

# Sister Beverly Ann witnesses trials of justice

*Shares reflection on visit to Sister Diane at Alderson Federal Prison*

As some of you may know, Sister Diane Pinchot, a friend and Ursuline Sister in my community, is serving time at Alderson Federal Prison Camp in West Virginia until May 8. Diane's offense (a misdemeanor) was trespassing onto Fort Benning in Georgia where the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) is located. School of the Americas is housed. The school was formerly known as the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA).

Graduates of the SOA killed Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, along with lay missionary Jean Donovan, in El Salvador in 1980. Sister Diane's trespass was part of a non-violent protest that takes place annually at Fort Benning with more than 20,000 people (visit soaw.org and ursulinesisters.org for more information).

On Good Friday I found myself in the company of three Ursuline sisters driving through the rolling hills of Ohio and Appalachia to visit Diane at Alderson Federal Prison camp which houses 1,000 women.

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***Thank you ... for sharing Diane's story and really the story of your community's witness for justice and peace. On our trip to Costa Rica we heard personal stories of the oppression perpetrated by the military against the people of Central America and thank God some of us are called to bear witness to our complicity in this story through the vigil/protest that is held each year at Ft. Benning, Georgia. As we relearned the story of El Salvador we of course always talk about Archbishop Romero and the Jesuits but I always remember Dorothy, Maura, Jean & Ita and all the unnamed martyrs whose lives on this earth were taken away for telling the truth and preaching the gospel.***

***Deaconess Deborah Nebel***

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months at the cost of \$500-600.

His daughter's story is typical of the majority of women in U.S. prisons who are serving time for non-violent crimes of petty theft, drugs, and prostitution. She is serving three years because of a "conspiracy" charge with her boyfriend who is serving 27 years for a drug crime. Women are prosecuted for conspiracy, i.e., having knowledge of the crime, and must prove that they did *not* have knowledge. This is difficult to do even in the best of circumstances when the woman can afford a private lawyer. In addition, women are less likely to provide the prosecutor with insider

***Ursuline Sister Beverly Anne LoGrasso, a personal friend to Sister Diane Pinchot, ministers at Women's Re-Entry Network (WREN). WREN provides resources to women to help them re-enter society upon release from prison. Often the start these women get after their release is a predictor of how successfully they will lead their lives in the future.***



The beauty of the hills contrasted with the poverty in the area; job choices seem to be working at Alderson or a nearby coal mine and living in trailers. A five or six car coal train loops around the visiting building. Any woman who attempts to escape on the train faces five more years on her sentence.

On Holy Saturday morning we waited in an outdoor line for about an hour for our paper work to clear. The gentleman in front of us was a grandfather from Chicago, with his wife and three grandchildren, ages 10 and younger, who had driven 12 hours to visit his daughter. He makes this trip once every two

information for a plea bargain, thus their sentences are often not shortened (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2006). Her story also reflects the 75 percent of women in prison who are mothers with children serving their sentences along with them; an estimated 721,500 State and Federal prisoners are parents to 1,498,800 children under age 18. Twenty-two percent of all minor children with a parent in prison were under 5 years old (Bureau of Justice Statistics). These children, of course, have a significantly increased risk factor for incarceration.

The visiting room we sat in recalled my novitiate visiting Sundays when I was allowed to see my family: families sitting in circles with children running around. In addition to the reassurance I felt when seeing Diane, the image that stays with me is that of the long procession of women pouring out of the building and walking down the hill to eat lunch. It rained on Holy Saturday and women were carrying umbrellas and wearing rain ponchos. Some of the women were walking with canes. The distance to eat a meal is approximately half a mile.

Diane is thinner and sleep deprived. She is on a top bunk which is very close to the ceiling light which is never turned off. These few “creature comforts” and losing her freedom aside, she said she has never felt freer and the kindness of the women inmates is getting her through it all.