

To Choose, to Love, to Unify

Shannon Clarke - October 2020

Sister Ita Ford, a Maryknoll Sister assassinated in 1980 by the El Salvadoran militia, once said,

I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for – maybe even worth dying for – something that energizes you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can't tell you what it might be - that for you to find, to choose, to love. I can just encourage you to start looking and support you in the search.

While Sr. Ita was not a Marianist, yet her values aligned with our Marianist mission: to make the world a better place and to respond to the needs of others. Sr. Ita both lived out and died for her mission through her work in Chile and El Salvador.

We live in a time of divisiveness rather than unity. Whether it be due to differences in politics, religion, class, or a fundamental belief system, it seems easier to point out each other's differences than our similarities.

I pray there is no death involved for the things in life that are worth fighting for. In the meantime, we can tirelessly work on the issues in life that matter most to us. Since becoming a member of MSJC's Death Penalty Abolition and Restorative Justice Issue Team, I have learned a new dimension of what it means to be "pro-life" in my Catholic faith. I have witnessed senior members of the DP/RJ team work tirelessly to abolish the death penalty. They exemplify what it means to choose, to love, and to unify.

When we live out Sr. Ita's hope of finding a deep meaning of life, we sit with those who hold different beliefs and show them love; we both listen and respond. Before becoming a member of DP/RJ, my only understanding of capital punishment was from a class I took at the University of Dayton called "The Death Penalty". The class explored major perspectives on controversial subjects involving capital punishment.

Since becoming a member of this issue team, I have a greater understanding of what my personal response is in terms of what it means to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty. I have been moved to advocate for this issue by participating in events such as the Catholic Mobilizing Network's upcoming conference on Harm, Healing, and Human Dignity and attending the DP/RJ team's conversation day last November which was my initial Marianist education on the issue.

The Catholic Church also has a response to the Church's position of the death penalty. In Pope Francis' new encyclical "Fratelli Tutti", the Holy Father emphasizes the need to work towards the abolition of the death penalty by stating, "There is no stepping back from this position."

As we reflect and take action on Pope Francis' call to abolish the death penalty, may we use Sr. Ita Ford's words to guide us on this mission: "I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you." There is deep meaning in defending, protecting, and sanctifying life. For those interested in becoming more educated on death penalty abolition, visit the website of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (<http://www.ncadp.org/pages/about>)