

FROM HELEN TO MADP BOARD PART II: IDEAS FOR NEW INITIATIVES

November 16-17, 2012

1. Getting the book DMW into college Freshmen Year Reading programs (also known as “Common Reader” programs).
2. Collaborate with Keppler Speakers to set up Helen’s speaking engagements in connection with Common Reader programs. Keppler has been setting up speaking engagements for me for 10 years, recently in conjunction with a Common Reader program, but most of the time, not. Speaking fees range from \$7,500 (which I received from Martin Methodist) to \$10,000. Until now, it has been Keppler that has initiated my speaking events. They call Margaret and we schedule it in.)

EXPERIENCING THE COMMON READER PROGRAM IN ACTION

I recently gave a lecture and met with student groups at Martin Methodist College in Pulaski, TN (small student body of 1,000 students) whose freshmen had read DMW over the summer. Greta Henglein (cell: 931.638.5988 ghenglein@martinmethodist.edu) directed the First-Year Experience Program at Martin. She had attended a conference, sponsored by the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience, which holds an annual conference, at which Keppler Speakers was present, and there she heard about DMW as a possible book and me as author, who would come to the college to speak. She said that 30-40 colleges and universities, who are interested in a Common Reader experience, attend these conferences. Publishing Houses also attend to feature their books. (See sample of Simon & Schuster’s suggested books. We could, of course, look into ways to collaborate with Vintage to be present at these events.) I suggest we set up a Task Force to put this plan into motion. Greta is a capable and energetic soul whom I believe would be willing to help us get our Common Reader Task Force started. She planned various events around the book reading – a debate, student presentations, films, and (get this) producing the play of DMW in the spring. In these Common Reader experiences, Vintage will sell the books. Where Keppler is involved, we get the speaker fees. (Keppler contact who worked with Greta: Richele Morgan work: 703-516-4000, fax 703-516-4819, rmorgan@keplerspeakers.com)

Until now, all of my speaking engagements have happened spontaneously. Invitations to speak have all come from outside. This new initiative, in which we take a more proactive role in promoting DMW as the book in Common Reader programs would help me prioritize speaking engagements, which will lessen as I reduce time on the road to write the new book.

Initiating Common Reader experiences in universities and colleges is a natural way to introduce the play of DMW. It happened seamlessly at Martin Methodist.

I want to suggest that the Board organize Task Forces for Getting the Book Out and the Play Project. We need folks working with our Point People on the board to plan, design, and execute programs on the ground – energetic, hands-on working groups to set goals and strategies and enlist allies to get the job done. By God’s good grace in DMW we have a persuasive book that has an excellent 19-year track record of changing hearts and minds about the death penalty, and has proven itself with students as a readable book. At

a deeper level, its stories bring people into a sense of deeper compassion. Not just a form of generic compassion, but Jesus compassion. DMW is in its heart a Christian story (in church terms: evangelization) Greta at Martin Methodist said that when she attended the luncheon to look for a book, she was looking for one that would lead students to compassion, that was the theme she had decided on.

As I see it, the task at hand for us as a board is this: to pro-actively initiate events and activities to expand the distribution of the book, DMW into wider readership across the nation – and with it, the play. And who better to target than the young people, the ones who will carry the work of the Gospel forward into the future?

. A NEW BRIMMING IDEA FOR THE PLAY PROJECT: LIBRARIES

This idea is in the very first stage: Susanne Dumbleton at De Paul is getting me the contact info for Nancy Davenport, who for years served on the board of the National Library of Congress, and she remains connected to that board. She talked to Susanne about how now with the digital age upon us, libraries are looking for new ways to engage with the communities they serve. What if libraries sponsored a community reading of the play, DMW, at the library and invited the community to read the book, and then gather to discuss play and book?

I ran the idea by Tim Robbins because it means expanding the play to community groups and going beyond schools. He’s very enthused about the idea and said that libraries have always been a hub of learning and discourse in communities. So, it would mean expanding the play into communities through libraries, which has fantastic possibilities.

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In Eugene, Oregon, where the opera of DMW will be performed March 15-17, there will be a city-wide reading of DMW and a discussion at the city library, which I will attend on March 16.+++++

WHERE I AM NOW....

I’ve reached a point in this work where I feel the need for the board to take on more of the organization and day-to-day management of our programs-on-the-ground: especially the play project, the vast potential of which is barely being tapped. But I also see the need for new initiatives to get the book of DMW into wider distribution. We need a new plan of action, such as the Common Reader Program in colleges and universities. We might also initiate a plan to get the book into Catholic high schools. Some schools have classes read it, but it’s done sporadically, or not at all. I need the help of the board to plan and initiate these programs. I need to devote my energies to the death row inmates I serve, the speaking tours and work with the media, which remains constant – and to birthing my spiritual memoir, *River of Fire*, which, because it delves deeply into interiority and the spiritual journey, is taking longer to write. Let me say – again – how grateful I am to you, the board, who, with me, have heartily embraced the mission to end the death penalty – and your leadership, Marianne, in developing our board into the strong and viable force it now is