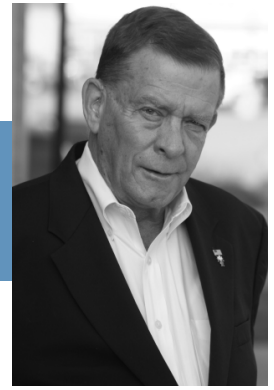


Voices of Texas: Joe Walker

“If you are going to expect mercy from the Lord, you must show mercy. Even though the thing he (Kosoul) did gives us the right to do the same, I am against violence.”
- Joe Walker



Joe Walker returned to his Greenville, Texas home on a hot day in July 2006 to find a note to call the police. A devout Catholic, Joe was coming home from Confession at his church.

Soon the police were in his home telling him that his 40-year-old daughter, Sarah Anne Walker, had been murdered. Sarah, a real estate agent, had been found stabbed 27 times in a model home in a suburb of McKinney.

“I didn’t believe it. I called my son and he already knew. I was hard to get hold of, and Sarah’s mother was sick and couldn’t answer the door,” Joe said.

A priest came to the Walker home and Joe told him, “We need to pray for the killer, too.” He has been doing so ever since.

At Sarah’s funeral, Joe again asked for prayers not only for the soul of his daughter and for his family, but for the killer, who had not yet been caught. About two months later, through the efforts of local and state police, the Texas Rangers and the FBI, Kosoul Chanthakoummane was arrested for the murder. Kosoul was tried for capital murder and received a death sentence in 2007.

Motivated by his devout Catholic faith, Joe wrote to the murderer and sent him the diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, revered for her emphasis on the merciful love of God and the flow of that love from one’s own heart to those in need of it. Joe told the perpetrator in a note that he forgave him for the murder.

Since Sarah’s death, Joe has been praying for Kosoul daily, guided by the Divine Mercy Chaplet. The chaplet is a devotion based on Kowalska’s writings and said to be followed by over 100 million Roman Catholics. “I have been praying the chaplet for him almost every day. I have only missed a few days in the past five years,” Joe said.

Forgiving Kosoul was just part of his faith, Joe said. And so is his opposition to the death penalty.

“If you are going to expect mercy from the Lord, you must show mercy. Even though the thing he (Kosoul) did gives us the right to do the same, I am against violence,” Joe said.

When asked by the district attorney in the case about seeking the death penalty, Joe responded that he was against the death penalty. The district attorney agreed to think about what Joe said and decide whether he would seek the death penalty in the case. The next day Joe read in the newspaper that the district attorney was seeking death for the murder of Sarah.

Although Joe was asked to speak against the defendant receiving the death penalty, he decided against taking the stand. “I still struggle with that. Maybe I should’ve taken the stand, but I don’t think it would have made a difference,” he said.

What Joe experienced during those dark days and years would shake anyone to their very foundations and challenge their convictions. Joe found in his faith the basis for moving forward – and for opposing the death penalty.

Joe Walker and his wife, Carol, have been married 48 years. Joe worked in retail 35 years before he retired. Joe is active with the Knights of Columbus, local charities and his local Catholic Church.

This profile was originally developed by Chris Castillo for the Fall 2012 Seizing the Momentum newsletter.