

## Annual Celebration Dinner & Auction

**REGISTER NOW!!** Join us at 5:00 p.m. on April 29, 2018 at the Fireside Inn in Lebanon N.H. to celebrate another year of success at Hartford Dismas House. Our Keynote Speaker, Sister Helen Prejean, is known around the world for her tireless work against the death penalty, and for social justice. She is the author of *Dead Man Walking: An Eye Witness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, which was widely acclaimed, made into a major motion picture, an opera and a play. Her second book is *The Death of Innocence*, and she is currently working on her third book, *River of Fire: My Spiritual Journey*.

Sister Helen Prejean has proved a devoted supporter of the Dismas mission of reconciliation in Vermont. She is a compassionate advocate for those in prison, and in particular, for those on death row. Sister Helen Prejean is a true disciple, who lives compassion freely, and continuously



*Advocate and Author of "Dead Man Walking",  
Sister Helen Prejean.*

inspires us in our work with prisoners.

At this event we will have time for cocktails and mingling while you browse through our silent auction items and get to know our residents and staff. We look forward to an amazing evening with you. ❖

## HOUSE HAPPENINGS

Buy Your Tickets Now!

**Hartford Dismas Annual  
Community Celebration & Dinner  
April 29, 2018 5PM**

Fireside Inn West, Lebanon, NH

**Tickets \$75 per person**

**ONLINE RESERVATIONS** at  
[www.dismasoft.org/hartford-dismas/hartford-annual-event/](http://www.dismasoft.org/hartford-dismas/hartford-annual-event/)

**OR EMAIL** Renee DePalo at  
[renee@dismasoft.org](mailto:renee@dismasoft.org)

**OR CALL** 802-698-8661

*Paper invitations will arrive in your mail  
closer to the event.*

## For More Information

Call our staff at 802-698-8661 or learn more about day-to-day life at Hartford Dismas by visiting our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/HartfordDismasHouse](http://www.facebook.com/HartfordDismasHouse)



*House mural painted by artist and resident,  
David Aspen, at right.*

## Sobriety through Art - David Aspen

My life started with the average family. I was raised in the church with the morals and fundamental teachings of a hardworking father and the loving and nurturing lessons of a stay at home mother. Things turned for the worse when my parents fell out of love and divorced. My life spiraled into a fast track of growing up too soon and learning lessons from the more risky crowd.

My life began to fall apart and my brother and I started to take our lives into our own hands at a very young age. All of this was happening while hidden inside of me was my burning

passion for art and the dream to become a great artist. While I didn't know how to achieve this goal, I turned to the fast life of drugs and money. I met a girl and had a beautiful baby daughter, but while falling in love with her, I fell in love with heroin.

The mixture of fast money, a newborn and my secret desire of a new life with art, I felt overwhelmed and was incarcerated for the first time. This was the beginning of a long journey of back and forth – incarceration, addictions, parenthood and the unquenchable thirst to be

*(continued page 3)*

## A ROUGH START

I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts to a single mother household. My mother did her best and I remember good times with her, but she had me young. She dealt with substance abuse problems as well as mental health problems. I remember having to go from battered women shelters to homeless shelters and back because my mom just couldn't stay away from abusive men. When I turned seven my mom decided it'd be best if she gave custody of me and my three sisters to her mother. So, we moved to Windsor, Vermont.



## NO SAFETY, NO HOME

Things were alright for a while, but I think my grandmother became overwhelmed with having to raise four of her grandchildren. She began to physically abuse me and my sisters. First it was smacks on the butt, but then it quickly progressed to really serious mental and physical abuse. This took a toll on me because I hated not being able to protect my sisters. I began experimenting with cigarettes around twelve and shortly after tried marijuana for the first time. At thirteen I finally broke down and told our family what was happening to us. A week later we moved to Randolph Vermont to live with other family members. Unfortunately, that arrangement didn't work out and we were placed into foster care.

## OPIATES

During my three years in foster care I lived in a few homes. The last home, in White River Junction, Vermont, was where I got introduced to "harder" drugs. One of my foster brothers got in a car accident and was prescribed OxyContin.

He gave me some and I tried it. During that year I ended up trying cocaine, benzos, psychedelics, and anything else I could get my hands on. Three months before I turned eighteen I ran away to live with my relatives again in Randolph, Vermont.

## GOOD DECISIONS AND POOR ONES

I got a job and started taking night classes to get my high school diploma. I met some older people and got into selling weed. My weed dealer began paying me in pills – opiates. I asked him what I was supposed to do with them and he said sell them or do them, so I tried a few and it was like it changed my life. I felt cooler, smarter, and like I had no pain (mentally). I felt like it made me a better person and I quickly began taking them every day. I went from 20 mg to 80 mg a day to 240 mg in six months. I needed help. I went to multiple rehabs and did pretty well but like most addicts I ended up relapsing. I got so bad that I was using any drug, especially heroin, and began stealing to support my habit.

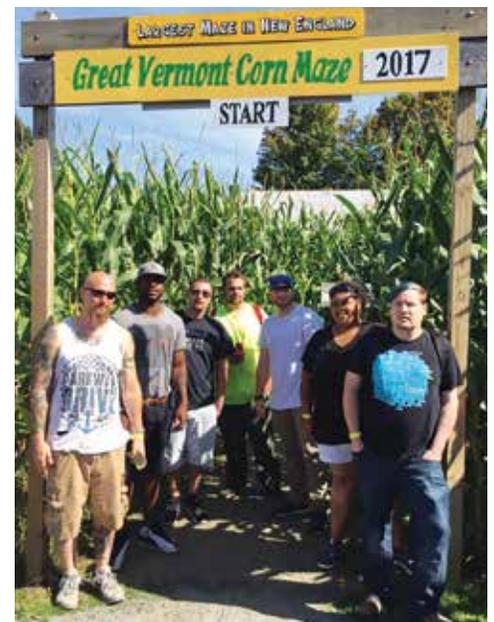
## PRISON

That's how I got sent to jail for the first time. My crimes were petty so I only served forty-five days and as soon as I got out I began using again. This time around I began selling heroin. In October of 2015 I got arrested and then convicted of felony possession of heroin with intent to distribute. I was sentenced to three years. I was granted pre-approved furlough and came to live at the Dismas House.

## DISMAS SUPPORT

At first I was trying to buck the system, but the sense of community you build with people while here finally won

me over. Dismas gave me the sense of family and support I had been lacking in my life. With help from a clinic I was staying sober and with the help of Dismas I was re-learning how to be a person. They really help bring back your self-respect. I did really well for 11 months, but again I relapsed and was sent back to jail. Fortunately, Dismas has been willing to help me more than once and I'm hoping with their support and assistance to set myself on the right path to succeed when I max out in June of 2018. ❖



Residents and staff at the giant corn maze outing.

## OUR WISH LIST

Dining Room Chairs	New Twin Mattresses
Dressers	Camping Items
Porch Furniture	Games
Pillows	Hygiene Items
Pillow Cases	Men & Women Clothes
Flatware Sets	Winter Hats
Blankets	

# Reflecting on my first year – What Dismas has taught me

Wow, one year has come and gone and I am a better person and Director for it. When I started in this position I had no idea what to expect, what to do or what to think of the individuals coming into this home. As always the first few months were busy with learning the lay of the land and the many procedural things I needed to know, but the months to follow were eye-opening and eventful.

Dismas has brought a sense of community into my life that I don't remember experiencing. Many residents when they move in wonder why we have to sit down each day with someone we have never met and share in a meal. I may have thought that at the beginning

too. Through these meals I learn something new, as do they, about who I am as a person and what community brings into your life. Witnessing the residents learn this is a blessing.

Since my arrival I have watched many different folks come and go. Many transition to independence, while some are defeated by their addictions. Others struggle with living the life of a productive community member. Each transition teaches me something new about resilience, perseverance, determination, defeat and loss.

Each individual arrives with their own story and leaves with a chapter about Dismas, which is why I love my job. They leave with a better understanding



House Director Renee DePalo with residents.

of their life, their choices, their future and a sense of family that many lack. I am blessed to be part of these stories and know the impact I have made on each of these individuals. I look forward to more memories, lessons, laughter and even all the negatives that can come with it in the years to come. Thank you to my Dismas family, you continue to teach me each day to be a better me! ❖

## HARTFORD DISMAS HOUSE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Tracy Dustin-Eichler... *President*  
Debbie Diegoli ... *Vice President*  
Sue Buckholz... *Secretary*

### MEMBERS

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Rachel Thompson  
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## HARTFORD DISMAS HOUSE STAFF

Renee DePalo, M.S. ... *House Director*  
Jeff Backus... *Asst. House Director*

## DISMAS OF VT STAFF

Jan-Roberta Tarjan... *Exec. Director*  
Jennifer Blair... *Business Manager*  
Richard Gagne... *Program Director*

## DISMAS OF VT FOUNDER & ADVISOR

Rita Whalen McCaffrey

*The Upper Valley community runs for Dismas. (see page 8)*



## Sobriety in Art... (continued from page 1)

a better person. I knew something had to change and this is when I learned of Dismas.

Since I have been at Dismas I have learned and become everything that my heart had envisioned. Dismas House has given me a chance to not feel alone, to have the support and structure and the fundamental values I started my life with. They have helped me to succeed in letting me grow as an artist, to achieve my true goals that I was put on this earth for. They have always been there when I am down and raise my spirits

each day. Dismas staff have assisted me with reconciling with my kids in order to be the father that I know I could be and have become.

Dismas staff and the community have taught me to have patience and to understand who I am as a man. They offer constructive advice, allow me to make my own decisions, but always push me in the positive direction. I have already accomplished so much with my art and I see no end in sight. I finally know myself and love myself without drugs. Dismas saved my life! ❖

Reconciling Former Prisoners with Society, and Society with Former Prisoners for 32 Years!

*"I am a broken individual who has a lot of work to do on myself. Dismas is a safe place to do this."*

- Dismas Resident

## DISMAS OF VERMONT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### OFFICERS

Dick Perez... *President*

John Gorman... *Vice President*

Jonathan Sylvia... *Treasurer*

Delores Barbeau... *Secretary*

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Tim McCarthy

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Debbie Ramsdell

Kathy Ross

Marykate Rowan

Phil Stephan

Jan-Roberta Tarjan

*Executive Director (ex officio)*

Bruce Wyatt

### STAFF ADVISORY

Jennifer Blair... *Business Manager*

Richard Gagne... *Program Manager*

## Living Change: New Strategic Plan

by Jan-Roberta Tarjan, Executive Director

For our Dismas residents, change is their very lifeline. Transitioning from incarceration to the less structured, more complex demands of "regular" society means changing almost everything about their daily lives. It means letting go of old ways of negotiating the world and deliberately choosing new ones. They live change every day. If they do not change they literally may not survive. But through change comes renewal, and through renewal comes a sustainable life.

Organizations and communities share that same need to embrace change and to negotiate an ever-changing world.

Through healthy change built upon a strong heritage of principles, their missions are renewed and their contributions to the common good are sustained. This is just what

Dismas of Vermont, Inc. has been doing this past year as we worked out a new strategic plan. Our new plan is made,



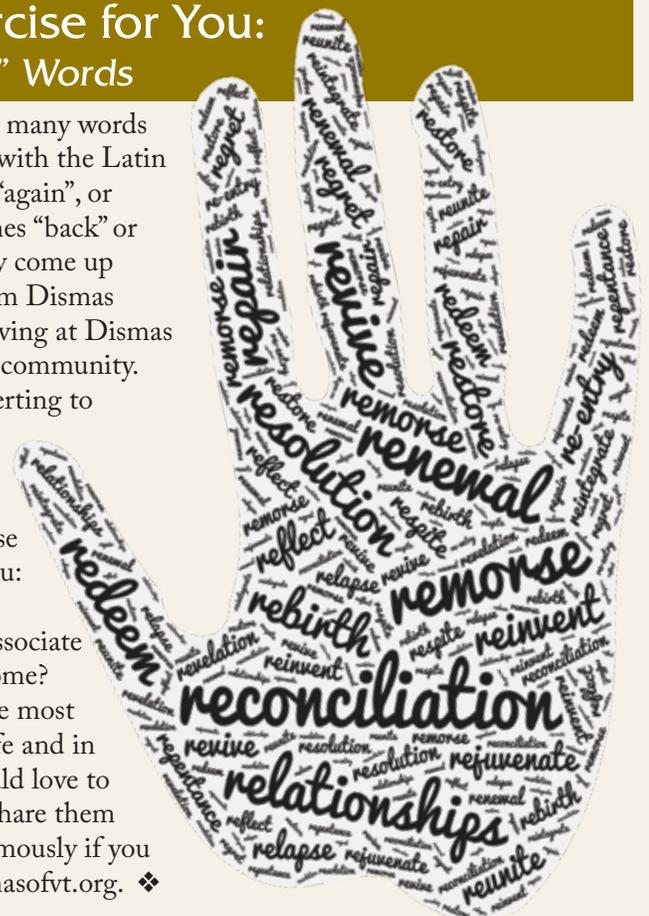
Jan-Roberta Tarjan,  
Executive Director

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## Meditation Exercise for You: Dismas and the "Re" Words

Have you ever noticed how many words associated with Dismas start with the Latin prefix "re"? The prefix means "again", or "again and again", or sometimes "back" or "going back". No wonder they come up so much in our work, and from Dismas residents! Men and women living at Dismas are coming back again to the community. Sometimes they stumble, reverting to poor choices. The biggest of the "re" words for us is RECONCILIATION.

Here is a meditation exercise on the Dismas mission for you: Read the "re" words here. How many of them do you associate with Dismas? Did we miss some? Which ones "re-verberate" the most deeply for you in your own life and in your connection to us? I would love to know your thoughts, and to share them in our next newsletter, anonymously if you prefer. Email me at [jan@dismasofvt.org](mailto:jan@dismasofvt.org). ❖

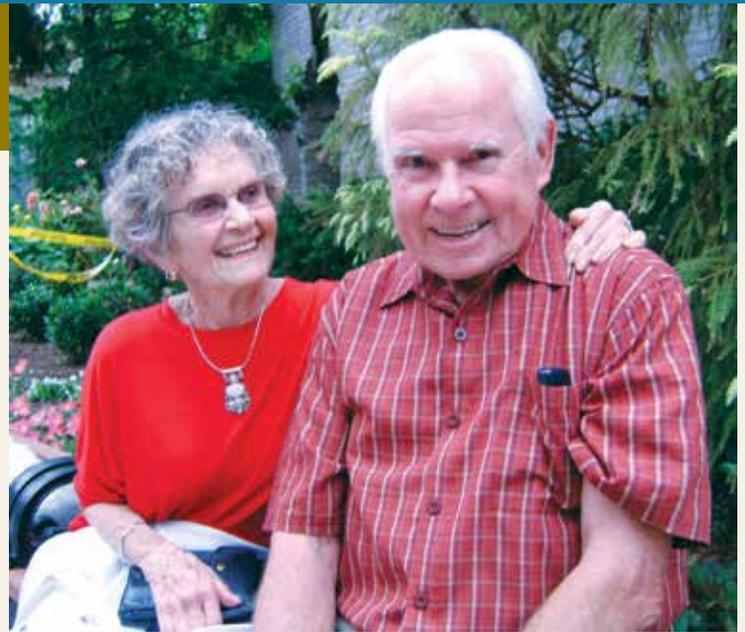


## Donors Shine a Light for Rutland Dismas House

Dr. Theresa Nicklas and husband Robert Reimers recently made a wonderfully generous gift of \$12,500 to Rutland Dismas House in honor of Theresa's parents, Muriel and Jim Nicklas, who served as volunteer cooks and supporters of the Rutland Dismas House for fifteen years before moving away to be nearer their grandkids and family. Jim passed away in 2015. "Our donation was made on behalf of Muriel and Jim because they leave behind such fond memories of Rutland, and a humble legacy of service to Rutland Dismas House, which they hope will continue to grow with the help of dedicated volunteers and supporters of this great mission", writes daughter Theresa and son-in-law Robert. Muriel, always a bright presence, commented about how much she loved to sit around the dinner table and hear residents' stories.

A quote from Roy T. Bennett's *The Light in the Heart* expresses the spirit Muriel and Jim brought to Dismas:

*"Learn to light a candle in the darkest moments of someone's life. Be the light that helps others see; it is what gives life its deepest significance."*



Honored: Muriel and Jim Nicklas

Dismas is deeply grateful for the light Muriel and Jim shone on the lives of residents for all those years, and for the renewal of that light which this very special gift represents. ❖

## Living Change: New Strategic Plan

*(continued from previous page)*

and we have moved into the implementation stage. All the basics you love about Dismas will not disappear. We will remain personal, community and mission driven, simple in our needs and compassionate in our outreach. The plan calls for streamlining our governance and oversight processes, examining our human resources and broadening our donor base by getting the good news about Dismas out there to those who can help.

From the base of our new strategic plan we can build a future which will continue to offer second chances, promote community reconciliation and meet new challenges with innovation. Dismas will be "living change" toward a stronger future, just as do our residents. If you would like to hear more about Dismas of Vermont, and how you can be part of our mission, please contact me at [jan@dismasofvt.org](mailto:jan@dismasofvt.org). ❖



*Annual Celebration Dinners and Auctions at all three Dismas locations are happening this Spring! JOIN US and meet very special people, peruse auction goodies, honor our volunteers and hear from residents and distinguished speakers.*

*(Photo from the Burlington Dismas Annual Celebration, 2017)*

## Ways to Give

Discover the many ways to support Dismas and make a difference in someone's life

No matter how you give, why you give, or how much you give, your gift is vital to Dismas of Vermont's programs. Leaving a philanthropic legacy through planned giving is a powerful and meaningful way to give back. You can give to support one of our local programs, or to Dismas of Vermont in general. Please contact either the program you wish to support, or our Executive Director, Jan Tarjan, for more information or assistance.

### GIFTS BY CHECK:

Checks should be made out to the local program you wish to support, or to Dismas of Vermont Statewide if you prefer, and mailed to the addresses listed on this page.

### GIFTS BY CREDIT CARD:

Credit Card donations may be made by visiting us online at <http://www.dismasofvt.org/donate>

### MATCHING GIFTS:

Your employer may offer an employee matching gift program to support your charitable giving. Please check with your employer to determine if they offer this option.

### HONOR AND MEMORIAL GIFTS:

These gifts offer a meaningful way to pay tribute to loved ones.

### GIFTS OF STOCKS, SECURITIES:

You can make a gift of stock by contacting our brokerage account with MassMutual.

ACCOUNT NAME: Dismas of Vermont Inc.

ACCOUNT NUMBER: R72025577

DTC NUMBER: 0226

MASSMUTUAL RE: Roger Webster

Phone: 802-264-6620

### PLANNED GIVING/BEQUESTS:

You may include Dismas in your lifetime charitable giving plans through a bequest, charitable gift annuity, insurance policy, charitable trust or other planned giving vehicle.

Planned gifts can be constructed today to benefit Dismas of Vermont at a future date.

Contact our Executive Director to learn more!

### DISMAS PROGRAM LOCATIONS:

#### Burlington Dismas House

Locations at:

96 Buell Street, Burlington, VT 05401

103 East Allen Street, Winooski, VT 05404

Kimberly Parsons and Richard Gagne, House Directors  
(802) 658-0381

[kim@dismasofvt.org](mailto:kim@dismasofvt.org)

#### Hartford Dismas House

1673 Maple Street, PO Box 174, Hartford, VT 05047

Renee DePalo, House Director

(802) 698-8661

[renee@dismasofvt.org](mailto:renee@dismasofvt.org)

#### Rutland Dismas House

103 Park Avenue, Rutland, Vermont 05701

Terese Black, House Director

(802) 775-5539

[terese@dismasofvt.org](mailto:terese@dismasofvt.org)

#### Dismas of Vermont, Inc.

103 East Allen Street, Winooski, VT 05404

Jan-Roberta Tarjan, Executive Director

(603) 795-2770

[jan@dismasofvt.org](mailto:jan@dismasofvt.org)



*Volunteering is reconciliation in action. Dismas residents planting trees at the Riverside Church in Hartford, VT.*

# Spirit of the Season

T'was the season of giving and being thankful for the people around us. After a peaceful and over-the-top Thanksgiving feast had settled for a few days, staff and residents began the next seasonal festivities with a house decorating party. A beautiful, fresh cut blue spruce, the focal point of the entire home, captured the spirit of the holiday as well as new beginnings and fresh starts. We decorated as a Dismas family, and residents remarked how long it had been since they had a stable home with vibrant seasonal colors, aromatic fresh pine scent, formal dinners, and most of all the emotional support and well wishes within this family.

The Dismas Holiday potluck was a wonderful success! An enormous amount of food and desserts were provided by local board members as well as residents. One particular resident spent the entire day grilling up some mouthwatering barbeque St. Louis ribs on low and slow in the frigid temperatures. This was served up with a tuna pasta salad that complemented the ribs so well that neither dish survived the evening as a leftover!

It was that special season where we appreciate what we have and give what we can, and the amount of support from



*Resident chefs master the deep-fried giant Thanksgiving turkey.*



*Assistant House Director Jeff Backus appreciating the holiday spirit at Dismas House.*

the surrounding community was borderline overwhelming. Throughout the month of December familiar volunteers and supporters of Hartford Dismas House, as well as new faces that became new friends, offered gifts to the residents in acknowledgment of what they are attempting to do with their lives and the rocky road ahead of them. A plethora of blankets, sheets (L.L. Bean sheets!), winter hats, gloves, warm wool socks, gift cards, clothes and yummy holiday treats arrived. We at Hartford Dismas House would like to pause right here and thank the community for everything they have done and the continual support that we very evidently receive.

With the tunes in the background cheering us on to having a holly jolly Christmas, and telling tales of grandma being run over by a reindeer, and supporting our dreams of getting that hippopotamus that we always wanted – it was a memorable evening to say the least. Residents were in a state of awe as they opened gift after gift, and realized the amount of thought that went into each one. They truly felt the support that we at Hartford Dismas House aspire to provide. Each resident recognized that they were appreciated and supported to achieve any endeavor or dream they might choose – and finally leave past mistakes behind. ❖

*Have a passion for reconciliation, second chances, social justice or civic engagement? We are looking for new board or committee members.*

**Contact Renee DePalo, 802-698-8661  
or [renee@dismasoft.org](mailto:renee@dismasoft.org)**

HARTFORD DISMAS HOUSE  
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Hartford, VT 05047

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**Get your tickets  
TODAY**  
for the **fabulous**  
2nd Hartford  
**Dismas Annual  
Celebration!**

**GO ONLINE**  
[www.dismasofvt.org/hartford-dismas/hartford-annual-event/](http://www.dismasofvt.org/hartford-dismas/hartford-annual-event/)

**OR EMAIL**  
[renee@dismasofvt.org](mailto:renee@dismasofvt.org)

**OR CALL**  
802-698-8661

## Hartford Dismas House

### Glorious and Gory

Dismas House jumped into the fun and frolic of the Hartford Gory Days Halloween celebration by holding our first 5k benefit race! On October 28th, seventy-four registrants, including the Waldorf School's running club, showed up at the Dothan Brook School to support Hartford Dismas. On a crisp and sunny day participants, who ranged in age from their eighties to babies in strollers, ran the roads in Wilder in their gorgeous costumes. We enjoyed food sponsored by The Box food truck and great craft activities. Hartford resident and artist, Dave Aspen, drew fantastic personal caricatures, and Assistant Director Jeff Backus's wife Amanda, also an artist, staffed the face-painting booth and crafted uniquely "horrifying" trophies. Thank you to TopStich for the discounted T-shirts, Hartford Dunkin Donuts and Shaw's of Lebanon for contributing prizes, and the fifteen volunteers who made it happen. Everybody was a winner that day! ❖



*5k butterfly costumes-- a fitting symbol of renewal*



**HARTFORD DISMAS HOUSE**  
PO Box 174 Hartford, VT 05047  
(802) 698-8661 | [dismasofvt.org](http://dismasofvt.org)