The Quality of Mercy Project

March–May 2016

A Community Conversation on Social Justice and Compassion
What is the Quality of Mercy Project?

Piven Theatre Workshop’s production of Dead Man Walking is the centerpiece of the Quality of Mercy Project, a three-month public programming initiative which invites our community to discuss the complex issues arising from the themes of the play. These include, but certainly are not limited to: forgiveness, compassion, the death penalty, mass incarceration, racial inequity, and social justice.

The Quality of Mercy Project is a collaborative effort of six key community partners:

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Thank you to Tim Robbins for bestowing on us his faith and the rights to his play Dead Man Walking. Thank you to Sister Helen Prejean for her strength and commitment, and for joining us on opening weekend.

Special thanks from Piven to the brave ones who first saw the potential and gave of their time to this collaboration: Juliet Bond, Vanessa Borjon, Pamela Cytrynbaum, Paula Danoff, Norah Diedrich, Patrick Keenan-Devlin, Betsy Lehman-Levisay, Nate Olison, Nicole Parker, Carolyne Rex, Joi Russell, Linda Stevenson, Karen Thompson and the smart folks at the Evanston Community Foundation.

And thanks to those who joined this project later without hesitation: Jeff and Nina at Bookends & Beginnings, Lesley Williams at the Evanston Public Library, Gilo Kwesi Logan, Brant Rosen, and Tim Rhoze from Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre.

And thanks to all those who joined a panel, raised a question, shared work, and responded to the themes that resonate deeply in our community and beyond.

This Project is Supported in Part By:

$1–4,999
Chicago Innocence Center

$5,000–9,999
Brenda Robinson
Evanston Community Foundation

$10,000–19,000
Anonymous
Paul M. Angell Foundation

Together, our hope is to continue the national conversation on a local level.
About Sister Helen Prejean

Sister Helen Prejean has been instrumental in sparking national dialogue on the death penalty and helping to shape the Catholic Church’s newly vigorous opposition to state executions. She travels around the world giving talks about her ministry. She considers herself a southern storyteller.

Sister Helen is a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph. She spent her first years with the Sisters teaching religion to junior high school students. Realizing that being on the side of poor people is an essential part of the Gospel she moved into the St. Thomas Housing Project in New Orleans and began working at Hope House from 1981–1984.

During this time, she was asked to correspond with a death row inmate Patrick Sonnier at Angola. She agreed and became his spiritual adviser. After witnessing his execution, she wrote a book about the experience. The result was Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States. It became a movie, an opera and a play for high schools and colleges.

Since 1984, Sister Helen has divided her time between educating citizens about the death penalty and counseling individual death row prisoners. She has accompanied six men to their deaths. In doing so, she began to suspect that some of those executed were not guilty. This realization inspired her second book, The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions, which was released by Random House in December of 2004.

Sr. Helen is presently at work on another book—RIVER OF FIRE: MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.

Sister Helen Prejean will be joining us April 15-17 for the Quality of Mercy Project and the opening of Dead Man Walking.

DEAD MAN WALKING
A Play by Tim Robbins
Directed by Mikalina Rabinsky
April 16-May 15, 2016

Based on Sister Helen Prejean’s national bestseller, Dead Man Walking tells the story of Sister Prejean’s journey through our system of capital punishment. Through the lens of her role as spiritual advisor to a death row inmate, the play Dead Man Walking meditates on the deeper issues of justice and mercy and the implication of our involvement in the human consequences of our justice system: the condemned, the bereaved, the executed, the executioner, the individual, and our community.

At Piven Theatre Workshop, 927 Noyes St, Evanston. 847 866 8409. Tickets at piventheatre.org
Community Programming

The following community programs incorporate months of discussion and meditation on the themes and ideas presented by Dead Man Walking and the Quality of Mercy Project. We encourage you to join the discussion in person at these free events and online using #qualityofmercyproject.

SCREENINGS AND PERFORMANCES

A Piven Pop-up Show!
Piven Theatre Workshop’s legendary youth performers bring their show on the road! Join us at Evanston Art Center’s beautiful new building for a pop-up storytelling show. Our actors will present stories of individuals who come to see the ramifications of bullying and injustice.

Tuesday
April 3, 2:30pm
Evanston Art Center
1717 Central St, Evanston

Film Screening: THE INNOCENT
by Lauri Feldman Fisher
Join us for a screening and discussion of THE INNOCENT, a documentary about men and women wrongly sentenced to death who lived to tell about it. The director, subjects of the film, and members of the justice community will be present for a discussion immediately after the screening. THE INNOCENT premiered at the Chicago International Documentary Film Festival and was chosen as an audience favorite. THE INNOCENT is produced by Brainchild Productions. Running time 90 minutes.

Tuesday, April 19, 7:00pm
Evanston Public Library
1703 Orrington Ave, Evanston

A First Look Reading of #LOVESTORIES:
INSPIRED BY BLACK LIVES MATTER, with Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre

#LOVESTORIES: INSPIRED BY BLACK LIVES MATTER by Gloria Bond-Clunie, Marsha Estell, and Tania Richard is a play in three parts exploring the breadth of love in a world of deadly conflict. Each playwright takes her turn sharing her gift of writing to tell a story of LOVE. This is a world premiere play commissioned by Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre. Join us for a special sneak peek! About the Playwrights: Gloria Bond-Clunie is the founder of Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre and an internationally recognized playwright. Marsha Estell is an accomplished actor and playwright; FJT produced her hit play Heat and her critically acclaimed one-woman play Big Butt Girls and Other Fantasies/The Remix. Tania Richard’s brilliant one-woman play Truth Be Told was commissioned and produced by FJT; she too is an accomplished actor and playwright.

Sunday, May 8, 3:00pm
Evanston Public Library, 1703 Orrington Ave, Evanston

PANELS & DISCUSSIONS

Life and Death in the Criminal Justice System
Illinois is at the epicenter of both profound corruption and reform in criminal justice. We lead the nation in false confessions, yet our state made international news by ending the death penalty. What is it like to be on the front lines of defending clients in death penalty cases? What happens to innocent people on Death Row? Hear the firsthand accounts from an attorney and an investigative journalist: Tom Verdun was a 15-year member of the Murder Task Force who defended numerous clients facing the death penalty and now serves as Senior Staff Attorney of the James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy. Pamela Cytrynbaum is an investigative reporter who has covered death penalty cases around the country and is now the Executive Director of the Chicago Innocence Center.

Thursday, March 24, 7:00-8:30pm
Bookends and Beginnings
1712 Sherman Ave, Evanston
Compassion in the Court? Can Mercy Meet Justice?
The American criminal justice system is a system of retribution, vengeance, and punishment. What does that mean for the guilty, the innocent, and the victims left behind? And what of mercy, of forgiveness, of rehabilitation and redemption? Religious traditions and global models of restorative justice offer alternative paths. Join us as we explore the possibilities of healing and transformation by expanding the intersection of mercy and justice. We bring you a diverse panel of experts working for justice from a wide range of theologies and perspectives. Moderated by Pamela Cytrynbaum, Director of the Chicago Innocence Center, and featuring panelists Jeanne Bishop, murder-victim’s sister, veteran defense attorney and author of Change of Heart; Gilo Kwesi Logan, Evanston-based Diversity Consultant, Educator, Writer & Speaker; Brant Rosen, Regional Director of American Friends Service Committee and Rabbi from Tzedek Chicago; and Rev. Taurean Webb, Assistant Pastor at the Second Baptist Church of Evanston, will discuss their complicated work finding where mercy meets justice.

Wednesday, April 20, 6:30-8:30pm
Rotary International Auditorium, 1560 Sherman Ave., Third Floor, Evanston

The Black Male Experience in Evanston
What is it like to be a Black male in Evanston? Join us in this panel discussion as we explore the history of the Black male in Evanston, their current experience, and challenges and opportunities they face in Evanston in the future. Come hear personal testimonies as well as what the latest research says regarding race relations among Evanston families, in our institutions, and across our communities. Share in exceptional stories of exceptional men whose experiences shed light and questions on race relations today. Panelists include Lionel Jean-Baptiste, Circuit Court Judge of Cook County; Bennett Johnson, President, Path Press, Inc.; Nathan Norman, youth and young adult outreach worker, City of Evanston; Dino Robinson, Founder of Shorefront and the Shorefront Legacy Center and Dereck Woods, 28-year volunteer coach of F.A.A.M. (Fellowship of Afro-American Men), and co-founder, Black Men Against Violence.

Saturday, April 23, 4:00-6:00pm
Evanston Public Library, 1703 Orrington Ave., Evanston

Curt’s Café Community Conversation: Youth, Stereotyping, and Criminalization: How Our Community is Affected
Join us for a moderated panel conversation with young men from Curt’s Café North. We will discuss the ways criminalization occurs in our community, its lasting effects, and alternatives to our current model for ensuring safety. Conversation will be centered on the stories of young people and how their lives have been impacted by the criminal justice system.

Monday, April 25, 6:00pm
Curt’s Café North, 2922 Central St., Evanston

READING AND BOOK SIGNING
Reading and Book Signing with Sister Helen Prejean
Join us for a reading and discussion with the woman whose story has inspired millions. Sister Helen Prejean has been instrumental in sparking national dialogue on the death penalty and helping to shape the Catholic Church’s vigorous opposition to state executions. Since 1984, Sister Helen has divided her time between educating citizens about the death penalty and counseling individual death row prisoners.

Saturday, April 16, 1:00-2:30pm
Bookends & Beginnings, 1712 Sherman Ave., Evanston
Each week during the run of Dead Man Walking, Piven Theatre Workshop will highlight the work of one of its featured partners in our community. Members of the featured organization will participate in talk-backs after special performances and a portion of ticket sales for that performance will go to support our partners’ programs. Audience members will have a chance to learn more about what these venerable institutions are doing to effect change within our communities, and to enhance our social and cultural lives.

April 14–17

James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy

The James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy provides low-income Evanston youth and their families with integrated legal and social work services to improve their quality of life at home, at school, and within the community. For 35 years, the Moran Center has been disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline with a lifeline of innovative, preventative and restorative programs and services designed to help kids succeed in school and stay out of jail.

Join us Sunday, April 17 after the performance of Dead Man Walking at Piven, for a talk back with Tom Verdun, currently Senior Attorney of the Moran Center, who was a member of the Murder Task Force in Illinois and defended numerous clients on capital cases. The special ticket price for this performance is $35, with $5 from each ticket going to support the Moran Center’s programming.

moran-center.org

April 21–24

Evanston Art Center

The Evanston Art Center is dedicated to fostering the appreciation and expression of the arts among diverse audiences by offering extensive and innovative instruction in broad areas of artistic endeavor through classes, exhibitions, interactive arts activities, and community outreach.

Join us Saturday, April 23 after the performance of Dead Man Walking for a talk back with a local artist to discuss their work and how art can highlight and address areas of social justice in our community. The special ticket price for this performance is $35, with $5 from each ticket going to support the Evanston Art Center’s programming.

evanstonartcenter.org

April 28–May 1

Literature for All of Us

Literature for All of Us brings the rewards of reading and writing through book group discussions to teen parents and other young people in underserved neighborhoods. LFAOU builds communities of readers, poets, and critical thinkers. They develop family literacy by providing children’s literature and child development resources to teen parents. Literature for All of Us opens worlds by opening books.

Join us on Saturday, April 30 after the performance of Dead Man Walking. Literature for All of Us (LFAOU) staff members will perform two poems from the curricula they created and implemented with over 200 participants across Chicago and Evanston. Since January 2016, youth from LFAOU book groups at the Chicago Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, Curt’s Café North and South in Evanston, The Crib (a homeless shelter for LGBTQ youth), and seven alternative high schools in Chicago sought to answer the following questions through their writing and poetry: Is incarceration a viable solution to mass issues of violence? Are we unjustly incarcerating a larger percentage of people of color? Are practices of restorative justice more effective in rehabilitating offenders? If a person commits an atrocity, are they now worthless? Their poetry and art have been compiled in a journal, along with work of professional writers, which is available for sale throughout the production run of Dead Man Walking, and is available at Bookends & Beginnings. The special ticket price for this performance is $35, with $5 from each ticket going to support LFAOU’s programming.

literatureforallofus.org
Evanston Township High School

Evanston Township High School (ETHS) is a premier public high school, serving more than 3,300 students and their families in Evanston and a portion of Skokie. Ranked in the top 2% of high schools in the nation, ETHS is committed to inspiring a lifelong passion for learning through a lens of equity and excellence. ETHS dedicates itself to educating all students to their fullest potential and empowering them to build a vision of what it takes to be successful today, and in the future.

Join us on Saturday, May 7 after the performance of Dead Man Walking for a special talk back with several ETHS students who participated in a unique partnership between the high school, Piven Theatre, and community organizations. Throughout the rehearsal process, students in ETHS’ History and Social Science classes engaged in extensive research and inquiry about themes present in Dead Man Walking, in order to inform and enhance the production design elements of the show. ETHS is proud to offer student voice and perspective to the Quality of Mercy project—a number of student leaders will talk about what it was like to research Louisiana prisons, the history of the death penalty in America, and more. The special ticket price for this performance is $35, with $5 from each ticket going to support ETHS programming.

eths.k12.il.us

May

5–8

Evanston Township High School

Chicago Innocence Center

We at Piven are particularly proud of CIC’s Executive Director, Pamela Cytrynbaum, an alumna of Piven Theatre Workshop. Founded in 2011, the Chicago Innocence Center is a nonprofit organization devoted to investigative reporting of wrongful convictions. CIC engages college students, community residents, private investigators and journalists in reporting, exposing and remedying mistakes by the criminal justice system.

Join us on Saturday, May 14 after the performance of Dead Man Walking for a special talk back with Pamela Cytrynbaum and exonerees who have worked with the Chicago Innocence Center to educate the public on wrongful incarceration and the effect on our community. The special ticket price for this performance is $35, with $5 from each ticket going to support Chicago Innocence Center.

chicagoinnocencecenter.org

Recommended Reading:

a book list brought to you by

BOOKENDS & BEGINNINGS

Books for Adults:

Bishop, Jeanne: Change of Heart: Justice, Mercy, and Making Peace with My Sister’s Killer. 2015.
Coates, Ta-Nehisi: Between the World and Me. 2015.

Books for Youths and Young Adults:


All titles will be on sale throughout the production at Bookends & Beginnings at 1712 Sherman Ave., Evanston, or online at bookendsandbeginnings.com
Behind the Scenes

The programming partnership of these six organizations continues beyond the public eye. We are finding new ways to collaborate and to bring communities together in exciting ways. Here are just a few of the happenings going on behind the scenes!

Evanston Township High School:

Students and staff at ETHS are participating with this project in a multitude of ways:

• Sister Helen Prejean will meet with students at ETHS to talk about her work with advocacy, the death penalty, and victims’ support.
• A student and staff member are cast members in the production.
• An ETHS Freshman will work side-by-side with Piven’s costume designer to learn the development and design of creating characters’ looks throughout the production of *Dead Man Walking*.
• A Student Workshop on Activism

  Although not open to the wider public, the effort to include our community youth in these discussions has not been overlooked. Proudly, the Chicago Innocence Center, ETHS, the Moran Center, Piven Theatre Workshop, Literature for All of Us, #dearevanston, and Gilo Kwesi Logan are working together to develop a morning activism boot camp to make sure our youth are essential voices heard in our wider community.

• New Curriculum Development

  Over the summer of 2015, teachers in the History, Social Science, English, and Government departments worked, with the support of Piven Theatre Workshop’s grant from the Evanston Community Foundation, to develop new curriculum focused on the themes of *Dead Man Walking*. In the 2015-2016 school year, students will read new texts, develop and write poetry, debate the death penalty, and participate in efforts to enhance the production at Piven.

Trainings with Literature for All of Us and The James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy

The Moran Center will use the lead up to the opening of *Dead Man Walking* as an opportunity to “train the trainers.” Literature for All of Us Book Group Leaders will learn about youth’s rights when interacting with law enforcement as well as within the public school setting.

Special Events

The James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy’s Annual Benefit

**Voices For Mercy: An Evening Honoring and Celebrating the Quality of Mercy**

Join us for drinks, dinner and dancing! Featuring Sister Helen Prejean, winner of the 2016 “James B. Moran Justice from the Lighthouse Legacy Award,” and entertainment that will make for a memorable evening.

**Friday, April 15, 7:00–10:00pm, VIP tickets will include a reception with Sister Prejean from 6:00–7:00pm**

27 LIVE!, 1012 Church Street

Tickets start at $100 and can be purchased at moran-center.org

Piven Theatre Workshop Opening Night Benefit with Sister Helen Prejean

Join us for a rare opening night event to benefit Piven Theatre Workshop. Enjoy an exclusive dinner with Sister Helen Prejean and tickets to the opening night of *Dead Man Walking* at Piven Theatre Workshop. The performance will be followed by a talkback and reception with Sister Helen, Pamela Cytrynbaum from the Chicago Innocence Center, and the cast.

**Saturday, April 16. Call Piven at 847-866-8049 for more information on this exciting event.**

Action Council Fundraiser at Lagunitas Brewery – Literature for All of Us

The Action Council, the young adult board of Literature for All of Us, is hosting an event at Lagunitas Brewery in Pilsen to support the transformative work of our book groups across the Chicagoland area. Lagunitas beers are available for purchase for $5.

**Monday, April 25, 5:30–8:30pm**

Lagunitas Brewery, 1843 S Washtenaw Ave., Chicago, IL 60608

Contact Literature for All of Us at 847-869-7323 for more information

Honor Thy Mother—Literature for All of Us

Join us on May 7, when more than 200 literacy-lovers will gather at the Bryn Mawr Country Club in Lincolnwood, IL for our 16th annual event celebrating the women in our lives. We are honored to have as our keynote speaker Gail Tsukiyama, the award-winning author of *The Samurai’s Garden* and *Hundred Flowers*.

**Saturday, May 7, 11:00am**

Bryn Mawr Country Club, 6600 N Crawford Ave, Lincolnwood, IL 60712

Contact Literature for All of Us at 847-869-7323 for more information