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the Church approved for Mother Teresa's beatification. I do know that Mother Teresa wanted to be a canonized saint. She was the most dedicated, focused person I have ever known. I don't agree with all her decisions, but there is no denying that she gave herself fully to God as she understood God.

You indicated that you not only left the Missionaries of Charity but also the Catholic Church. Lapsed Catholics who return to the confessional can expect the priest to ask, 'Why have you stayed away from God's church for so long?' (I think they read it off a card.) Hypothetically, how would you reply to that question?

I've been away from the Church for about a decade. During that time I've known more freedom, more love, more honesty, more genuine joy than I knew in the 40-some years in which I was connected to the Church. Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them."

On the subject of writing, I saw an interview where you advised aspiring writers to 'read a lot' and had to fend off a suggestion that books are obsolete. How do you combat that mentality in which any communication over 140 characters is considered excessive in some circles?

Personally, I love Twitter — the challenge of condensing a thought to 140 characters is a great exercise for a writer. But human life is a big endeavor, lots bigger than a single thought. We lost power here in New Hampshire two days ago, and yesterday I spent the entire afternoon immersed in a book — it was one of the most enjoyable afternoons I've spent in

ages, wrapped up in a blanket in front of the fireplace, wearing my mittens and turning the pages of a real book. I've decided that when the power comes back, I need to make time every week to tear myself away from my electronics and immerse myself in a great story told by a great writer, the way I used to do before I was online so much. A good book takes us deep into the experience of what it means to be a human. I need that, and I enjoy it.



Mary Johnson at Lamar, October 2011

Finally, I was reminded of the old Steve Goodman song 'You Never Even Called Me By My Name' when you wrote that in 20 years with the Missionaries of Charity — often in close proximity to Mother Teresa — she never called your name once, whether Sister Donata or Mary

Johnson. Clearly that bothered you, but is it fair to consider it dehumanizing? Does being a spiritual being require the rejection of one's humanity?

I'm not interested in becoming a spiritual being if that means I have to divorce myself from my humanity. Carl Jung said that developing one's individuality was the greatest gift anyone could give the world. Sometimes religious life asks us to deny our talents, needs and desires. Sometimes a family asks that, or a corporation does. St. Irenaeus said something I like very much: "The glory of God is the human person fully alive." Jesus said, "I came that you may have life and have it to the full." I want that fullness of life. I wanted Mother Teresa to call my name, but even more than that, I longed for my religious community to recognize me and to recognize each sister as a unique person whose individuality was a gift, not a burden, to the community. ■

SALES TAX

Jefferson County cities reaped major tax payments during the month of July. Beaumont payments increased 14.72 percent over the same period last year, Nederland increased 25.07 percent and Port Arthur increased an astounding 75.14 percent over July 2010. Overall, the county total increased by 28.61 percent.

According to Deborah Echols, director of finance for the city of Port Arthur, the increase came as the result of unusually large audit collections during the time period.

Orange County total tax revenue fell by .19 percent over the same period last year. Bridge City showed an increase of 8.98 percent, Vidor rose by 1.31 percent and Orange dropped by 3.81 percent.

Kountze tax income fell by 5.97 percent, Lumberton increased 1.32 percent and Silsbee dropped 1.27 percent. Overall, Hardin County gained a modest .62 percent over the same period in 2010.

	Net this period	Prior year	% change
Hardin County			
Kountze	30,515	32,455	-5.97%
Lumberton	196,586	194,008	1.32%
Silsbee	189,218	189,218	-1.27%
County Total	464,390	461,512	0.62%
Jefferson County			
Beaumont	2,855,058	2,488,606	14.72%
Groves	120,684	113,205	6.60%
Nederland	328,832	262,917	25.07%
Port Arthur	1,522,126	869,084	75.14%
County Total	4,921,838	3,826,813	28.61%
Orange County			
Bridge City	89,119	81,770	8.98%
Orange	246,970	256,761	-3.81%
Vidor	143,866	141,995	1.31%
County Total	621,095	622,331	-0.19%

BY THE NUMBERS