

Bios for MVFHR Board of Directors

Sister Helen Prejean

Sister Helen Prejean, one of the most tireless advocates for the abolition of the death penalty, is the author of *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*.

The book, an account of the time she spent with Patrick Sonnier, the convicted killer of two teenagers in Louisiana, became an international best seller, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and has been translated into 10 languages.

Dead Man Walking became a major motion picture in 1996 starring Susan Sarandon as Sister Helen and Sean Penn as the death row inmate. The movie received four Oscar nominations including Tim Robbins for Best Director, Sean Penn for Best Actor, Susan Sarandon for Best Actress and Bruce Springsteen's "Dead Man Walking" for Best Song. Susan Sarandon won the award for Best Actress. In 2000 an opera based on the book and with libretto written by Terrance McNally premiered in San Francisco.

Sister Helen has witnessed five executions in her native Louisiana and today educates the public about the death penalty by lecturing around the world, organizing and writing. She founded Survive, a victims' advocacy group in New Orleans, and counsels not only inmates on death row but the families of murder victims as well. She is currently finishing a book about two possibly innocent men on death row for Random House. Her new book, *The Death of Innocents* is dedicated to Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights.

Sister Helen joined the Sisters of St. Joseph of Medaille in 1957 and received a B.A. in English and Education from St. Mary's Dominican College, New Orleans, in 1962 and an M.A. in Religious Education from St. Paul's University in Ottawa, Canada in 1973.

Her many honors and awards for her abolition work include:

1986 - the Abolitionist Award from the Louisiana Capitol Defense Project.

1990 - the Sanctity of Life Award from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Mike McGough Award from the Convocation of Jail and Prison Ministers.

1992 - the National Abolitionist Award given by the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty; the Catholic Press Association Journalism Award, Best Short Story - "Beloved Sons" - St. Anthony Messenger.

1993 - the Christopher Award was given to *Dead Man Walking* for "artistic excellence affirming the highest value of the human spirit;" the Herbert and Sara Ehrmann Award from Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty; named One of the Most confident Woman in America by McCall Magazine.

1994 - the Champion of Liberty Award from the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (first time given to a non-lawyer); the Pax Christi USA Book Award (Honorable mention); the Melcher Book Award (Honorable mention) given by the Unitarian Universalist Association; Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice by Paulist Center, Boston, MA; Lifelines Book of the year from the Lifelines Association in the United Kingdom; the Abolitionist Award from the Death Penalty Focus, California; the "Esse non Videre" award ("To be and not to seem") from St. Joseph's College, New York; the National Civil Liberties Award from the American Civil Liberties Union, Georgia; the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights Award from Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights; Mirabella Magazine named her among "100 Fearless Women."

1995 - the New Orleans Business Women's Owners Association Achievers Award; Citizen of the Year Award from Louisiana Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers; the Wade Mackie Award Peacemaking Award from Bienville House in Baton Rouge Louisiana; an Honorary Doctorate of Law from the University of Glasgow, Scotland; the Justice Albert Tate, Jr. Award' from the National Association of Defense Lawyers in New Orleans; the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship; the Christopher Spirit Award, New York, N.Y.

1996 - an honorary degree from Regis College in Weston, MA; an honorary degree from Seton Hall University in New Jersey; an honorary degree from Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia; an honorary degree from St. John's University in Jamaica, New York; an honorary degree from George Town University Washington, D.C.; a Torchbearer Award from the Dominican College in New Orleans, LA; an award for the Alliance for Justice; the Laetare Medal from Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana; was asked to carry the torch for the Olympics in New Orleans on May 24,1996; the St Thomas More Award from St. Mary's School of Law in San Antonio, Texas; the Vision 2000 Courage Award from Catholic Charities U.S.A. and the 1996 Roger Baldwin Award from the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Massachusetts; received the Humanitas Prize as a consultant for the film Dead Man Walking; the Eyewitness Award of the Illinois Coalition Against the Death Penalty; the Adele Dewyer - St. Thomas of Villanova Peace Award by Villanova University Center for Peace and Justice; the Florida Lasker Civil Liberties Award by the New York Civil Liberties Union; the Pope Paul VI Teacher of Peace Award by Pax Christi USA.

1997 - an honorary doctorate from Mt. St. Vincent College in Riverdale, New York; the Carondelet Medal from Mt. ST. Mary College in Los Angeles, California and an honorary doctorate from Amherst College in Amherst, Massachusetts; the Louisiana Legends Award in Baton Rouge, Louisiana by the Louisiana Public Broadcasting.

1998 - the Ben Smith Award from the American Civil Liberties Union in New Orleans, La.; the Robert O. Cooper Fellowship in Peace and Justice Award and the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award from St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa; the Abolitionist of the Year Award from Juneau, Alaska; the award at the 5th annual celebration of Women Week from Y.M.C.A. in New Orleans; an honorary degree from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington; an honorary degree from Notre Dame College in Manchester, New Hampshire; an honorary degree from St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa and an honorary degree from St. Joseph College in West Hartford, CT; the Peacemakers Award from ROCA, Inc.; an honorary Faculty Award from New England College, NH.

1999 - an honorary degree from Briar Cliff College in Sioux City, Iowa; an honorary degree from Maryville University in St Louis, Missouri; an honorary degree from Barry University in Miami Shores, Florida; an honorary degree from Avila college in Kansas City; an honorary degree from Cabrini College in Radnor, Pennsylvania; an honorary degree from the University of San Francisco; an honorary degree from Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts; the Catholic Woman of Achievement Award from the College of St. Elizabeth in New Jersey; the 1999 U.S. Catholic Award from U.S. Catholic Magazine in Chicago; the Pope John XXII Award at Viterbo College in La Crosse, Wisconsin; the Alumna of the Year Award from St. Paul University in Ottawa, Canada; the Distinguished Service Award from the National Council of Catholic Women; the Centennial Catholic Woman of Achievement Award from Lourdes College in Sylvania, Ohio; the Centennial Catholic Woman of Achievement Award from St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin.

2000 - the Bishop Dingman Peace Award from the Catholic Peace Ministry in Des Moines, Iowa. She received the Bishop Carroll Dozier Peace and Justice Award from the Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tennessee; an honorary degree from the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario; an honorary degree DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois; an honorary degree from Northeastern University in Boston, MA; the Human Rights Award from The St. Anthony Messenger in Padua, Italy; an honorary degree from St. Thomas University in Fredericton New Brunswick, Canada.

2001 - the Harry F. Fagan Roundtable Award; an honorary degree from St. Mary of the Woods from Terra Haute, Indiana; an honorary degree from Wheeling Jesuit University in Wheeling, West Virginia; an honorary degree from the University of Scranton in Scranton, Pennsylvania; an honorary degree from Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas; an honorary degree from St. Rose College in Albany, New York.

2002 - the Ut Diligatis Invicem Award from Gannon University, Erie, PA; an honorary degree from Ball State University, Muncie, ID; an honorary degree from Marygrove College, Detroit, MI.; an honorary degree from Governors State University, University Park, IL; an honorary degree from University of Dayton, Dayton, OH; an honorary degree from National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland; Caritas Award from Catholic Charities in Paterson, New Jersey; the Dignitas Humana Award from St. John's School of Theology and Seminary, Collegeville, MN.

2003 - Franciscan International Award from Franciscan Retreats, Prior Lake, MN; an honorary degree from Spring Hill College, Mobile, AL; an honorary degree from Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL.