

Reflections from Bro. Jerry Sullivan, SM

The 2 1/2 days I spent in DC for the Annual 4 Day Fasting Vigil to Abolish the Death Penalty was grueling because of the sun and the heat, but it was GOOD and I'm glad I did it. I'm pretty sure I'll go next year. We need to get a few others. It would be good for them. They can do one or more days. Whatever they can handle. CCNV isn't the Ritz, but it's clean and within walking distance. Earplugs help. We have 3 guest rooms here that can be used as a base and the Marc fare is \$7 roundtrip for seniors. They have a volunteer section in CCNV and we were mixed women and men with metal bunk beds and plastic covered mattresses. You bring your own bedding.

I spent 2 days in front of the Supreme Court handing out pamphlets or holding the banners. The police were lenient and allowed us to rest the legs of the banners on the ground rather than have to hold them up. Except for the sun it was pretty easy since we could sit down. I didn't fast, but I ate very little and drank A LOT of Gatorade. We could take an air condition break every hour or two in the Methodist church beside the Supreme Court. I knew it was time when my face got very hot or I felt faint. The second day I used the umbrella I brought. It helped. The glare, both off the Capitol building and the Supreme Court was intense and hard on the eyes. My eyes burned for a couple of days after even though I had glasses that darkened. The third day I did what they called the Roving Vigil for a half day. Wearing an Abolish the DP T-shirt I walked the mall from one end to the other. I could see people checking it out. It was okay to go into the museums or anywhere there are tourist, but I only went into the Smithsonian Castle. I walked over 5 miles that day and my feet were sore when I got home.

The reactions of the passers-by were interesting from those who tried to ignore you as if you didn't exist, those who shook their head no at the pamphlets or some who went out of their way to take one. Several times folks stopped to discuss or debate the issue, but generally civilly. We only had 3 or 4 negative reactions. There were a lot of folks who said they agreed and many who signed the abolition petition. There were lots of grade school kids with their classes and many of the teachers took the opportunity for a teaching moment saying things like, "these folks are exercising their First Amendment right", and so on. One class came over and checked out our display table. Teachers told their students not to take pictures of us because their parents might not be in agreement with our stand on the Death Penalty. Some kids, being kids, took pictures any way.

I was impressed with the folks who participated, the majority of whom were fasting. There were young 20 somethings on up and a couple who were older than I am (78). The dedication and enthusiasm for Abolition was very impressive and many like myself work on abolishing the DP during the year. We had a teaching with speakers each evening from 6 to 8pm. It rained the second evening for a while, but everyone took it in stride and pitched in to cover the table and carry things inside. There were men who had spent time on death row and were exonerated who spoke. Folks from Families of Victims, also Families of men on death row. The compassion, forgiveness and acceptances expressed was overwhelming. Sometimes I'm angry when I hear of murders, but the stories of conversion and the turning away from anger to forgiveness, acceptances and a desire to change the vengeful attitude of others touched me deeply. This from Victims families and those wrongfully accused.

I don't know if it was more of a spiritual experience or one of survival. I think a bit of both, but I'm elated that I did it because it was definitely a positive experience.

Who knows, maybe we had a positive effect on the Justices since they were considering the case of Troy Davis and they decided to postpone a decision until September. Many saw this as positive.

Peace, Jerry