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Article published October 1, 2003

Death-penalty foes offer message of forgiveness



'Forgiveness is not something you give away. Forgiveness is a gift, a gift you give yourself,' death-penalty opponent Aba Gayle of the Ohio Journey of Hope says at Bluffton College. (THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH)

By [ERICA BLAKE](#)
BLADE STAFF WRITER

BLUFFTON, Ohio - Aba Gayle vividly remembers the day she learned her youngest daughter was murdered 12 years ago.

She remembers the feeling of loss, and then sadness, and eventually rage, an anger directed at the man who stabbed Catherine Blount, 19, to death. And then she waited for closure, something others promised would come after the man who was arrested, tried, and convicted for her daughter's death was finally put to death.

Yesterday, before about 150 Bluffton College students and staff, the California native said she eventually realized closure would never come with the death of her daughter's killer but instead through forgiving him.

As part of a 17-day Journey of Hope, Aba Gayle is one of several people touring the state sharing their stories. Members of the tour, which will be in Toledo at Corpus Christi Parish at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow and at Epworth United Methodist Church at 7:30 p.m. Friday, are made up of people who oppose the death penalty, including family members of murder victims, exonerated death row inmates, and death row family members.

"I'm opposed to the death penalty because I don't agree with murder," said Aba Gayle, 70, who now lives in Oregon. "Murder is still murder. It's violence against a human being."

The Journey of Hope began 10 years ago as a way to raise awareness about the death penalty. At the time, it was planned to be a one-time tour throughout Indiana. But as more anti-death penalty organizations learned of the group, residents in other states received the chance to listen to their stories.

Thirty-eight states in the country have the death penalty. In Ohio, 209 inmates, including one woman, currently sit on death row.

Jana Schroeder, statewide coordinator of Ohio Journey of Hope ... From Violence to Healing, said yesterday more than 25 participants from around the country are participating in the tour, which began Sept. 26. During their stay, the speakers will address civic groups, churches, and educational institutions who have invited them. Tomorrow, members will speak to groups in Toledo as well as Bowling Green, Defiance, Fremont, Tiffin, Findlay, and Sandusky.

Though participants likely will meet many supporters along the tour, Ms. Schroeder said plenty won't agree with their views. But maybe by the time the speaker is finished, those who have come to hear them will leave with something to think about, she said.

"We feel there should be a moratorium on executions so that the issue can be studied," she added. "But we think it all has to start with dialogue."

Bluffton College freshman Jackie Nelson, 18, agreed. A native of Peoria, Ill., Ms. Nelson said she does not agree with the death penalty and would like to see Ohio institute a moratorium similar to her home state. Perhaps then, more people would realize "forgiving is closure and not revenge," she said.

"I think it's really awesome what they're trying to do," the English major said of the speakers.

Aba Gayle told the attentive crowd yesterday that it was never her intention to become an anti-death penalty advocate. In fact, she had planned to watch with satisfaction the day her daughter's killer was put to death - an event still about two years away.

And although she knows he is guilty and does not excuse his crime, she has met him face to face and forgiven him.

Aba Gayle is saddened daily that her daughter was in the wrong place at the wrong time when Douglas Mickey came to kill her housemate in a drug-related crime. She still thinks of her youngest child daily.

But when Mickey is finally executed, she no longer plans to be among those people who despise him but instead among his friends and families.

"Forgiveness is not something you give away," she said. "Forgiveness is a gift, a gift you give yourself."
