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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

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JSRI is currently accepting submissions of articles or videos to the JSRI JustSouth Monthly newsletter. Please see Guidelines for Submission here. Authors will receive a $350 honorarium from JSRI for articles/videos published in the newsletter.

Upcoming Events

For Second Chance Month this April, JSRI has organized several on-campus events, listed below. For more information see the Second Chance Month at Loyola flyer here.

A combined Visiting Room and Ignatian Teach-in on Mass Incarceration will be held Wednesday, April 24, from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM in the Audubon Room.

The documentary film, ***Commuted***, will be screened in Miller Hall Room 117 on **Monday, April 29**, at 5:30 PM, to be followed by a **discussion** led by Ms. Danielle Metz, whose life story is featured in the film.

Reflections on Receiving a Second Chance

By Charles Amos

There is nothing more powerful than a second chance. Today, during Second Chance Month, I am excited to share my second chance story with you. Let me start off by defining what I think a second chance means: It is the belief in the goodness of forgiveness, the possibility of redemption, and the power of the human spirit.

However, a person cannot be forgiven, redeemed, and given a second chance if a person does not come to grips with the reality of his or her life The reality of my life was that at the age of sixteen, I was an uneducated alcoholic and drug user headed into the adult prison system with a five-year sentence for armed robbery, uncertain of what my future held. The adult prison system made a big and negative impression on me. I was already being shaped and defined by the trends of my peer culture-- which were not very positive or supportive. Being incarcerated with adults only reinforced my life of crime.



Amos at the Louisiana State Capitol testifying against legislation that would end parole.

In 1995 at the age of 20 I was sentenced to life without parole for second degree murder and sent to the Louisiana State Petitionary (Angola). It was at this moment that I decided to grab hold of my life. Angola was a real eye opener for me. With so many people sentenced to life without parole there I knew I was doomed to die in prison unless I changed my mindset.

Other Events

JSRI, Loyola University Student Life & Ministry, and Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans will be holding an Ignatian Retreat for Loyola Rayburn students & the Catholic community at Rayburn Correctional Institute on Saturday, April 27.

I immediately began enrolling into rehabilitation programs. I had to start with basic literacy classes which was very embarrassing for me - I was in my early twenties struggling to read. However, my current state was worse than my pride, so I worked hard to achieve my GED. During that time I had a fight with another incarcerated person and I was placed in administrative segregation (solitary confinement). Being in a cell by myself for a few days afforded me the opportunity to draw close to God and commit my life to Him.

I was already making educational strides and changes, now my life was embarking on a newfound spiritual journey, a spiritual “second chance." I eventually enrolled in the New Orleans Baptist Theology Seminary Extension Center at Angola and in 2007, I obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Christian Ministry. Soon after, I was sent to be a chaplain’s assistant at another prison where men were going home regularly. I took advantage of this opportunity and committed myself to giving these men some of the wisdom I’d gain from my mistakes - so they would have successful “second chances.” It was a wonderful experience.



Amos testifies at a rally led by VOTE. Photo courtesy of Charles Amos.

Three years later I was sent back to Angola where I obtained my culinary certification. Still hungry for knowledge, I continued enrolling in all the programs I could. With so much schooling and learning I decided it was finally time for me to file for a commutation of sentence from the Pardon Board. Praise God that the Pardon Board recommended a sentence of 99 years with the possibility of parole after serving 30 years. A couple years later, Governor John Bel Edwards signed my pardon, making me eligible to apply for parole and a second chance at free life. The problem was, I still had three more years

in prison before serving 30 years. That's when a good friend of mine decided to get me a lawyer to bring my case to the Orleans Parish District Attorney's Civil Rights Division, which reviewed my case and agreed that I never should have been sentenced with second degree murder but rather manslaughter.

The Criminal District Judge handling my case agreed, I was resentenced with credit for 28 years served, and in April 2022 my dream for a second chance at life was realized and I obtained my freedom! I vowed then to give back to my community and fight for those whom I left behind in prison. I knew that God had worked all of this out for me - there was no other way any of this could have happened without God. I was soon blessed with obtaining a job with VOTE (Voice of The Experienced) as a Community Organizer registering people to vote, informing people about their voting rights, and going to the state Capitol to advocate for criminal justice reform

The past two years have been amazing. I had an opportunity to thank Governor John Bel Edwards personally for signing my clemency papers. I testified twice before the state legislature. I was featured in a story by *The Guardian*. And this summer I will be getting married!

My life is now a testament that second chances do work. Even people who have committed the worst crimes can change their lives and make a difference. When resources are properly given achievements will happen. For me the resources came while I was in prison, but I don't want the younger generation to have to go to prison for twenty plus years to obtain the support they need.

I want to leave you with this: THANK GOD FOR SECOND CHANCES!



Amos working to register community members to vote. Photo courtesy of Charles Amos

Charles Amos is a Chapter Organizer for VOTE, an Ambassador for The Visiting Room Project, and a member of the JSRI Advisory Board.

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.

Please send feedback to jsri@loyno.edu.

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As our prison education program continues to grow, we need to make sure that each and every one has access to an exceptional educational experience. We can't do it without your help. Give today!

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