

SPRING 2022

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



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WHERE GRACE ABOUND IN SOUTHERN TERRITORY

By Mary Catherine Johnson

I have found, in short, from reading my own writing, that my subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory largely held by the devil. – Flannery O'Connor

I am writing this on what would have been the 97th birthday of the Southern Gothic writer, Flannery O'Connor. My social media newsfeeds today are full of quotes from and about Flannery, and the one I included above really resonated with me because it's how I would describe New Hope House. Much of my ministry is about simply being present with people and gently guiding them into awareness of God's grace, even in the darkest of circumstances. God's promise of "I am with you always" sustains me in this work, and I strive to make New Hope House a living manifestation of that promise for those we serve. My visits on death row and with death row families are about listening and reflecting back God's love. And in the days preceding executions I encourage families to be as present as possible – to notice their loved one's aliveness, to look for moments of grace at the prison, and to remember that they are never alone.

One of the great joys of my work at New Hope House is showing our death row families some of my favorite places in the Southern landscape surrounding the ministry – locations like The Whistle Stop Café from the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes*; and the original Ebenezer Baptist Church where they play recordings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermons in the sanctuary; and the restaurant where The Allman Brothers Band loved

the food so much, they brought its cook, Mama Louise, on their tours; and Flannery O'Connor's family home, Andalusia, where peacocks roam the beautiful grounds. These are places where evidence of God's grace is abundant despite being surrounded by territory largely held by forces like poverty, racism, and the death penalty. I treasure my road trips with our families, away from the prison and away from the pain and sadness of the death penalty, where we can revel in God's grace in the form of delicious food and gorgeous landscapes and inspiring writing for a short time. Now that's Amazing Grace, Southern-style!



Mary Catherine with a death row family member in front of a mural in Macon, Georgia depicting The Allman Brothers Band at their favorite restaurant where Mama Louise prepared her famous soul food for the band.

A SWEET NEW RIDE FOR NEW HOPE HOUSE

There's a new addition to the New Hope House family: a beautiful new 2022 Toyota Sienna Hybrid Minivan! Thanks to a generous grant from the **Episcopal Community Foundation for Middle and North Georgia**, and through a partnership with **St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Atlanta**, we were able to replace our aging minivan with what one of our death row family members described as a "sweet new ride." The new vehicle has everything we were hoping for and more... optimum fuel efficiency, all of the latest safety features, a quiet, smooth ride, and plenty of room for up to six passengers or precious cargo like 40 Christmas boxes for death row.

"I felt so joyful as I drove the new Sienna for the first time, thinking of all the ways that it would be used in service to God's people on death row and their families," said Mary Catherine on the day she purchased the minivan last November. "Look out world - transportation on Justice Road just got kicked up a notch!"

Mary Catherine can now be seen driving down the road – and at the gas pump – with a big smile on her face, because she feels safe in the new economically-sound Sienna, and thrilled that the guests of New Hope House have such a beautiful and comfortable new mode of transportation. Check out the great photos on the next two pages that tell the story of New Hope House through our sweet new ride!



Above: Thanks to the awesome volunteers from Jubilee Partners who built the carport for the new minivan!

Right: These excited death row family members were the first ones to ride in the new minivan last December.



Above: Mary Catherine's first selfie with the new ride.





Left: A cold and rainy December day did not stop these wonderful volunteers from coming out to assemble 40 bountiful boxes of holiday gifts and goodies for the men on death row, and load them into our new minivan. New Hope House is honored to continue this tradition that Murphy Davis of the Open Door Community started over 30 years ago.



Above and right: Friends and family members of the men on Georgia's death row were happy to pose with the new minivan with a sign thanking the Episcopal Community Foundation.

These minivan memories were made possible by:



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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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The arrival of a new minivan at New Hope House meant that our beloved gold-colored **2006 Toyota Sienna** (pictured above with some death row family members en route to a prison visit), which was donated by the Open Door Community in 2017 and affectionately called **Golden Girl** by Mary Catherine, officially retired to that special place in heaven where all saintly vehicles go after they've given all they had to give in service to justice. **Thanks for the 300,000 miles and countless special memories, Golden Girl!**