



SEEKING JUSTICE

IN TEXAS

TEXAS COALITION TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY

WORKING THROUGH EDUCATION AND ACTION

SUMMER 2008

Inside This Issue:

From the Chair	2
Scott Panetti Update	3
Mayor Joins Tour	4
Chapter News	5
Project Needs Help	6
Member Spotlight	7
Faith Communities Step Up!	8

Texas Death Penalty News and Alerts

Executions to Resume in Texas June 3

With the recent Supreme Court decision on lethal injection, executions are expected to resume the beginning of June. Our education and advocacy efforts are vital. Check with your local chapter leader or regional representative for vigils in your area, page 5.

United Methodist General Conference Addresses Texas Death Penalty



The United Methodist Church sent a strong message to Texas Legislators, Governor Rick Perry and the Board of Pardons and Paroles. A resolution calling for the abolition of the death penalty in Texas was passed at the General Conference, an international gathering which took place this spring in Ft. Worth, Texas. The resolution was spearheaded by St John's United Methodist Church of Lubbock, TX.

Impending Executions

June

- 3 Derrick Sonnier
- 11 Karl Chamberlain
- 17 Charles Hood

July

- 10 Carlton Turner
- 22 Lester Bower
- 31 Larry Davis

August

- 5 Jose Medellin
- 14 Michael Rodriguez
- 20 Denard Manns
- 21 Jeff Wood

September

- 9 Gregory Wright
- 18 Joseph Ries

As of the end of 2007, Texas had executed 405 people since 1982. The 26 people executed in Texas in 2007 represented 62% of the national total.

Wrongful Conviction Summit Hosted by Senator Rodney Ellis

A summit that brought together prosecutors, defense attorneys, police chiefs, legislators, Innocence Project leaders, Court of Criminal Appeal Judges, criminal justice advocates and multiple Dallas County exonerees raised the question of whether the time has come for a Texas Innocence Commission. Learn more about the summit on page 9.

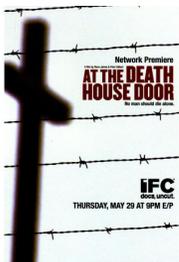
Music for Life in San Angelo, Dallas, and Ft. Worth!



The Sara Hickman concert series continues to roll through Texas cities with concerts in Beaumont, El Paso and Denton earlier in the spring. Each concert has helped raise awareness of the death penalty, reached new audiences, and provided new contacts to help TCADP generate dialogue on the issue throughout the state. Check page 4 for the exciting news from El Paso Mayor John Cook and for more info on locations and dates for the San Angelo, Dallas, and Ft. Worth Concerts. Spread the word and come out for some great music with a message!

Project Needs Help!

New innovative project between Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights and National Alliance on Mental Illness needs your support. See Page 6 for more details.



At the Death House Door

The award-winning documentary aired on the Independent Film Channel May 29. Multiple chapters across Texas hosted successful screenings. Learn more on page 3 about how you can use this film in raising the dialogue in your community.



A Note from the Chair

A seven-month moratorium on nationwide executions ended on May 7, when Georgia executed William Lynd. On April 16, the US Supreme Court rejected a challenge to the lethal combination of 3 drugs used in most American executions, which opponents had argued risked inflicting unnecessary pain.

Tragically, many states, including Texas, have since rushed to schedule execution dates. To no one's surprise, Texas leads the way, already scheduling 12 executions, with Virginia setting 4 dates, followed by Louisiana with 2, and Arkansas, Illinois, Oklahoma and South Dakota setting one execution date a piece. It is anticipated that the nation might have as many as 60-70 executions this year.

Last year, 42 people (including 26 here in Texas) were put to death across America, the lowest number since 1994 when 31 people were executed. But even though that number is sadly going to be surpassed this year as the nation continues its headlong rush to kill, we must remember that the overall trend of death sentencing in the US is declining and that disapproval/questioning of the death penalty is increasing.

It is clear that many (more) people are, and should be, deeply troubled by the inherent structural problems of the death penalty institution and its processes. Soaring costs, continued evidence of nationwide prosecutorial and police misconduct in capital cases, frequent poor legal representation, innocence, and racism are only some of the many factors impacting the judicial process when it comes time to decide who lives and who dies.

TCADP will continue its dedication to ending the death penalty in Texas, working with all segments of society who share this goal. Folks must re-dedicate themselves to this task and to realize that this difficult struggle needs more people to help make abolition a reality.

Join us NOW!

Rick Halperin

President, Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty



The Abolition movement lost a great friend on May 7, 2008. Mike Kennedy of Dallas, TX seen here with Sister Helen Prejean, passed away unexpectedly. He will be dearly missed.



**Daily News on the
Texas Death Penalty**

Check out the
Texas Abolition Blog
<http://tcadp.blogspot.com/>

Subscribe and have it come to your Inbox!



**Become a member online,
at www.tcadp.org**

Thank you!



SEEKING JUSTICE IN TEXAS
Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty
2709 S Lamar, Blvd, Suite 109
Austin, TX 78704
(512) 441-1808, www.tcadp.org

Newsletter Editor: Vicki McCuistion, info@tcadp.org
Summer Issue #22, 2008 Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall

Mail your name, address, and phone number with annual donation to Austin office to receive quarterly newsletters. All donations are tax-deductible. Thank you! If you are already a member and would like to receive the TCADP newsletter via email, send your name and email address to info@tcadp.org.

At the Death House Door Debuts Across the Country



Rev. Carroll Pickett

At the Death House Door debuted on the Independent Film Channel May 29. It is the story of the Death House Chaplain, Pastor Carroll Pickett, and of Carlos DeLuna, who is suspected may have been wrongfully convicted. The feature documentary follows the remarkable career journey of Pickett and weaves in the story of DeLuna, an inmate whose execution bothered Pickett more than any other because he firmly believed the man was innocent. The film tracks the investigative efforts of two *Chicago Tribune* reporters who turned up compelling evidence that strongly suggests DeLuna was innocent. *At the Death House Door* is a Kartemquin Films Production in association with the *Chicago Tribune* and has received multiple awards at film festivals across the country.



Corpus Christi Film Showing at Texas A&M Corpus Christi

P.S. The work of TCADP and TCADP Founder Dave Atwood are featured in this film!!

The Austin, Corpus Christi, Houston and Lubbock TCADP chapters hosted showings at multiple venues.



Austin Film Showing at the First Unitarian Universalist Church

To host a showing of this film in your area contact the state office at 512 441-1808. Consider charter/secular high schools, faith communities and community centers as possible venues. The film is 93 minutes long and does a great job of highlighting the impact of

executions on all parties involved: victims' families, inmates' families, and the employees of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

Update on Scott Panetti

By Kristin Houlé

On March 27, 2008, Judge Sam Sparks once again deemed Texas death row inmate Scott Panetti competent to be executed. The judge ruled that Panetti possessed sufficient rational understanding of the reason for his execution, despite the fact that Panetti believes that the state seeks his execution in order to prevent him from preaching the gospel in prison.

In his order denying the Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus, Judge Sparks further ordered that Panetti's execution shall be stayed pending the outcome of the appeal in this case. The case has been forwarded to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court for Appeals for review.

**

"Panetti was mentally ill when he committed his crime and continues to be mentally ill today," read Sparks' opinion. "However, he has both a factual and rational understanding of his crime, his impending death, and the causal retributive connection between the two. ... Therefore, if any mentally ill person is competent to be executed for his crimes, this record establishes it is Scott Panetti," Sparks wrote.

TCADP encourages chapters and members to organize screenings of "Executing the Insane: The Case of Scott Panetti" (20 Minutes), to distribute copies of the fact sheet on mental illness and the death penalty, and to collect signatures on the mental illness postcards, in order to raise awareness of these important issues. Please email Kristin at khoule@tcadp.org to request resources or visit the Prevention not Punishment Blog for more information. A link to the blog can be found on the TCADP home page.

Save the Date!

**TCADP ANNUAL CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 21, 2009
AUSTIN, TX
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
FAMILY LIFE CENTER**

El Paso Mayor Joins Tour!

The Music for Life concert series with Sara Hickman headed to Denton on May 29 with the addition of Mayor John Cook of El Paso as a speaker / performer for the tour. Mayor Cook performed at the concert in El Paso and became so energized and committed to the cause of abolition of the death penalty that he asked to join the tour.

Mayor Cook will speak and perform at each of the remaining venues and will challenge his fellow Texas mayors to come to the concerts and let their voices be heard.

The Denton concert will be the eighth in the series, with future concerts scheduled as shown below. The concerts have become excellent opportunities for people to hear great music and learn more about the death penalty in our state. Speakers at previous locations have included individuals who have lost a family member to murder, clergy members, college professors, activists, and a former District Attorney.

Please note if a concert is scheduled for a location near you and make plans now to attend and bring a friend or two. More information is available at the TCADP website, www.tcadp.org.



Mayor John Cook



MUSIC FOR LIFE TOUR

Featuring

Sara Hickman & Friends

Raising the Dialogue on the Death Penalty in Texas

www.tcadp.org/musictour.php



- KICKOFF:** October 3, 7:00pm First United Methodist Church, Austin w/ Barbara K ✓
 November 7: Olson Auditorium Sam Houston State Univ., Huntsville ✓
 December 8: First Unitarian Universalist Church - San Antonio w/Shelley King ✓
 January 14: Burning Bush Coffeehouse, Corpus Christi w/Stacey Earle & Mark Stuart ✓
 February 6: Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston w/Trish Murphy ✓
 March 3: Lamar University - John Gray Auditorium, Beaumont ✓
 April 9: Club 101, El Paso w/ Mayor John Cook ✓
 May 29: Dan's Silverleaf Denton w/ Carl Finch and El Paso Mayor John Cook ✓

June 25: **San Angelo w/ Cindy Jordan and El Paso Mayor John Cook**

July 20: Cathedral of Hope, **Dallas**

August 23: Jefferson Freedom Café, **Ft. Worth**

September 18: Waldo's Coffeehouse, **Waco** -Austin Lounge Lizards

FINALE: October - **Austin** - TBA

12 CITIES - 12 MONTHS

LISTEN, LEARN, AND HAVE FUN!

Organized by and benefiting the
 Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty

I'm someone who wants to start a dialogue. That's all. I want to get Texas talking about the death penalty because we are the state with the greatest number of executions, and yet, no one wants to talk about what it means.

I hope you will come out and join me, to ask questions, to meet family members of murder victims, to meet family members of those executed on death row.

*Come hear music and get involved at the same time. This isn't easy. In fact, it's scary. But the conversation must begin, and I hope it begins with you and me. **In Grace, Sara Hickman***

TCADP Chapter News

The **Austin** Chapter recently hosted Mike Farrell. A reception and house party was held for actor Mike Farrell to thank him for his life-long work to abolish the death penalty. In addition to his career as an actor, Mike is also a writer, producer, and director. He is probably best known for his role as B. J. Hunnicutt in the TV series M*A*S*H. Mike was in Austin as part of a book tour held in conjunction with the release of the paperback version of his book "Just Call Me Mike". He spoke to the approximately 50 individuals who attended the reception and urged them to continue their efforts to end capital punishment in the state of Texas. Mike also signed copies of his book for those in attendance. In addition to his appearance in Austin, Mike visited and held book signing events in El Paso and Houston. *Editor's Note: House parties are a great way to bring together potential new partners you want to work with in your community.*



Hostess Elizabeth Cole with Mike Farrell

The **Corpus Christi** Chapter will be presenting a Resolution for a Moratorium on the Death Penalty in Texas to the City Council in June to bring the issue before the citizens of Corpus Christi. Democrats in Corpus Christi passed a resolution to Abolish the Death Penalty at the Nueces County Convention and this resolution will be processed in the Resolutions Committee at the Democratic State Convention in June in Austin. We are hopeful that enough activists involved in this issue will be in positions to make a difference in the 2008 Democratic Platform.

On May 3 the **Houston** Chapter along with Amnesty International 23 participated in the annual fundraising walk of the



National Alliance on Mental Illness - Houston (NAMI). Counting children, about 20 people were part of the group. Their banner received a number of compliments on its message. \$1000 was raised for NAMI by the two groups. Everyone was very enthusiastic about the walk and plan to take part again next year. Thanks to Kristin Houle in Austin who encouraged the Houston chapter to participate in the walk.

Editor's Note: Check to see if and when there is a NAMI Walk in your area too. This is a great opportunity to create new alliances and meet new people. What better place to raise awareness about the TCADP mental illness and the death penalty postcard campaign!

The banner is ready and available to be borrowed.

The **Huntsville** chapter is up and running with members committing to various actions over the summer that include attending vigils and spreading the word of execution dates, continuing work on the speaker series, bringing people to Huntsville to speak on different topics, writing letters to the legislature based on the example provided from the TCADP website and committing to become TCADP members. If you live in the Huntsville area, take this opportunity to participate in your chapter! If you are interested or have questions please contact James Moore at huntsville@tcadp.org and get involved. We need your help in working to end the death penalty in Texas.

Chapters (C), Regional Reps (RR), and Affiliates (A)

STATE OFFICE—Austin (512) 441-1808 info@tcadp.org

INTERNATIONAL Sandrine Ageorges international@tcadp.org

Amarillo (RR) Eileen Dolan amarillo@tcadp.org

Austin (C) Bob Van Steenburg austin@tcadp.org

Beaumont (C) Bob Gazaway beaumont@tcadp.org

Lamar University Students (C) lamarstudents@tcadp.org

Killeen (C) Adele Mark killeen@tcadp.org

Brazos Valley (C) collegestation@tcadp.org

Corpus Christi (C) Jeanne Adams corpuschristi@tcadp.org

Dallas/Ft. Worth (C) Rick Halperin dallas@tcadp.org

El Pasoans Against the DP (RR) elpaso@tcadp.org

Houston (C) Nancy Bailey houston@tcadp.org

Huntsville (C) James Moore huntsville@tcadp.org

Laredo (RR) Sr. Rose Marie Tresp laredo@tcadp.org

Lubbock (C) Vince Gonzales lubbock@tcadp.org

Rio Grande Valley (C) Sylvia Garza riogrande@tcadp.org

San Angelo (RR) Robert Leibrecht sanangelo@tcadp.org

San Antonio (C) Roger Barnes sanantonio@tcadp.org

Victoria (C) Rev. Wanda Ritchea victoria@tcadp.org

(please call the state office if you need a contact phone number)

NAMI Joins with Murder Victims' Families in Groundbreaking New Project

[Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights](#) (MVFHR) and the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI) have come together to draw attention to the intersection between the death penalty and mental illness from the victims' perspective.

MVFHR is an international organization composed of relatives of homicide victims and relatives of people who have been executed, all of whom oppose the death penalty in all cases. NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots organization for people with mental illness and their families. NAMI opposes the death penalty for people with mental illnesses, believing that the execution of these individuals compounds the tragedy of violent crimes and serves no purpose in deterring similar crimes.

MVFHR and NAMI are united in the belief that persons suffering from mental illness should be treated, not executed. Both groups are interested in preventing the conditions that lead to criminal violence and in raising public awareness about the effect of sentencing offenders with severe mental illness to death.

What they're going to do:

Organize and host a gathering of family members of victims killed by persons suffering from mental illness and family members of mentally ill offenders who have been executed. The gathering, which will be the first of its kind, will take place in Texas and will include a facilitated private meeting among the families, as well as a public ceremony and press conference.

Publish a report that will be released at NAMI's July 2009 conference, which will be held in San Francisco. The report will be based on interviews with 20-30 family members who fit the profiles listed below, and will include policy recommendations and other useful information.

What they're looking for:

Murder victims' family members who are opposed to the death penalty and who are, specifically...

- Family members of victims killed by someone suffering from severe mental illness

Families of the executed who are, specifically...

- Family members of someone who suffered from severe mental illness and was executed
- Family members who are related to both the victim and the mentally ill offender, because the murder involved one family member taking the life of another within the same family

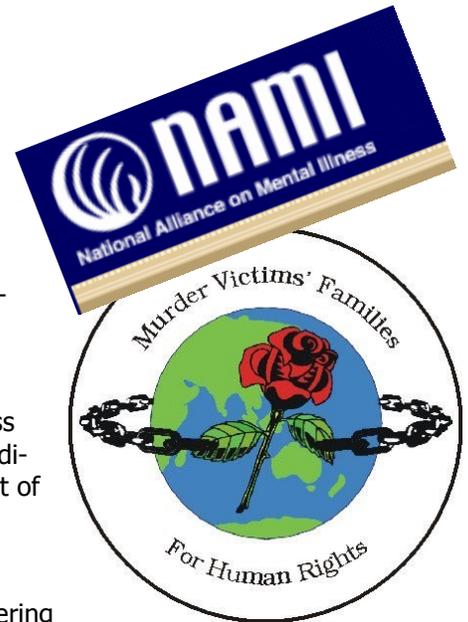
How you can help

Refer MVFHR to families fitting one of these profiles, or let MVFHR know of people, groups or organizations that might be sources of information about such families.

Help MVFHR cover the costs of bringing family members to the gathering and public event in Texas by making a donation or recommending potential sources of financial support for this and other aspects of the project.

Please contact Susannah Sheffer with MVFHR at sheffer@aceweb.com if you can offer assistance in either of these areas.

For more details and updates as the project progresses, visit <http://preventionnotpunishment.blogspot.com/>.



Check out the TCADP website! www.tcadp.org

Want to receive email alerts via email?

Send your name and email address to info@tcadp.org

Thank You for Your Generous Support

TCADP thanks the following members and donors who have contributed generously from **February 13, 2008—May 12, 2008**. Your financial assistance is essential for TCADP to continue to GROW its advocacy and education efforts to end the death penalty in Texas. Forgive us if we have missed you and please let us know. In some instances we do not have spouses names.

Charles Spain & John Adcock Chauncey Ashburn David Atwood Nancy Bailey Roger Barnes
Dr. Johannes Bastian & Christiane Bastian-Engelbert Neuza Beal Mary Berwick Francis Boakari William Bolin Byrd Bonner
Marian Breen Catherine Brown Sr. Margaret Bulmer Rep. Lon Burnam Carrie Campbell Wilfred Canning Mina Carpio
Ruben Catano Paolo Cifariello Elizabeth Cole Robert Connelly Serena Connelly Jim & Sherry Coombes
Robert O. & Shirley Cooper Sr. Germaine Corbin, CCVI Carla Maria Crisford Richard O. Curley Richard Daly
Ron Glass & James Detty Angela & Herb Diener Denise Doyle Josette Ducote Brigid Earthman Richard Easton, Jr. Amy
Farrier Dr. Maria Felix-Ortiz Robert Folz Joseph Forman Jean Fox Mary Gifford Irmie Glockner Susybelle Gosslee
Karl & Sharon Gronberg Phyllis Guest Rick Halperin Marilyn Harrington Cecelia Hawkins Chuck & Sue Heaberlin
John Holcombe Wanda Holcombe Nicole Horne Claire Jackson Elizabeth Jeter Carole Johnson Nettie Johnson
Daniel Kaminski Tom Keene John King Martha Lankford James Legare Alvin Loewenberg, Jr. Sue Ann Lorig David Mack
Father John Manahan Adele Mark Bill & Bea Martin Samuel Martin Mary Maxwell Kelly McClendon
Marty Whitehead & Patricia McGuire Barbara McGuirk Deborah Michalewicz Julie Miller James Moore Todd Moyer
John Murnin Sheila Murphy Laura Nye Bernadette O'Connor Thomas Phelan Kenneth Phelps Rev. Carroll & Jane Pickett
Iris & Norman Porter G. Allen Ramirez Suzanne Rittenberry Ken & Lois Robison Grace Rogers Martha Schecter
Laura Seipp Rhett Smith Mikkell Sonne Robert Sosa Myron Steves, Jr. Michael Stewart Burnham & Joan Terrell
Karen Tuel Mark Van Steenburg Robert & Jean Van Steenburg William Vaught Phil Wahlberg John Walker Ann Webb
Debra Weston-Mervant Linda White Dale Whiteaker-Lewis Gerhard & Christel Wieding Janice & Wayne Williams
Congregation of Divine Providence, Inc. Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word
Socially Responsible Investment Coalition

TCADP urges all members to keep their dues current. Maintaining your membership is important for a variety of reasons. We need to be able to count the number of people against the death penalty, particularly those who are willing to back it up with a financial investment to make it possible for us to fund our outreach and educational programs. **Thank you for your generous support!**

TCADP Member Spotlight...

How did you come to be against the death penalty?

Through education, research and very personal involvement as a wife of a death row inmate.

How did you learn about the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty?

Internet and through personal friends.

What are your expectations in becoming a member of TCADP for yourself?

For myself my expectations are to become more educated in the fight to end the death penalty, to carry on the fight in my husband's memory should he be executed and to help enlighten those ignorant of the harsh reality of what our "justice" system deems a fair and just punishment.

My expectation for the organization is to NEVER give in to the negativity and bigotry we face each and every day in this battle and to carry on this endeavor in honor of those lost and those facing execution.

What do you think is standing in the way of ending the death penalty in Texas?

An uneducated and ignorant public that refuses to acknowledge how horribly flawed our justice system really is!

What is the most compelling argument for you that the death penalty is wrong?

Oh gosh, where do I start?? Improper review, or lack thereof, of cases before the courts, needless pain and suffering of those being executed, the creation of additional victims in families of those condemned, and last but certainly not least, the fact that God's commandment is "Thou Shall Not Kill", not "Thou Shall Not Kill Unless....."

What other societal issues concern you?

Racism, Health Care for the elderly, Failure of proper review by the courts, to name a few.

What are your gifts, hobbies, and areas of expertise?

I am a nurse working primarily in case management and patient education. I used to have many hobbies but since beginning the fight and struggle for my husband's life I find it very difficult to focus on anything else outside work, his case and the fight to end the death penalty.

Connie Wright
Livingston, TX



Connie and Greg Wright.
Greg has an execution date of September 9, 2008.

TCADP Launches 2008 Religious Outreach Program

Page 8, Summer 2008

As the State of Texas prepares to resume executions, following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Baze vs. Rees* that the current lethal injection protocol used by most states does not constitute cruel and unusual punishment, there has never been a more critical time for education and action on the death penalty. The unfolding impact of the *Baze* decision and the approaching 2009 session of the Texas Legislature provide significant opportunities for faith communities to become involved on this issue.

TCADP seeks to engage at least 100 faith communities statewide over the next year in activities focused on the death penalty. In particular, we are encouraging faith communities to undertake one or more of the following activities as part of our ongoing efforts to promote dialogue and facilitate action:

- Distribute information on the death penalty issue, in keeping with their faith tradition's perspective on the issue.
- Collect signatures for TCADP's postcard campaign calling for a prohibition of the death penalty for offenders with severe mental illness and increased funding for mental healthcare in Texas.
- Hear testimony from a murder victim's family member or from an exonerated death row inmate.
- Watch one of the following films and hold a discussion:



Photo by Scott Langley

"At the Death House Door." This film presents the journey of Reverend Carroll Pickett, the former Texas death house chaplain who accompanied 95 men to their executions. 2007. 1 hour, 37 minutes. DVD available on loan from TCADP.

(For Catholic communities) "A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death." Based on the U.S. Bishops' 2005 statement of the same name, this film explores the Church's stand on the use, effectiveness, and necessity of the death penalty and offers guidance to parishes that wish to address the issue. 2006. 15 minutes. Available on loan from TCADP or from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for \$9.95: www.ccedp.org.

"The Empty Chair." In this balanced and compelling portrayal, four families that have lost loved ones to murder confront their notions of revenge, forgiveness, and healing. This film is well suited to audiences that hold mixed views on the death penalty or with groups that are addressing the issue for the first time. It includes commentary from Sister Helen Prejean. 2003. 52 minutes. DVD available on loan from TCADP.

"Executing the Insane: The Case of Scott Panetti." Scott Panetti was sentenced to death in Texas despite his long, documented history of paranoid schizophrenia. The film powerfully illustrates the devastating impact that Panetti's mental illness – and his death sentence – has had on his family. 2007. 27 minutes. Available on DVD from TCADP.

TCADP encourages Catholic communities to organize activities in conjunction with October's Respect Life month or as part of Faithful Citizenship, in keeping with the first key theme of Catholic social teaching – "The Right to Life and the Dignity of the Human Person." We encourage other faith communities to organize activities at the most opportune time in their calendars.

Written materials, petitions, postcards, speakers, films, and discussion guides for all of the activities suggested above are available at no cost from TCADP.

TCADP chapters/members can assist with this effort by organizing activities or events within their own faith communities or by sending the names and contact information of potential participants to the Religious Outreach Committee at outreach@tcadp.org.

To learn more about any of these initiatives or to request resources, please visit the TCADP website at www.tcadp.org/index.php?page=religious-outreach (under Programs, click on "Religious Outreach"), send an email to outreach@tcadp.org, or call the TCADP office at 512-441-1808.

A member of the TCADP Religious Outreach Committee will contact you to follow up.

Wrongful Conviction Summit Hosted by Senator Rodney Ellis

As a result of the unprecedented number of exonerations in Texas, key leaders from across the state gathered in Austin on May 8 for a landmark Summit on Wrongful Convictions. Judges, lawmakers, defense attorneys, prosecutors, exonerees, and criminal justice advocates came together for the Summit. The Summit marked the first time any of the state's criminal justice leaders have initiated a high-level meeting to address wrongful convictions. Texas State Senator Rodney Ellis spearheaded the Summit with support from Democratic Senator John Whitmire and Republican Senator Robert Deuell. Innocence Project Co-Director Barry Scheck along with Jeff Blackburn of the Texas Innocence Project were present and vocal.

Nine Texas exonerees told their very compelling stories of conviction, incarceration, and the fight for hope and their release. The tragedy of their stories were apparent in the loss of so much time and opportunity. One exoneree told the audience of the death of his pregnant wife in a car accident on the way to one of his court hearings. The now 50+ year old man spoke of his sense of loss over losing his wife and how the state of Texas had robbed him of ever having a family.

Problems with bad eyewitness testimony, poor representation, and difficulty in working through the habeas process were common themes from the exonerees. Senator Whitmire also pointed out the racial makeup of the exonerees, only one being Caucasian. Dallas District Attorney Craig Watkins also attended and was recognized for his inviting the Innocence Project in to his office to review all past cases. This has played a large role in the 17 exonerations that have come out of Dallas County.

Senator Ellis has presented legislation for an Innocence Commission in 2005 and 2007. The summit is to lay the ground work for similar legislation to be presented in 2009. This is a bi-partisan effort to create a commission that would address the root causes of wrongful conviction.

Who are the

TCADP Board of Directors?

Go to the TCADP website to learn about the many dedicated and experienced people serving this organization in the name of ending the death penalty in Texas!

<http://www.tcadp.org/index.php?page=board-staff>
(under the About TCADP button)

United Methodist Church Adopts Texas Death Penalty Resolution

Whereas, The United Methodist Church strongly opposes capital punishment, and

Whereas, in the state of Texas

- over 400 persons have been put to death since the state resumed executions in 1982;
- among the persons executed since 1982 at least six were mentally retarded, at least twenty suffered from mental illness, and thirteen were juveniles when their crimes were committed;
- among those executed eighty-three African Americans were put to death for crimes against white victims, and only one white person was executed for crimes against African Americans;
- eight persons sentenced to die have later been proven innocent and removed from death row;
- capital trials have at times been characterized by "unreliable witnesses, lack of evidence, incorrect experts, official misconduct, and inadequate defense attorneys";
- the Innocence Project of Texas has pointed to the likelihood that one or more innocent persons have been executed; and

Whereas, over 250 organizations of all kinds, including religious, civic, political, legal, and humanitarian groups, have officially called either for a moratorium on executions or for the abolition of the death penalty in Texas, and

Whereas, at least ten major newspapers in Texas have endorsed either a moratorium on executions or the abolition of capital punishment in the state,

Therefore, be it resolved, that the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, meeting in Fort Worth, Texas,

Express its deepest appreciation to all those organizations and individuals in the state of Texas who have valiantly struggled and continue to struggle for a more humane society in which the death penalty is rare or non-existent.

Call upon the Texas Legislature either to abolish the death penalty completely or to stop executions in the state until such time as all capital cases can be tried in a completely equitable way,

Call upon the Texas Pardon and Parole Board and the Governor to commute the sentences of persons currently on death row to life in prison without parole or to life in prison.

Instruct the Secretary of the General Conference to have copies of this resolution sent immediately to all members of the Texas Legislature, to each member of the Pardon and Parole Board, to the Governor of Texas, to the Texas Conference of Churches, and to the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

Approved by General Conference of the United Methodist Church, May 2, 2008

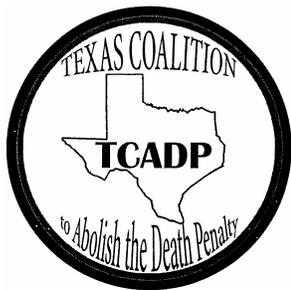
Approved by St. John's United Methodist Church Council, October 1, 2007

Editor's Note: Notice of this resolution has been sent out from the United Methodist Church to the parties listed above. Please check in with your Texas Senator and Representative on the passage of this resolution.

TEXAS COALITION TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY

2709 S. Lamar Blvd., Austin, TX 78704
(512) 441-1808

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage PAID
Permit # 882
Austin, TX



If there is no date on your address label or a date prior to 6/01/2008, please take the time to renew your membership or become a new member. See below for membership form.

JOIN TODAY!

Donations are tax deductible and support our education efforts in Texas.

I want to be counted as a member of TCADP and as actively working to end the death penalty in Texas.

_____ \$15.00 Student/Fixed Income Annual Member

_____ \$30.00 Annual Member

_____ \$50.00 Annual Joint Member

_____ \$100.00 Sustaining/ Organization Member

_____ \$250.00 Business Member

_____ \$ Enclosed is an additional contribution to support TCADP.

Please make checks payable to TCADP. Mail to TCADP, 2709 S Lamar, Austin, TX 78704. Secure online contributions can be made at www.tcadp.org.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

TCADP Quarterly Newsletter: _____ Print and/or _____ email

_____ I would like to host a program in my faith community, civic organization, or school.

_____ I want to host a new member party in my area with support from TCADP.