

# NEW HOPE HOUSE

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

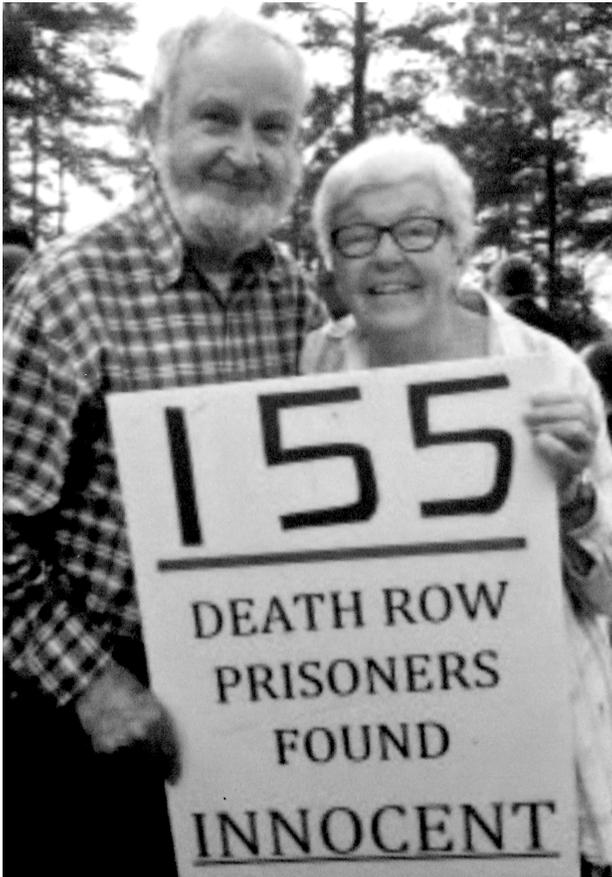


2016 Holiday Edition

## ED AND LORA WEIR HONORED BY GEORGIANS FOR ALTERNATIVES TO THE DEATH PENALTY

By Mary Catherine Johnson

In October, activists gathered in Atlanta for the **Ninth Annual MaryRuth Weir Memorial Dinner**, sponsored by Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (GFADP). This year's dinner was one of the more memorable ones I've attended, because two people I love dearly, Ed and Lora Weir, were given an honor they richly deserve. As recipients of GFADP's **Martina Correia Courage Award** that night, Ed and Lora took



their rightful place among those acknowledged as the greatest death penalty abolitionists of our time.

Suzanne Hobby-Shippen, a former resident of New Hope House, had the honor of presenting this award to the Weirs. Suzanne highlighted Ed and Lora's unique approach to this work, which combines loving hospitality for death row prisoners and their families with fierce opposition to the system that supports capital punishment. Her heartfelt tribute to Ed and Lora told the story of two lives defined by love, sacrifice and uncompromising devotion to those directly impacted by the death penalty.

It seems fitting that Ed and Lora took home an award named for Martina Correia, the sister of Georgia death row prisoner Troy Davis, who tirelessly fought to prove Troy's innocence until he was executed in 2011. Martina considered Ed and Lora to be family, and she received tremendous love and support from them over the years. From offering hospitality to Martina and her family during Troy's numerous death watches, to holding Martina's hand on her death bed, Ed and Lora were consistently there for Martina. Surely she

would be abundantly pleased that the award bearing her name was presented to Ed and Lora.

As Ed and Lora received a standing ovation at the GFADP dinner, I couldn't help but think of all of the people who could not be with us in body, but who were most certainly there in spirit, applauding and cheering right along with us. I thought of all of the death row prisoners with whom Ed and Lora have shared their lives – the prisoners they've visited, prayed for, laughed with and cried for. I thought of all the death row family members that Ed and Lora have befriended and hosted at New Hope House. I thought of all the defendants and legal teams in the 100+ capital trials that Ed and Lora attended in Georgia. I thought of all of the New Hope House donors and supporters who have believed in Ed and Lora, and have made their work possible over the years. We are all better for having known Ed and Lora Weir. We are all better because of the way they have lived their lives.

## OUR YEARS OF PRISON VISITS ON DEATH ROW

By Lora Weir

For over 25 years Ed and I have visited the men on Georgia's death row. This has been an awesome privilege for us. The names have changed over the years because of several men getting their death sentences overturned, or sadly a few of them were executed. There was a period of time in the early 1990s that I visited several men at the Reidsville prison whom I had previously visited on death row and were subsequently serving life sentences.

Ed and I have made the difficult decision that we will have to stop our visits at the end of this year, due to our health conditions. We made our September visits at the end of the month and told the men we would be stopping our visits. I got very emotional and teary-eyed when telling them. The reaction was so great! They were so appreciative of the years we visited and cared for them, and treated them like family. They assured us we were making the right decision and thanked us profusely for our visits.

One good thing that will happen is that we can stay in touch with the prisoners by e-mail. They have the capability of sending and receiving e-mails now, so they will put us on their lists and Ed and I can stay in touch.

We thank the several law offices we have worked with over the years for their support of us visiting their clients. And thanks to all of you reading this article for your ongoing support, being it visiting us, praying for us, or sending contributions allowing us to continue this ministry. Ed and I will continue to live at New Hope House and be here to help provide hospitality for those families visiting on the row or who are here during the execution of their loved one. This ministry means so much to us, and we are grateful that we have been able to do so much for so long.

\* \* \*

### ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF A DEATH PENALTY STATE

By Mary Catherine Johnson



Charmon Sinkfield

*In a murderous time  
the heart breaks and breaks  
and lives by breaking.  
It is necessary to go  
through dark and deeper dark  
and not to turn.*

*I am looking for the trail...*

-from "The Testing-Tree" by Stanley Kunitz



Gregory Lawler

October 19, 2016. It was one of those mornings when getting out of bed proved more difficult than usual. The heaviness of the coming day was upon me, and I asked God for the strength to endure. An hour later I was sitting in an Atlanta courtroom, directly behind a man named Charmon Sinkfield, who was fighting for his life. His mother sat next to me, and I squeezed her hand whenever the state's prosecutor said something cruel about her son – a squeeze that said, "Be not afraid: You and your child are beloved." After lunch, instead of returning to the courtroom as I usually did, I drove to the prison in Jackson, where the same state that was seeking the death penalty for Charmon was preparing to execute Gregory Lawler. As Charmon slept in his jail cell, awaiting another day of his death penalty trial, Gregory Lawler was pronounced dead at 11:49 pm.

One day. One state. Two men facing death. Countless tears. Zero justice. One day it will be otherwise. I continue looking for the trail to a different place.

# 2016 Annual Appeal



*Dear Beloved Friends of New Hope House,*

*Postage for letters to death row prisoners. Gas and repairs for the cars that take families to death row for visitation. A new roof for the guesthouse. Big Chic fried chicken for death row families facing the executions of their loved ones. Strategy meals with pastors and legal teams who defend death row prisoners. Travel to death penalty abolition meetings and vigils. Groceries for a death row family experiencing hard times. Lunch during grueling death penalty trials.*

*These are just some of the many ways your generous donations support our ministry. We could not do this work without each of you, and our hearts burst with gratitude when we think of the many ways you support us. This past year has been incredibly challenging, with seven executions (a state record for Georgia), three death penalty trials and costly repairs to our aging houses and cars, and we expect 2017 to bring more of the same. Your donations will help us continue to provide warm and loving hospitality for those directly impacted by the death penalty.*

*As we enjoy the holiday season with our families, our thoughts and prayers will be with all of you - our cherished community. We wish each of you a blessed holiday season and new year. May the coming year bring us ever closer to the Beloved Community with the abolition of the death penalty.*



*Peace, love and gratitude,  
Ed, Lora & Mary Catherine*

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**OUR MINISTRY**

New Hope House is a Christian community offering hospitality to families of people on Georgia's death row and support to people whose family members are involved in death penalty trials. We also visit people on death row and work to replace the death penalty with just alternatives.

New Hope House is part of Possum Trot Ministries, a nonprofit (501c4) organization. We are financially dependent on gifts (not tax deductible).

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**September 21, 2016. Mary Catherine Johnson, far right in the I AM TROY DAVIS shirt, joined religious leaders and activists at a press conference outside the Georgia Capitol on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Troy Davis's execution to renew the call for Georgians to abolish the death penalty.**