

Daniel Gwynn Blog Update
10/1/15

Dear Pope Francis

September 14, 2015

Greetings in the name of our Heavenly Father. I pray that this letter finds you in god health--mind, body & spirit. i hope that your journey hasn't been too taxing, as I know from experience how draining it can be to see so many human beings in various degrees of senseless distress and suffering. I hope that your journey continues to inspire the people to wake up and make the changes we need to become a better society. I am very grateful for your time and this opportunity to congratulate you on your well deserved elevation from which to serve God better. I am also very grateful to be able to introduce myself while you are being gifted with a painting I created, and to be able to share my story.

My name is Daniel Gwynn, a wrongfully convicted 45 year old man trapped on Pennsylvania's (PA) death row. For 20 years, I've suffered the oppressive indignities of long-term solitary confinement for something I didn't do. I was literally snatched off of the streets of Philadelphia and woven into the polluted fabric of this case. There was, and is, no evidence I committed this Arson/Murder, yet I was still coerced into falsely confessing, due to my weakened state of mind (I was a crack cocains addict for 10 years). How I became a suspect is still a mystery, but we now know that the trial prosecutor lied about it in open court, and that he hid evidence that was favorable to me. I didn't receive a fair trial.

During my incarceration, I had turned my life around in spite of the lack of encouragement by the PA Department of Corrections (PA DOC). I got my GED, educated myself on the law, got closer to God, and learned to paint. I contribute my time & talents to charities when I can (scholarships for victims' families; crime prevention programs for at risk youths; criminal justice reform; and bring awareness to the dysfunctional criminal justice system). Most of my time is spent painting for my survival--financially & mentally. I come from a poor family with no means of support, except what I earn from my prison job. I've earned myself a position as a yard worker, passing out games to death row prisoners caged up in rows of kennels. I'm being warehoused with 127± other death row prisoners in a long-term solitary confinement unit. I'm locked in a 8x12' cell no bigger than an average size bathroom. We get 2 hrs. of yard Mon-Fri.; 2 hrs. of law library; a shower; and a visit (if someone braves the 6 hr. trip). Every time I exit my cell I am stripped searched, even though I'm under armed escort, in restraints, and being led to another cage with no human contact, other than my library partner in the next cage.

Witnessing the deterioration of these men everyday has affected me profoundly, and I'm forever scarred. Everyday I am assaulted by the sights, sounds & pungent odors of human decay. I've stared into the eyes of a man I once knew to be sharp, intelligent & thoughtful, who now stood before me a tormented shell of a man I knew. All day & night, I would hear his anguished cries as he relived the nightmare of a beating he sustained so long ago by prison guards. I had to turn my head & scurry off in fear of being seen crying for this man (Herbert Watson) by other prisoners. I had thought to myself, "There but for the grace of God go I." I too suffer from my long-term confinement on the row: memory loss; depression; sleep deprivation; anxiety; chronic arthritis; obesity; loneliness and other related symptoms. I had thought about suicide once, but as you can see I changed my mind. A few others went through it though. I feared telling anyone because I didn't want to be made fun of by the guards or other prisoners, or put on mind numbing drugs and left to deteriorate like Mr. Watson. What changed my mind was the people that wrote to me telling me how much they appreciated my artworks. Out of the blue as if sent by God. It's difficult sitting in this oppressive environment knowing that I didn't do what they have convicted me of. I wish I could convey to you all of

Daniel Gwynn

the injustices I've witnessed and experienced since being here. It breaks my heart as I look into the faces of death row (prisoners & guards alike), and see how it's affecting them. I wonder how a society that professes to be a civilized nation and the world's moral compass create such a travesty of injustice: Death Row/Capital Punishment.

Numerous studies has been conducted and concluded that every aspect of capital punishment constitutes a violation of our Constitution. Our lock-down confinement has never been authorized by the PA. Legislature, yet we are automatically placed in this environment simply because of our sentence. The PA DOC took it upon themselves to enact a policy & practice of confining death row prisoners to solitary confinement, which is illegal according to PA Law. Yet this government turns a blind eye to this. They also know from multiple studies that capital case prisoners are under constant cruel and unusual punishment due to the affects of long-term solitary confinement. I've witnessed the degradation & deterioration (mentally & physically) of the strongest & weakest of men alike. This type of confinement deprives death row prisoners of basic rights and amenities afforded the prison population in general, simply for being sentenced to be executed. The prison population prisoners who violate the facility's rules are placed under death row type confinement as punishment for 30-90 days, yet death row prisoners are subjected to this confinement for decades! The PA Supreme Court has recognized that death row prisoners' confinement constitutes an atypical and significant hardship as in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison population life, yet they fail to instruct the PA DOC to correct this.

Also, in PA only 3 prisoners were executed because they volunteered, 6 were exonerated, and 40 others that I know of have died due to some medical condition, disease and inadequate medical care. Not to mention those who are mentally dead due to the oppressive conditions of confinement and lack of psychiatric help. Did you know that constant cell illumination & strip searches are used at Gitmo as forms of torture & humiliation? Well that's what I've been subjected to for years.

What's worse is that this system of capital punishment is so error prone that over 154 innocent men were almost executed, and some like myself may still be, because there's no DNA evidence to clear us like the 154 exonerees. Hundreds of cases in PA has been overturned due to government misconduct and ineffective assistance of counsel. In particular, trial prosecutors has withheld favorable evidence from the defense. In my case, we've discovered hundreds of documents in the possession of the District Attorney's office that was hidden from us for 20 years. Outrageous!!! Don't get me started on the botched executions. Capital punishment supporters are so blood thirsty and bent on revenge that they've lost sight of their humanity. When a man was being put to death, something went wrong and the man started screaming in agony as the lethal cocktail coursed through his body like molten lava, they were found cheering. In another case, a man's blood vessel burst due to an inexperienced technician; with the same technician & equipment, the DOC prepped to execute the next man scheduled to die that day just hours later.

In my opinion, the death penalty should be abolished because we have a dysfunctional government at the helm, and taking another human beings life is a sin no matter the justification. Instead of taking lives, we should be educating our children. I'll close here and thank you for your time & patience. Please pray for us. God bless.

Daniel Gwynn

GERMANTOWN

'ART FOR JUSTICE'

St. Vincent's Catholic Church hosts exhibit of artwork created by prison inmates

By Arlene Edmonds
21st Century Media News Service

GERMANTOWN » Being an inmate and honing professional caliber artistry may seem like a misnomer.

Yet even some of those on death row in Pennsylvania prisons have gifts as master artists.

With the upcoming visit of Pope Francis to Philadelphia, some are even inspired to capture the pontiff, who is known to speak out against mass incarceration and for helping ex-offenders get reintegrated into society.

This was evident at the "Art for Justice" opening reception at the St. Vin-

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SUBMITTED PHOTOS

This painting by artist Charles Zafir Lawson is one of the pieces on display in the 'Art for Justice' exhibit at St. Vincent's Catholic Church in Germantown.



Attendees explore the 'Art for Justice' exhibit at St. Vincent's Catholic Church in Germantown during the opening reception Aug. 28.

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cent's Catholic Church, 109 E. Price St. in Germantown, Friday, Aug. 28, at 7 p.m. recently. This is an exhibit of religious art by prisoners. Among the artwork was "Man for the People" by Daniel Gwynn and "Light of Hope" by Charles Zafir Lawson. Other artists in the series include Eddie Ramirez, Luis Gonzalez, George Lopez and Daniel Mastrigt.

Those who attended the opening reception marveled at the paintings of Pope Francis, another drawing of an African Jesus Christ or conversion moments for those in the criminal justice and correction systems.

Andrew Puntel and his wife, Gina Pantele, along with their children, 8-year-old Gabriela and 6-year-old Mateo, were among those in attendance. The family are parishioners at St. Vincent's. They said that it was a welcome addition to the historic church and they hope it would inspire many to visit their house of worship during September.

"I was just deeply moved," Gina Pantele said. "I think that all the art was directly related to our faith. I am Catholic and we believe in justice."

Puntel readily admitted that he was surprised by the quality of the art since most of the prisoners were not trained artists.

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"It just showed the depth of thought and expressiveness of the prisoners. To realize that they did this in a secluded environment — I understand some were in solitary confinement and to think we had the unique opportunity to see this. It is better than some art galleries," he said.

In her remarks, Ann Marces Kirk explained that some of the artists on display have lifetime sentences and will never be released. She said that they found the painting "Black Jesus" rolled up in the bottom of a box. She pointed to the quality and vividness of the art to show the potential of those who are behind bars.

"This art tells a story," Kirk said. "We are connecting with all this talent. It's great that so many have come out tonight to take the time to look at this."

Kirk explained that the initiative showcases prisoner artwork at various venues, including houses

of worship. "Art for Justice" was founded in 1997 and have displayed the artwork in locations like the Ethical Humanist Society and some of the area's colleges and universities.

Laura Ford was quick to point to the "Behind the Mark" painting. She coordinates the prison ministry for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and has been a member of St. Vincent's for 27 years. She said the art initiative actually is therapeutic for the prisoners.

"We see work here from those who may enter the re-entry program. The art shows that those who are behind bars and come out have talent. Some are from Graterford lifers, but others will be out on parole.

"I am just thrilled that St. Vincent's has this collection here are this time. It is important because it connects with Pope Francis' concern for those who are incarcerated and re-entry. Pope Francis has made

this one of the issues that he addresses. We even have art here that celebrates the people. It will be here through the entire month. So, we hope that those who come to the city to see the pope will come by here and see this art," Ford said.

Art for Justice board member Pam Superville agreed. She said that the timing of having the collection at St. Vincent's was providential. She thanked the pastor, the Rev. Sy Peterka, for his welcoming spirit of showcasing the art not just for the reception or during the week of the World Meeting of Families but during the entire month.

"Many do not always think that those in prison and re-entry are also women, including mothers," Superville said. "So we see here art told through different eyes. It is important to bring this into the church."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

This painting by artist Daniel Gwynn is one of the pieces on display in the 'Art for Justice' exhibit at St. Vincent's Catholic Church in Germantown.



EXHIBITS .

'ART FOR JUSTICE'

SUBMITTED PHOTO

This painting by artist Daniel Gwynn is one of the pieces on display in the 'Art for Justice' exhibit at St. Vincent's Catholic Church in Germantown. For more on the exhibit, see Page A4.