

California People of Faith

Working Against the Death Penalty

Educating and Mobilizing Faith Communities to Act to Abolish the Death Penalty in California. Winter 2008

Helping People See the Death Penalty Differently

CPF Member Marion Scherer has been performing her one-woman play about the death penalty, "A Prison of the Mind," since 2003 and was recently invited to take her act all the way to our nation's capital.

Professor Robert Johnson, an accomplished author and playwright in his own right, read about Scherer's play on the internet and invited her to perform for his honors class at American University in Washington DC. After months of planning, Scherer traveled from Ventura County to the East Coast for her October 15th performance.

"It was a privilege for me to perform in front of tomorrow's lawmakers. We've already seen the tremendous impact that the young are making in politics today. If more young people are really looking at this issue and other moral issues that impact our society we stand a chance of truly becoming a more thoughtful, spiritual and morally based planet of people," says Scherer.

Scherer writes, directs, and acts in her own plays. After a Catholic Chaplain once asked her to write a play for the youth in prisons, she came up with "If Only I Had More Time," a play about losing a loved one.

"The idea of writing about issues important to all of mankind became my inspiration for pursuing what I continue to call my 'modern day morality plays,'" says Scherer. "So many times we tend to stop thinking about important issues. We latch onto whatever the dictates recommend that we think, and close off our own processes."

"A Prison of the Mind," Scherer's second 'morality play,' effects many audience members on a personal level.

"Very often after this play a retired judge or prosecuting attorney may comment to me, 'several times as a judge, I sentenced the death penalty and now I regret it.'"

Scherer stresses that her goal is not to 'preach to the choir' about the tragedy of the death penalty.

"I welcome pro-death penalty people and fence sitters," says Scherer. "In making each audience 'the second act,' I encourage all opinions to be voiced. And in that voice that champions the validity of the death penalty, I often see them hearing their hollow words falling flat on the crowd."

With all the complexities surrounding the death penalty, there's a simple statement that Scherer wants to hear from anyone who has seen her performance:

"I never thought about the death penalty in this way, your play has helped me see the death penalty differently."

That, Scherer says, is "the best kind of compliment I can receive."

For more information on "A Prison of the Mind" and to inquire about booking a performance, please contact Marion Scherer at 805-485-2861 or marionscherer16@hotmail.com.

See a photo of Marion's trip to the East Coast on the next page.



Rev. H. Alix Evans
Nov. 28, 1958 -
Oct 12, 2008

CPF Says Goodbye to a Friend and Supporter

California People of Faith will greatly miss our longtime Steering Committee Member Rev. H. Alix Evans. An accomplished lawyer and an ardent activist and abolitionist, Rev. Alix passed away on October 12th, 2008 after a hard-fought battle with breast cancer.

While working as the Rector at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, Rev. Alix devoted an enormous amount of time to the anti-death penalty movement. Rev. Kate Cullinane, a friend and former Rector at St. Mary's, shared some memories of Rev. Alix during her memorial service:

"Alix was tenacious when she knew she was on the side of truth and justice. She just never gave up fighting for what she believed was right...Alix represented a number of clients on death row. She believed in their innocence or in the fact that our justice system had not fairly treated them. She worked very hard to end the death penalty. Any one of us may or may not have agreed with Alix, but I believe that we have to honor that she stood up and worked for what she believed was right."

For information on CPF activities statewide, visit www.californiapeopleoffaith.org.



Marion Scherer (highlighted above) poses with Professor Robert Johnson's honors class at American University in Washington DC on October 15, 2008.

"A good multi-dimensional look at the complex issues surrounding the death penalty," said senior Stephanie Petrides. "Scherer took a huge risk and pulled it off well. In a time where many shy away from the explosive topic of the death penalty, she approaches it head on, drawing in the audience, forcing them to explore their own feelings about the death penalty."

A Gift of Peace

Why is Peace such a hard gift to find?
 We all use it in solace for our own peace of mind
 Yet our countries won't reach out to seek that in one another
 Allowing us to band together, like we should as sisters and brothers.

Too many lives are being continuously lost
 A price way too high to pay at any cost
 What will it take for our leaders to see
 That wars and killings are not really the key.

Peace must be felt within our hearts, body and soul
 For if it's not we will never achieve that awesome goal.
 I know this can be accomplished by beginning with you and me
 Spreading the goodwill for everyone to see.

We seek harmony and unity for one and for all
 No longer tolerating anymore lives that will succumb to a fall
 So to spread the message of Peace I will continually pray
 Asking you to do the same in your faith, to finally finding our way.

– Mary Ellen Samuels is one of fifteen women on Death Row in Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla, California. CPF thanks our member, Sr. Kathryn Shannon, for contributing this poem.

CPF at Work

Orange County

More than sixty Orange County Clergy from over thirteen religions took advantage of a unique opportunity on October 29th, 2008 in Irvine to learn about and discuss the death penalty with their peers. Titled "Dialogue on the Death Penalty," the event was the latest in a series of Clergy Luncheons sponsored by Death Penalty Focus, California People of Faith, Progressive Jewish Alliance, and Progressive Christians Uniting. These luncheons are designed to foster an open discussion among participating clergy about how best to discuss the death penalty with their congregations.

Clergy speakers lead discussions in topics including using texts to address the death penalty, restorative justice, speaking about controversial topics, and good and bad techniques for raising this issue with a congregation. Those present were also given death penalty information packets and goals aimed at inspiring them to work towards abolition.

San Diego

San Diego Chapter of CPF, St. Thomas More Catholic Church and California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty sponsored a free screening of the feature length movie "Love Lived on Death Row" on October 26th in Oceanside. The documentary film is a moving story of a mother's murder, a father's crime and four children's forgiveness. The event included a discussion with filmmaker Linda Booker and Judy Kerr, sister of a murder victim and a leader with Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. The event was a great success with over forty people attending. The movie was "powerful" and "riveting" and we plan to partner with more San Diego churches to sponsor showings in 2009. To see a trailer or learn more about the movie please go to: <http://www.lovelivedondeathrow.com>

Members are working actively in the San Diego Death Penalty Abolition Coalition. A current focus of the Coalition is educating the public on the staggering cost of the death penalty. The Coalition has developed a website which documents the economic and social costs of the death penalty and encourages San Diego residents to demand that the district attorney disclose the true costs to taxpayers and be accountable for tax dollars wasted on this immoral and barbaric practice. Please see the Coalition's website for more information: www.taxed2death.org/index.html

The CPF Steering Committee invites you to attend the first meeting of the newly-formed

Los Angeles Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

Wednesday, January 14, 2009, 6-8pm
 ACLU of Southern California
 1313 West Eighth St.
 Los Angeles, CA 90017

The Los Angeles Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty is a newly-formed coalition of organizations focused on reducing death sentencing in Los Angeles County and ending the death penalty in California. Los Angeles County currently sends more people to death row than any other county in California. Please join our fight to replace this failed policy and help build a community that is safer for all of us.

This meeting is open to the public. Pizza and refreshments will be provided.
 Please RSVP to Eric Greene at egreene@aclu-sc.org

Convened by Death Penalty Focus, the ACLU of Southern California, Progressive Jewish Alliance, California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, California People of Faith Working Against the Death Penalty, and Amnesty International USA.

Continue Your Support or JOIN NOW!

CPF appreciates any year-end contributions that you'd like to make. We could not continue our work against the death penalty without your help.

- I would like to renew or begin my membership with CPF. Attached is my email address and phone number.
- I would like to make a donation to CPF. My check for \$_____ is payable to: *California People of Faith.*

Please mail your response to: 2049 S. Santa Fe Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90021

Sincerely,

Emily Hammargren
 CPF Coordinator

