

NEW HOPE HOUSE

Support for People on Georgia's Death Row and Their Families



FALL 2018

IF THIS TABLE COULD TALK: 30 YEARS OF RADICAL HOSPITALITY AT THE NEW HOPE HOUSE WELCOME TABLE

By Mary Catherine Johnson



The Welcome Table in the dining room at the guesthouse has been serving death row families for 30 years.

In 1988, Ed and Mary Ruth Weir established a new home on a dirt road, deep in the woods – a home to share with the loved ones of the men on Georgia's death row. In those early days of this ministry, families would gather at New Hope House during executions, as well as just about every weekend after visitation, to enjoy a delicious meal around the large wooden table in the dining room. Now, 30 years later, it is my great honor and privilege to continue to serve families on this same table.

The addition of vending machines at the prison has meant that families don't come as frequently after visitation anymore, but there are many other occasions to fill this table with comfort food for our guests. Every time I sit down with families at this table, I think of the meal we are sharing as an extension of the Eucharist – an extension of the meal that Jesus shared with his loved ones just before his death, and asked us to continue to do in his memory.

One of the first times I sat at this table was the night before my friend Marcus Wellons was executed. I had come over to New Hope House with his family after visiting with Marcus all day at the prison. We were exhausted, emotionally drained and hungry as we arrived at the guesthouse, where we were met by the smiling faces of Ed and Lora Weir, as well as the intoxicating smells of lasagna and garlic bread. Much of that night is a blur to me as I got caught up in the emotions of the occasion, but I do remember how it felt to sit at the dining room table with Marcus's family that night. I think Maya Angelou was right when she said that people may forget what you said, people may forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel, because I will never forget how Ed and Lora made us feel at this table. We felt loved and comforted and welcome at a table that was feeding us on so many levels. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was that feeling that would inspire me to move to New Hope House two years later so I could be the one to welcome families to this same table, and make them feel as I once felt: loved, cherished and comforted.

If this table could talk, it would tell many tales, both joyful and heartbreaking. It would tell of a celebration when everyone sitting around it heard that David Crowe got clemency. It would tell of countless tears shed when clemency was denied to so many others. Of endless mounds of fried chicken consumed by families hungry for comfort food and justice. Of a last meal shared with Josh Bishop via phone a few hours before his execution, with us having the same food Josh was eating. Of a love so powerful, that nothing the State could ever do can touch it.

Snapshots of Summer at New Hope House



Scotty Morrow's family comes every other month for Scotty's contact visits on the row, and afterward we have a huge feast at the truck stop buffet across the street from the prison – yet another extension of the Eucharist.



Melissa Nyarko, an investigator at the Georgia Resource Center – the outstanding and fiercely dedicated legal team that represents many of the men on Georgia's death row for their final appeals – created a beautiful new mailbox for New Hope House, and it's the same color as the guesthouse. Just look for the bright Aruba Blue mailbox when you come visit!



Michael Nance's brother came all the way from Kansas to visit his brother on the row. Here he's posing with the drawing that Michael donated to New Hope House, and also showing off his mad karaoke skills at a local pub in Griffin. Hospitality takes many forms in this ministry, and accompanying guests to sing karaoke is one of them!



Dominic and Kathryn Jones traveled across the pond from London in August to visit Jeremy Moody on the row.



(Left) Warren King's sister and Mary Catherine are all smiles after a road trip across Georgia for Warren's contact visit on the row.



Susan and Dirk Herr-Hoyman came from Indiana to spend a week here in May, showing this ministry some major love through painting, scrubbing floors, installing ceiling fans, screen doors and bathroom fixtures, and so much more! They also stood vigil with us at the prison the night Robert Butts was executed.



Robert Butts' mother

On May 4, 2018, the State of Georgia executed Robert Butts. Mary Catherine (third from the left) led the vigil at the prison that evening with the help of Father Joseph Shippen (far right). The Butts family lived close by and did need to stay at New Hope House overnight, but we were able to provide plenty of delicious food for the family throughout the week of the execution through the generosity of Robert's dear friend Cathy Schneider (far left) and members of her church. Robert's mother spoke of that food – that extension of the Eucharist – as bringing her family a great deal of comfort and joy during one of the most challenging times of their lives.



Robert Butts

Fall Work Days at New Hope House



Work Days are fun for all ages!

Thursday, October 11, 2018*

10 am – 3 pm

*Sponsored by Jubilee Partners

Saturday, November 3, 2018

10 am – 3 pm

Lunch provided!

Come out for one or both days to work alongside cool people as we make our grounds and houses beautiful for our death row families. Featuring projects for all skill levels.

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Or if you can't make it for one of the official Work Days but would like to come another time to help out, or if you just want to visit and enjoy some retreat time in the woods, please call or email me!

