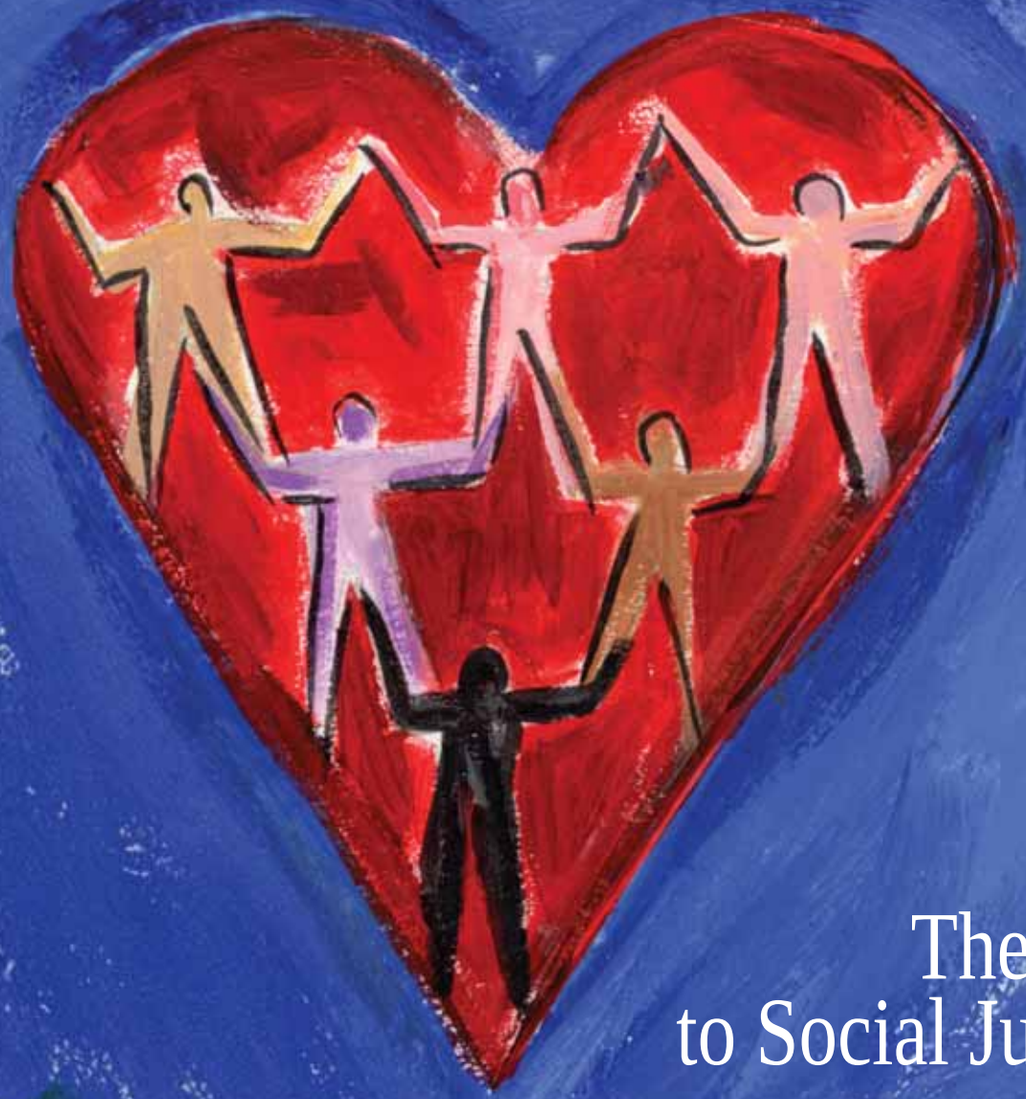
NOVUS

ELMS COLLEGE MAGAZINE

2007 ISSUE



The Call to Social Justice

"It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little."

— Sydney Smith (1771-1845), English minister and defender of the oppressed



They work for peace; they build houses for the poor. They advocate for immigrants, and act as spiritual advisors for those who have lost their way. They fight for the oppressed at home and abroad. In accepting the responsibility and privilege of giving a voice to the voiceless, being a friend to the friendless, and remembering the forgotten victims of injustice, they show us that each and every human being matters, and that every human being can change lives.

In this issue of Novus, we celebrate five individuals whose moral compasses have led them into the struggle for social justice: Sister Jane Morrissey, long-time pacifist; Mary Ann Martin Durso, devoted humanitarian; Scott Hartblay, champion of the oppressed; Sister Helen Prejean, defender of the rights of the poor and crusader against the death penalty; and Father Peter Phan, advocate of cultural diversity in the Catholic Church. In big ways or small, whether they are celebrated or anonymous, all five follow a call to engage in the great moral struggles of our day, knowing that it is what their God wants them to do. They make a difference in the world.

Their work resonates throughout Elms College, which was founded on the principles of social justice. As a Catholic institution and a product of the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph, we are guided by the fundamental belief in a compassionate world where human dignity is respected and all people have the same basic rights, opportunities, and responsibilities.

We admire these five. We are inspired by them. And in this magazine, we celebrate them.

James H. Mullen Jr., Ed.D.
President

NOVUS

Novus is the Latin word meaning "extraordinary news." When spoken in classical Latin, it is pronounced "Know Us," and that's our goal – to help you know more about our extraordinary institution.

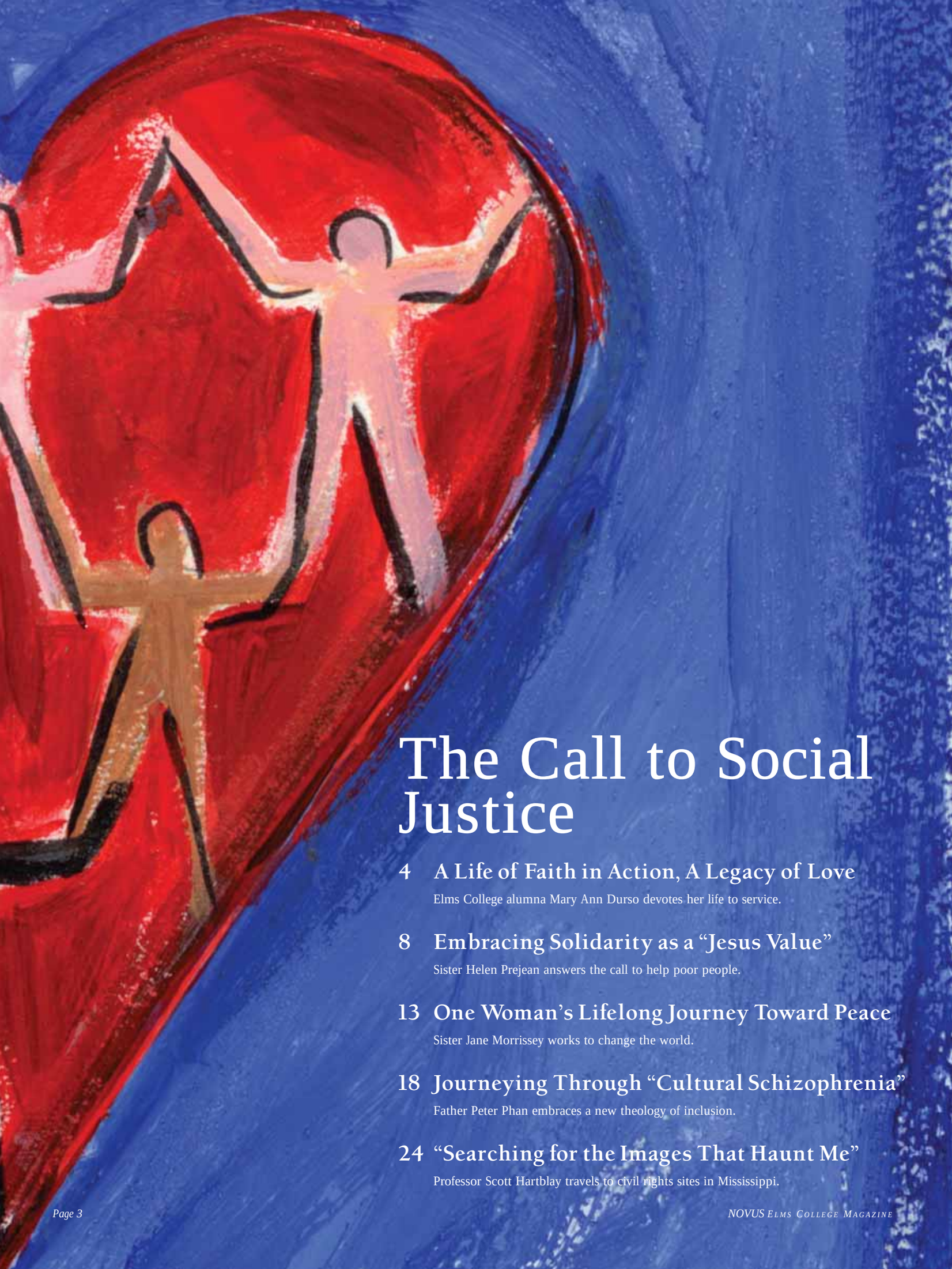
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A Life of Faith in Action, A Legacy of Love

At the Elms College commencement in May, Mary Ann Martin Durso, Elms College Class of 1965, was honored with the college's 2007 Distinguished Alumni Award, given annually to a graduate who has distinguished herself or himself through unusual service to profession, community, family, or religious life. The honor read, in part:

"Compassionate soul, caring activist, teacher, and dynamic volunteer:
you have provided responsible and caring leadership and dedication to the humanitarian causes in which you believe. As an alumna of the College of Our Lady of the Elms, you exemplify its vision and its values. You have brought honor to the college through your outstanding leadership skills, service, and compassion."

Mary Ann Martin Durso vividly remembers one family in Florida she got to know years ago in her work with Habitat for Humanity. The family of four – husband, wife, and two small boys – lived in a two-room trailer with no heat or air conditioning, and with floors that were literally rotting beneath their feet. The husband's meager wages as a laborer were the family's only income, and the wife spoke very little English, couldn't get a job, and was timid and discouraged. They were in severe need.

"We accepted them as a Habitat partner, and the whole family was very involved as they worked the required hours on their house," Mary Ann said. "The wife got very friendly with the volunteers on the job site, and they encouraged her. As her confidence grew, she was able to get her driver's license and find work as a housekeeper at the Hilton. Through hard work and dedication, she became head housekeeper, and was named one of Hilton's top employees – worldwide! Then, when they were settled in their new house, her husband was able to get a better job as a carpenter with the skills he acquired helping to build their own house. The older son graduated from high school and joined the National Guard to earn money for college, and served proudly in Iraq. The younger son is currently in high school, and is working hard to earn a college scholarship. That's a Habitat success story."

It is a success story that is repeated time and again for the families who benefit from the work Mary Ann performs as executive director and vice president of family services for Habitat for Humanity of Collier County, Florida. As a full-time volunteer (along with her husband Sam), she has steered the organization to become the top-producing Habitat in the United States, having increased the group's productivity more than 600 percent in 10 years, from 20 houses per year to 125 this year. This year, they are celebrating the building of their 1,000th Habitat home.

"My passion is the hope that I will never hear another child tell me that he is afraid of his house because bats fly out of the closet; or that three girls won't have to sleep in one twin bed width-wise with their legs hanging over the edge because that is their only space; or that children won't have to sleep on a garage floor or in a shed in somebody's backyard," Mary Ann said. "They won't have to go down the street to the 7-11 when it rains because their toilets have backed up into their kitchen. I pray that no child will have to sleep in a trailer where rats and snakes come through the floorboards during the night. I don't mind being bone-tired to fix all of that; I find it glorious."



Mary Ann addresses the volunteers at a Habitat for Humanity build in Florida, backed up by her husband Sam.

Her dedication to service is nothing new. "I have always believed that one should work to make a change for the better in someone else's life," she said. "I remember volunteering for many committees while at Elms. Participating in the census for the Archdiocese is something that I specifically remember as a service project. In the years following my graduation from the Elms, I taught CCD, volunteered in the schools my children attended, and continued to participate in activities that allowed me to share my gifts in service of others."

In addition to the Bachelors of science degree in biology she received from Elms College in 1965, Mary Ann attended the Harvard University Business School Affordable Housing Leadership Conference. She had worked as a biochemist at New England Nuclear Company, and as a teacher in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Her work with Habitat began 15 years ago, at the invitation of her husband.

"Sam and I have been blessed with 41 years of marriage, five children, and six grandchildren, and we have also been fortunate that our partnership extends to Habitat for Humanity, an area of great passion in our lives," she said. "Many nights in the past years, Sam and I have gone home from a build and sat right down on our couch, so bone-weary that we just couldn't move, and been so joyful about it that we just didn't care. God is good."

When the Dursos moved to southwest Florida 15 years ago in search of "the good life," they each had projects in which they wanted to become involved – Sam in Habitat, and Mary Ann as a certified guardian ad litem (one who is appointed by the courts to represent the interests of minor children who have been neglected, abused, or abandoned.)

"Habitat for Humanity was originally Sam's endeavor," Mary Ann said. "He got involved in the Collier County affiliate, which at that time was focused on building housing in Immokalee, a migrant farming community where most of the people live in run-down trailers or housing that is extremely substandard. As his involvement grew, he wanted to share the experience with me, and we started working on construction sites together."

She became as hooked as Sam was.

But at the same time, Mary Ann followed her own call to service, and trained to become a guardian ad litem (GAL).

"I received my first case in October 1992, and I continued as a GAL for 10 years while working with Habitat," she said.

Mary Ann (far left) and her husband Sam (far right) work with Habitat for Humanity to bring people together with the common goal of building affordable housing for neighbors in need.



In 1995, Mary Ann was recognized by the Florida State Supreme Court as the outstanding guardian ad litem of the 20th Judicial Circuit, and served as a member of the initial advisory board of Collier County guardian ad litems.

"The most memorable case I worked on lasted five years, and it was dramatic and intense," she said. "But after a tremendous amount of work by all involved, the children were returned to their mother, and I felt good about that."

The common denominator in Mary Ann's choice of volunteer work is a strong devotion to family.

"Sam is focused on the financial planning and land development for our Habitat affiliate, while I am dedicated to family services," she said. "It is a wonderful balance for Habitat, and for us."

"Family services" centers around the relationship between the homeowners and Habitat, she said.

"We have set up programs that serve the family as a whole, before, during, and beyond the closing on a new home," she said. "Families are assigned a mentor to help guide them through the exciting, yet often intimidating process of purchasing their first home. We also offer classes in English, parenting, finances, and many others. The family services offered by Habitat make the journey to home ownership an empowering experience that builds confidence in each of the members of a partner family."

The Dursos were both asked to serve on the board of directors at the Collier County Habitat for Humanity, and they began to expand services offered to the residents there beyond the community of Immokalee.

"We discovered that there was a tremendous need for affordable housing and family services in Naples, Florida too," she said. "The economy in Naples, a very wealthy area of southwestern Florida, is dependent on a large population of service industry workers who are earning minimum wage. So the need for affordable housing is critical in this area as well."

The need for housing is even greater in southern Florida since 2005, when Hurricanes Wilma and Katrina devastated the region.

"Ninety percent of all the mobile homes in East Naples were destroyed, and 30 percent of the mobile homes in all of Collier County were demolished," Mary Ann said. "Nearly two years later, there are still people living in homes that have not been repaired and have tarps covering the roof. We estimate that there is currently a shortage of 30,000 units of affordable housing in Collier County."

Even under these dire circumstances, the fact that her Habitat chapter is the top-producing Habitat in the United States makes Mary Ann confident that people are being helped, house by house.

Through your outstanding work as a certified guardian ad litem, you have spoken out for children who have no other voice in court proceedings involving their families, and you have done it always with competency and caring. Through this work, you have demonstrated your unwavering belief in the rights of all children, and your loving dedication to each child you accompany and protect.

— Taken from the 2007 Elms College Distinguished Alumni Award

Long term planning has been the key to the success of Habitat for Humanity of Collier County, she said. "Before striving to grow to the next level of achievement, we were careful to ensure that each area of our office, construction, and family services were equipped to handle the increase," she said.

In addition to her work with Habitat and as a GAL, Mary Ann has been a volunteer for the Greater Naples leadership class master's program, the housing development corporation, and the Ronald McDonald Caremobile advisory board. She has received numerous awards, including the Collier Building Industry Association Humanitarian Award, the Parke Wright III Distinguished Leader Award, the Robert C. Cosgrove

At the ceremony honoring her as the Distinguished Alumni Award Winner, Mary Ann visited with a former Elms College mentor and professor, Sr. Margaret James McGrath.



Award, the Marco Island Civic Association Citizen of the Year, and was named United States volunteer of the year for Habitat for Humanity International. She was named "woman of achievement" by the American Association of University Women, and one of *N* magazine's "women of style."

"In recognizing Mary Ann as the Distinguished Alumna of 2007, we are affirming values close to the heart of Elms College," said Dr. James H. Mullen Jr., Elms College president. "By living her life with an active devotion to service, she stands as an eloquent example for those alumni who have followed her, as well as for those who will follow in generations to come."

"To get an award for being an instrument of providing the most worthy, beautiful families the joy of home ownership is a tribute to everyone at Elms College," Mary Ann said. "I dedicate this award back to my wonderful mentors at this college, who by their daily dedication to all of the students, truly taught me to live a life of service."

"My years at the Elms taught me many important life lessons," she said. "The most significant for me was to lead a life filled with faith in action."

That is a life lesson Mary Ann Durso obviously learned very well. ■

Habitat for Humanity: An Example of Faith in Action

Habitat for Humanity is an international, ecumenical Christian, non-governmental, non-profit organization devoted to building simple, decent, and affordable housing for people in need. Homes are built using volunteer labor, and are sold at no profit, with no interest charged on the mortgage.

The organization was founded in 1976 in Americus, Georgia, and there are now Habitat groups working in more than 100 countries. By 2004, Habitat had built 50,000 houses in the U.S. and more than 175,100 around the world. In 2005 Habitat built its 200,000th house, bringing the number of people sheltered in Habitat houses worldwide to one million.

Habitat relies on volunteer labor in order to construct homes for its partner families, as well as to build community and civil society in the areas in which it works. Most volunteers are unskilled prior to first working with Habitat, although some professional or retired tradesmen or contractors donate their services.

According to the Habitat:

"When people of different faiths and cultures come together to build a house, individuals learn from and find new respect for one another. Coming together for the common goal of building a house with a neighbor in need has proven to be a successful way for bringing healing to divided communities, and creating a sense of cross-cultural unity."

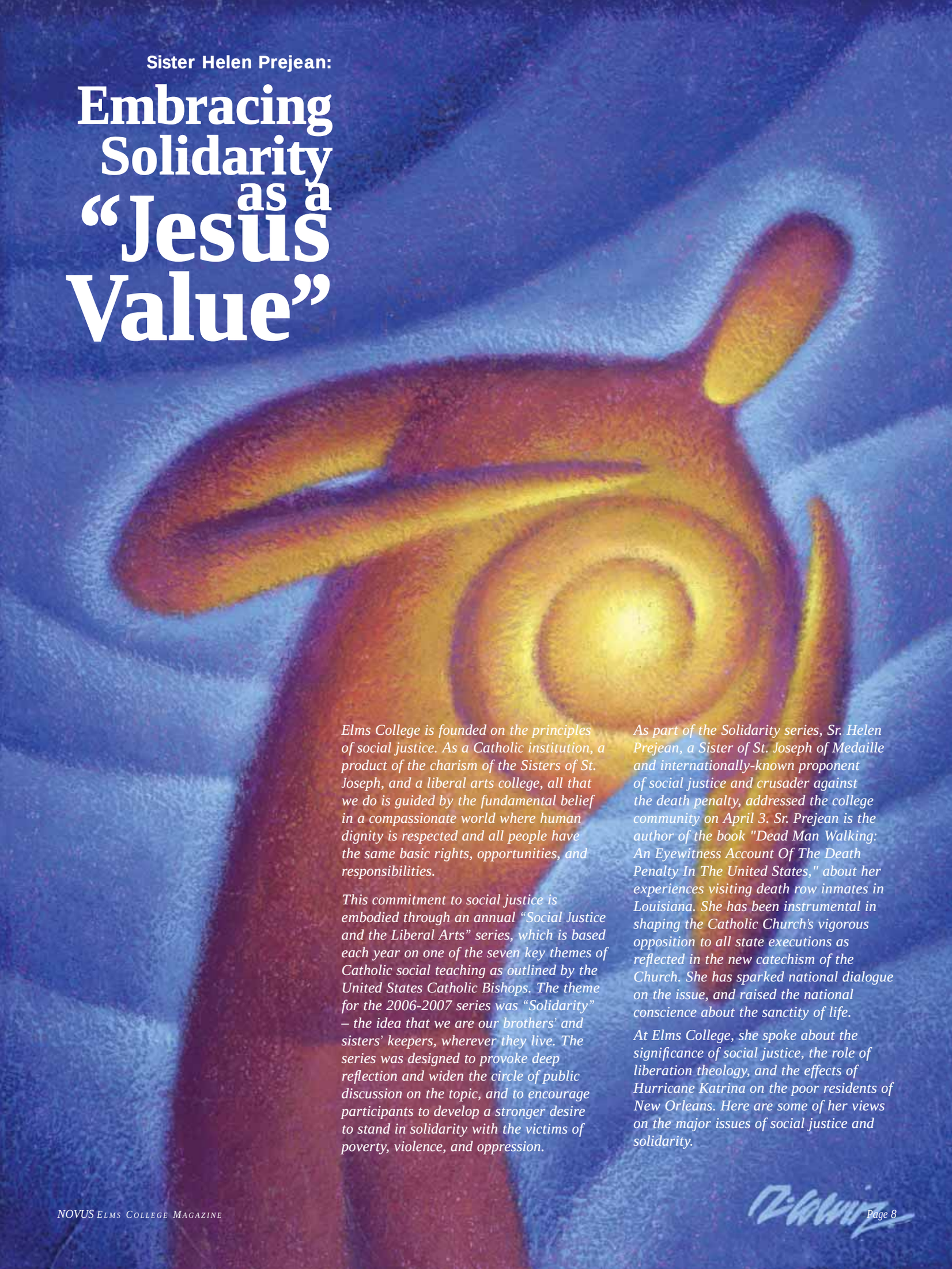
Homeowner families are chosen according to their need; their ability to repay the no-profit, no-interest mortgage; and their willingness to work in partnership with Habitat. The organization does not discriminate according to race, religion, or ethnicity.

Homeowners are usually expected to put approximately 500 hours of "sweat equity" into their own or other project homes. Mortgage payments from homeowners are deposited into a locally-administered fund, the proceeds of which go toward future construction.

Habitat builds simple houses with locally appropriate materials. This could mean concrete block homes in Third World nations, or poured concrete-walled homes in hurricane-prone regions of the United States. Chapters of Habitat in more developed countries are strongly encouraged to donate 10 percent of the money they raise for local housing to the national group for the purpose of building Third World homes. For instance, Habitat New Zealand builds one house in Fiji for each house they build in New Zealand.

Many churches and other houses of worship sponsor houses and provide a large amount of the volunteers from their congregations. College students often spend breaks volunteering on local or national builds in areas of great need. Some corporations and businesses that value good corporate citizenship provide financial support to the projects and/or donate materials for use in construction. Many politicians and celebrities have volunteered with Habitat, reflecting its profile as a highly regarded non-profit organization.





Sister Helen Prejean:

Embracing Solidarity as a "Jesus Value"

Elms College is founded on the principles of social justice. As a Catholic institution, a product of the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and a liberal arts college, all that we do is guided by the fundamental belief in a compassionate world where human dignity is respected and all people have the same basic rights, opportunities, and responsibilities.

This commitment to social justice is embodied through an annual "Social Justice and the Liberal Arts" series, which is based each year on one of the seven key themes of Catholic social teaching as outlined by the United States Catholic Bishops. The theme for the 2006-2007 series was "Solidarity" – the idea that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. The series was designed to provoke deep reflection and widen the circle of public discussion on the topic, and to encourage participants to develop a stronger desire to stand in solidarity with the victims of poverty, violence, and oppression.

As part of the Solidarity series, Sr. Helen Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille and internationally-known proponent of social justice and crusader against the death penalty, addressed the college community on April 3. Sr. Prejean is the author of the book "Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account Of The Death Penalty In The United States," about her experiences visiting death row inmates in Louisiana. She has been instrumental in shaping the Catholic Church's vigorous opposition to all state executions as reflected in the new catechism of the Church. She has sparked national dialogue on the issue, and raised the national conscience about the sanctity of life.

At Elms College, she spoke about the significance of social justice, the role of liberation theology, and the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the poor residents of New Orleans. Here are some of her views on the major issues of social justice and solidarity.

Q. *What does solidarity mean to you?*

Sister Helen:

Solidarity is a deep biblical value, a Jesus value. Solidarity is to stand with people and feel with people. It means that we embrace their burden and embrace their struggle, and accompany them in that struggle. We're not their saviors, but we feel their burden as our own, so it moves us to act.

When I lived in New Orleans at Hope House in the St. Thomas housing development, among poor and struggling African-American people, I was in there with the people. There was great suffering, but because I was part of it, being there with the people, it was not like just looking in and saying, "That's so bad, that's so depressing." When you're in there with people and you're struggling with them, you can't afford the luxury of despair or depression, because you've got to get up in the morning and struggle just like they do.

Q. *How is a commitment to social justice connected to faith?*

Sister Helen:

Our God, embodied by Jesus, is a God of justice. The Bible is filled with justice; grounded in justice. So a commitment to justice is as integral to following Jesus as going to Eucharist and saying the Creed.

Jesus inaugurated a new kind of community where everyone was treated with respect. There were no marginalized people; no outside people; no people being "othered." Translate that to today: Who would Jesus be with? Jesus would be with illegal immigrants. Jesus would be with gay people, struggling for their dignity in this society. Jesus would be with death-row prisoners. Jesus would be with the poor.

This is all Gospel. How many times have I meditated on the Gospels? How many times have I done retreats on Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was in prison and you came to me." When we see people who are deprived of the basic things they need to live – food, water, freedom – how shall we, who have been given so much, devote our lives to be persons of justice?

There is a beauty of the faith community when we gather around Eucharist and celebrate Jesus, who gave his life for us. When the words are said, "This is my body, this is my blood," it refers, of course to the bread and the wine – but, look, it refers to us! We can't sustain ourselves without prayer, without meditation, without being together in a community of faith. Nobody works on the big issues of our day, the soul-sized agenda, without being part of a community of faith. We have to live in a mutually sustaining relationship with everyone.

God bless the religious communities of women – our sisters across this nation. Mercy sisters have done unbelievable things helping people get housing, education. You know, the women of the Church always have our hands in there with the people. We don't wear too many plumes in the liturgical processions, but we get our hands in there with the people.

Q. *What was your 'awakening' to your call to address the plight of poor people?*

Sister Helen:

For a long time, I didn't hear the cry of poor people. It took me until I was 35, almost 40 years old, to understand about the Gospel of Jesus and the call to social justice. I knew that there was poverty in the world; I even knew some of the statistics about poverty in the world. But I had a great inner conflict about all this – did the Gospel really mean that we were called to be on the side of poor people? And it wasn't just my conflict – there was a debate going on in our community. The "social justice" nuns were on one side saying, "We've got to be over there on the side of the poor." And on the other side, what we call the "spiritual sisters" saying, "We're not social workers. We can't do everything. We can't get in there and deal with affordable housing, schools, racism." There's nothing like belonging to a religious community for fermentation, right? All the sisters know this.

Anyway, in 1976 I went to a slum outside Mexico City. I went, honest to God, because I felt obliged, I felt I really ought to do this. It was one of those social justice things, and I wasn't too enthused about it. (And when the trip was over, and I came home with amoebic dysentery, then I was really bummed out about going there.) But just seeing the poor was not enough for me. I thought, "Wow, that's really sad how they're suffering." I came back and was more grateful for what we have, and I wanted to do something to help poor people, sometimes. But nothing inside me had changed. Enlightenment didn't come to me until four years later at a conference.

We never know when we're going to be zapped by grace, or enlightenment, however you want to put it; where suddenly something in us awakens, and we understand, and the trajectory of our life changes. We all went to Terre Haute, Indiana for this conference, all of our sisters, and there's Sister Maria Augusta Neal speaking. I'd heard of her; she was one of them social justice nuns. I was not happy. And we had her for three days! And she's going to talk to us about social justice. I'm thinking, with the grace of God, perhaps I can come through unscathed.

First day I did, because she mainly talked to us about the Western world, the First World countries, United States, six percent of the world's population consuming 48 percent of the world's goods, two-thirds of the world malnourished, going to bed hungry every night. I knew there were injustices in the world; I knew everything she said. First day, unscathed.

Second day, she announces she's going to talk about Jesus, and I'm thinking, well, like, excuse me, but I have been meditating on Jesus myself for about 30 years. I thought I knew what she was going to say about Jesus. I thought what she was going to say about, how every hair of our head is numbered, and God lets grace fall on the just and unjust – thought I knew. But she said, "Jesus preached good news to the poor. And integral to the good news Jesus preached to the poor was that they would be poor no longer." I'm thinking, where'd He say that?



Why have we been given these gifts? So that we can put our lives into transforming this world. Is that not what the Gospel of Jesus calls us to?

And then all of a sudden, boom, man, it just hit me. There was a swiveling in my soul where things came together. My awakening – it was to poor people and it was to the Gospel. "That they would be poor no longer" means that it's not enough to go to people who are starving, or whose children are dying, or who don't have health care, or who are being killed by death squads like in Latin America, and tell them that God loves them. I get it! Jesus was on the side of the poor, and we have to be in solidarity with the poor.

And I've got to call it grace, because suddenly I got the understanding about the Gospel of Jesus and my place in it, and it changed my whole life. And a fire begins to burn in my heart. I mean, to become impassioned is one of the best gifts we can ever be given, because if we catch on fire with passion for justice, it's like a little bullet. We've been moving along, then, boom. It's like you catch a wave, and you go, I've got to do something with my life about this. I've got to begin to stand up for justice. Finally, I get it, and everything's changed.

Q. ***Where did your newfound call to solidarity with the poor lead you?***

Sister Helen:

My own journey has taken many roads. After my awakening in 1981, I realized the first place I needed to go was to poor people in my own city of New Orleans. I had spent years at the mother house with the St. Thomas housing project right behind us, and I had never set foot in there. Then I awakened to the Gospel of Jesus that called me to be in solidarity with my struggling African-American brothers and sisters, so I moved into those housing projects. And I'm seeing blood on the sidewalks where there was violence. I'm seeing young men beat up by the police. I saw a man die because they called for the ambulance, but he didn't have health insurance, so the ambulance just left, and he died. I'm seeing people coming into our adult learning center, and they can't read a third grade reader. How are they going to get a job? One of the women said to me, "We got no choice. We can't move to another part of the city because we don't have the money for rent." So I'm beginning to see how it all works, and how unjust it is.

And so, it's 1982, and I'm in St. Thomas, and one day I meet a friend from the Prison Coalition office. And he says. "Hey, Sister Helen, you want to write to somebody on Death Row?" I said, yeah, sure, I can do that. I wrote the man, Pat Sonnier. Not complicated, I just wrote him a letter. The problem was, he wrote back. And there's an encounter between two human beings; it changes everything.

I'm writing to him about what's going on in Hope House, and he's writing about life on Death Row in a six foot by eight foot cell; how he's confined 23 hours a day; how glad he is when the summer months in Louisiana are over because it's so hot in the cell, he'd take the sheet from his bunk and wet it and put it on the concrete floor to lie down; how mosquitoes come in through the windows. He never really asked me for anything; he was just glad I found him, and he had somebody to write to.

So one morning I'm meditating with Matthew 25: "I was hungry, you gave me to eat. I was in prison, and you came to me." And the words went boiiiiiiiiing, and they were lighted up, and I got it. So I wrote him: "I'll be glad to come see you some time." He's so excited - a visit! Imagine – you're in this confined space for 15 years, and you have nobody. Nobody sees you. Nobody visits you. And you get a thousand signals a day that you're disposable human waste. So he's all excited.

So I drive two-and-a-half hours to see him, and then I started getting nervous, because I'm thinking, they're going to lock me in a room with him for two hours. I've never been with a murderer before, and we're going to be together two hours; are we going to have a regular conversation? And I'm pacing, pulling on my cross, and then I can hear the guards bringing him, and I can hear the sound of his leg irons as he walked, you know, as they were sliding across the floor. And boom, there he is, and I look up – and I was shocked at how human his face was. He was a human being. He said, "Sister Helen, you came; you drove all that way. Thank you." And we talked, and the two hours flew.

We make monsters out of death-row inmates, and we're scared of them. When you have this feeling that some people aren't human the way we are, then you can do anything to them. But they are human.



Two-and-a-half years later, the State of Louisiana killed Pat in the electric chair. The day arrived, and I waited with him for hours while they prepared for his death. And I'm right there in it; I'm accompanying Pat in this part of his journey. It's a formal, big thing. The witnesses file in, and the press. The electrician comes in, tests the chair, gets paid $400 for the execution. Chaplains come, and associate wardens in their three-piece suits. The guards shave his hair and put a clean white T-shirt on him. I thought, "That's the opposite of a baptismal garment!" When people come into the faith community, step-by-step we admit them in. And with this death, step-by-step we remove them from the community.

I came out of the prison after the execution that night, and I threw up. I thought of that first epistle of John: "What we have seen and heard and touched with our hands, this is the Gospel we proclaim to you." And I thought, I've been a witness; I've got to tell the story. So I started telling the story, and I've been telling it ever since.

Being present at Pat's death left an indelible mark on my soul. I think of it as a kind of second baptism in my life, for it forever committed me to pursuing the gospel as it relates to poor people and the quest for justice. For me, the death penalty is the emblematic experience of taking human beings, making them "other," and taking away their dignity. I accompanied that man, Pat Sonnier, and since then I've accompanied five other people to their executions. Solidarity for me means being with them and accompanying them so they know their own human dignity.

Q. ***For the past year and a half, you have been actively working with the poor victims of Hurricane Katrina in your native New Orleans. What does that situation teach us about social justice?***

Sister Helen:

When we face these social problems, whether it's the death penalty or it's what happened in Katrina, it has to do with the way we are isolated from one another; the way poor people are made to be the "other." How could the horrors of Katrina have happened to a major city in the United States in the 21st century? People were killed; they lost their homes. Mothers were separated from their children. They were stuck in the Superdome for days with no food or water, and some people died there. They were forced to move away from their city. And who did it affect? Poor people. There was no evacuation plan for a major city with 100,000 poor people who don't have cars. People who had resources got out; people who didn't have resources were left behind. There were never any buses for them. National government failed them, state government failed them, city government failed them.

In St. Gabriel's parish, my church parish, an African-American community, Katrina destroyed everything these people had worked their whole lives for. In only a few minutes, eight feet of water flooded through the area, destroying homes and the church. Everything, gone.

People were forced to leave the housing projects in New Orleans after the storm. They were forced out of their homes – even those on the second or third floors, and even when their houses hadn't been touched by water – forced evictions. Put them on buses, and took them all over the place, to Texas, to Atlanta. Then the housing people came up with a plan – to raze everything that was there. To the ground, all of them – even if they were just as clean and neat as a pin as before the storm and no water touched them! The people said, "Just let us go home!" Oh, the cry of the people. I heard their cry, but those housing people couldn't hear their cry. The bureaucracy kept them from hearing their cry; their plan kept them from hearing their cry.

Then some of the African-American leaders got up and said, "Look, these people are not listening to us. We've got to get in there and occupy those houses; go and take our houses back. If a lot of us do this, it's going to be hard for them to put us out because it'll look bad on the national news." So the people just cut through the fence and went in and started cleaning the houses. The police were all around, but they didn't arrest anybody. So it's been people helping people that have been rebuilding the city of New Orleans. People who believe in justice have come from all over to help the poor people in New Orleans. Students from Elms College came to help us in New Orleans!



Students from Elms College joined other Habitat for Humanity volunteers in New Orleans, helping to rebuild housing that had been destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

"People who believe in justice have come from all over to help the poor people in New Orleans. Students from Elms College came to help us in New Orleans!"

Q. *What do you think of the social justice program at Elms College?*

Sister Helen:

You asked me to come here to speak about "solidarity," "liberation theology," "immigration," "migration from Katrina." It's interesting that you put these things together – put the mosaic together with the different colors – and of course the solid rock underneath all of this is solidarity and what it means.

As they say in Latin America, "The path is made by walking." You step out with the people. You learn from experience with the people. And then you come back and take that to your heart, and that's what you meditate on. It's action-contemplation, grounded in experience with the people. It's not, "Go contemplate in a monastery for 40 years." It's a breathing – in and out. Action-contemplation, together in community – that's the thrust of liberation theology. That's how it differs from the other theology, where you just went and studied. Have you ever noticed; poor people never go to theology classes? You never see them studying theology, at Notre Dame, or at Elms College, or anywhere. Liberation theology's done on the ground.

A song I've learned to love is "Truth springs up out of the ground." We've got to be on the ground with the people. You students from Elms went to New Orleans and were on the ground with us there. You saw what happened in our city and you put your hands where they would make a difference. And you came home with a lot more than you gave. That happens all the time when we give ourselves over in a community of love, a community like the one here at Elms College. And you have to join in community, because you can't take on all the issues, big issues of social justice alone. Lone rangers don't last long in social justice movements.

The students at Elms College are learning that those of us who have more than we need have a responsibility to share – to join with those in that struggle. We have everything! We have the benefits of being middle class! We've got health care, we've got a roof over our heads, we've got good food to eat, we've got an education or are getting an education. We can use our energies for justice. People who are struggling to keep ends together, or to pay the rent, or to put food on the table don't have energy to come out to meetings on solidarity and liberation theology. But we do.

Why have we been given these gifts? So that we can put our lives into transforming this world. Is that not what the Gospel of Jesus calls us to? ■





One Woman's Lifelong Journey Towards Peace and Justice

by Sister Jane Morrissey

I spent the entire Elms homecoming weekend in bed, felled by bronchitis, and I used the time to reread *Little Women*. When I first read it years ago, I really wanted Jo March to marry Laurie, not Mr. Baer, and I've spent a lifetime wishing another ending into being. So I never read the sequel, *Little Men*.

But my recent rereading of *Little Women* made me gape at the newlyweds opening a school for poor boys. Why had I forgotten that? My older sister Joyce introduced me to Louisa May Alcott's novel so many years ago, and she had probably told me that the sequel was about that school. I had a conversation with Joyce last night, and she reminded me that the "little men" in the second book were the students of Jo and her husband, the character she chose to marry whom I did not prefer.

It may be time now for me to read *Little Men*, because this time, when I read about them – the poor, forsaken, and dearly loved scalawags the newlyweds take into their first home – I recognized that they might teach me something about the promising children Sister Maureen Broughan and I come to know at the Homework House of Hermano Pedro we started last year.

How did it happen that Sister Maureen and I – two Elms graduates and Sisters of St. Joseph – came to open an after-school program for children at risk in the poorest neighborhoods in Holyoke, the poorest city per capita in Massachusetts? The program started with two elementary students both named Jose. Then came Fernando and Aidan, Odalis and Sheila. We served 20 students in the first five months, and then more than quadrupled that number over the past school year, and opened a second location.

How did the steps of my life turn toward an insertion in the lives of the Latino poor, toward justice, peace, and social reform? Surely the first answer is grace, pure and unadulterated. As Therese of Lisieux said, "*Tout est grace*" – everything is grace.

"I know it was my education at the College of Our Lady of the Elms that helped me to understand that there were some things I couldn't do, but oh I could change the world. At least, a little bit."

Therese was my maternal grandfather's favorite saint. He was the only grandfather I knew, and on Sunday visits he would tell my mother to put his ice cream in the oven, for it was "too cold." Was it grandfather that made me think I could warm ice cream without its melting? Was it reading that made me think I could have my own ending to *Little Women*? Maybe a little. But in great measure, I know it was my education at the College of Our Lady of the Elms that helped me to understand that there were some things I couldn't do, but oh I could change the world. At least, a little bit.

As an Elms student, I thought about majoring in everything from physics to social work to philosophy to mathematics. My brilliant high school mentor, Sister Marita Joseph, had suggested to me that it would veer toward mortal sin if I majored in English when God had so gifted me in science and math. Her words held sway until the autumn day of my sophomore year at Elms when I found my focus with the equally brilliant Sister James Mary. She seemed to look into my soul across the desk in her small office and introduced herself by saying that she had heard I was good in English. I demurred. Sister James Mary asked me another question: she asked what I loved. The answer to that question came out with an immediacy that surprised me: I loved to read. Her response penetrated my soul, as did her blue eyes, not at all obscured by coronet or veil. "Follow your heart, Jane."

I majored in English and minored in math. Under Sister James Mary's tutelage, my reading tastes spread from Dante and Dostoievsky to Chaucer and Camus. I wandered the Middle Ages, and learned about the Catholic Worker, and existentialism. I began to understand the world and to see that people could – and did – change it. Who else would, for worse or for better?

The day I graduated in 1962, I had pronounced over an ironing board to my mother that I would not become a Sister of St. Joseph if that were the last thing in the world. So much for what I knew!

The following day, I moved to New York City. Manhattan thrilled me, from the Cloisters past Central Park to my employer "Mother" Equitable, past East Village where most of my newfound friends lived, to Battery Park, and across Hart Crane's Brooklyn Bridge to Bay Ridge where I lived. I soared even when riding the dirty subway.

On weekends, my classmate Maureen Scott and her new husband Frank Malaspina welcomed me into their life in Glen Cove. We talked about everything from Elms memories to my latest Broadway show. *A Man for All Seasons* made me look deeper into my faith and its costs; *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* plunged me more deeply into the dysfunctions of the 60s.

Freed from the circumstances of my upbringing, I attended to life's core values, at least most of the time. Hearing the Gospel at St. Patrick's Cathedral about Christ's call of the rich young man in a pew to the right of the lectern, I knew something new and true about my vocation.

At the close of the following summer, while planning to start graduate study in English at the University of Wisconsin, I went with Brooklyn-born Catherine Ormond, Elms class of '63, to introduce her to Sister Patricia James, an SSJ. As my only teacher in grades 9 and 10, Sister Patricia had led me deep into the forest of loving learning. Cathy didn't know her, but she was going to enter the Sisters of St. Joseph, and Sister Patricia could and did tell her where would-be nuns went shopping.

After Cathy and I parted company on the subway, I was haunted by Sister's spirit. She had seemed delighted that I would study metaphysical poetry with Helen Vendler. But her insights into religious life were compelling me – against my wishes – to try Cathy's direction.

John F. Kennedy was president; U.S.-Soviet relations were thawing after the Cuban Missile Crisis, and war was waged in Vietnam. My Church was one year into Vatican II. My world was changing. I would change too. At Maureen and Frank's that weekend, I wrote a letter requesting consideration by the Sisters of St. Joseph. That September, my sister Joyce used black shoe polish to dye the green Girl Scout beret I wore the next day before donning the black veil of a postulant at the doors of Mont Marie.

While I was there learning old and new spiritual practices and teaching English to novices and postulants, Jack, Bobby, and Martin were assassinated, and John XXIII died. However cloistered my life, new social awareness and grace came to life in me.

I had started graduate studies in English at UMass in the mid-60s and it was impossible to miss the ferment and free love on campus. I began attending gatherings where my race was in the minority and my convictions constantly challenged. I changed habits, even though some of my fellow students preferred me in medieval robes that matched their field of specialization. I felt freer in shorter skirts and longer hair.

From Sister Mary Dooley, who was newly-elected Reverend Mother with ink just drying on her Ph.D. from the Sorbonne, I began to learn the more intimate and subversive lessons of the Second Vatican Council, and became attuned to my Church's call to justice. How easily the words seemed to trip off her tongue: action on behalf of justice is "a constitutive element of the preaching of the Gospel." If I had any doubts, the Synod of Bishops said so. How often I also heard from my sisters in community about our Church's "preferential option for the poor." The Latin American Bishops had coined the phrase.

In the mid-70s after a three-year stint teaching at Cathedral High School and four years of full-time graduate study at UMass leading to my Ph.D. in medieval literature, I was asked by Sister Mary Dooley to teach at my alma mater. As in my call to the Sisters of St. Joseph, my first instinct was to beg off. But she insisted, and I relented. She asked me to do it for one year. I would stay far longer.

I had learned obedience, but in that same spirit, guided by the same vow, I had also learned to ask questions. The call to justice and the preferential option for the poor led me to ask Mary and her Council if I might live among the poor, and they said yes. I found the Memorial Square neighborhood in the North End of Springfield, now the poorest neighborhood in Massachusetts and still my home, just two miles down the road from Elms College. I could walk the distance. Kathleen O'Connor, then a Sister, and I moved in together. When asked for a rent reduction, Jack and Mollie O'Shea said that "so long as ye'll pray for what ye can't pay for, we'll not lose a penny having ye as our tenants."

So in October 1976 we began to know what it is to live among the immigrant poor. We began to hear the voices of our neighbors. Like the first Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy, France, in 1650, we began to see and pray about the needs of our neighborhood.

That fall there was a fire in a gray house on our street. Six years later, five Sisters – Cathy Homrok, Joan Roche, Eileen Witkop, Kathy, and I, along with Julie James, family members, friends, and neighbors – bought the vacant, vandalized, charred gray 17-room Victorian house at 22 Sheldon Street for $500, and formed the Gray House, Inc. With the help of countless friends and neighbors and Elms students and alumnae and prisoners and boy scouts and girl scouts, we knocked down and built up and repaired and refreshed house and yard. On April 22, 1984, we moved in, and began the work of serving our dear neighbors through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy to which our Sisters are committed. We had a food pantry, a clothing store, a literacy program, and something for the children. (The Gray House is independent now, and last year served over 13,000 people in need. Sister Cathy Homrok and I still live here, as do Sisters Jeanne Branchaud and Annette McDermott.)

During the year we moved into the Gray House, the late Penny Lernoux, renowned author of *Cry of the People* about the suffering and struggle for justice of the Church in Latin America, was an Elms honorary degree recipient and commencement speaker, and she gave a lecture in Veritas Auditorium on human rights. *"Mi casa es tu casa,"* she said to me. She invited me to bring students along.

That summer, five of us went to Bogotá, Colombia: Regina Wagner, Maureen O'Connor, Cheri Santagate, Donna Denette, and I. In the invasion *barrio* named for Pope John XXIII, I began to learn something directly about those poor for whom the Latin American bishops had declared a "preferential option." I wanted to learn yet more. Penny continued to mentor me.

We returned to Elms College in the fall. Much to my dismay and despite the objection of a small group of faculty and students and the resulting college-wide discussion, the Elms had become involved in a regional ROTC program. I was increasingly disenchanted with this choice, which was at odds with my growing commitment to Gospel nonviolence on behalf of the poor. I began to feel I no longer belonged at the Elms as I had.

Inspired through the 80s by Latin American martyrs, especially the four Church women from the United States who were raped and killed in El Salvador, and by assassinated Archbishop Oscar Romero, I was increasingly drawn toward knowing firsthand something of that brand of poverty into which so many of my neighbors were born.

I took a leave of absence from the Elms. I landed in Barrio Chino on the coast of Cartagena, Colombia. I arrived with questions: where are the "poorest of the poor" and how does one know? When, on my first day there, the youth group in *Barrio Chino* told me that their major concern

Sister Jane speaks at a peace rally on the steps of Springfield City Hall in March 2003.



was *alcantarillado*–sewage – I began to understand how poverty stinks. On the coast of Colombia and in the mountains of Bolivia, I also met young people with a strong desire to further their education.

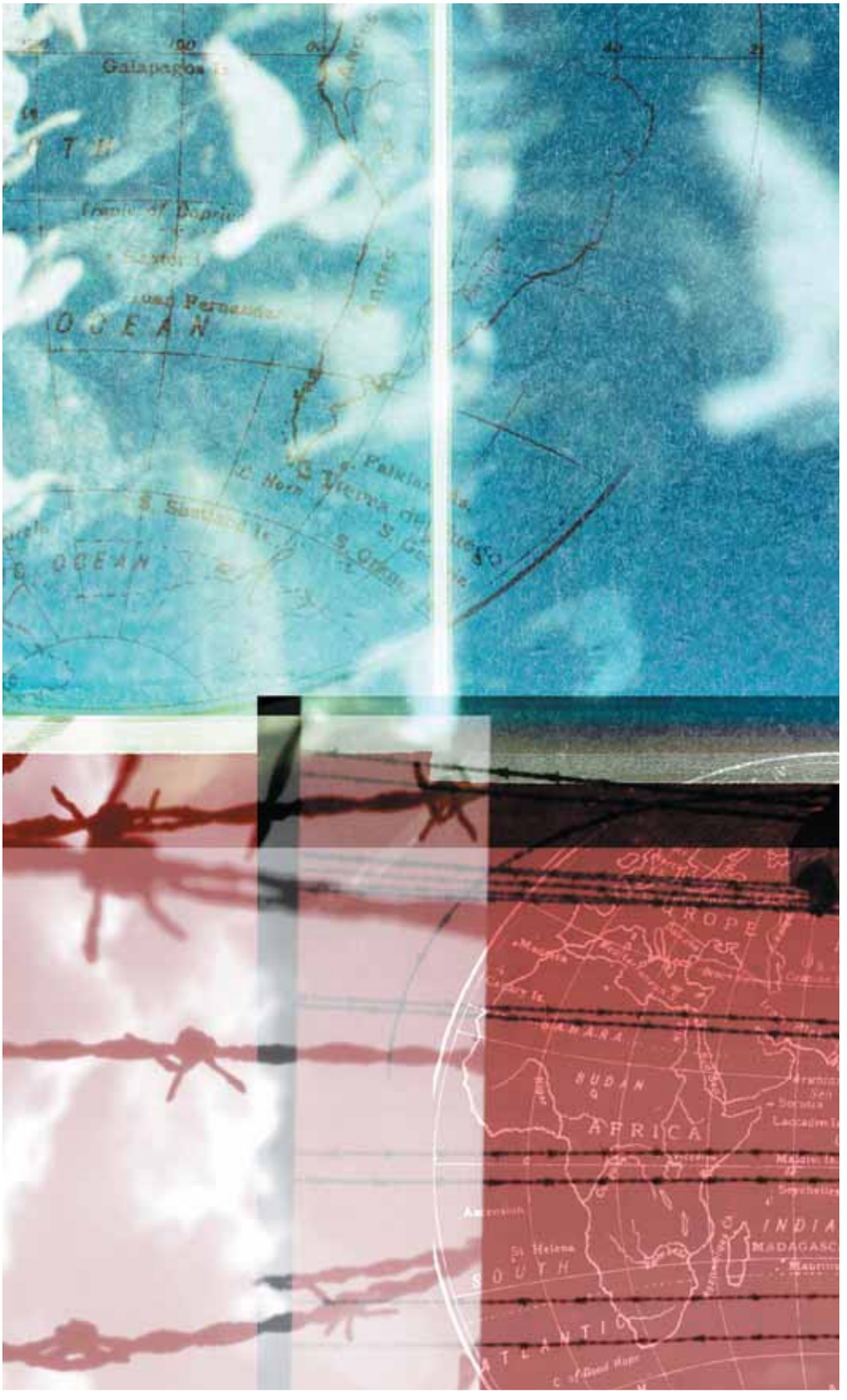
After seven months I returned to the Gray House and the Elms. Over the next few years I was able to make arrangements for four Bolivian girls – Margot Gonzalez, Patty Luque, Maria Elena Arequipa, and Patty Cerruto – to study at the Elms on scholarship, and for Luis from Barrio Chino to study at Holyoke Community College. (Later, Sister MaryAnne Guertin, SSJ, would help him earn a scholarship to complete his studies at Assumption.) So many from the Elms and elsewhere helped to support them.

In the fall of 1988 at a lecture on Nicaragua in the Alumnae Library Theater, I asked Sister Maureen Broughan, who was going to Guatemala for two weeks to learn more Spanish, if I might accompany her. I needed better to understand my Latino neighbors and advisees.

On my first day in Guatemala – December 31, 1988 – I was distracted in prayer at the Franciscan Church by an interminable queue of people, rich and poor, indigenous, Latino, Ladino, and tourists. They were visiting the burial spot of Hermano Pedro de San Jose Betancur, of whom until that day I knew not one iota. In the cultural bias of my own "faith life," I dismissed them and their customs as mindless superstition, until I remembered something I had read in Dostoievsky during my years as a novice. He had once said that he became Christian because he loved the poor, whose best friend, he noticed, was invariably Jesus Christ. How could he love them and not love the One they loved?

How could I ever love the Latin American poor if I spurned their expression of our common faith? Getting in line, kneeling where they knelt, I felt my heart nearly jump out of my body. From that moment on, whenever I asked about Hermano Pedro, I heard an enchanting story of a saint, similar to lore I loved as a child.

When I returned to the Elms, a comment made by Bob King in an English Department conversation in the Alumnae Room alerted me to an NEH summer seminar in oral tradition to be held at the University of Missouri in Columbia and led by John Miles Foley, a friend from UMass and now an accomplished scholar in the field. Why not apply? Why not collect these stories about Hermano Pedro?



During that seminar, my questions became more basic: who might help me collect stories in Spanish and Kakchikel, one of the languages indigenous to Guatemala? We would want a representative sample of the oral tradition, and more than 50 percent of Guatemalans are indigenous. Sister of St. Joseph Kathleen Imbruno suggested we ask our humanities colleague Cristina Canales, a native Spanish speaker, and given her fascination with Mayan culture, she agreed.

By 1996, the year *Gracias, Matiox, Thanks, Hermano Pedro: A Trilingual Anthology of Guatemalan Oral Tradition* was published by Garland Press, I had left my teaching career to work three years in the Sisters of St. Joseph Office for Justice and Peace, and subsequently left that work to serve Blessed Sacrament, my parish in Memorial Square,

as pastoral visitor. It helped that my travels and scholarship had left me more fluent in Spanish.

Gang violence had reached its height in Springfield's North End, and we were frequently praying and processing through the neighborhood and city for an end to the violence. Our pastor, Father Michael Doyle, cautioned the parish staff and council that **if we didn't respond to the tragedy in our neighborhood, we betrayed the Gospel.** We buried 11 youth from our parish – two on my first day of work – a 15-year-old boy and the 21-year-old mother of three. Sometimes the perpetrator of the crime and the victim and their families were parishioners. I came to know my neighborhood more intimately.

I also began working with the Springfield police. After teaching them a course for Anna Maria College in the Gospel Imperative for Social Transformation, I was asked by the city to establish an interfaith, cross-cultural Community Chaplains-on-Call program. During those years I came to know more about what the consensus statement of the Sisters of St. Joseph asks of us when it says we love the dear neighbor "without distinction."

Violence and injustice hit closer to home in a way that led me toward public protest in the form of nonviolent civil disobedience. Sitting around the Gray House kitchen table as the probability of the first war in the Persian Gulf had dawned, Annette McDermott suggested to me that if she believed what I believed, she would have to risk arrest. I had considered the question before, but it had always felt like someone else's call.

There was new urgency to it once I worked at the SSJ Office for Justice and Peace. Meetings I attended in Mason Square had introduced me to the local Muslim community. Kamal Ali of Westfield State College inspired me to think in harder ways regarding where I stood and where I was perceived to stand.

On the eve of Martin Luther King Day 1993, I was arrested at the gates of Westover Air Force Base. I did it again one month later. For both acts, the Chicopee Court left me stranded, "without a finding." In the mid-90s I was handcuffed and arrested again, this time in front of the White House with a group from Pax Christi USA for protesting budget cuts to services for the poor. That trespassing charge was dropped.

It was becoming more and more clear to me that there was a close connection between the increase in global poverty and U.S.-supported violence in wars and proxy wars. I became aware of the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, dubbed by its critics "the School of Assassins." I learned that many military, paramilitary, and government leaders who were responsible for genocide, assassination, and persecution of the Church in Latin America were proud graduates of this institution. And I learned that a delegation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious had protested at the gates of Fort Benning, including Sisters of St. Joseph Connie Quinlan, then our congregation's president, and Mary Quinn, our congregation's current president. In conscience, the more I read, the more I knew that I had to put my body where my soul led me, and that was to Fort Benning. I was arrested there, and issued a "Ban and Bar" order prohibiting me from entering the grounds for five years.

Elected president of the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1999, I grew increasingly alarmed at the march toward the current war in Iraq, and by so much of the domestic and international policy established in Washington in this new century. In the 90s, our congregation had taken a corporate stand in opposition to all war and the threat of war. My conscience again led me to nonviolent protest, this time at the Federal Building in Springfield, arrest, and, on this occasion, to trial. My experience at the Elms as student and teacher, coupled with the legal advice of my one brother, helped me to argue our defense. We were found innocent.

Now, I find myself devoted to Homework House. I think the time has come for me to read *Little Men*, about those poor, forsaken, and dearly loved scalawags who remind me of the tough, tender school children here who teach me every day about the indomitable power inherent in simply loving. The tutors and benefactors patiently give their time and affection to the children, and the results are nothing short of miraculous. **The children learn because they are loved. There's justice in this operation.**

The long road that has been my life has led me into the fray on many fronts. From my Memorial Square neighborhood in the North End of Springfield – now the poorest neighborhood in Massachusetts – to the poor barrios of Colombia and Bolivia, and from the burial spot of Hermano Pedro in Guatemala to the Homework House in Holyoke that bears his name, it has been a journey filled with grace. ■

Sister Jane participates in an interfaith prayer service for peace in front of the Federal Building in Springfield in April 2003.



Sister Jane made arrangements for four young women from Bolivia to study at Elms College on scholarship, including Margot Gonzalez, shown here shortly after arriving in Massachusetts in1986.



Sister Jane (second from right) is shown with her students and volunteers at Homework House, which she co-founded with Sister Maureen Broughan (fourth from left.)





Journeying Through "Cultural Schizophrenia:" Immigrating to a New Land, and Embracing a New Kind of Theology

By Reverend Mark S. Stelzer

The subject of this article, Peter C. Phan, Ph.D., S.T.D., D.D., is one of the foremost Catholic theologians of the English-speaking world, and was the 2007 commencement speaker at Elms College. He is currently a professor of Catholic social thought at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and was formerly president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. Father Phan is a prolific author and editor in diverse theological areas, having authored and edited more than 400 books, chapters in books, articles for encyclopedias, essays and articles in scholarly journals and popular magazines, and book reviews. He has served on the editorial boards of **Journal of Catholic Social Thought, The Asian Journal of Philosophy,** *and* **Asian Christian Review**.

Father Phan has taught and lectured several times at Elms College, including as the coordinator and keynote speaker since 2001 at the annual Leaning Fest programs that have focused on diversity in the Catholic Church. His participation in those learning fests inspired him to edit a book released in 2005 called **Many Faces, One Church - Cultural Diversity and the American Catholic Experience**. *The book is dedicated to the eighth president of Elms College, the late Joachim W. Froehlich. Elms College religious studies professor Reverend Mark S. Stelzer, who was a doctoral student of Father Phan's, authored the foreword and the first chapter.*

Father Stelzer, who is also pastor of Holy Name of Jesus parish in Chicopee, and founder of the Institute of Theology and Pastoral Studies at Elms College, authored this article about Father Phan, his friend and mentor.

People of every generation and every culture have known the pain of losing their native land. Whether because of war, economic adversity, or religious or intellectual persecution, women and men have been forced to leave the familiar and to embrace the new.

The Reverend Peter C. Phan knows personally this sorrow of losing one's home. The 64-year-old priest left his native Vietnam in 1975 in the wake of that country's bitter civil war, and immigrated to the United States. His experiences in this new and very different land induced a kind of "cultural schizophrenia" which echoed what he felt during his early education, and later in his development as a theologian from very traditional beliefs to new and emerging themes of liberation theology.

Recognized at an early age for his intellectual prowess and academic ability, Father Phan received a "French education" as a youth in Vietnam. Totally immersed in French culture and history, he now laments that during his early student years he learned nothing of his native country's history, geography, literature, and art. His separation from his culture continued during his years of study in Hong Kong from 1962 to 1965, where he read and studied in Latin, and followed a course of western philosophy. After teaching philosophy in Hong Kong for three years, Father Phan was sent to Rome in 1968 for advanced studies in theology. "For the first time in my life, I came into contact with the western world I previously knew only through books," he said.

But Father Phan arrived in Rome in the immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which had left the Church in a great period of upheaval and led to a new way of doing theology and thinking about Catholicism. During those years, Father Phan and his contemporaries found themselves caught between two worlds: between the pre-conciliar and the post-conciliar, between the old and the new, between the liberal and the conservative.

"Despite the very idealistic language of many conciliar documents, cultural pluralism and religious diversity were not yet articulated as theological concepts," Father Phan said. "So despite the many positive signs of renewal taking place in the Church and in the world, I remained as unfamiliar as ever with Vietnamese and other Asian cultural and religious traditions."

After he was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood in 1972, Father Phan returned to Vietnam. He was stationed in Hanoi where he taught high school, lectured in philosophy and theology to seminary students, and engaged in various pastoral ministries.

The Paris peace talks were completed in 1973, and American military forces were being systematically withdrawn from Vietnam, so the prospect of a lasting peace seemed imminent. But those prospects were shattered in 1975 with the Communist invasion of the South. Heeding rumors of an upcoming invasion of Saigon, Father Phan, accompanied by his parents and eight other relatives, was among those fortunate enough to be airlifted via U.S. military aircraft from Saigon to the island of Guam.

"There is no greater sorrow on earth



... but there is, in the worst of fortune,

There, they were reunited with Father Phan's older brother and his family, who had left previously. Eighteen in number, the entire family was housed in tents provided by the Marines for the many who sought temporary refuge in Guam. In April 1975, Father Phan and his family were abruptly sent to San Diego, California and the nearby Marine base at Camp Pendleton.

By the end of May, there were 10,000 Vietnamese refugees in the camp, and Father Phan was pressed into ministerial service by the American chaplains. He witnessed firsthand the emotional pain and suffering of America's newest immigrants. It was the beginning of his ministerial engagement with the Vietnamese-American community, and of the healing of his cultural schizophrenia.

After two months in the camp, Father Phan and his family were sponsored by the University of Plano located near Dallas, Texas, enabling them to seek temporary employment and to begin the process of acclimating to a new country and a new life. Anxious to assist his family financially, Father Phan accepted the humble position of a sanitation worker in Plano. (He often self-deprecatingly quips, "I once collected garbage. Now, I disseminate it!")

Father Phan soon was appointed to a teaching position in the Theology Department at the University of Dallas, and concurrently undertook doctoral studies at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome. He wrote his doctoral dissertation in 1978 on the work of another refugee, Russian Orthodox theologian and iconographer Paul Evdokimov (1900-1969).

For the next 10 years, Father Phan continued to teach at the University of

than the loss of one's native land...



the best chances for a happy change."

— Euripides, 431 B.C.E.

Dallas. He became an American citizen in 1982, and went on to earn a doctor of philosophy degree at the University of London in 1986. And he quickly gained notoriety as an engaging lecturer and prolific writer, and emerged as a new and powerful voice on the landscape of U.S. Catholic theology.

In 1988, Father Phan left the University of Dallas for an associate professorship at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. In 1992 he was appointed chair of the university's Department of Theology, a position he held until 1995. Sensing a desire to further explore the emerging field of cultural theology, Father Phan left the Theology Department in 1997 to join the Department of Religion and Religious Education as the Warren-Blanding Professor of Culture and Religion. He earned a Doctor of Divinity at the University of London in 2000, and was nominated for the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in the Humanities at the University of Vienna in 2001-2002.

During this time, Father Phan's own theological investigations and writings led him from a consideration of some very traditional theological themes to a consideration of the new and emerging themes of liberation theology. Taking as its starting point the pain of those who suffer and the underside of history, liberation theology began as a Latin American phenomenon in the 1970s. Since that time, its fundamental orientation and insights have been used to critically examine a wide array of social, cultural, and religious problems. Enriched by the voices of a new generation of theologians from different continents and contexts, the belief in and dedication to liberation theology continues to expand around the world.

By the end of May, there were 10,000 Vietnamese refugees in the camp, and Father Phan was pressed into ministerial service by the American chaplains. He witnessed firsthand the emotional pain and suffering of America's newest immigrants. It was the beginning of his ministerial engagement with the Vietnamese-American community, and of the healing of his cultural schizophrenia.

Father Phan delivered the 2007 Elms College commencement address.



The fact that Father Phan and a growing number of immigrant theologians teaching and writing in the United States are drawn to liberation theology is, no doubt, because they know firsthand what it is to live at the borders and not at the center of society; to be "betwixt and between." They know what it is to be neither American nor Asian, nor Latino/a, nor African. They know what it is to be a minority and never fully accepted by the majority. Like Father Phan, they know what it is to live with cultural schizophrenia.

In most of his recent writing and lecturing, Father Phan directs his attention to theories and theologies of culture. This focus flows from his efforts to explore fundamental Christian beliefs in light of Asian customs, practices, religious texts, everyday stories, literature and art – something his early childhood education and subsequent college studies never allowed him to do. In this process, Father Phan heeds the wisdom of the Vietnamese proverb he is so fond of quoting: "Come back and bathe in your own pond." As Father Phan insists, whether clear or murky, one's own pond is always better, simply because it is one's own and not another's. By "coming back to his own pond" and doing theology from an American-Asian perspective, Father Phan frees himself from the lingering remnants of his cultural schizophrenia, and shows other immigrants how to do the same.

At the same time, he opens the eyes and hearts of non immigrants to new ways of thinking about God, religion, and the Church. He challenges them to displace themselves – spiritually and ideologically – from the center, and to move to the border in solidarity with people whose very mode of being is to live there. Perhaps most significantly of all, Father Phan leads us to the realization that to be on the border, to be neither this nor that, is not a totally negative phenomenon: it enables one to be both this and that.

Father Phan's challenge has been accepted and embraced at Elms College, at the annual Mary A. Dooley Lecture Series in which he has served as a frequent presenter, and at summer learning festivals, which he

coordinates here at the college. During these summer gatherings of lay pastoral agents, religious, and clergy, Father Phan and other outstanding theologians from throughout the United States explore traditional and contemporary theological themes from the perspective of the new immigrant groups who are growing in numbers as part of the Church in the United States.

In addition to coordinating these learning festivals, Father Phan edited a book called *Many Faces, One Church: Cultural Diversity and the American Catholic Experience* (Sheed and Ward, 2004), an impressive collection of many of the presentations given during these summer sessions. Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Joachim Froehlich, Elms College's eighth president, this critically acclaimed text is used in colleges and universities throughout the United States.

Currently, Father Phan serves as a consultant to Elms College's Mission and Catholic Identity subcommittee, demonstrating his abiding commitment to the college and its potential to emerge as a nationally recognized Catholic liberal arts institution in which the very best of the rich Catholic intellectual tradition is engaged and celebrated.

Father Phan's guidance leads us to explore ways in which familiarity with – and commitment to – the Catholic intellectual tradition not only encourages, but mandates, that we remain open to new and diverse modes of thinking and being.

It has been more than 2,400 years since Euripides named the pain of generations of immigrants: "There is no greater sorrow on earth than the loss of one's native land." But he continued: "There is, in the worst of fortune, the best of chances for a happy change." Father Phan has proved this to be true. Deprived in his formative years of a familiarity with his own culture, and later forced to leave his native land, Father Phan has grown to find fulfillment and happiness in identifying and celebrating what it is to be "betwixt and between," to be neither this nor that, but to be both this *and* that.

"The happiness accompanying that sense of fulfillment affords great hope to all who embrace the Gospel and its invitation to 'de-center' ourselves," Father Phan said. "It is in this process that we realize – perhaps for the first time – Christianity's truest essence." ■



Author's Note From Father Mark Stelzer:

Peter Phan and I first met during his tenure at Catholic University of America. When I arrived in Washington as a doctoral student in systematic theology, I was assigned as one of Peter's advisees. Although I had already been teaching on the college level for eight or nine years, I felt like a neophyte during my first semester of studies in Peter's seminar on Karl Rahner. The lectures were extremely well organized, intriguing, and replete with Peter's typical humor, and the reading and writing assignments were rigorous. They pushed me beyond my comfort level and forced me to think in new and different ways. Peter's relentless insistence on the importance of clear and concise writing were a constant reminder of his untiring commitment to the formation of a new generation of theologians capable of critical thinking and effective communication.

Moved by Peter's seminar on Rahner, I chose the social dimension of Rahner's eschatology as a licentiate dissertation topic, with Peter as director. The process of writing that first dissertation and the frequent interaction that began to occur between Peter and me was one that forged my lasting friendship with him.

Peter offered me untold kindness, encouragement, and support. The times we spent together were always highlighted by his quick humor and stories he would share of people and places he most recently visited as a guest lecturer, consultant, or keynote speaker. Always highly anecdotal in nature, these stories were delightfully animated by Peter's recollections of meetings with cardinals, bishops, and curial officials – the "high and mighty" routinely disarmed by Peter's good nature, quick wit, and theological acumen.

In retrospect, I now see that whether in an intense advising session or over a leisurely dinner in a quaint Washington restaurant, Peter was welcoming me to the world and the work of the professional theologian.





Searching for the Images That Haunt Me:

My Civil Rights Journey to Mississippi

By Scott R. Hartblay, M.S.W.

Scott Hartblay is an associate professor of social work at Elms College. He received a bachelor's degree at Boston University and a master's in social work at West Virginia University. His interests include human oppression, the development of values and ethics in social work students, international social work, group work, and the use of literature and art in the teaching of social work practice. He has taught in Northern Ireland, Poland, and Lithuania, presented at international social work conferences, and regularly leads students on educational trips to Ireland and Poland.

Last June I went to Mississippi.

I'm not sure exactly why. I've been teaching about the treatment of African Americans for some years now. I teach a course at Elms College called "Human Oppression," and regularly use an old video series entitled "Eyes on the Prize," which presents the history of the civil rights movement. I am haunted by these black and white videos, and I watch them over and over again. Each time I watch, I see something new. I am haunted by the people. And I am haunted by the places. Maybe that is why I went to Mississippi. I had grown to know them so well, those people, those places.

Here are the images that constantly run through my mind:

Emmett Till in 1955, visiting his uncle in a little place called Money, Mississippi. A 14-year-old boy from Chicago, accused of "talking fresh to a white woman." A banging on the door of Emmett's uncle's house in the middle of the night. "Where's that boy that done all that talking?" Emmett brutally murdered. Emmett's mother grieving. Emmett's funeral back in Chicago with miles and miles of mourners walking single file past Emmett's open casket. Emmett's mother wanted it open, so that the whole world could see what they had done to him.

The hopeless trial in nearby Sumner. "A Good Place to Raise a Boy," said the sign as you entered the town. A hopeless trial. An all-white jury. Mose Wright, Emmett's brave uncle. Mose Wright, the sharecropper in his white shirt. When asked to point out the man who came to his door that night, he pointed. He pointed at a white man in that Southern courtroom and said, "'Thar he." Courageous Mose Wright. That's an image that I see.

The jury was only out for an hour. When they marched back in, the all-white male jury gave the verdict: not guilty. After it was read, the grinning murderers, kissed on the mouth by their wives, one of whom Emmett Till "talked fresh to." And two months later, the two defendants, brave now, cocky now, sold the story of how they had killed Emmett Till to *Look Magazine* for $4,000. They killed 14-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi.

Another image from the videos, and from my own memory as a boy at English High School in Boston: Freedom Summer, 1964. Michael Schwerner, James Chaney. One white; one black. One from the north; one from the south. One 24 years old, the other 21. Working for CORE, the Congress on Racial Equality; helping to register black people to vote… a supposed right under our Constitution.

Chaney and Schwerner were based in Meridian, but were driving to Philadelphia, Mississippi to organize for voter registration in Neshoba County. They attempted to organize a voter education center at a black church. The next day, the Ku Klux Klan went to the church and beat the members of the congregation for talking to these civil rights workers. Then they burned down the church.

Chaney and Schwerner, going to investigate the fire at the black church with Andrew Goodman – just 20 years old, a white college boy. He had been training in Ohio with the other volunteers for Mississippi Summer, and this was his first assignment. In their station wagon, the three are arrested by the Ku Klux Klan sheriff for a supposed traffic violation. Put in the Neshoba County Jail. Let out at 10 o'clock at night. It was a plan, you see. Driving back to Meridian in the dark, on a Mississippi country road, they were cut off and surrounded by cars. The cars, driven by the heroes of the Ku Klux Klan, who murder the three young men who are trying to get people their rights.

Schwerner's grieving girl/woman wife, Rita, young, composed, dignified, who said, even then, that it is only because two white men were killed is so much attention being paid to this crime. Black men are killed in the South all the time with hardly a ripple in the media. She had wisdom, this girl/woman, even in grief. And at the funeral for James Chaney, there was his little brother Ben Chaney, 10 years old, sobbing for his big brother, who was buried alone in Meridian. Haunting images.

Another Southern trial before an all-white jury. Eighteen white men, accused of the murders. Most of them set free. Laughing sheriff and deputy sheriff in the Neshoba County Courthouse. Another picture for all the world to see. This time in *Life Magazine*.



And then I couldn't leave Mississippi without finally going to Money. Money, in the northwest corner of the state. In the Mississippi delta. Hot in the summer. Cotton country. Home of B.B. King and the blues. I wanted to find Emmett Till.

Those are my images. Those are my memories.

Last June I went to Mississippi. I had to go to Mississippi. I zigged and zagged in a rental car around the state to the little towns that I knew so well: Meridian and Philadelphia and Sumner and Money, and the city of Jackson.

I went to visit the grave of James Chaney in Meridian. He is in a little cemetery on a deserted country road far out of town. His gravestone set far away from the others. James Chaney alone. It was the request of the families that they be buried together, Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. One black; two white. But Mississippi law wouldn't allow it. There had to be segregation even in death. And for the racists and haters, murder wasn't enough for James Chaney. In the years following the funeral, they kept overturning his gravestone. Finally, his brother had thick metal supports installed, welded and bolted to the gravestone. It's hard to knock over now. Still alone, James Chaney. I stand before his grave and take pictures for my students. I stand before his grave and think of him. James Chaney in 1964. Brave James Chaney. On a country road late at night in Mississippi. The cemetery seems like such a lonely place. I search my pockets for something to leave him. Finally, I place my house key on top of his gravestone. He is always welcome.

From Meridian I drive to Philadelphia. I drive on the same road that Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner had taken on that last day of their young lives. And it so happens that in Philadelphia, now, in 2005, there is a different trial going on. In the Neshoba County Courthouse, there is justice delayed for 80-year-old Edgar Ray Killen, a KKK organizer who 41 years earlier had conspired to kill Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. Forty-one years of freedom, behind him now.



And on television I saw that little Ben Chaney was there. Mature now, no longer 10 years old. No longer little. There for his brother. And Rita Schwerner, wise Rita Schwerner was there too. Different now, after all the years. More mature and older, and I didn't want to see.

And the mothers had come. Andrew Goodman's mother. Elderly now. To have grieved all these years for her 20-year-old son. Forever young. And James Chaney's mother, who tells about the last time that her son left home 41 years ago. And she talks as if it were just yesterday. And then she breaks down on the witness stand.

This time the jury, men and women, black and white, this time, they found Edgar Ray Killen guilty, guilty, guilty. Forty-one years to the day after his crime. A few days later he was sentenced to 60 years. And later, leaving the Neshoba County courthouse, he was pushed in his wheelchair, having lived a full life … 80 years. He was pushed between the rows of the media people and photographers, and as he went down the line, he swatted at the cameras on either side like a snake spitting. Still mean at 80.

And I left Philadelphia and Neshoba County to drive to Jackson, the capital of that state of Mississippi, and got to the city in the evening and found it deserted. No one walking the streets. No restaurant open. Grand buildings, but no people. I was scared



Scott Hartblay searched Meridian, Mississippi for the remote burial place of James Chaney, who was murdered by a KKK organizer 41 years ago. Scott left his house key on top of Chaney's gravestone, saying: "He is always welcome."



James Chaney's parents and his little brother Ben at James' funeral. James Chaney was murdered in 1964 for trying to register African Americans at voting polls.



Ku Klux Klan members Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price and Sheriff Lawrence Rainey – two of the defendants on trial for participating in a plot to kill Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman – appear relaxed in the courtroom, obviously not worried that 12 white jurors would find them guilty.

in Jackson. I was frightened. I felt that it was a ghost town. A city of ghosts. A city without a soul. Maybe a city that had lost its soul. Lost its soul because of hundreds of years of evil in a state that had taken thousands of souls.

And then I couldn't leave Mississippi without finally going to Money. Money, in the northwest corner of the state. In the Mississippi delta. Hot in the summer. Cotton country. Home of B.B. King and the blues. I wanted to find Emmett Till.

Money, just a crossroads, near Greenwood. I looked at the tiny dot of Money on the AAA map. I'd read that the little place was hard to find now. That there was not much left there. The map showed a gravel road leading north from the main road of Greenwood. I couldn't find any other way to get to Money, so I found the gravel road and took it. It seemed to run for miles and miles between cotton fields, and I wondered if I was going the wrong way and would end up in the middle of nowhere. And I thought of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner, and wondered how they felt on a road like this, in the dark, in Mississippi, in 1964. What courage they had. What courage they all had, those who fought for civil rights in the South in the early 60s.

And finally I reached a paved road and a bridge that crossed a brown, muddy river. This was the Tallahatchie River where they had thrown 14-year-old Emmett Till after they were done with him. Thrown his body into the river. His bloody body weighed down by a heavy metal cotton gin fan, tied to him with barbed wire. And I was finally at the place that I had seen so many times in my classroom in the black and white video. But it looked different now, that place.

All the commercial buildings were gone from that little main street of that little town.

There was just one building left. And it was Bryant's Store — Emmett Till's building. This was the store where the white woman had worked. Where Emmett Till from Chicago had gone one summer's day to buy some candy, and "talked fresh" to that white woman. It was still standing because it had been the only brick structure in the little town. But the front porch has collapsed, and the big store windows are covered with plywood. I stood in front of that falling-down building. I tried to peer inside through a crack in the plywood. It was dark inside of that store and I couldn't see much. And I got no sense of what the little, dusty town of Money was like on a hot summer's day in 1954. For that I'll have to rely on the black and white video. And I looked at this abandoned building, and thought that it should not be allowed to fall down. This is what the white Mississippians probably want, to be able to wipe out the past. To not have to think about, not admit all the terrible things that they had done to African Americans. To make it all go away.

Most of the town is gone. There is just this one remnant to remind them of what they had done to Emmett Till. I think this building should be refurbished and restored, restored to the condition that it was in in 1954. It should become a memorial to Emmett Till. And a plaque should be placed on the front describing what had been done to Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi that day in 1954.

I stood there in front of the falling-down store in Money, Mississippi and thought of Emmett Till in 1954, and thought of our country in 1954. Then I walked back to the bridge to gaze down at the slow-moving, muddy Tallahatchie River, and thought that memorials and signs need to go up all over the South honoring all those who had suffered at the hands of hate and injustice. Memorials and signs for our children to see and remember, and for our children's children.

Last June I went to Mississippi. ■



Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia, Mississippi, in 2005. Coincidently, Scott Hartblay arrived in the town when the trial of 80-year-old Edgar Ray Killen, the KKK leader who organized the murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner 41 years earlier, was under way in this building.



Rock Cut Road in Meridian, Mississippi, on which Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were murdered.



Scott's route took him all through Mississippi in search of locations of important events in the civil rights movement.

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