



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TCADP Annual Conference to Address Changing Death Penalty Landscape

Statewide gathering will honor advocates, exonorees, faith leaders, and victim survivors

(Austin, Texas) — Advocates from across Texas will gather this Saturday, February 17, 2018 at Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas for the 20th consecutive annual conference of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP). This event, *Transforming the Landscape*, will feature workshops, a keynote address, and a panel discussion featuring Dallas County exonorees Johnny Pinchback and Christopher Scott and moderated by Mike Ware, the Executive Director of the Innocence Project of Texas.

Reverend Sharon Risher will provide the keynote address. A native of Charleston, South Carolina, Reverend Risher received a Master of Divinity Degree in 2007 from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She worked as a staff chaplain and trauma specialist with Parkland Hospital of Dallas.

Reverend Risher was thrust into the spotlight after the horrific shootings at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina on June 17, 2015. Her beloved mother — the church's sexton — Ethel Lee Lance, was killed along with eight others, including two cousins and a childhood friend.

Since that senseless tragedy, Reverend Risher has been outspoken about the nation's gun laws. She has also written about her views on the death penalty, including a piece for *Vox*, "My mom was killed in the Charleston shooting. Executing Dylann Roof won't bring her back" (June 15, 2016).

During the conference, TCADP will honor Rev. Dr. Wes Magruder, the Senior Pastor of Kessler Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, and Rev. DeAnna Golsan, the Senior Pastor at Disciples Christian Church in Plano, for communicating faith-based opposition to the death penalty and elevating the issue among people of faith.

We also will present Appreciation Awards to those on the front lines of fighting for justice. We will recognize the members of House of Renewed Hope in Dallas for their work to expose the truth in the case of Max Soffar, who served 30 years on death row in Texas before dying of cancer in 2016. Serious questions continue to surround the integrity and reliability of Soffar's capital murder conviction.

Attorney Jeff Newberry, a legal clinic supervisor at the University of Houston Law Center, will be honored for his long-time representation of Robert Pruet. Pruet was executed by the State of Texas on October 12, 2017 despite strong evidence of his innocence.

Dr. Judy and Glenn Cherry of Fort Worth will receive the 2018 Courage Award for their efforts to stop the execution of the man who killed their son, Jonas, in Fort Worth in 2006. Their powerful appeal for mercy inspired thousands of people in Texas and around the country. Their advocacy also raised questions as to whether prosecutors withheld information about their opposition to the death penalty from defense attorneys during Paul David Storey's trial, which led the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals to grant Storey a stay of execution in April 2017.

The death penalty landscape in Texas has changed significantly since TCADP held its first annual statewide conference in Austin. At that time, use of the death penalty was at its peak. In 1999, the State of Texas executed 35 people. Last year, there were 23 executions nationwide, of which 7 were carried out in Texas.

Likewise, in 1999, Texas juries sentenced 48 people to death. There were fewer than 40 death sentences in the United States in 2017, and just four in Texas.

The landscape is shifting even in the Texas counties that have imposed the death penalty most often. In the mid to late 1990s, Harris County alone was sending a dozen or more people to death row each year. For the past three years, however, there have been no new death sentences out of Harris or Dallas Counties. Those two counties together account for more than 400 death sentences and 186 executions.

"We are thrilled to host our 2018 Annual Conference in Dallas, where a robust community dialogue about smart criminal justice practices is currently underway," said TCADP Executive Director Kristin Houlié. "Recent developments in Dallas County mirror the steady movement away from the death penalty not only in Texas but throughout the United States."

The TCADP 2018 Annual Conference will take place at Friendship-West Baptist Church (2020 W. Wheatland Road, Dallas, TX 75232) from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. The keynote address and awards ceremony will take place from 12:30 to 2:00 PM. All are welcome.

For more information about the conference, visit <http://tcadp.org/what-we-do/annual-conference/> or contact Kristin Houlié at the information listed above.

TCADP 2018 Annual Conference: "Transforming the Landscape" @TCADPdotORG #tcadp2018

TCADP is a statewide, grassroots advocacy organization based in Austin.

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