1. THE PERSONS

Helen Prejean:
Helen is a sister in the ‘Hopehouse’ in a black neighbourhood. She helps poor people, teaches children, ... She starts writing with a death-row inmate and becomes his spiritual adviser. Helen has never done a work like this before. After the death of her death-row inmate, Pat, she tells herself that there will be no more involvement with death-row inmates. No more death row pen pals and no more visits. But that’s not the case, she becomes the pen-pale and spiritual adviser of a lot more death-row inmates.

Patrick Sonnier :
Patrick Sonnier, 27 years old, is the first deathrow inmate Sister Helen gets in contact with. On November 4, 1977, he and his younger brother Eddie, abducted from a lovers’ lane a teenage couple, Davis LeBlanc and Loretta Bourque. They raped the girl, forced the young people to lie face down, and shot them in the head. When he meets Helen, he is already waiting for his deathpenalty for about five years. Nevertheless, he says he didn’t do it. He told Helen that he wasn’t the one who shot the teenage couple, but it was his brother Eddie who did it. Patrick is called ‘Pat’ in the book. He has a daughter, Star. She is eleven years old but he has just seen her once. She lives with adoption parents now. When Helen started to write whit this man, she didn’t expected to get some letters back. But that wasn’t the case. Pat was very happy to have someone he could talk with. That’s also the reason he asked her to be his spiritual adviser. Pat has never been one to share his feelings, because when he was a kid growing up his mother and father used to fight a lot and they separated when he was six. They were with three children at home. Patrick, Eddie who is the youngest, and a sister who was the oldest. As kids they moved from father to mother and back again, and changed schools a lot. Pat dropped out of school when he was fifteen. He started to work as an eighteen-wheelers-driver what he liked. One thing he still got from his father, who died when he was just a teenager, is his love of work.

Eddie Sonnier :
Eddie Sonnier is the younger brother of Patrick. We don’t know that much about him, but he is still important because he was the one who killed the young couple and his brother has got the death penalty for it. Except his familial circumstances (which are the same as those of Pat), we know that he is going
true a very hard time in prison. He cannot keep his head up. He is very depressive. For him it’s very hard to now his brother is going to be murdered in his place. That’s why he tries to clear this up; he wrote on a letter that they were going to kill the wrong one. He gave this note to Helen (who was also befriending with him) and she passed it to the governor. But it didn’t made any difference.

Robert Lee Willie
Robert ’s mother, Elizabeth, was married to his father who had also spent 27 years in jail. That's why she remarried ‘Junior’, the stepfather of Robert. They have 3 children, Mickey (18), Tim (16), and Tod (11). They have always had a hard life. His mother had to work hard because they didn’t had a lot of money. Robert hasn’t had much schooling. He used drugs and was a real rebel, just like his father.

Now Robert is 26 years old. Up until now, he has already spent 5 years in prison. He has been found guilty of raping and stabbing to death Faith Hathaway. But he says he is not guilty and it’s Vaccora, his accomplice, who is guilty of the facts. He has received the death penalty, and Sister Helen Prejean became his spiritual adviser just as if she was for Patrick Sonnier.

2. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PERSONS

Helen and Pat :
Helen becomes involved in the case and as Pats’ spiritual adviser, she tries to help him the best as she can. She becomes a good ‘friend’ of Pat. Pat thanks her for loving her. He has never known real love and has never loved a women. In the prison, he met Helen and thanks to her, he can love someone. Now he knows what loving is. Helen gives Pat love and that ’s something wherefore he is very grateful. She also will help him to save his soul by receiving the sacraments of the church. She would do anything to help him.

Examples from the book :
- p102 : “Please tell Pat what happened, he’ll be worried”
Pat looks at me anxiously and asks, “are you all right?”
- p105 : He looks up at me and says, “Thanks for loving me, but I feel guilty that so much love has been lavished on me.”
- p120: He says “I love you”. I stretch my hand toward him. “I love you too”.

Robert and Helen
In the beginning, the relationship between Robert and Helen was rather superficial. Robert is more reserved and we get the impression that he is using Helen a bit. He hopes that he can achieve a life sentence with her help and doesn’t have to die. Later, when they can’t do anything anymore to provide his execution, their relationship becomes deeper and more precious. Robert starts to show his real feelings, he takes of his mask of the bad, arrogant, and remorseless ’man’ he pretends to be. Helen gives him the strength to take up the responsibility for his deeds. He also starts to believe because of her. He becomes religious and believes that he will go to a better place.
In the beginning Robert thought that Helen would be preaching all the time, and she thought that he was
some kind of sociopath but as they get to know one another they became good friends.

Example from the book:

- P.268: “I have to make a confession to you,” he says, and he explains that when he first heard I was a nun he thought he was really going to be ‘in for it’. “I thought you would doin’ nothin’ but preaching repentance at me, but after our first visit, I saw I could just talk to you like friend, and I told my mother that I met this real nice lady.”

Their relationship has changed a lot in time. Because of Helen, he is prepared for his death however, he is really afraid. He’s sorry for his acts and lets this know to the parents of his victim. He hopes his death will bring them some relief and peace. The truth has set him free. He has inner peace now. He goes in calmth, knowing his family and Helen love him.

**Helen and the parents of the victims**

Helen is caught in a difficult situation when she wants to help both the convict and the family of the victims of the convict. The relationship with the parents doesn’t grow really while she’s also treating their enemy. It’s only after the death of this deathrow inmate that the relationship between Helen and the parents of the victims strengthens. During the sentence of the convicts, she’s fixated on him. Helen avoids the parents because she’s afraid they will turn on her and attack her. After the convict’s death, she starts fixin more on the victims. Then there is a lot less more tension. They are more relieved and don’t blame her that much anymore.

Example from the book:

- P.292: But I also realise I’m protecting myself. I’ve been avoiding the victims because I’m afraid they’ll turn on me and attack me. I fear their anger and rejection. Plus, I feel so helpless face of their suffering. I don’t begin to know how to help them.

After the death of Robert, she starts organising public demonstration and workshops against deathpenalty. But she also starts a program for murder victim’s families. She can combine and realise both. She did things as she wanted to. She’s been a big support for both sides.