



The Center for Dominican Studies

NEWSLETTER

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Sister Helen Prejean Delivers a Passionate Address on the Death Penalty at Ohio Dominican University

More than 500 participants from ODU and the surrounding community gathered at 7:00 PM in the Matesich Theatre to hear a passionate presentation entitled *The Death Penalty: How Just is Our System of Justice?* Sister Helen Prejean, a native of Louisiana, is known internationally for her tireless work against the death penalty. She was instrumental in sparking national dialogue on the issue and in shaping the Catholic Church's newly vigorous opposition to all state executions.

A member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Medaille, Sister Helen spent her first 24 years with the Sisters teaching religion to junior high school students and working within her community. At the age of 40, she realized that being on the side of poor people was an essential part of the Gospel. She moved into the St. Thomas Housing Project in New Orleans and began working at Hope House, a center that assists public housing residents. During this time, she was asked to correspond with a death row inmate. She agreed, and so began a new ministry. In 1982, she started visiting Patrick Sonnier in Louisiana's Angola Prison. She became his spiritual adviser, worked to prevent his execution, and finally walked with him to the electric chair. She did the same thing with a second prisoner, Robert Willie. Concerned with the plight of murder victims' families she founded "Survive", which provides counseling and support for grieving families. And then, she sat down and wrote a book about the experience. The result was *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, which Random House published in 1993. The book became a best seller, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, and spawned an Oscar-winning movie and an internationally-acclaimed opera. Now Tim Robbins has made it into a play that is being performed by high school and college students across the country. Since 1984, Sister Helen has divided her time between campaigning against the death penalty and counseling individual death row inmates.

Sister Helen accompanied four more men to their deaths. In doing so, she began to suspect that some of those executed were not guilty. This realization inspired her second book, *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions*, which was released by Random House in December of 2004. She is a regular contributor to national and international publications, and has become a recurring presence on major TV news shows. Besides her degrees in English and religious education, Sister Helen has received honorary degrees from universities all over the world and numerous awards. Sister Helen lives in New Orleans and works with the Death Penalty Discourse Center, the Moratorium Campaign and the Dead Man Walking Play Project. She is presently at work on a book about her experiences with poor people in Latin America to be published by Orbis Press.



Sr. Helen Prejean greets dinner guests and participants during the book signing.

Student Participants Reflect on Sr. Helen's Presentation

"Since going to the lecture, I have a new view on the death penalty. I used to think that death was all that was left for those who brutally murdered another person, but I learned that equal justice does not mean you kill, you die. It is possible to join the 160 countries that have done away with the death penalty." **(Sara Day)**

"I think Sister Helen's speech, "How Just is Our System of Justice," was excellent. Her lecture gave me a much better understanding of the death penalty and the inhumanness of it. It made me see that the people on Death Row truly are human beings too and that they are worth more than the horrific crimes they have committed. It made me see more clearly that the person who committed the crime is a human being who has feelings and a family and a life to live. God should be the only one who can determine whether a person lives or dies." **(Juliette Gnatowski)**

"Sr. Helen's presentation influenced me more than any other presentation I have ever attended. I have changed my mind completely about the death sentence, especially looking at it from both sides." **(Jackilyn Hall)**

"I learned that even as someone who suffered so much, compassion can still be found and the strength to forgive can be found even in the worst circumstances. I almost did not believe the story about the two men being so friendly when one's son had killed the other's son. But, it is true, forgiveness can be found for even the harshest crimes. This shows that Christians can overcome their hate and fears and be forgiving. That is one of the greatest strengths of all. Not too many people have that capability. Sr. Helen was fun to listen to and she had some great stories to tell. She was very insightful and she showed the audience that even those who have committed the worst crime deserve a fair say and a fair chance. She was a great speaker and I enjoyed her presentation." **(Keary McFadden)**

"My way of thinking about the death penalty has totally changed thanks to Sr. Helen Prejean. Boldly, she has taken a stand on what is truly right, to choose life over death." **(Roszell D King)**

Fr. Steve Fitzhenry, OP Shares Reflections on “Islam” during the Dominican Conversation Circles Dinner Series



On Wednesday evening, **January 17, 2007**, fifty-six participants gathered in the Colonial Room of Sansbury Hall for the Dominican Conversation Circles Dinner session. At that time, Fr. Steve Fitzhenry, OP, STL, shared an interesting and thought provoking lecture on the topic of **Islam**. Fr. Fitzhenry, Dominican friar, scholar and chaplain for the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs spent twenty years in the Muslim culture of Pakistan. In his presentation, he discussed some of the history, geography, religion and politics of “how we got to where we are now through the eyes of one who lived in a Muslim society.” Following his lecture, the group engaged in a lively and thought provoking discussion.

Aquinas Convocation

January 25, 2007

“Contemplative Wisdom: The Goal of a Dominican Education”

Featuring

Fr. Kurt Pritzi, OP

*Dean and Associate Professor of Philosophy,
The Catholic University of America*

The entire text of Fr. Pritzi’s presentation may be found on The Center for Dominican Studies web site at:

<http://www.ohiodominican.edu/about/dominicanstudies/newsletter.asp>



The Most Rev. Frederick Francis Campbell, Bishop of Columbus greets Fr. Kurt Pritzi, OP, Ph.D.

“In the thinking that we do, however mundane or unremarkable, is rest, which, however humble, is contemplation. In the thinking that we do is also motion. A prospect of wisdom opens up for each of us, growing throughout our lives, to the extent that we see what Thomas Aquinas sees (this would be a profound instance of rest) and place our activities of thought in the service of rest in the pursuit of more and more truthful intellectual rest. Dominicans claim as their own the motto “to contemplate and to share what is contemplated” with the hope that they can do both well and knowing that the sharing part, the illumining as well as the shining, is possible only because the motto fits everyone. I hope that you leave Ohio Dominican University appreciating just how much it fits you.” (Pritzi,OP)



A meeting of the **Advisory Board of the Center for Dominican Studies** was held on **Friday, February 9, 2007**. Previous to the meeting, a special luncheon was held featuring Dominican Sister Arlene Flaherty, O.P., who spoke on the topic ***Solidarity the Spirit, Challenge, and Mission of the Dominican Tradition***. Attending this portion of the meeting were over thirty invited guests of ODU's administration, faculty and staff. Sr. Arlene's spirited talk challenged all of to reflect on our individual and collective responses to issues of peace and justice today and into the future. Sr. Arlene, a member of the Dominican Sisters, Blauvelt, New York, spent her early years in ministry in Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies, where she organized women to claim their rightful place in the community. She served as Justice and Peace Promoter with Catholic Relief Services an organization whose mission is to assist the poor and disadvantaged, leveraging the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to alleviate human suffering, promote development of all people, and to foster charity and justice throughout the world. Additionally, from 1999-2005, Sr. Arlene served as Director of the Intercommunity Center for Justice and Peace a coalition of more than 40 Roman Catholic Congregations of men and women religious with ten thousand members. Sr. Arlene is the Program Committee Chairperson for the **Parable Conference for Dominican Life and Mission** an organization that unites the the energies of the U.S. Dominican Family for the sake of preaching the Gospel in today's world. Through stories of our Dominican heritage and call to mission, Sr. Arlene challenged us to look at ways in which we, as members of a Dominican University community, might build cultures of peace and justice among our colleagues, students and neighborhoods. During the business portion of the Advisory Board meeting, members had a lively discussion around the question:

"What did you hear that might have implications for The Center for Dominican Studies?"

Highlights of Programs and Events 2007-2008

SPECIAL PUBLIC EVENTS:

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| September 22, 2007 | Symposium: <i>The Role of Mary in the Church</i> 8:00 AM-2:00 PM |
| November 16, 2007 | Concert: <i>Preaching for Justice through Liturgical Music</i> 7:00 PM
(Venue: Dominican Sisters' Motherhouse Chapel) |
| January 24th, 2008 | Aquinas Convocation: <i>Personal Growth and Conversion: A View from Aquinas</i> 10:30 AM |
| February 2008 | Play: <i>Thomas Merton: The Hermit in New York</i> (Exact performance date to be determined.) |



DOMINICAN LIFE OF THE MIND SERIES:

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| October 2, 2007 | <i>One People, One Planet, One Spirit</i> 7:00 PM Featuring: Eileen Gannon, OP
Dominican Order's NGO Rep. to the United Nations |
| March 6, 2008 | <i>What Does It Mean to be Human?: Reflections on the Christian Response to Homelessness</i>
7:00 PM Featuring: Anthony J. Gittins, C.S.Sp. |
| April 11, 2008 | <i>Speaking with Authority: Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today</i>
7:00 PM Featuring: Catherine Hilkert, OP |

In June 2007, visit The Center for Dominican Studies web site <http://www.ohiodominican.edu/about/dominicanstudies/default.asp> to view a complete listing of programs and events (Truth Seekers Series, Dominican Conversation Series, Book Study Groups and Video/Discussion Luncheons.) To secure a brochure of programs and events email Sr. Catherine Colby at colbyc@ohiodominican.edu.