

# SEEKING JUSTICE IN TEXAS

TEXAS COALITION TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY  
WORKING TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY IN TEXAS/FALL 2005

## The Journey of Hope is Coming to Texas by Bill Pelke



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Murder victims family members who oppose the death penalty will address the statement often used by pro death penalty forces: "You would support the death penalty if someone in your family were killed." Family members of murder victims will be coming to the Texas Journey of Hope from around the country. For 17 days they will be sharing their stories of their own journey 'from violence to healing'. Speakers will be talking about how the death penalty does not heal the hurt. The death of the accused only extends the cycle of violence.

Murder victim family members lead the Journey; however family members of death row inmates join them. These family members put a human face on the issue and share their personal agony of waiting for the state to kill their loved one. And yet they hope for some sort of miracle on their journey. Exonerated death row inmates will also join the Texas Journey and share their stories of what it was like to be on death row, waiting for the state to kill them for a crime they did not commit.

Beginning in Houston, and reaching out to communities in Beaumont, Corpus Christi, Victoria and Huntsville, the Journey speakers will present their testimonies in high schools, colleges, churches and other various venues for five days before moving on to the Dallas/Fort Worth area doing similar events for the next four days.

*"I am a Christian, and Jesus said, 'Whosoever has no sin, cast the first stone.' Under that criteria, none of us can cast the stone of death."*

During this period several groups of speakers will head out west to El Paso, Lubbock and Amarillo. From Dallas/Ft. Worth the Journey heads to San Antonio for three days that will be highlighted when Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking* joins the Journey for a special evening at St. Mary's University.

The Journey will continue on to Austin on Tuesday the 25<sup>th</sup>. After two full days of events, the Journey will join the annual conference of the National

Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. On Saturday the 29<sup>th</sup> a march to the State Capitol for a rally will be held. The march and rally will combine the forces of the Journey, the NCADP, TCADP, Campaign to End the Death Penalty and the Moratorium Network. Activists are greatly encouraged to join the Journey tour, the NCADP conference and the Capital march. The Journey couldn't happen without activist support across the state of Texas.

Please pass this information on to any death row family that you think might be interested in joining the Journey at some point along the way. They will find the Journey to be a wonderful community of support for their heavy burdens.

*Mr. Pelke is President of Journey of Hope...from Violence to Healing, and Chair of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty*

### Impending Executions

Please note that dates are tentative.

#### September

14 Ms. Frances Newton

22 Michael Lynn Riley

#### October

6 Ronald Howard

20 Luis Ramirez

#### November

2 Jaime Elizalde

3 Melvin White

9 Charles Thacker

**September 15, 2005**

**Deadline to register or schedule a venue.**

**We need your help!**

**To register:**

**[www.tcadp.org](http://www.tcadp.org)**



## Death Row Prisoners Award \$5,000 College Scholarship

*Compassion* is a bi-monthly publication written by death row prisoners throughout the United States. One half of all subscriptions and donation funds are awarded as college scholarships to family members of murder victims. Death row inmates developed *Compassion* in 2001 in response to a suggestion by Siddique Abdullah Hassan, who is on death row in Ohio State Penitentiary in Youngstown. "In no way are the scholarships to the immediate family members of murdered victims meant to atone for the loss they have experienced," Hassan wrote in his first editorial. "Scholarships are a compassionate gesture to those who have had a significant and unfortunate tragedy befall them." The son of a Texas murder victim received a scholarship last year.

This year a \$5000 college

scholarship was awarded to Zach Osborne, a young man in Jamestown, North Carolina whose 4 year old sister was murdered in April, 1992 when he was 6 years old. "Natalie's death has haunted my family since the day she was found", he wrote. "After many long years of wasted fury, I have finally been able to forgive Jeff (his mother's boyfriend) for his crime against my family". Zach will use his scholarship to pursue a criminal justice degree and become a law enforcement officer. He goes on to say, "Through realizing this dream, I would play a key role in preventing situations like this from ever happening again."

Scholarship decisions are not based on whether or not the applicant makes any statement of forgiveness, *Compassion* editors say. "We

would like to support him in realizing his dream of becoming an officer of the law and finding a way to prevent future violence."

*Compassion* focuses its efforts on publishing compassionate and introspective articles written by death row prisoners. We have many talented prisoners here in Texas and several are participating in this very positive endeavor. The current editor, Dennis Skillicorn, who is on death row in Missouri, views *Compassion* as "an opportunity for us to give back to society. In the process death row prisoners are able to work toward restoring some of what we've torn down."

This publication is distributed without charge to all 3400+ prisoners under the sentence of death. Fred Moor, St. Rose Parish, Perrysburg, Ohio,

oversees publication, and St. Rose Parish has been authorized by death row prisoners to handle all money for the publication and scholarship fund. This is a very excellent program which shows death row prisoners engaged cooperatively in very positive actions. For those of you on death row, please send them your literary contributions. For others, please support this publication and program by sending in your \$50 subscription or a donation to:

St. Rose Peace and Justice,  
COMPASSION

140 W. South Boundary St.

Perrysburg, OH 43551

Check out the website:  
<http://www.compassionondeathrow.org>

## Sugar Land Area Church Hosts Forum

Thoreau Unitarian Universalist Congregation in the Stafford / Sugar Land area hosted a Criminal Justice and Prison Issues Forum on Sunday, July 31, 2005. Guest panelists were Paul Kieniewicz, TCADP member and Death Penalty Coordinator for the Houston chapter of Amnesty International; Mary V. Alexander, Texas Inmates Families Association (TIFA); Dean Becker, Host, Producer, and Director, Cultural Baggage and the 4:20 Drug War News on KPFT 90.1 FM; and Wanda Redding, Program Administrator, TDCJ Rehabilitation and Reentry Divi-

sion. Each of the panelists made a presentation on their topic of specialization, and a very spirited question and answer session followed. The program was followed by a reception with light refreshments. TCADP and Amnesty International, along with others, provided literature at information tables where guests were able to drop by and talk about these issues

This very informative event was moderated by Dr. John Speer, Co-founder and Teacher, Thoreau UU Creative Writing Workshop Inside



the Prison and was planned and coordinated by Thoreau's Criminal Justice and Prison Issues Program Administrator, Sue Ann Lorig, also a member of TCADP. The congregation

at Thoreau is currently actively pursuing a number of excellent projects aimed at furthering their mission of criminal justice and prison reform.

# Tune in to the SHOUT OUT SHOW on KDOL Radio

KDOL 96.1 FM, a radio station located in Livingston, has been broadcasting for a little more than two years. From the beginning their format played music 24 hours a day every day. Their music covers the gamut: pop, classical, country-western, oldies, gospel, etc., you name it. Steve Kaus, known to his radio audience as Steve Kay, Monday through Friday 5 – 9 PM, takes requests for music and dedications.

Recently, they were contacted by a prisoner on Texas death row, who was moved by a number they played by Roma Downey called "Irish Blessing" and felt like letting them know. This initial contact led to the birth of a new program created specifically for death row prisoners in Livingston that allows people to send messages and music dedications to these men.

A short time later, on May 1, 2005, the inaugural broadcast of "The Shout Out Show" aired in the time slot it continues to hold, Sundays from 2 - 7 PM or later, depending on the volume of messages to prisoners known as "shout outs" or requests for special music directed their way. It has quickly become the most

listened to program by death row prisoners in Livingston. The staff at the station, Jim Wolfe (owner and DJ), Joy Weathers (station manager), and Steve Kay (DJ) are just as enthusiastic about this venture as the prisoners are. They have received mail from/or to about one fourth of death row at this point, thanking them for this terrific program which comes in very clearly on their radios because it is local access. The program has gone a long way to alleviate the pain-



**Steve, Joy, and Jim in the control room.**

ful feelings of isolation and depression for many prisoners. Here's how it works. A person who wishes to send a message can e-mail [kdolradio@livingston.net](mailto:kdolradio@livingston.net) and the message will be read on the

air Sunday evening. If they would like to deliver the message in their own voices, they can call (936) 328-8874 and leave that message on the voice mail, and it will be played during the program. If they would like to send special music or voice recordings by e-mail to be played on the program, they can be sent to Jim at [jimwolfe@livingston.net](mailto:jimwolfe@livingston.net) Monday through Friday only. It is very important not to do this during program time because it jams the computers and interferes with the broadcast. This program cannot be picked up by radio other than locally, but can be heard by computer at:

<http://67.18.103.116/kdol81>.

These are wonderful caring people, who are providing a small but very bright spot to men who live each in his own 6 by 10 solid box 23 hours a day and have very few bright spots in their lives. The station operates out of an old Victorian house on the edge of downtown Livingston. Their address is 309 N. Drew Street, Livingston, TX 77351. I am sure that donations to help them with their work would be greatly appreciated as they are supported by donations.

Please note that when football season starts, the Shout Out Program will be moved to the same time slot on Saturday, so that their radio audience will not have to choose between football and Shout Out.



**KDOL Radio, home of the Shout out Show!**

**The Shout out Show on KDOL Radio, 96.1 FM Livingston, Sundays/Saturdays 2:00 pm to 7:00pm**

## Medical Releases

For those of you on death row who are wanting to fill out an authorization for someone to be able to talk to the medical section about your medical condition should there be a problem, you may obtain this form by sending a "sick call request" to medical records requesting the form. It would be good to consider putting a family member you are in good communication with AND someone (an individual, not an organization) in the abolition community on the outside. Please remember to keep these updated every 6 months.

**Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty  
602 W. 7th Street, Suite 202  
Austin, TX 78701  
(512) 441-1808**

Annual Donation: \$30

Annual Joint Donation: \$50

Student/Restricted Income: \$15

Mail name, address, and phone number with annual donation to Austin office to receive quarterly newsletters. All donations are tax-deductible, Thank you!

Newsletter Editor: Vicki McCuiston,  
[vmccuiston@hotmail.com](mailto:vmccuiston@hotmail.com), [www.tcadp.org](http://www.tcadp.org)

# TCADP Chapter News

## Austin Chapter:

The Austin Chapter is continuing its planning for the Journey of Hope visit that will be in Austin October 25-28.

We also anticipate that venues will be established in the Temple and Waco areas. We are coordinating these with the Diocese of Austin Office of Parish Social Ministries.

The event at St Edward's University on Oct 25 will be a kick-off of the Journey visit to Austin. There will be two events that evening. The first will be an informal "Brown Bag Dinner" for the campus population. The second event will be a more formal one with Bishop Aymond of the Diocese of Austin welcoming the Journey to Austin and delivering remarks.

We have submitted a request for a financial grant to the Diocese of Austin Catholic Campaign for Human Development to support the Journey of Hope. We anticipate a response within the near future.

While the focus of the chapter is primarily on the Journey of Hope, we also are considering having a fund-raising activity in January. This would be a one-actor performance on the life of Clarence Darrow. Planning for this is in the very early stages.

The Austin chapter meets monthly on the first Thursday of the month. The next meeting will be September 1. The meetings begin at 7 PM and are held at 2700 W. Anderson Lane, Austin.

For further information about the Austin chapter, please contact Bob Van Steenburg at bobvans@austin.rr.com or P.O. Box 500007, Austin TX 78750.

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## Houston Chapter:

The Houston Chapter has met twice with Bill Pelke of the Journey of Hope to plan activities in October. One major event that will occur is the rally at the Walls Unit in Huntsville on Saturday, Oct. 15. It is hoped that TCADP members from around the state will attend that rally.

David and Peggy Atwood traveled to Amarillo and Lubbock in early May to give talks on the death penalty and encourage citizens in those cities to form TCADP chapters.

TCADP members Dave Atwood and Nancy Bailey met with members of MVFR Texas on April 17 to plan future activities.

The Houston chapter had an information table and distributed literature at a program on the death penalty at Strake Jesuit High School in Houston on April 15. Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza and Sr. Helen Prejean spoke at the program. "Dead Man Walking" was performed by students of Strake Jesuit and St. Agnes High School.

Dave Atwood gave talks on the death penalty at Houston Community College (Apr. 12) and St. Agnes High School (May 11).

On June 10, Dave Atwood of the TCADP and Sam Dunning of the Catholic Diocese of Galveston-Houston spoke on the subject of the death penalty at a Meeting of the Democrats for Life in Houston, Texas. Anti-death penalty literature was distributed to the attendees.

**For more chapter activities  
and information,  
check out the TCADP website,  
[www.tcadp.org!](http://www.tcadp.org)**

**Look for a chapter near you  
and come on out!**

**Check with your chapter  
leader for dates and times  
of meetings!**

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## TCADP Chapter News Cont.

### Beaumont:

On June 7, the TCADP gave an award to the children of James Byrd Jr. who was murdered in Jasper, Texas, on June 7, 1998. Byrd's children had courageously spoke out against the death penalty after their father's murder. The award was given at a program at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas in Beaumont. Thanks to Jesse Doiron, the event received extensive news coverage in the Beaumont area.

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### North Texas Chapter (Dallas/Ft. Worth):

The north Texas TCADP chapter has been meeting regularly working on a variety of items. We were engaged in legislative efforts supporting certain pieces of legislation during the past session which ended in May, and since then have been actively working with the folks from the Journey of Hope to secure speaking venues during the time the Journey will be in the north Texas area (Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex and beyond, Oct. 19-21).

We remain active and visible on all death penalty-related issues! For further information, contact Rick Halperin at 214-768-3284.

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### Victoria:

The Agape Chapter of the TCADP/Victoria Area represents a small group of people beginning the legendary "journey of a thousand miles" (to the abolition of the death penalty in Texas) with "one small step". Members are from the Cuero, Ganado and Victoria area, working with contacts in Wharton and Lavaca Counties.

Our first major effort was to sponsor a panel presentation on the death penalty, hosted by the First United Methodist Church in Cuero. David Atwood of Houston spoke on the abolition cause; Sr. Elizabeth Riebschlaeger, ccvi, presented in summary the history of the Catholic position on the death penalty; Rev. Ron Welborn, Pastor of FUM/Cuero, presented the Methodist history; and Mr. Paddy Burwell of Westoff in Dewitt County, at the time a member of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, gave an overview of the Board's structure and the clemency process as it exists under Texas Law. About 20 participants attended, and participated in the question and discussion period that followed. This was the first attempt any organization has made at opening up a discussion on the death penalty in public forum in Dewitt County.

The "precursor" to organizing a TCADP chapter in Dewitt County was the TCADP Poster Project. Rafael Acosta, Jr. a Cuero artist and muralist was commissioned to do an oil painting on the theme, "Jesus, an Innocent Victim of the Death Penalty" at the request of the Peace and Justice Committee of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio. This painting served as the basis of a poster on the same theme, by Senan Gonzales of Signs-FX also of Cuero. Funding for the project came from grants received from the TCADP Board, and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament in Victoria and Corpus Christi. The painting was unveiled during the previous regular session of the Texas State Legislature on the steps of the Capitol at the Day of Innocence ceremony sponsored by Rep. Harold V. Dutton, Jr. It has been on display at the Administrative Offices of the Diocese of Victoria and Houston, and is scheduled for display in the Archdiocese of San Antonio in the Fall. Over 500 posters were distributed to youth who visited the TCADP, Pax Cristi, and the Dominican Sisters Booth at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Houston last year. We answered a request for a copy of the poster which was received from the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in Los Angeles, California. They are preparing an exhibit of graphic art on the theme of the death penalty, and we expect will include the TCADP Poster. Information about the Center may be found by visiting their website on-line at [www.politicalgraphics.org](http://www.politicalgraphics.org). Their exhibits often travel to other areas of the US when a sponsor requests one. Posters are available for purchase.



**To borrow or display the painting, contact David Atwood in the Houston Chapter**

The Chapter is busy setting up venue sites for the Journey of Hope presenters who will visit the Victoria area. In preparation for Oct. 16-17, the Chapter has worked with the Catechetical Office Annual Conference Committee of the Catholic Diocese of Victoria to include a presentation for one of the afternoon breakout sessions by Linda and Ami White of Houston, members of the Family Victims of Violence for Reconciliation. This conference annually has from 500-600 persons in attendance from a 10-county area. We hope that their session will attract many people to the JOH events being planned.

There are four other venues that we hope to have for JOH. We hope to develop one of these in the context of a memorial service for the victims of violence in our area. Family members would be invited to bring pictures of their loved ones and attend, Bell Pelke is guiding the development of this session.

**New Lubbock chapter! Contact: Vince Gonzales (806) 799-1150 [mitigate1@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mitigate1@sbcglobal.net)**

## Legislative Update

by Scott Cobb

The 79<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Texas Legislature will go into the history books for making “the first significant change in the state's death penalty laws in decades”. At least that is how a reporter for the Austin American-Statesman described passage of the life without parole bill. Time will tell whether life without parole will reduce the number of death sentences and, eventually, the number of executions in Texas, but there is no doubt that its passage was an historic step in the history of the number one execution state in the nation. Apart from the LWOP issue, the legislature showed little interest in the death penalty.

### Bills That Passed and Were Signed by Governor Perry

**LWOP:** When Perry signed SB 60, the Life Without Parole bill, he made Texas the 48th state to offer such a sentencing option. New Mexico is now the only death penalty state that does not offer life without parole as an alternative to the death penalty. LWOP was approved despite opposition from big-city prosecutors such as Harris County District Attorney Chuck Rosenthal, who thinks it will make it more difficult for his office to secure death sentences. Some other prosecutors favored the bill. In the end, it passed because it was overwhelmingly supported by the people of Texas. When asked during the floor debate why the bill should be approved, Terry Keel, chair of the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence, answered: “because our constituents want it”. He was referring to opinion polls showing support for LWOP among Texans as high as 78 percent. SB 60 eliminates the sentencing option of life with parole eligibility after 40 years, which the original bill included. The bill sponsor, Senator Lucio, could not find enough support for retaining three options, so he compromised and the result is that lethal injection and life without parole are now the only punishments available for juries to choose when sentencing people convicted of capital crimes in Texas.

**Juvenile Offenders:** On March 1, the U.S. Supreme Court banned executions of people who commit offenses before they turn 18. Several Texas legislators had filed bills to abolish the death penalty for juvenile offenders. The bills became moot after the Supreme Court ruling, but in order to conform to the ruling the Legislature added an amendment to the LWOP bill that changed the language in the Texas penal code to make 18 the minimum age for death penalty eligibility.

**Crime Labs:** The legislature passed House Bill 1068, which creates a nine-member commission to investigate potential problems in crime labs across the state. The bill passed as a response to the massive problems in the Houston Police Department crime lab, as well as problems in other crime labs across the state. As former FBI director William Sessions said in a Houston Chronicle Op-Ed, HB 1068 “provides Texans with the means to ensure the quality of forensic evidence that is used to convict the guilty and protect the innocent. Where problems are identified, the new Texas Forensic Science Commission is empowered to investigate, identify the sources of the problems, recommend corrective action and demand effective implementation”. The new commission will have the power to investigate labs, but the Department of Public Safety will retain the power to accredit labs.

**Death Certificates:** The legislature passed House Bill 93, which changes the wording on death certificates of executed inmates. Instead of "homicide," the cause of death will be listed as "judicially ordered execution." The change takes effect on Sept 1.

**Death Penalty Expansion:** Also receiving approval was SB 1791, a bill by Senator Whitmire that expands capital punishment by making the death penalty a sentencing option for people convicted of murdering judges.

### Bills That Did Not Pass

**Mental Retardation:** Legislators again failed to reach a compromise on the issue of mental retardation. The U.S. Supreme Court banned executions of people with mental retardation in 2002, but Texas still has not passed legislation to define mental retardation or to set up rules when to decide the question of whether a defendant has mental retardation – before or after the 'guilty-or-not-guilty' phase of the trial.

**Innocence Commission:** Senator Ellis's proposed Innocence Commission failed to pass, even though Ernest Willis was exonerated and freed from Texas Death Row in October - just three months before the legislative session began. He spent 17 years on death row for a crime he did not commit. The Innocence Commission would have been charged with investigating cases of innocence and attempted to discover how to avoid wrongful convictions. On a positive note, the legislature did approve about \$200,000 each for four innocence clinics at Texas law schools. The clinics include the Texas Innocence Network at the University of Houston Law Center, which is a program that focuses exclusively on investigating claims of actual innocence.

**Death Penalty Study Bill:** SB 544, a bill that would have created a commission to study the death penalty in Texas, was approved by the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice, but its sponsor could not find enough votes to bring it to the floor of the senate for a vote. The study commission bill lost momentum after Governor Perry announced the creation of his Criminal Justice Advisory Council, which is charged with evaluating the entire Texas criminal justice system. It remains to be seen whether a panel appointed by Governor Perry can be relied on to conduct a thorough investigation when it comes to criminal justice issues. SB 1033, a bill that would have strengthened Perry's panel and given it authority to investigate wrongful convictions, did not pass.

**Lethal Injection and Life Without Parole are now the only punishments available for juries to choose when sentencing capital crimes in Texas.**

## Legislative Update Cont.

**Moratorium on Executions:** There was increased support for a moratorium on executions this session, at least among Democratic legislators, whose party platform endorsed a moratorium in 2004. However, unlike in 2001 and 2003, there were no committee hearings held on the issue of a moratorium on executions. In fact, in the Senate there were no moratorium bills introduced, because Senator Shapleigh did not file moratorium legislation as he had done in the last two legislative sessions. In the House, Terry Keel refused to schedule a hearing on the moratorium issue, even though four House members filed moratorium legislation, including Rep Dutton and Rep Naishtat. They have both filed moratorium legislation in each session since 2001. This session they were joined by two new pro-moratorium voices, Garnet Coleman and Ruth Jones McClendon, who both filed moratorium legislation for the first time this year.

**Compensation for Wrongful Convictions:** Two bills addressing this issue passed the senate, but died in the house. One bill would have made it easier for people to qualify for compensation for their wrongful convictions and the other would have raised the amount of money available to people who were wrongfully convicted, including as much as \$100,000 each year an innocent person spends on death row.

### Terry Keel's HB 268

HB 268, a bill by Terry Keel, died when Senator Ellis threatened to filibuster it because it would have weakened qualifications of appointed defense lawyers and might have triggered an opt-in provision of the federal "Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996". The provision, if triggered, would shorten the time that capital defendants have to appeal their cases to the federal courts. Keel retaliated by killing Senate Bill 368, which would have raised judicial pay, increased legislative pensions, and provided \$12 million in additional state funding for indigent defense. Texas Monthly named Terry Keel one of the "Ten Worst Legislators" of the session because of his "wanton acts of bill-killing for personal reasons". Fortunately, Keel has announced that he will not seek re-election to his house seat in 2006. Instead, he has announced his candidacy for a seat on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.

**Pancuronium Bromide:** A bill that would have banned the use of pancuronium bromide in executions was filed by Rep Gallego, but it failed to receive an affirmative vote in committee.

### Abolition

Rep Harold Dutton again filed a bill to abolish the death penalty. His bill did not receive a hearing as it did in 2003. However, after the legislative session, TCADP received good news on the abolition front. A legislator who has always supported capital punishment sent word that he is now an abolitionist. Rep Lon Burnam was expected to announce his new abolitionist position at the June 23-27 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association in Fort Worth. Rep Burnam becomes the fourth Texas legislator who has publicly stated support for abolishing the death penalty. The others are Dutton, Eddie Rodriguez and Paul Moreno.

## Frances Newton May be innocent—Her execution would be unjust!

Frances is an African-American woman who is scheduled to die on September 14, 2005, for the murder of her husband and two children. Frances denies that she ever committed these murders and the evidence is weak that she ever did.

Frances Newton's appeals attorneys believe she may be innocent and would never have received the death penalty if her legal representation during the trial had done a halfway decent job in defending her. As it turned out, however, she was represented

by the notoriously incompetent Ron Mock who failed to investigate the case or call any witnesses on her behalf. If he had done so, the State's case against Frances would not have held up to scrutiny. However, Frances' poor legal representation is not the only reason why she should not be executed. As it turns out, the State has destroyed the only evidence that possibly could prove her innocence! This alone should be reason enough to take the death penalty off the table. Finally, Frances has been a

model prisoner during the many years she has been in prison. To get the death penalty in Texas, you must be a "future danger to society". Frances' model behavior in prison has shown that she is not a "future danger". Society can be adequately protected by keeping Frances in prison. Her execution is totally unnecessary. [The Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty calls on Governor Perry and the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to commute Frances Newton's sentence to life in prison.](#)

### Write Governor Perry and the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles NOW,

The Honorable Rick Perry,  
Governor, State of Texas  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, TX 78711-2428  
Fax No. (512)463-1849

Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles  
Ms. Maria Ramirez,  
Clemency Administrator  
Executive Clemency Section  
P.O. Box 13401 Capitol Station  
Austin, TX 78711  
Fax No. (512) 467- 0945

**Terry Keel will not be seeking reelection, however he will be throwing his hat into the ring for a seat on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals!**

## Death Penalty and the “POWERS THAT BE”

by Tom Keene

Why do readers of the bible differ on the death penalty? Some say God wants it. Others say “no.” Can we ever come to a mutual understanding? Supporters often use quotes from the book of Leviticus that have God clearly requiring certain offenders be put to death. Such cases involve murder, adultery, incest, blasphemy, spiritualism and unruly children. Some proponents point out that it was through the death penalty that Jesus died for our sins.

Death penalty opponents, who also read the bible, have sincere doubts about divine approval of the death penalty but search in vain for biblical confirmation. One way to find that is to consider the meanings of biblical themes conveyed in such words as scapegoat, Satan, Paraclete, resurrection and “the powers that be.”

The scapegoat ritual involved the village coming together over two goats: one was chosen to receive all the sins and guilt, all the bad blood among villagers, all the vengeful intent of neighbor against neighbor. That goat the villagers drove into the desert to meet its fate. They sacrificed the other goat as a prayer of reconciliation with the God who was offended by the people's sins.

“The Satan” had meanings that evolved over the centuries. Under the influence of Persian dualism Satan came to personify the dark forces that opposed the God of light. The gospel of John makes full use of this notion, casting Satan as the driving force in society that led to the cruci-

fixion of Jesus. John describes how the institutional dynamics of the state (personified by Pontius Pilate) and religion (personified by the high priest Caiaphas) worked together to get rid of Jesus. They believed his preaching and charisma were a threat to their control of the people. John shows Jesus calling Satan “a liar from the beginning.” This may refer to the snake in the Garden of Eden. Just as likely, we can see its connection to Satan's name, which means accuser. In an oppressive regime, we can expect the law's accuser-prosecutors to be more dedicated to convicting defendants than to ensuring justice or the innocence of the accused. The rulers of unjust societies need scapegoats to take the blame of injustice off themselves.

That is how it turned out in the trial of Jesus. At that time the political and religious “powers that be” were at odds with each other and the people. John shows how the civil and religious “powers that be” came together to cast Jesus into the role of scapegoat. In the words of the high priest, “It is better that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should be destroyed.”

With the death of Jesus his followers asked themselves the same question posed by survivors of the Holocaust: How could God let this happen? For some followers the answer came in their belief in Jesus' resurrection. Here was a declaration that God did not side with the accusers but with the scapegoat. As this insight matured among the

community of believers John was able to show Jesus referring to the Spirit of God as “The Paraclete,” a Greek word meaning advocate or defense attorney. For John and for the resurrection believing community, God's defense of Jesus consisted of a demonstration: a resurrection showing what God was doing as the “powers that be” were doing their worst to Jesus.



**“This called for transforming the idea of God from a divinity that demands justice through punishment, retribution and blood sacrifice to a God who calls us to achieve justice through our love for one another.”**

The first writer in the Christian scriptures to grasp the significance of this was Paul, who told converts that without belief in Jesus' resurrection their faith was “null and void.” Over and over Paul would remind people that the worldly “powers that be” were ultimately subject to a God of love. This called for transforming the idea of God from a divinity that demands justice through punishment, retribution and blood sacrifice to a God who calls us to achieve justice through our love for one another.

We can understand how “the

powers that be,” the governmental, corporate, and religious forces that would control the people and profit from that control prefer that we believe in the God of vengeance. For them the death penalty is the divine will of a controlling, fear evoking God.

Citizens of Texas could see the devotees of this “God” at work in their own legal system. In Tullia, Texas a prosecutor, judge and jury collaborated with a lying undercover narcotics agent to convict and imprison half the town's African-American residents. Houston's Harris County sends more persons to death row than any other jurisdiction. There, the Police Department Crime Lab is investigated for giving tainted and false testimony in hundreds of cases.

To create a better system of justice requires a better vision of what humanity is all about. For those who read the bible, such a vision is available. There one can find a God who does not require scapegoats, blood sacrifices or death penalties. Rather, we discover a God who calls us to heal ourselves by changing our “powers that be” so they will serve life rather than death and humanize us instead of dehumanizing us. When readers of the bible agree on a God of love we can cut through different interpretations and ask if love requires a death penalty.

*Tom Keene retired as a professor of religious studies from Our Lady of the Lake University. He holds graduate degrees from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and St. Mary's University in San Antonio.*

# Rally opposes death Penalty

by Jim Jones

Special to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram

**FORT WORTH** - With a hot sun blazing down, a speaker at an anti-capital-punishment rally said Texas is the true "hellhole" as far as the death penalty is concerned.

"You are standing in a state that is the worst killing jurisdiction in the Free World," Rick Halperin of Dallas, head of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, told about 300 gathered outside the Fort Worth Convention Center.

The rally was held as a "public witness" against the death penalty and was part of the Unitarian Universalist Association national assembly, which continues through Monday.

Some of the 4,000 delegates to the assembly carried signs reading "Death Penalty is

Dead Wrong," "Fight the Urge to Kill" and "Death Doesn't Deter Crime."

The Rev. William Sinkford, president of the Unitarian Universalists, prayed for prosecutors, prison officials and others whom he said participate in a flawed system "that metes out death."

He also prayed that Texas lawmakers "may find the courage to put aside the understandable impulse for punishment" and create a system that protects residents "without taking more life."

The Rev. Craig Roshaven, minister of First Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church in Fort Worth, presided at the rally and recognized members of other religious faiths participating.

Ralph McCloud, director of pastoral and community services for the Roman Catholic

Diocese of Fort Worth and a former Fort Worth City Council member, said the time must come when people focus on reconciliation and redemption. "We people of faith, gathered here today, envision a day when we will no longer have capital punishment," McCloud said.

Linda White, chairwoman of Murder Victims for Reconciliation, whose 26-year-old daughter was a murder victim, said the death penalty offers false hope to the families of those who die from violent crime. "So many have found out after waiting 10 or 15 years to see someone executed that it doesn't bring closure or peace," she said.

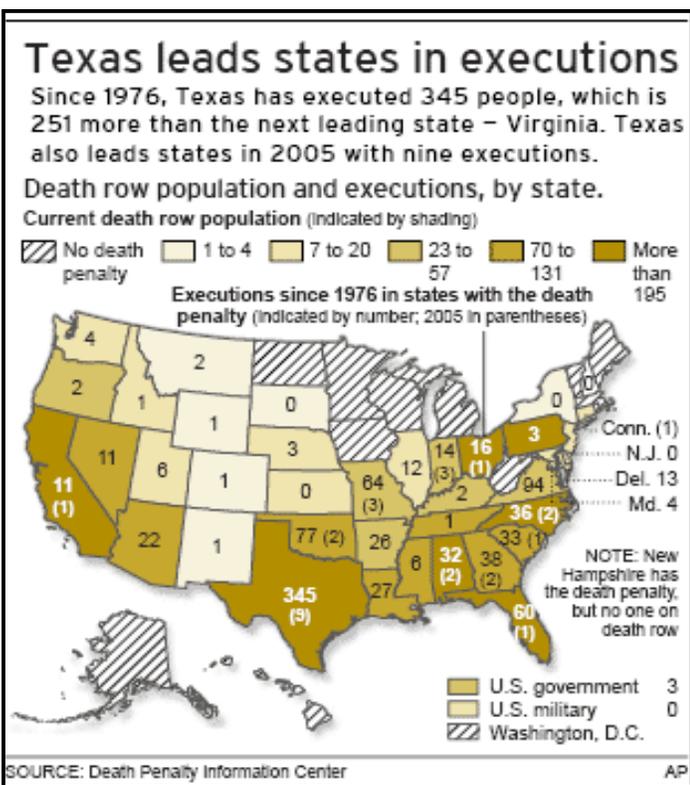
not new for the Boston-based denomination of 225,000 members. At the first general assembly 44 years ago, when Unitarian and Universalist denominations merged, delegates approved a resolution calling for an end to capital punishment.

<http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/news/local/11990625.htm>

Posted on Sun, Jun. 26, 2005



Opposing the death penalty is



**Don't Forget!**

**TCADP Board Meeting**

**October 8, 2005**

Academy of Oriental Medicine  
2700 W. Anderson Lane,  
Austin, TX

**11:00 am Executive Committee,**  
**12:00 pm General Board**

**All are welcome!**

**This will be an important**  
**meeting as we finish**  
**preparations for the**  
**Journey of Hope!**

Newsletter Editor: [vmccuiston@hotmail.com](mailto:vmccuiston@hotmail.com)  
Newsletter Online: [www.tcadp.org](http://www.tcadp.org)

## Poetry and Essays wanted for Death Row

Karen Sebung is in the process of gathering materials for the upcoming edition of the *Death Row Journal*. Many of you have participated in the past with your poetry and your essays. Please muster up your creative juices and send your work to Karen at:

The Lamp of Hope Project  
P. O. Box 305,  
League City, TX  
77574-0305.

We have enough literary talent on Texas Death Row to fill the needs of both the *Death Row Journal* and *Compassion* single handedly, so let's keep them busy.



TCADP with Amnesty International  
Austin, TX at the Capitol, April, 2005

**"It feels really good to be active and making a difference. The death penalty has bothered me for a long time, long before I developed my faith life. I cannot see how we can expect a certain level of humanity from people who have not also been able to receive that same level of humanity during the course of their lives. The percentage of abuse suffered by death row inmates saddens my heart. If the state would just fund education and social service programs many children wouldn't fall through the cracks and have to suffer in this way and maybe years later find themselves in the prison system or on death row. It is just an unending cycle of no compassion or connection with those in need. We are just throwing people away because we deem them unworthy of our attention and our resources. We are called to be better than this and it is time our state and our country responded."**

**- Vicki McCuiston**

### Good luck to Monte and Jim !

TCADP would like to thank Monte Youngs, TCADP program coordinator and Jim Young, the JOH Summer Intern, for their many hours of support. Monte was the first hired staff of TCADP and helped set up the Austin office. Jim worked this past summer organizing the Journey of Hope. Their hard work and help are greatly appreciated.

**We wish you the best of luck in your future.**

## TCADP hires new Program Coordinator

TCADP hired a new program coordinator in July. Vicki McCuiston has varied non profit and community organizing experience: hosting special events, communications, volunteer management, fundraising, as well as a long time strong moral opposition to the death penalty. She graduated from Southwestern Univ. with an International Studies degree focused on Asia and Poli. Sci. Vicki resides in Wimberley, TX where she is also responsible for directing the Barnabas Connection, a mission outreach of the Wimberley United Methodist Church. Vicki is married to Dan with 3 daughters at home, Holly 10, Hether, 8, and Hanna 7. Her family is very proud of her new job and the many people she hopes to help.

## TCADP State Conference

Reserve: January 28, 2006, 8:00am—5:30 pm  
Marriott Northwest, San Antonio, TX  
Look for more details as they become available  
on the web site and in the winter newsletter.

## Fourth Annual PACT Conference

Mark your calendars now. Texas Department of Criminal Justice will hold the Public Awareness Corrections Today (PACT) Conference Saturday, September 17, 2005 at Sam Houston State University Criminal Justice Center, 16<sup>th</sup> Street at Avenue I in Huntsville.

This is usually an all day event and provides an opportunity to learn useful information about TDCJ including contact information. There will be presentations on topics of interest to all families and supporters of prisoners. There will be table displays from the various departments within the system, and you will have opportunities to talk with various department heads about problems you may be having.

There is no cost, and registration is not required. There will be more information available as September approaches. Watch your Echo for an announcement by TDCJ. For those of you on death row, please alert your families.

# October 2005 JOH

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15 Rally at Walls Unit, Huntsville, TX
16 Thoreau, 1st, Wirt Unitarian churches, St. Paul UMC, St. Mary's Seminary	17 Strake Jesuit High School, Univ. of Hous, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church	18 Duchesne Academy, St. Pius X High School, Texas A&M	19 Brook Haven College, SMU	20	21 St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Church	22 Gather in San Antonio
23 St. Thomas Episcopal Church—Dallas	24 Sister Helen Prejean @ St. Mary's Univ.	25 Brown Bag dinner @ St. Edwards Univ.	26 Kiwanis Club, UT Catholic Student Center, Houston-Tillotson Univ.	27 UT Amnesty International, First UMC, Several Catholic churches	28 NCADP conference AUSTIN	29 March on Capitol - AUSTIN

30 Live Oak and First Unitarian Universalist Churches

**Deadline to Schedule an event or to register to participate is September 15, 2005. If you have any questions please call the Austin office (512) 441-1808, and ask for Vicki!**

## More About Bill Pelke, organizer of the Journey of Hope

Bill recently authored a book entitled *Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing*, which details the May 14, 1985 murder of his grandmother Ruth Pelke, a Bible teacher, by four teenage girls. Paula Cooper, who was deemed to be the ringleader was sentenced to die in the electric chair by the state of Indiana. She was fifteen years old at the time of the murder.

Pelke originally supported the sentence of death for Cooper, but went through a spiritual transformation after praying for

love and compassion for Paula Cooper and her family. He became involved in an international crusade on Paula's behalf and in 1989 after over 2 million people from Italy signed petitions and Pope John Paul II's request for mercy, Paula was taken off of death row and her sentence commuted to sixty years.

Bill, a retired steelworker, has dedicated his life to working for abolition of the death penalty. He shares his story of forgiveness and healing, and how he came to realize that he

did not need to see someone else die in order to heal from his grandmother's death. He also helps organize Journey tours nationally and abroad.

Pelke has traveled to over forty states and ten countries with the Journey of Hope and has told his story over 5000 times.

Bill Pelke's new book will be available at the Journey of Hope...from Violence to Healing.

**Check the calendar for a venue near you and help us pass the word!**

**Journey of Hope  
Schedule of Events  
www.tcadp.org**

- 15 Huntsville Rally
- 16 -18 Houston
- 18 Beaumont, Corpus Christi, the Valley, College Station, Lubbock
- 19-21 Dallas/ Ft. Worth
- 22 El Paso
- 22-24 San Antonio
- 25-30 Austin
- 27—30th NCADP Annual Conference
- 29 March on Capitol

**To schedule an event contact your JOH area coordinator:**

Houston-Dave Atwood (713)520-0300  
Victoria-Sr. Elizabeth Riebschlaeger (361)676-2921

San Antonio-Rosalyn Collier (210)930-2950  
Dallas-Rick Halperin (214)768-3284

Ft. Worth-Curt Crum cwaide69@yahoo.com

Austin-Bob Van Steenburg (512)258-6480

El Paso- Carol Tures (915)581-6246

Beaumont-Jesse Doiron (409)880-8564

Corpus Christi-Jeanne Adams (361)882-1133

College Station-Cecelia Hawkins cecelia\_hawkins@hotmail.com

**To participate in the Journey of Hope, Download an application from [www.tcadp.org](http://www.tcadp.org)!**



NCADP 2005 NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
TURNING WINS INTO WINNING

OCT. 27-30 IN AUSTIN, TEXAS

To register early go to [www.ncadp.org](http://www.ncadp.org).

On Site Registration available at event  
\$150.00.

Note: Registration Fees for Standard, On-Site  
and Student includes Annual Awards Banquet.

**NCADP 2005 National Conference - October 27th - 30th**

Less than a decade ago, we lacked members, muscle and momentum. But today, the death penalty abolition movement is achieving major wins in the courts and in the state capitals, and the American public is shifting to our side. If we are smart, use our resources wisely, and work together, the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty will abolish the death penalty in America.

**Workshops**

- Building the Base: Reaching Out to Key Constituencies (Students and Youth, People of Faith, Families of Murder Victims, and Death Row Inmates)
- The Power of One: How to be an Effective Citizen Lobbyist
- Winning Step By Step: How to Organize and Win Moratorium and Abolition Resolutions
- The Art of Activism: Using Documentary Films to Change the Minds and Build the Movement
- New Allies: Working with Consultants to Maximize Success
- Human Rights, Human Wrongs: How to Work Against the Death Penalty for People with Mental Disabilities
- Creative Activism: Using the Internet to Educate/Engage the Public

**CONGRATULATIONS  
TO OUR**

**2005 NATIONAL AWARDS WINNERS**  
SPECIAL CELEBRATION OF SUPREME COURT DECISION IN  
ROPER vs. SIMMONS

Abolitionist of the year: Shari Silberstein

**Lighting the Torch Award: David Atwood**

Outstanding Community Service Award: Susan Schindler

Outstanding Public Service Award:  
State Senator Rodney Ellis, Joseph Lentol (D)

Legal service Award: (including) Texas Defender Service

Join us on Saturday, October 29, 2005  
as we honor the 2005 Award Winners  
at the Annual Awards Banquet  
Hyatt Regency Austin at Town Lake  
8:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.

**TEXAS COALITION TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY**

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