



PRESENTS

# WHERE THERE IS DARKNESS

*A documentary about the disappearance of Fr. Rene Robert  
and his plea to save the life of the man who abducted him.*

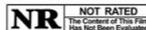
BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL



WHERE THERE IS  
DARKNESS

STELLA MAR FILMS PRESENTS WHERE THERE IS DARKNESS A FILM BY SEAN BLOOMFIELD CIMELA KIDONAKIS JESSI HANNAPEL  
CO-PRODUCED BY JOZO IVANKOVIC ROYCE HOOD EMILY BLACK VICTOR PAP DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CIMELA KIDONAKIS LAWRENCE DAUFENBACH WRITTEN BY SEAN BLOOMFIELD  
MUSIC BY DENISON WITMER STARRING ERIC NEWCOMBE DICK MCMAHON JAMES BLOOMFIELD ANNA BLOOMFIELD JOHN BLOOMFIELD  
PRODUCED BY JESSI HANNAPEL CIMELA KIDONAKIS SEAN BLOOMFIELD DIRECTED BY SEAN BLOOMFIELD CIMELA KIDONAKIS

CONTAINS VIOLENCE, LANGUAGE, AND DISCUSSION OF ADULT TOPICS



After its completion in late 2018, *Where There Is Darkness* has been seen by thousands of people in film festivals and hosted cinema screenings – most of them sold out.

## OFFICIAL SELECTION in over **80 film festivals**, including:

- Catalina Film Festival
- Awareness Film Festival (*Regal LA Live*)
- Big Apple Film Festival (*Florida Showcase*)
- Silk Road Film Festival (*Dublin, Ireland*)
- Snowdance Film Festival (*Munich*)
- AFIN International Film Fest (*Australia*)
- Fort Lauderdale Film Festival
- St. Augustine Film Festival
- Fort Myers Film Festival
- Maryland International Film Festival
- Vero Beach Wine + Film Festival
- Louisiana International Film Festival
- New Hope Film Festival



## Over **60 film festival awards**, including:

- *Best Feature Film* – Ocean City Film Festival
- *Best Director, Best Feature, and Best of Fest* – Magnolia Independent Film Festival
- *Best Documentary and Best Director* – Milledgeville Eatonton Film Festival
- *Best Documentary & Best Director* – Los Angeles Crime and Horror Film Festival
- *Best Documentary, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Soundtrack* – James Bond Film Festival
- *Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Sound Mixing* – Prison City Film Festival
- *Best Professional Documentary* – George Lindsey UNA Film Festival
- *Best Documentary Director* – Hollywood Florida Film Festival
- *Best Documentary Cinematography* – European Cinematography Awards
- *Best Feature Film and Audience Award* – Sands Film Festival
- *Best Documentary* – Australian Inspirational Film Festival
- *Best Documentary* – Black Cat Picture Show
- *Best Documentary Nomination* – Snowdance Film Festival, Munich
- *Finalist* – Colorado International Activism Film Festival
- *Semi-Finalist* – Burbank International Film Festival
- *Semi-Finalist* – Columbus International Film & Animation Festival
- *Semi-Finalist* – Social World Film Festival, Naples, Italy)
- *Semi-Finalist* – Emerge Film Festival

- *Special Mention* – Prague Film Festival



## Synopsis

Having devoted his life to helping the less fortunate, **Fr. Rene Robert** was regarded as a “living saint” in the tight-knit community of St. Augustine, Florida.

But when Fr. Rene began helping ex-convicts after they’d been released from prison, the people closest to him worried that he was putting his life at risk – especially the local sheriff, one of Fr. Rene’s longtime friends.

So, in **April, 2016**, when Fr. Rene failed to show up at a church service, the sheriff immediately put his best detectives on the case and local residents joined them to search for the beloved priest. It quickly became apparent, however, that Fr. Rene was not just missing – **someone had taken him against his will.**

True-crime documentary *Where There Is Darkness* follows the nationwide search for Fr. Rene amid a series of shocking revelations – including the discovery of a 20-year-old letter in which Fr. Rene seemed to foretell his own fate.

- **Length:** 1 Hour, 45 Minutes (*1:30:00 version also available*)
- **Genre:** Crime Documentary/Docudrama (*with a spirituality/forgiveness theme*)
- **Completed:** Late 2018/Early 2019
- **Distribution:** To Be Determined

- **Studio:** Stella Mar Films (*independent*)
- **Trailer & More Info:** [www.wherethereisdarkness.com](http://www.wherethereisdarkness.com)

## The Story

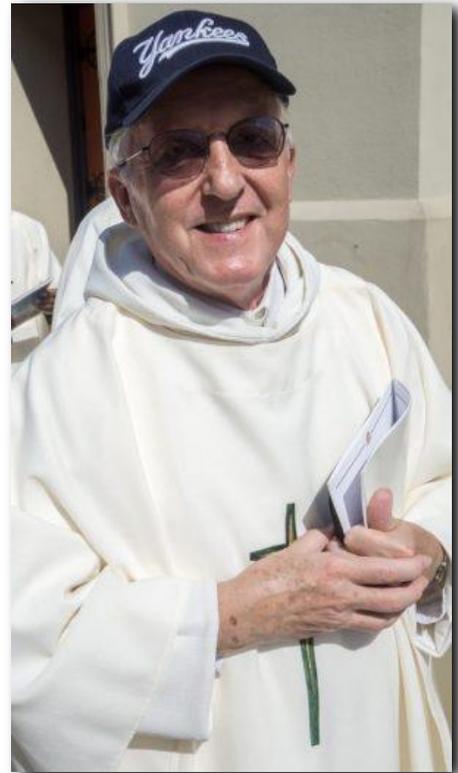


**CONTAINS SPOILERS** – It wasn't like Fr. Rene to miss a funeral service like the one he was supposed to attend on April 12, 2016. After Fr. Rene failed to answer subsequent calls to his cellphone, his friends reported him missing, setting into motion a frantic search that led investigators to suspect the worst.

Described by those who knew him as a "living saint," Fr. Rene Robert was a beloved figure in the tight-knit community of St. Augustine, Florida. He had a special place in his heart for people cast aside by the rest of society.

Police suspected foul play early on in Fr. Rene's disappearance, and the local sheriff put some of his best detectives on the case to help find his missing friend.

Days later, 28-year-old Steven Murray was spotted driving the priest's blue Toyota Corolla. When police eventually captured Murray, he led investigators to Fr. Rene's body and admitted that he had kidnapped the priest in Jacksonville, FL, and drove him against his will to Georgia and South Carolina, at some point forcing Fr. Rene into the trunk of the car.



And then, in the chill of the pre-dawn darkness, Murray drove down a remote logging trail, let Fr. Rene out of the trunk, and shot him to death.

Prosecutors announced that they would seek the death penalty in the murder case. Many people – including many of Fr. Rene’s heartbroken family and friends – felt that Murray deserved nothing less than execution for committing such a heinous crime.

But then came a voice from beyond the grave... the voice of Fr. Rene himself.



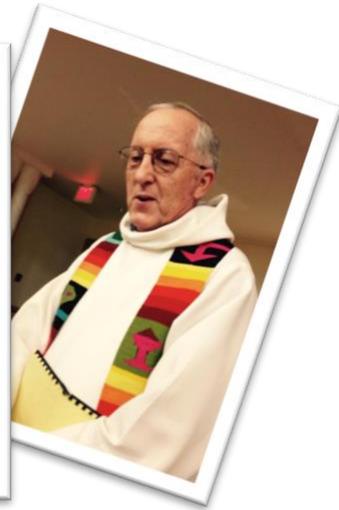
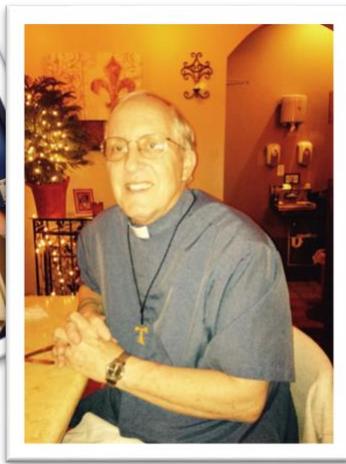
The secretary at the bishop’s office was going through Fr. Rene’s old files when she stumbled upon a document titled DECLARATION OF LIFE which Fr. Rene had signed in 1995 – more than 20 years earlier. The document read in part:

*Should I die as a result of a violent crime, I request that the person or persons found guilty of homicide for my killing not be subject to or put in jeopardy of the death penalty under any circumstance, no matter how heinous their crime or how much I have suffered.*

*–Fr. Rene Robert*

It was as if Fr. Rene had foreseen the circumstances of his own death. The bishop immediately sent the letter to the prosecutor’s office and urged them to reconsider their pursuit of the death penalty in the case...

**But would anyone listen?**





## CAST & CREW

*Directed by Sean Bloomfield & Cimela Kidonakis*

*Produced by Cimela Kidonakis, Jessi Hannapel, & Sean Bloomfield*

*Associate Producers Jozo Ivanković, Emily Black, & Royce Hood*

*Eric Newcombe as Steven Murray*

*Dick McMahon as Fr. Rene Robert*

*James Bloomfield as Young Steven Murray*

*Featuring music by Denison Witmer, Iron & Wine*

## LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CASE

- [1 year after his murder, parishioners gather to remember beloved St. Augustine priest](#)
- [Florida Priest Wanted His Future Killer's Life Spared](#)
- [Suspect describes mental, moral descent that led him to kill St. Augustine priest](#)
- [Tormented family: Suspect's siblings reported they were abused by dad](#)
- [Key characters in the life story of man accused of killing priest](#)
- [Diocese of St. Augustine Statement about Fr. Rene's passing](#)
- [Slain St. Augustine priest signed document asking that his killer not be put to death](#)

***NEXT: WHERE THERE IS DARKNESS in the MEDIA***

## Aiken Standard

### Film brings forgiveness for families of the Rev. Rene Robert and of his killer, Steven Murray

*Aiken Standard | Jan 13, 2019*

"Where There Is Darkness" tells the story of a brutal murder, but its central theme is mercy.

The documentary chronicles the life events – a long history of sexual and drug abuse from the hands of his father – that led Steven Murray, whose roots are in Aiken County, to shoot the Rev. Rene Robert, a 70-year-old, retired Catholic priest from St. Augustine, Fla., in the back on a lonely road in rural Burke County, Ga., in April 2016.

But more importantly, the film celebrates Robert's compassion and love for troubled people – people with mental and emotional problems and who had been convicted of crimes. Murray was one of those people whom Robert was trying to help get back on track.

The film tells the story of how Robert's own words from the grave affected his killer's sentencing and saved Murray from almost certain death. The documentary also helped bring forgiveness for both Murray's and Robert's families and the darkness they both endured.

The Fountain of Living Waters Church of God in Warrenton will sponsor a special screening of "Where There Is Darkness" at 4 p.m. Jan. 26 at the Imperial Theatre at 749 Broad St., Augusta.

All proceeds will help the church, at 275 Flint Drive in Warrenton, build a new sanctuary to extend its ministry.

"Where There Is Darkness" tells the story of the Rev. Rene Robert, who was murdered in 2016 by Steven Murray, a former Aiken County resident. A screening of the documentary Jan. 26 at the Imperial Theatre in Augusta will benefit the building fund for the Fountain of Living Waters Church of God in Warrenton.

Murray's family – his two sisters, brother and mother and father – attended the church years ago, said the Rev. Bertie Altman, the pastor, who has kept in touch with sisters, Crystal Murray and Bobbie Jean Murray. Altman participated in the documentary's filming.

“His sisters told the producers all about me, and they came from Florida to meet me,” Altman said. “They filmed different things and did a large interview, and some of that is in the movie – bits and pieces.”

The film focuses, too, on a prophetic plea Robert made 15 years before his murder.

Both Burke County prosecutors and the priest's family pushed for the death penalty for the murder, Altman said.

But during the trial, Robert's bishop in St. Augustine discovered a paper the priest had written called a “Declaration of Life.”

“In that paper, he stated – because he always worked with drug addicts and the homeless – should I ever lose my life at the hand of another human being, I do not want them to receive the death penalty,” Altman said. “Burke County was still trying to override that. The bishop from Florida said no, no. However they worked it out, Steven did not get the death penalty.”

Murray is serving a life sentence in the Valdosta State Prison in Georgia.

Altman attended the documentary's premier in Florida with Murray's sisters and witnessed the forgiveness both families felt firsthand.

“The film tells a little bit about what brought Steven to this, but it emphasizes that between the trial and the premier of this film, the family came to a place of forgiveness. I was there,” Altman said. “The amount of weeping and love that was there when this film was finished was just unbelievable. You felt everything. You didn't have to be related. You had an experience that day. It was absolutely amazing – that feeling of forgiveness and the weeping and the hugging.”

Robert's family felt that forgiveness, too.

“The family told the sisters we're going to pray for your brother. We had no idea what his life had been like, what brought him to this place,” Altman said. “None of us know. You can say all day long this will never happen to me, but you never know what's coming down your road. The film speaks to everyone who has had these struggles.”

For Murray's sister, Crystal, the film provided not only forgiveness but healing. The filmmakers asked Crystal and Bobbie Jean to return to their childhood home in Graniteville and to places where their father, Jimmy Murray, shot them up with crack and abused them in other ways when they were growing up.

“We honestly didn't know how we would react. I was scared I was going to flip out, but it started a healing process for us,” Crystal said Thursday during a phone conversation. “Prior to that, I was a lot more nervous and anxious and not able to talk about it. It's been buried. It honestly helped my sister in more ways than you can honestly imagine.”

Crystal started school, will graduate this year and will begin college next year. She has a son and is getting married Mother's Day.

“It's just a lot things,” she said. “Before I would try to get close to people, but I would push them away. It's been a really good thing.”

And Crystal and her sister found forgiveness for their father, too.

“In the process of all this, our father, who used to beat and molest us every day and shoot us up with drugs and was abusive in every way possible, he ended up passing. Me and my sister actually forgave him at the end for everything he put us through in our lives,” Crystal said. “I had never actually been able to forgive him, and I don't think I would have been able to if it wasn't for the producers of this film and exploring our childhood home and talking about it and just getting it out. I believe anybody struggling with their past or with forgiveness issues - I believe this film will help.”

According to news reports from 2016, Murray, first arrested at 11 to escape his abusive father, asked Robert for a ride in Jacksonville, Fla. Once in the car, Murray kidnapped the priest and later killed him, authorities said.

Murray was found driving Robert's Toyota Corolla in South Carolina a day after Robert was reported missing. After his arrest in Aiken County, Murray led police to Robert's body, which had several gunshot wounds, in a wooded area in Georgia.

For Altman, the documentary could turn Robert's tragic story into a blessing for her church and congregation, continuing the priest's legacy of giving and good works.

"God spoke to me about building a sanctuary," Altman said. "My argument with him was that we don't have that many people. We don't have any money. The Lord replied: Noah did not wait for the need. If I waited for the need, it might be too late. So we started a building fund and had fundraisers, and we've had great response."

Stella Mar Films, based in central Florida, produced "Where There Is Darkness." The documentary has been screened at film festivals in America and around the world and won numerous awards.



## **Film on forgiveness for man who killed a priest**

*Augusta TV NEWS12, January 25, 2019*

AUGUSTA, Ga -- A special showing of the documentary "Where There is Darkness" which is based on a priest who was killed by Steven Murray will happen tomorrow.

The sisters of Murray say even though their brother killed Father Rene Robert, the priest has saved his life.

It's been more than a year since Murray's sisters Bobby Jean and Crystal watched their brother get life in prison for kidnapping and killing a Florida priest.

Time hasn't erased their memories of the terrifying calls and pleas with Steven to turn himself in.

"The state of mind he was in I wanted to help them catch up to him because he wouldn't have stopped and he could've gotten hurt his self," said Bobby Jean. "It was scary to me. I didn't want anything to happen to him and I didn't want him to hurt anyone else and relieved to the extent that he was ok."

Her relief wouldn't last long.

Steven Murray confessed to investigators he kidnapped and killed Father Rene Robert and then-District Attorney Ashley Wright filed plans to seek the death penalty.

But, a letter from Father Rene Robert written years before his death asked for forgiveness for whomever if someone might take his life.

"I just starting crying immediately," said Bobby Jean.

"I would probably being a stranger would just hug his neck. He, we feel like he helped save my brother's life and we are thankful for that," said Crystal. "I never got the change to meet him personally and I wish I could have to be able to forgive somebody before they even do you wrong. That's an amazing person."

Call it a final act of kindness from a man who devoted his life to helping people, battling the same demons as their brother.

The sisters say they couldn't say no to the movie. The directors pitched it to them as a story of forgiveness.

They hope it helps others who are battling a past of abuse, like their brother. The sisters feel if they could've gotten to their brother sooner and gotten him help, all of this would never have happened.



## ***Where There Is Darkness* featured at Sands Film Festival**

*Ponte Vedra Recorder, April 19, 2019*

A man searches for love with an online Russian bride. A young woman faces the chance of avenging her father's death. **A St. Augustine priest is murdered**, and a boy in love with a girl ruins his chance by punching her in the face. Films on these stories and more were shown at the first Sands Film Festival April 13-14 at Players by the Sea theater in Jacksonville Beach.

Small, but mighty, the Sands Film Festival captured filmmakers' attention online and many reached out. After over 300 submissions later, the Mutic brothers found their festival selections. Alen and Irhad chose over 30 films from around the world that they believe showed quality and potential. Some have even been Oscar-nominated and internationally awarded.

"The majority of film festivals select films from their own town," Irhad explained. "I don't think quality comes into play a lot. It's usually just because they want to fill up a theater, so they select filmmakers from there because the majority are going to show up.

"Not only for screening, but also for awards," Alen added, mentioning that the more that local movies are featured, the higher the chance a local movie will be voted the best because of the local audience.

**Coincidentally, "Where There is Darkness," a featured film and documentary on the murder of St. Augustine priest, Father Renee Robert, won best feature film at the Sands Film Festival, not because of the local connection it made with the audience, but because of the content within the film itself.**

"I think that might be one of the best films we have," Alen said. "It's a story that needs to be told."



## **Film in the works based on murder of beloved St Augustine priest**

*First Coast News (NBC/ABC), Anthony Austin, May 18, 2018*

ST. AUGUSTINE, Fla. -- The murder of a beloved St. Augustine priest has inspired a couple of filmmakers to bring his life to the big screen.

In 2016, Steven Murray shot and killed Father Rene Robert and left his body in the Georgia woods. The filmmakers say it's not just a story about a saint and a monster, but a visual representation of forgiveness.

"I'm just very inspired by who Father Rene was," Cimela Kidonakis said.

This project all started with Cimela Kidonakis, a filmmaker, who heard about the murder of Father Rene on National Public Radio.

"I don't even know how I got home because I was so in tune to the story and I loved how it was talking about how he had forgiven 20 years before his murder," Kidonakis said.

The beloved priest had signed a declaration of life, stating if he was ever the victim of a violent crime, the person responsible would not receive the death penalty.

"Father Rene taught everybody that he knew, not to judge anyone and I think that's the most we've gotten out of making this film," Sean Bloomfield added.

Cimela contacted fellow filmmaker, Sean Bloomfield, who lives only two hours from St. Augustine. He had heard the story of Father Rene and wanted to get involved.

"We chose this project with no budget at the time. We had no money, nothing really, except a lot of passion," he said.

A lot of passion over the past year and half, researching the life of the priest and his final moments with his killer, Steven Murray. Sean said the community wanted this story to be told.

"We never expected to get the kind of support that we've had from this community, Northeast Florida and especially St. Augustine, it's been so beautiful to us. It's made me want to move here."

The filmmakers found an actor from out of state to portray Father Rene and they had a few similarities.

"It was amazing because we found a guy in Oregon, Dick, whose name is Richard Wayne. Father Rene's name before he took Rene Robert was Richard Wayne," Kidonakis explained.

Actor Dick McMahon said he turned to Father Rene for guidance on how to tell his story.

"To be quite honest with you, I prayed to Father Rene once I got down here to Florida and learned a little bit more about him. I prayed for him to jump into my body and help me tell that story," Dick McMahon said.

This project is called "Where There is Darkness." There is meaning behind the title. It's based on the Peace Prayer of St. Francis.

"There's a line in there where's there's darkness let me bring the light," he said. "For us, we felt that could be a perfect title because Father Rene brought this light into the world, into the dark world."

The filmmakers hope when you watch it, you will understand his final act of mercy and forgiveness.

"It inspires me to be more forgiving and to find peace in forgiving," Kidonakis said.

Stella Mar Films plans to release this docu-drama in September around Father Rene's birthday. The filmmakers say the families of both Father Rene Robert and Steven Murray have been supportive during the process.



DALLAS MAGAZINE

## A Highlight of the Women Texas Film Festival: Two Sisters in a True Crime Doc

***Where There Is Darkness* tells the story of a beloved Catholic priest who went missing. The festival brought his sisters to town to discuss it. BY MICAH FLORES | AUG 21, 2019**

Among this year's number of imaginative and engaging features to grace the 2019 Women Texas Film Festival line-up, Stella Mar Films' *Where There is Darkness* stands out. Following the 2016 disappearance of Catholic priest and community figure Father Rene Robert, the award-winning true crime documentary dazzled the Texas Theatre audience through sublime landscape shots, archive footage, thoughtful re-enactments, and powerful storytelling. Even more exciting, the two sisters at the center of the feature, Bobbie Jean Murray and Crystal Murray, attended the screening and participated in a Q&A afterward.

When friends and family describe Father Rene's kind albeit quirky personality, a few traits come to mind. His admiration of St. Francis. His steadfast humility. His staple accessory, a New York Yankees hat. His uncanny affection for cheese (he would put it on salmon). A beloved spiritual leader and friend to all, Fr. Rene touched the lives of many in the close-knit community of St. Augustine, Florida. When he didn't show up to a funeral he was supposed to attend on April 12, 2016, and wouldn't answer his cell phone after, people began to worry. This is where the story begins.

As the film progresses, we learn that Fr. Rene's generosity and trustworthy nature extended to people from all walks of life. He took an interest in helping ex-convicts as they transitioned from prison back into society. Sometimes his assistance came in the form of spiritual guidance. Most times, as financial aid.

One such man whom Fr. Rene built a relationship with was 28-year-old Steven Murray, the brother of Bobbie Jean and Crystal Murray. Many close friends and family members advised against this kind of support and worried he was putting his life in danger, though this did not

stop the priest from continuing the work he felt called to do. Just days after Fr. Rene Robert's disappearance, Steven Murray was seen driving his blue Toyota Corolla.

Police eventually captured Murray. After hours of evasive answers and feigned ignorance, the young man admitted to kidnapping Fr. Rene and, ultimately, killing him. Prosecutors announced they would seek the death penalty and the case's outcome appeared immutable. That is, until the bishop's office found an old document signed by Fr. Rene in 1995, over two decades before.

In the document, titled "Declaration of Life," Fr. Rene essentially requests that should he be victim to a violent crime, the person found guilty should not be given the death penalty, writing, "no matter how heinous their crime or how much I have suffered." Though not legally binding itself, the posthumous act of mercy began something of a campaign by the community to save Steven Murray's life. Somehow, it worked. The judge sentenced Murray to life in prison.

While it may be tempting, and perhaps easier, to truncate the story down to its most sensational features or leave out certain perspectives, this film does not do so. *Where There is Darkness* feels balanced, and seemingly unravels a complex saga as efficiently and as truthfully as possible in this medium. As the Murray sisters take the stage, they explained how directors Sean Bloomfield and Cimela Kidonakis frequently consulted them and allowed for creative input during the process.

"With Sean and Cimela, we actually did have a lot of say-so. We were the first ones to see it. They were completely honest and very open with us. There were some things that we were not okay with, so they didn't include them," Bobbie Jean Murray says. "This film does not tell it all, but it tells enough for you to get the picture."

Prior to working with Bloomfield and Kidonakis, the Murrays turned away countless media inquiries, not exactly trusting what some outlets would do with the story. Gene Tolbert, one of the detectives on Fr. Rene's case, is close with the sisters and was more or less the person who convinced them to work with Stella Mar Films. After receiving their brother Steven Murray's permission, filming began.

The feature gets its name from a line in the Prayer of Saint Francis: "Where there is darkness, let me bring your light." Aptly titled, the film embodies this ideal of finding hope in tragedy, however impossible doing so may appear to be. The sisters' willingness to contribute to a project so deeply personal, and the readiness of all others in the film to be interviewed on camera, speaks to some fiber of faith we may cling to; at once arresting and inspiring.

# Epic Theatres to host sneak peek of Father Rene Robert documentary

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When Father Rene Robert failed to show up for a funeral he planned to officiate, people started to worry.

When the priest did not answer calls to his cellphone, friends and family began a frantic search.

When authorities spotted known criminal Steven Murray driving Robert's car, loved ones, neighbors, parishioners and riveted strangers feared the worst.

The kidnapping and murder of "Father Rene" in April 2016 sent shock waves through the St. Augustine community.

What kind of person could stuff a man of the cloth into a trunk, drive him into the Georgia woods and shoot him in the head at point-blank range?

Though it was never their intention to answer this question, independent filmmakers Sean Bloomfield and Cimela Kidonakis will shed light on the "why" of Father Rene's murder in their upcoming documentary, "Where There is Darkness."

The film, which can be seen in a sneak peek in St. Augustine on Father Rene's birthday, Sept. 2, couples live interviews with action-packed dramatizations to tell a true story of horrific tragedy and the power of forgiveness.

The Record caught up with co-director Sean Bloomfield to discuss what attracted him and Kidonakis to the story, the process they went through to capture it on film and how they were forever changed by spending time in Father Rene's world.

## **A chat with Sean Bloomfield, co-director of “Where There is Darkness”**

### **What drew you to this film project?**

I live in Florida, and Cimela is from Texas. I had always told her how much I love St. Augustine. When she heard about (Father Rene on NPR), she told me about it and we started looking into it. It seemed like a story that needed to be told, so we started documenting it.

### **What was the first step in telling this story?**

The first interviews we did were kind of exploratory. I reached out to the bishop (Bishop of St. Augustine Felipe J. Estévez), and he was very receptive to us coming up. We met with him and also the sheriff (Sheriff David Shoar). We interviewed both of them and were even more fascinated by the case. We ended up spending a lot of time with the detectives who were on the case. They led us to Steven Murray’s family — especially his sisters. It’s kind of like branching out — from each person you interview you follow the story from there.

### **As independent filmmakers, how did you finance the project?**

We just kind of boot-strapped it with what we could come up with. We pretty much used all the profits from our last movie in making this, and then we also did a crowd-fund more recently for post-production costs, which are pretty high. Our total budget was probably \$120,000.

### **Can you talk a little about the filming? Was it smooth?**

(In addition to interviews), we’ve also done a lot of re-enactments. We had a full crew for those shoots. We feel really good about those because they help illustrate the story, so it’s not just a film where people are talking. There’s a lot of action and investigation; it’s a pretty fast-paced movie — in a good way. With the re-enactments, the St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office was amazing. They gathered a SWAT team for us because we needed to re-enact the capture of Steven Murray, and the hunt for him in the woods. Even though that happened up north, the sheriff’s office had their squad guys put patches over their insignia, so we were able to film that around St. Augustine in the woods. The car chase, which did happen in St. Augustine, we re-enacted that with the sheriff’s office as well. Those shoots were surprisingly good. Even though

there were a lot of moving parts and a lot of people involved, they turned out really well. We also did a lot of more happy re-enactments of what Father Rene meant to the community.

### **What have you learned about Father Rene during this process?**

The thing that we loved learning was the fact that he was so unique. He almost had a radical faith, which a lot of people would look at as naïve in some cases. But at the same time, he was so selfless. It was amazing for us to see how many people he helped. We're constantly getting comments through our website. We hear so many stories that involved him, and it's amazing how many people he helped. Father Gillespie from San Sebastian (Catholic Church), whom we interviewed a lot, had some good quotes about how people look at saints from the past as these perfect people. That's what the history books remember them as, but as Father Gillespie says, 'they weren't perfect people.' In the same way, Father Rene wasn't perfect. That's the human side of him that people will be able to connect with after our film. We also go into some of his funny quirks. We would see these themes throughout all the interviews. People would say the same things. One of them was how much he loved cheese. He would put it on everything, even things that seemed like it didn't need cheese. We also heard how he would bug people about recycling to the point that it would really annoy them. He insisted they had to recycle, and he'd dig through their trash and stuff. Those are just funny quirks that are on the side of this beautiful ministry he had.

### **What was it like interviewing Steven Murray?**

We didn't meet fact-to-face, but we talked to him on the phone several times. We found out a lot of things that nobody knows because this was after his hearing and his sentencing when he was able to be a lot more open about what happened. It is strange. When we started this film, we wanted to make a film about Father Rene's mercy and the unique part of the 'Declaration of Life' that he signed, which ended up preventing Steven from getting the death penalty. But looking at the case, we were like, how do we make a film where this guy, this murderer, that seems like a total monster with no remorse and then Father Rene is this perfect person. How does that make a good story? But then, the more we delved into it, the more we met people and talked to people, we found not only the very human side of Father Rene, but also the very human side of Steven Murray. A lot of people might not know the extent of the amount of abuse he suffered. It's not an excuse for what he did, but the amount of abuse that he went through ... it's mind-

boggling that he's even still alive, honestly. Like one of the detectives said, 'I don't believe Steven Murray was born; I believe he was made.' We go into that (in the movie); it's kind of a side story.

### **Does your film take a stand on the death penalty?**

We didn't want to be pro- or anti-death penalty, or make some political statement. That's not what we're trying to do with this, so we leave it up to the viewer. At the same time, I think people will go into it and at first, feel that anger that everybody did. But, I think at the end, people will feel a bit more sympathy, and maybe see (Murray) in the way that Father Rene saw him, despite Steven's flaws.

### **Why did you choose St. Augustine for the sneak peek?**

It's where Father Rene lived and where the film is set, but more than that, we chose St. Augustine because of the amazing support we got from the Catholic parishes — from the priest and the bishop — but also from the sheriff's office and all the residents that knew Father Rene. They were just so welcoming to us and that was just such a beautiful thing — that Southern hospitality.

### **What do you hope audiences get out of the film?**

I would say a few things — like judging people less is a big one. Father Rene did not judge people. That's one thing that we learned about him — just how open he was to people of different backgrounds and beliefs. Cimela and I talk about it all the time. We didn't think we judged people. We're pretty open-minded, but this project has had a big effect on our actions. Through the process of making this film, we judge people less.

*Sneak peek of "Where There is Darkness" | 7 p.m. Sept. 2 | Epic Theatres of St. Augustine*



## Filmmakers to Host Space Coast Screening of Award-Winning Crime Documentary ‘Where There Is Darkness’

Space Coast Daily | December 14, 2018

*Merritt Island Resident and Filmmaker Sean Bloomfield will be with cast and crew at the AMC Avenue 16 in Viera at 3 p.m. on Sunday, December 16 – has already won a slew of film festival awards.*

**BREVARD COUNTY, FLORIDA —** The 2016 disappearance of beloved St. Augustine priest Fr. Rene Robert is the subject of a new documentary by Central Florida-based production company Stella Mar Films, and Space Coast residents have a chance to see it **Sunday, December 16, in the area’s first-ever showing of the film.**

Filmmakers Sean Bloomfield, Cimela Kidonakis and Jessi Hannapel have been documenting the story for more than two years.

Although they completed the final cut of the film just last month, “**Where There Is Darkness**” has already won a slew of film festival awards, including Best Documentary and Best Director at the Los Angeles Crime and Horror Film Festival in November.

“This is a film about hope and forgiveness,” said Sean Bloomfield.

“Even though it involves a tragic event, we uncovered so much hidden beauty as we retraced the circumstances surrounding Fr. Rene’s disappearance, and the audience response so far has been amazing.”

Filmmakers Sean Bloomfield, Cimela Kidonakis and Jessi Hannapel have been documenting the story for more than two years. “This is a film about hope and forgiveness,” said Bloomfield, above, who grew up in Brevard County and lives in Merritt Island.



Co-filmmakers Kidonakis and Hannapel live out of state but spent most of the last two years living in the area to work on the 1 hour and 39-minute documentary, which features re-enactments to help retell important elements of the story.

“Making this movie was an intense experience,” said co-director Cimela Kidonakis, “and as we documented the story, there were twists at every corner, which audiences seem to love.

“At the heart of the film, though, is a powerful message that seems to stick with viewers for a long time.”

The filmmakers and other members of the cast and crew will be at the AMC Avenue 16 in Viera at 3 p.m. on Sunday, December 16 to present “Where There is Darkness.”

***With most of the film’s showings selling out, tickets can be purchased online in advance.***

# WHERE THERE IS DARKNESS

STELLA MAR FILMS PRESENTS WHERE THERE IS DARKNESS • A TRUE STORY OF MURDER & MERCY

## CONTACTS

Contact us for more information, quotes from the  
filmmakers, high-res photos, videos, and more.

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