



- GO! calendar, movies, see: montereyherald.com/gomagazine
- For the latest news from across the state, see: montereyherald.com/state
- Contact information for your elected officials, see: montereyherald.com/officials

Monterey County

LOCAL STATE

www.montereyherald.com

Broken penalty system

PREJEAN SPEAKS ABOUT EXECUTIONS

By JANE PALMER
Herald Staff Writer

After Sister Helen Prejean watched the execution of Patrick Sonnier by lethal injection, she went outside and was sick.

"I never watched a human being be executed before," Prejean said. "But seeing him die did set me on my path."

Horrified by her experience and stunned by her

If you go

- **What:** Sister Helen Prejean speaks about her book "Dead Man Walking"
- **When:** Friday, 7 p.m.
- **Where:** San Carlos Cathedral Parish Hall in Monterey
- **Admission:** Free
- **Information:** www.sancarloscathedral.net/sisterhelen

perceived injustices in the judicial system, Prejean's mission became crystallized: to educate people about the death penalty.

"It is such a broken system," Prejean said. "That is what people have to see."

Ten years after Sonnier's

execution, Prejean turned her experiences into the best-seller "Dead Man Walking." In 1996, the film based on the book received four Oscar nominations.

Prejean will share the story of how she became involved in the death

penalty ministry at the San Carlos Cathedral Parish Hall in Monterey on Friday.

An execution "is a cloistered event, a secret ritual that people are detached from," Prejean said. "My job is to bring them close to what happens — to educate them."

The response of previous audiences has been heartening, said Prejean.

"It's not that people are deeply entrenched in the death penalty," she said. "It is that they have never thought about it."

Please see **Prejean** page A3

Prejean

From page A2

Not only is the system racially and economically biased, but innocent people are executed, Prejean said. In 2004, Prejean's second book was published, "The Death of Innocents: an Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions."

In the U.S., 139 wrongly convicted people were executed, Prejean said. For the

wrongly convicted, there is no recourse.

"You can't ever prosecute the prosecutors," she said.

"The death penalty in no way respects human dignity," said Deacon Andres Laraza of San Carlos Cathedral Parish and Salt & Light Social Justice Ministry. Laraza, Fred Luiz and Carol Greenwald organized Friday's event to raise awareness of the death penalty.

Luiz hopes the talk will encourage people to think beyond their immediate

emotions, such as anger and revenge, in their daily lives.

"We know that people in this area are increasingly worried and frustrated about the violence, especially the violence that is going on right now in Salinas," Greenwald said. "We are hoping to promote a new attitude about how to address violence."

But organizers hope to bring to attention the financial burden of the death penalty in California. The system costs California approximately \$137 million per year,

according to the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice.

"And there are no statistics that show that the death penalty has deterred crime," Luiz said.

Prejean agrees. In her talk, she hopes to highlight that more moral and less expensive alternatives exist — namely incarceration.

"There are ways to keep society safe but not repeat the violence," she said.

LOCAL/STATE