

# Hope House Journal

Fall 2018

## A Chance to Right a Long-time Wrong

Louisiana voters have a great opportunity to right a century old wrong on November 6th. Over a century ago the citizens of Louisiana changed the rules related to jury votes in felony cases. Prior to the 1898 Constitutional Convention, a unanimous vote was required to convict. It was then changed to allow a conviction by a 10-2 vote.

Why was this change put into place? As notes from the Convention confirm, the goal was to do whatever was legally possible to shore up white power in Louisiana. Even if two black citizens were on a jury, white people could still convict a black person — sending him to prison where he would basically have to work as a slave. As a felon, he would also lose his right to vote.

During this century-long period, thousands of people went to prison as a result of a less than unanimous jury vote. Hundreds are now in prison as a result of such votes. In forty-eight other states, where a unanimous jury vote is required to convict, these folks would not be in prison.

If one or two people on a jury listen to the evidence and arguments presented in court and discuss the case with their fellow jurors and still have serious doubts about the guilt of the person on trial, is the jury, as a whole, beyond a reasonable doubt concerning the person's guilt?

Might a guilty people go free if Amendment 2 passes? Yes. Might an innocent people go to prison if Amendment 2 fails? Certainly. Forty-eight states have already addressed this reality. They have decided that it is more important to protect the innocent than to punish the guilty. Louisiana should do the same.

**Vote Yes on Amendment 2!**



## Remembering Patrick Stevenson

Patrick Stevenson, a Hope House family member for many years, died October 2, 2018 after a long illness. We trust that he is with God, but we miss him dearly.

Patrick's connection to Hope House pre-dates the actual existence of Hope House. He, his brothers and sisters and his mother lived on the same block in the St. Thomas Housing Development as Srs. Lory Schaff and Harriet Waldo. Patrick often visited the sisters after school to play with their games and have something to eat. He was even an angel in one of their Christmas plays.

Like so many other young men in the project, Patrick got involved in petty crimes at an early age. As he grew older, the crimes became more serious. At age 15, he shot a delivery man to death in a botched robbery outside a nearby corner store. He spent the next 13 years in prison, first at Orleans Parish Prison as a juvenile and then at Angola, the state penitentiary, when he reached 17.

In 1986 Sr. Lilianne Flavin learned that Pat would soon be released from Angola and wrote him to invite him to come to Hope House when he got out. She knew that he would need a lot of support in order to stay out of trouble and build a new life for himself. Patrick came to Hope House and enrolled in the adult learning center. After a

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## **Saint Oscar Romero**

Canonized on October 14, 2018

### **A saint for our times**

#### ***Oscar Romero, in his own words:***

We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted knowing they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are the workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

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I have no ambition for power, and so with complete freedom I tell the powerful what is good and what is bad, and I tell any political group what is good and what is bad. That is my duty.

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When Father Raphael Palacios was murdered in Santa Tecla, and his body was laid out here, I said that he was still preaching, calling attention not only to crimes outside the church, but to sins within the church. The prophet also decries sins inside the church. And why not?

We bishops, popes, priests, nuns, Catholic educators - we are human, and as humans we are sinful and we need someone to be a prophet to us too and call us to conversion, and not let us set up religion as something untouchable.

Religion needs prophets, and thank God we have them, because it would be a sad church that felt itself owner of the truth and rejected everything else. A church that only condemns, a church that sees sin only in others and does not look at the beam in its own eye, is not the authentic church of Christ.

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Dear brothers and sisters who are economically powerful, it is probable that at this moment, faced with the threat of land reform, you feel discouragement, fear, and perhaps hatred, and have even decided to oppose by every means possible the reforms being carried out. Probably there are some who even would rather destroy everything and radically harm the country's economy than share with those whose labor you have used for many years.

The church that has given you so much says to you today: This is the moment to show yourselves to be generous Christians and to love as Jesus has loved us, who, being rich, made himself poor for our sake.

# Six Years of Study and Finally, His Diploma

Devin Swington is a tall, lanky young man who will look just fine in his cap and gown next May. He probably won't show a lot of emotion as he walks across the stage to receive his diploma. His autism gets in the way, but he, and everyone that knows him, will be thrilled.

Devin enrolled at the learning center in 2012. He seldom missed a day of class until he earned the final point he needed to pass the HiSET exam on August 8, 2018. He put in over 4000 hours of study time; his amazing persistence paid off.

Devin usually walked about 4 miles to get to class, and he almost always arrived early. He has a lot



of energy, and the walk seemed to be a great way to burn it off. He also has a great appetite. He often took a break to visit the nearby Wal-Mart and came

back with a not-so-small bag of food.

To help motivate Devin to stick with the program until he earned his diploma, Don Everard promised him a bicycle when he earned his diploma. Soon after the August 8<sup>th</sup> test, Devin showed up with the test result in hand. After all the congratulations, hugs and photos, he was ready to get his bicycle. Dondrove him to the nearby Wal-Mart. Devin had clearly done his homework. He quickly identified the nicest looking – and most expensive – bike on the racks. He pedaled back to the learning center, where pizza and cold drinks awaited him, to show off his new wheels.

Almost weekly, Devin pedals over to Hope House. He's looking for part-time employment, and we are trying to help him find it.



Two highly esteemed opponents of the death penalty.

## “Sister” Showcases the Life And Work of Sr. Helen Prejean

“Sister” is a one hour documentary film on the life and work of Sr. Helen Prejean. It recently “premiered” here in New Orleans to a select group of Sr. Helen’s friends, co-workers and supporters. Soon, it will be showing widely on PBS - so be on the watch.

The premier showing was followed by a 45 minute “question and answer” session with Sr. Helen and Joe Cardona, the film’s director. Cardona is a highly esteemed documentarian with many PBS films under his belt. Sr. Helen is a widely acclaimed and passionate opponent of the death penalty. They’re a hard team to beat.

Cardona used Sr. Helen’s story to show the call and response nature of God’s invitation to “act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God.” Sr. Helen came to Hope House in response to a call. Living and working here made her keenly aware of how poverty and inequity negatively impacted the lives of her neighbors in the St. Thomas Development. This awareness helped prepare her for the next call - an invitation to write to man on death row. The calls continue, as have the faithful responses.

A call leads to a response, which leads to another call that demands a further response. The film invites its viewers to pay attention to God’s calls in their own lives and encourages them to trust God enough to respond.

In addition to the one hour version of the film, there will be a two hour DVD that further explores the connections between violence and poverty, between the death penalty and socio-economic inequality.

(Patrick, from page 1)

few “bumps in the road,” he earned his diploma. Soon after, a good friend of Hope House provided funds that enabled Pat to get his own apartment, and Hope House hired him part time to do odd jobs.

Patrick was no longer just a “bad boy” from the project and an ex-offender. He had a place to live, a part-time job and a community of people who cared about him and depended on him.

Hope House then hired him to supervise its recreation program at the Redemptorist Gym. He did this for nearly a decade – years marked by an influx of drugs, guns and violence in the neighborhood. Pat saw the gym as a safe haven, a place where young people could play and hang out in a safe environment, free of drugs and guns. It was hard, challenging work, but Patrick saw it as his calling. The violence so common on the streets never erupted in the gym.

A volunteer who worked with Pat at the gym wrote a poem about him, named “Redemption Gym.” Her thesis – that he found redemption in his work with the kids. Patrick put it a little differently, saying, “the kids put me through all the trials and tribulations that I had put others through. They humbled me.”

Patrick also shared his story with literally hundreds of groups. He was a mainstay of Hope House’s Education for Justice program. Those who heard him were deeply touched by the brutal honesty of his story and his highly personal and thoughtful reflections on his life. Few, if any, who heard him walked away unchanged in their thinking about poverty, inequality, the criminal justice system, and the God-given dignity of every human person.

In his last years, Patrick suffered a great deal. Old injuries from his time in prison, stomach cancer, heart disease, leukemia, and diabetes took their toll. Then came a series of strokes, which took away his ability to communicate, to remember, to organize his thoughts, to take care of himself. He had always been so friendly, independent and willing to help others.

Patrick gave a lot to Hope House and the neighborhood. Hope House meant a lot to him. We loved him dearly. Rest in peace, dear brother.

## Christmas Giving Program Is Underway

With Christmas just a couple months away, Sr. Lilianne and Janita Delmore are preparing for our annual Christmas Gift Program. Beginning November 1st they will be taking applications from low-income families in the neighborhood

They are also seeking out groups and individuals who might be interested in providing Christmas presents for one or more of these families. If you are interested in helping us provide presents to these families, please call Sr. Lilianne at 504-524-7353 weekdays from 9 AM to 1 PM.

***And please don’t forget to include Hope House itself on your Christmas gift list. We depend on your gracious giving to continue our work.***

## Hope House Hosts Resident Meetings

During the last several months, Hope House has hosted several meetings with residents of both the River Garden Apartments and the Redemptorist Apartments for Seniors. These meetings have been opportunities for residents to share their concerns and organize themselves to act on their own behalf. Sometimes, residents invite management to these meetings to tell them about problems they are experiencing, to call them to accountability and to remind them that residents need to be taken seriously.

Participation in the meetings is growing slowly. It’s not easy to convince residents that they really have power when they work together. But a small core group is beginning to make a difference.

**Hope House** is a not for profit, tax-exempt 501©(3) organization. We do not charge fees for any of our programs, but we do accept donations that enable us to do our work.

**Our mission:** to strive to be a gospel people, a visible sign of Christian community; to live and work with the poor, to manifest the human concern of Jesus for all people, to foster dignity and respect for all, and to work with others to create a society where truth and justice abide.

We can be reached by phone at 504-525-2561, by email at [house3868@bellsouth.net](mailto:house3868@bellsouth.net), and by mail at 916 Saint Andrew St., New Orleans, LA 70130.