



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kelly Hughes, 312-280-8126
kelly@dechanthughes.com

“*Change of Heart* is a tragic story of senseless violence, horrific loss, and, in the end, forgiveness that is astonishing. I kept asking myself: ‘As a Christian, could I be as strong and merciful as Jeanne Bishop?’ I have my doubts.” — John Grisham

New Book Tells How a Public Defender Reconciled with Sister’s Killer

Twenty-five years ago, Jeanne Bishop’s sister and brother-in-law, and their unborn child, were murdered in a crime that rocked Winnetka, Illinois, an affluent suburb of Chicago. A Christian, Bishop forgave the killer, a teenage neighbor. She thought she could move on with her life while he languished in prison, serving a life without parole sentence. Instead, she found herself compelled by her faith to go farther: to seek reconciliation with the killer, David Biro, whom she now visits in prison.

Her new book, *Change of Heart: Justice, Mercy, and Making Peace with My Sister’s Killer* (Westminster John Knox Press, March 4, 2015) recounts a soul-wrenching transformation: “My first response was to seal a stone over my heart. God rolled away that stone...and grew in its stead the green shoots of renewal and change.”

Bishop resolved to live a life worthy of her sister. She left her job at a prestigious law firm to become a public defender—an unlikely calling for a relative of murder victims. Further, she was instrumental in helping to overturn capital punishment in Illinois. “I was set on a path toward advocating for mercy for the very people who had committed crimes like Biro and one day, for Biro himself.”

Bishop came to recognize that following Jesus required working for reconciliation. She wrote to Biro, and was floored by his response confessing to the murders, something he had never done. Visiting him, Bishop sees a man, not a monster: she senses his remorse is real and that his desire for understanding and connection is genuine.

-continued-

Biro received three sentences of life in prison without parole. Bishop was satisfied with the sentence, and glad that, because the killer was a juvenile at the time of his crime, he wasn't eligible for the death penalty: "The last thing I wanted was to widen the pool of bloodshed. That wouldn't honor Nancy, who loved life. It wouldn't bring her back or assuage my grief." Later, Bishop came to oppose mandatory life sentences for juveniles, recently declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. Biro has filed a petition to be re-sentenced.

Change of Heart arrives at a time when the nation is having an important and wide-ranging conversation about overly-harsh sentences in the criminal justice system, joining other books on the topic such as Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* and Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*.

The personal cost has been high for Bishop, with friends and family often disagreeing with her. It remains a matter of faith and conscience for her, however: "It doesn't matter that I don't know how it will turn out," she says. "That is up to God. I cannot change the heart of a killer. But God can. Many people are willing to write off the David Biros of the world. I was one of those people once. God changed my heart. Why not the heart of David Biro?"

Jeanne Bishop is a public defender in Cook County, IL, and an activist for the abolition of the death penalty. She writes regularly for *The Huffington Post*, and her work has been featured by CNN.com, *Chicago Sun-Times*, and *Chicago Tribune*, among others. She has spoken around the world on issues related to crime, capital punishment, juvenile life sentences, and restorative justice.

###

Change of Heart: Justice, Mercy, and Making Peace with My Sister's Killer
by Jeanne Bishop
Westminster John Knox Press
Hardcover \$16.00
March 4, 2015