

## Sister Diane Therese Pinchot shares thoughts while serving 60-day sentence at Alderson Federal Prison



*Sister Diane Therese Pinchot reported to Alderson Federal Prison in West Virginia on March 11 to begin her 60-day sentence for trespassing onto the grounds of Fort Benning in Georgia in protest of the U.S. Army School of the Americas. The following is the most recent reflection Sister Diane has written since her arrival.*

### Reflection II, Holy Week

Often while I'm walking at night, or standing in the "pill line" or in the dining room waiting line, I hear language or see behavior from which I have been sheltered as an Ursuline Sister or as a tenured professor at the college. I am grateful to be anonymous and to be treated like everyone else, as an inmate, a prisoner at Alderson.

Early this month I received a beautiful letter from Bob Call, a former School of the Americas Prisoner of Conscience,

convicted of the same crime some years back. I met Bob at the training workshops before the trial in January. His words have stayed with me and especially now during Holy Week. I keep recalling them as I walk alone after work on the compound grounds, often trying to find a quiet place to pray.

When Bob was a prisoner he prayed to the Creator Spirit to give him shelter. Instead, he sensed the Spirit saying to him: "I've given you shelter for years. Now I want to give you something better. I've arranged it so you can get to know some people who are very important to me but whom the world has kept you from meeting. I'm offering you a chance to share in my knowledge and compassion."

Coming to prison has offered me the same opportunity as Bob -- to get a glimpse of a life I would never have chosen to see. I often feel much sadness around me and feel that I have to be the compassionate one in the middle of all this, just as Bob thought the Spirit was asking of him. But the ones who have been called "criminal" or "prisoner" have shown *me* compassion, offering me ways to stay alive and have hope in the middle of the darkness. I can't help but think differently now of the image of Jesus and the criminal who died on the cross next to him that same day -- another compassionate heart.

### Reflection I, Lent

The lesson all around me this Lent here at Alderson is about the grain of wheat: *Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground it will not bear fruit.* The uncertainty, the chaos, the

feeling of letting go of everything in my life has made me reach deep down into that scripture passage and gives me a new understanding of its meaning this Lent. The understanding brings feelings of stillness within, knowing that this is where I'm supposed to be right now. It's a blessing to be here. I know that seems so strange. But I know this whole journey is not something I've sought, but rather something to which I have said 'yes.'

The kindness and warmth of many of the women inmates welcoming me here remind me of that stillness within. And I am surprised by the joy that I experience here in the middle of so many paradoxes. The beauty of the mountains surrounds me, but yet I often feel like I'm in the valley of tears. I'm stripped of everything, but I feel a freedom that I've never known before. I have no control over anything, but I know who I am and why I needed to take this non-violent action. The images of truth stay with me and help me know that torture and killing must stop. There is not a single moment of silence around me and the lights are always on, but there continues to be peace in my heart and in my soul.

And so as Holy Week approaches, there is a real Knowing that Divine Love is within, giving me a new understanding of Life and what's really important. That grain is bearing fruit. And I'm happy for this blessing and grateful for the many messages of support I have received.