

For Immediate Release

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SR. HELEN PREJEAN TO KEYNOTE

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC WOMEN 2011 ANNUAL CONVENTION

Arlington, VA—Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ, Pulitzer-nominated author and national advocate for the abolition of the death penalty, will be the keynote speaker at the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) 2011 Annual Convention in Chicago, Illinois, November 9 - 12. The theme of the convention is "Campaign for Human Dignity: Love in Action."

"NCCW looks forward to welcoming Sr. Helen to this year's convention, particularly because our focus is our Campaign for Human Dignity," said NCCW President Patty Johnson, from the Diocese of Knoxville. "Our campaign addresses ways to respect the human dignity of all—from the innocent unborn child to the person at the end of life. Recognizing the human dignity of someone convicted of a capital crime may be difficult, but our faith challenges us to do just that. I'm sure Sr. Helen will inspire all of us to put our faith into action."

Nearly 700 Catholic women from across the United States are expected to attend this year's convention. The first full day of convention activities is Thursday, November 10, with several pre-convention workshops in the morning; the opening session and keynote address begin that afternoon at 1:15 pm. Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago, will preside at the opening liturgy on Thursday afternoon. The convention will continue through November 12, with workshops, general session speakers, daily liturgies, the Annual Business meeting, and receptions and informal gatherings. The Convention concludes with a closing banquet. The November 9 events include an optional tour of Chicago-area churches sponsored by the Chicago Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women.

Sr. Helen began her prison ministry while living among the poor in New Orleans and became spiritual advisor to Patrick Sonnier, the convicted killer of two teenagers, sentenced to die in the electric chair of Louisiana's Angola State Prison. She turned her experiences into *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, a book that made the 1994 American Library Associates Notable Book List and was nominated for a 1993 Pulitzer Prize.

Since 1984, Sister Helen has divided her time between educating citizens about the death penalty and counseling individual death row prisoners. She has accompanied six men to their deaths. In doing so, she began to suspect that some of those executed were not guilty. This realization inspired her second book, *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions*, released by Random House in December of 2004. She is presently at work on another book, *River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey*. As the founder of "Survive," a victim's advocacy group in New Orleans, she continues to counsel not only inmates on death row, but the families of murder victims, as well. Sister Helen has served on the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty from 1985–1995, and most recently created the Catholic Mobilization Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty, whose mission is to proclaim the Church's unconditional pro-life teaching and its application to capital punishment and restorative justice. Sr. Helen received the NCCW Distinguished Service Award at the NCCW national convention in Kansas City in 1999.

All Catholic women interested in spiritual enrichment, leadership development, and service to the Church and society are invited to register and attend the convention. Full registration information is online at www.nccw.org.

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