27 in St. Louis. He was 84 years old, a Jesuit for 67 years and a priest for 54 years.

MORE ON THE WEB
For complete obituaries, visit the province website: www.jesuitscentralsouthern.org/in-memoriam.
BEQUEST
Your will can include a gift of a specific asset, a dollar amount or a percentage of your estate to charity.

CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITIES AND CHARITABLE REMAINDER TRUSTS
These plans can provide you with income over your lifetime and a charitable income tax deduction, while leaving a nice gift to charity. If you own appreciated assets such as stock or real estate, we can help you sell those assets tax free.

LIFE ESTATE
You can make a tax-deductible gift of your home and remain living in it for your lifetime.

There are additional real estate sale strategies that can provide you with cash, a charitable deduction and even income.

To find out the many ways you may benefit from planned giving, please contact:

Jean Dempsey
Major Gift Officer
251.232.0528
jdempsey@jesuits.org

Rosalie Tomeny
Major Gift Officer
504.220.0472
rtomeny@jesuits.org

UCSAdvancement@Jesuits.org
DAYS OF Reflection

The province will host days of reflection for donors and friends in the following cities in 2020:

TAMPA
Saturday, March 7
Bethany Center

DALLAS
Tuesday, March 17
Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House

CONVENT, La.
Sunday, May 12 & Monday, May 13
Manresa House of Retreats

ST. LOUIS
Tuesday, May 19
White House Jesuit Retreat

DENVER
Day and place to be determined

Please check the province website, www.JesuitsCentralSouthern.org, to find a Day of Reflection in your area.