



To seek out and advocate
for the poor and needy,
especially families,
for the Kingdom of God.

Holy Family Sisters

AUGUST
2018

Interview with Sister Aurora Perez: Ministry at San Quentin State Prison

How did you first get involved in your ministry at San Quentin State Prison?

I believe that there are guilty and innocent people in our prisons and a great need for a reformed criminal justice system based on accountability and compassion. Prejudice, bias, favoritism does exist in prison. I also believe that all of us deserve a second chance. God is with us, loves us in good times and in bad times. The Holy Spirit helps us to listen and to follow the way of Christ. Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God.

What is a typical day like?

I have volunteered at San Quentin State Prison for 3½ years, three days a week. Sunday is my only typical day - I attend three Masses: English, Spanish and a late afternoon worship with men from death row. I have given reflections on the readings and celebrated Communion services when no priest was available.

The other two days I visit men on death row or the “hole” (detention), or serve in the Catholic chapel for the men-in-blue (incarcerated). They facilitate groups for lifers, or conduct choir practices for the Sunday Masses. During chapel visits many men have also communicated their stories to me, or concerns, or talents of art or poetry or writing.

I have also participated in Restorative Justice programming [See related article]. I am grateful for the opportunities of being part of



What is Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is a simple, practical approach to criminal justice that is rooted in our faith as Christians and Catholics promoting values, such as respect, care, trust and humility.

In a Restorative Justice approach, justice is sought by identifying the needs of the stakeholders and seeking repair by promoting responsibility and healing on all sides. It prescribes cooperative dialogue among persons most affected, which include the victims, offenders and the community.

The purpose of Restorative Justice in a prison setting is to assist with the prisoner’s rehabilitation, and eventual reintegration into society.

By repairing the harm to the relationships between offenders, victims and the community that resulted from the crime, Restorative Justice seeks to understand and

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Prison Ministry

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the roundtable circles where members have grown to listen, share, and gain courage to trust. The process of facing the truth and healing is lifelong. The energies that are required of us are worth the blessings of greater peace, freedom, strength and quality of life.

What was your first impression?

My first day at San Quentin was on Palm Sunday. I walked into the Catholic Chapel which was decorated beautifully; it looked like a parish church. When the Liturgy began, the choir, all men-in-blue (incarcerated), surprised me with beautiful voices and the assembly all sang. The songs, homily, environment all expressed a deep faith in God. I felt at home.

What surprised you the most?

Each time I am a Communion minister, I feel very privileged and honored to give Holy Communion or bless the man who chooses not to receive. I feel very humbled.

What do you find most challenging?

At San Quentin, there are approximately 3,600 men. I know only about 250. Remembering names and what has been told

to me in confidence can be challenging.

Can you tell us about the best thing that has happened since starting your ministry?

Every time a man is released to go home, we bless him at the end of Mass. I feel tremendous joy for him and his family.

What do you wish other people to know about the people with whom you work?

The first time I visited the “hole” was the first time I felt and knew I was in prison. Then I visited with one of the gentlemen and saw in his eyes, goodness. God reminded me of His presence. I was not alone and the community of saints, as well as my Sisters and those who pray for me, are always with me when I visit San Quentin. There are many, many men who are good; they ask for forgiveness and want to give back to those they harmed, and to do good for their fellow human brother/sister.

“Whatever you do for the least of these sisters and brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Matthew 25: 40

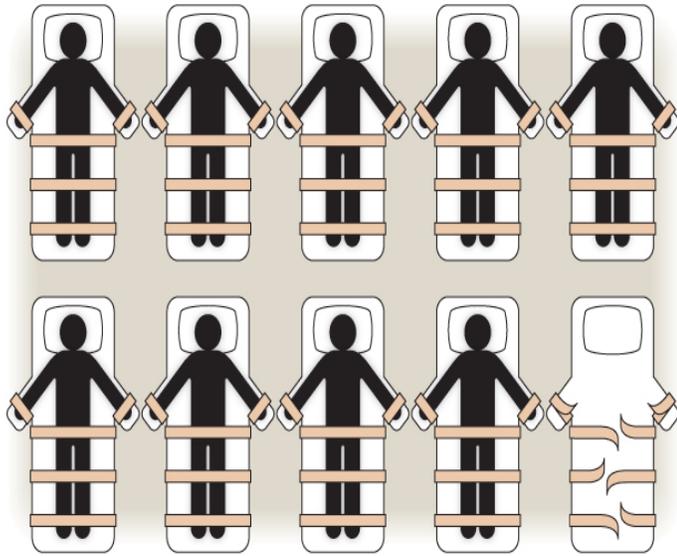
Sister Aurora entered the Sisters of the Holy Family to seek out and advocate for the underserved in society and in the Church. Past ministries included: catechist, DRE (Director of Religious Education), and Director of SPRED (Special Religious Education - Diocese of Oakland, CA for 37 years) Sister served a total of 47 years to the Church before retirement and starting her ministry at San Quentin State Prison.

FACTS

TATS

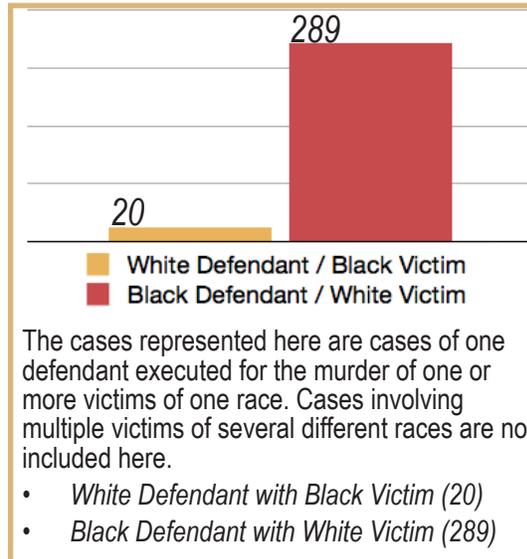
For every nine executions, one death row inmate has been exonerated

While 1,420 convicted killers have been executed since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, another 156 have been cleared of their crimes.



Source: Death Penalty information Center

READING EAGLE: GARY VISGAIIS



The cases represented here are cases of one defendant executed for the murder of one or more victims of one race. Cases involving multiple victims of several different races are not included here.

- White Defendant with Black Victim (20)
- Black Defendant with White Victim (289)

In 96% of states where there have been reviews of race and the death penalty, there was a pattern of either race-of-victim or race-of-defendant discrimination, or both. (Prof. Baldus report to the American Bar Association, 1998)

Restorative Justice Victims, Communities & Offenders



- Fully Restorative
- Mostly Restorative
- Partially Restorative

Holy Family Sisters: Contributions & Recognition

Justice has always been woven into the history of Sisters of the Holy Family. From the very beginning our charism has always been focused on advocating and supporting those who are marginalized and less fortunate. Our Sisters have made many contributions throughout the years for projects related to Restorative Justice and death penalty reform.

In the past two years, grants for Restorative Justice have included the *Center for Restorative Justice* for their *Get on the Bus* program and *The Lioness Tale Prison Project*. And, for death penalty reform, contributions were made to the *Justice that Works*.

In June 2018, the Sisters of the Holy Family were honored to receive a certificate of recognition from the Archdiocese of San Francisco for our contributions to Restorative Justice ministries serving the most vulnerable in our community. Thank you to Archbishop Cordileone and all of the Catholic ministries working for peace and justice.



San Francisco, Re-entry Conference & Resource Fair

The Archdiocese of San Francisco Office of Human Life and Dignity is hosting the Annual Re-entry Conference & Resource Fair on September 7, 2018.

Each year the Re-entry Conference and Resource Fair brings hundreds of individuals and organizations from around the Bay Area to explore the latest concerns, services and advancements of justice-involved and crime-affected individuals and families.



Join us and participate to:

- Influence Public Policy and Legislation
- Build Stronger Organizational Practices
- Connect with Coalitions and Networks
- Train with Providers and Advocates
- Research Community Organizing & Actions
- Strengthen Panel Discussions

Free admission. Register as participant or volunteer at this webpage: sfarch.org/rjministry-reentry-conference.

St. Mary's Cathedral - Event Center -
1111 Gough Street, San Francisco, CA 94109
Friday, September 7, 2018 - 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM

This issue's sources:

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| insightprisonproject.org | unicef.org/tdad/ |
| sqrestorativejustice.com | littlebookrjpakaf.pdf |
| restorativejustice.org | crjw.us |
| catholicsmobilizing.org | usccb.org |
| cacatholic.org/restorejustice | deathpenaltyinfo.org |
| sisterhelen.org | sfarch.org |
| franciscansforjustice.org | |

Pope seeks to abolish death penalty, changes Catholic Church teaching



Pope Francis has decreed that the death penalty is “inadmissible” under all circumstances and that the Catholic Church must work to abolish it, changing official church teaching to reflect his view that all life is sacred and there is no justification for state-sponsored executions.

Francis rebuked his predecessors who did not exclude capital punishment completely, “Let us take responsibility for the past and recognize that the imposition of the death penalty was dictated by a mentality more legalistic than Christian.”

Pope Francis has long railed against the death penalty, insisting it can never be justified, no matter how heinous the crime. He has also long made prison ministry a mainstay of his vocation and even opposes life sentences, which he has called “hidden” death sentences.

He mentioned it in his address to the United States Congress on his trip to America in 2015, saying that “from the beginning of my ministry” he had been led “to advocate at different levels for the global abolition of the death penalty.”

“The death penalty is an inhumane measure that, regardless of how it is carried out, abases human dignity,” Pope Francis said. Executions are unacceptable in all cases because they are “an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,” he said. He called for an official change to the Catechism, which was formalized this week.

The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Spanish Cardinal Luis Ladaria said the development of Catholic doctrine on capital punishment didn’t contradict prior teaching but rather was an evolution of it. The new Catechism formulation aims to infuse energy towards a “decisive commitment to favor a mentality that recognizes the dignity of every human life and, in respectful dialogue with civil authorities, to encourage the creation of conditions that allow for the elimination of the death penalty where it is still in effect.”

He added, “I am convinced that this way is the best, since every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, and society can only benefit from the rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes.”



[Please visit: catholicsmobilizing.org/catholic-social-teaching-death-penalty]

Catholic Mobilizing Network
to End the Use of the Death Penalty



A Prayer for Justice

prayer

God of Compassion,

You let your rain fall on the just and the unjust.

Expand and deepen our hearts so that we may love as You love, even those among us who have caused the greatest pain by taking life.

For there is in our land a great cry for vengeance as we fill up death row and kill the killers in the name of justice, in the name of peace.

Jesus, our Brother,

You suffered execution at the hands of the state but you did not let hatred overcome you.

Help us to reach out to victims of violence so that our enduring love may help them heal.

Holy Spirit of God,

You strengthen us in the struggle for justice, help us to work tirelessly for the abolition of state-sanctioned death and to renew our society in its very heart so that violence will be no more.

Amen.

– adapted from Sister Helen Prejean

TAKE ACTION Get involved

- ◆ Take the Catholic Mobilizing Network Pledge to End the Death Penalty: catholicmobilizing.org/action
- ◆ Take the Restorative Justice Pledge and share with your family, friends and parish community. For pledge cards in Spanish and English, contact the California Catholic Conference, (916) 313-4000.
- ◆ Call your legislators today. Ask them to support legislation which would repeal the death penalty from your state. The death penalty does not serve as a deterrent. It risks innocent lives and costs taxpayers millions of dollars more than life without parole.
- ◆ Volunteer at a local Restorative Justice organization or a local crime victims' group that works with Restorative Justice.
- ◆ Write to a person in prison: www.sisterhelen.org/writing-to-someone-in-prison
- ◆ If you are in the Bay Area, volunteer at the Annual Re-entry Conference & Resource Fair. See story and info on page 4.

Restorative Justice

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address the underlying circumstances which contributed to the crime. This is thought to prevent recidivism once the offender is released.

The potential for Restorative Justice to reduce recidivism is one of the strongest and most promising arguments for its use in prisons. [See graphic on page 3.]

About Restorative Justice at San Quentin

Insight Prison Project was founded in 1997 with one class for 14 male prisoners at San Quentin State Prison. Today, IPP offers unique and effective programs for thousands of men, women, and youth at 15 state prisons, three county jails, several re-entry facilities, and one juvenile institution.

The San Quentin Interfaith Restorative Justice Roundtable is an organization led by incarcerated people and volunteers in California's San Quentin State Prison. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the harms caused by crime and to support anyone impacted by crime on their healing journey.