



Spring 2014

Seizing the Momentum

Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty

TCADP Seeks Your Support for Priority Initiatives

TCADP's Strategic Plan prioritizes 5 areas of importance for furthering our goals of first decreasing and then ending the use of the death penalty. These focus areas advance our effectiveness as an organization and play a key role in many of our activities. We invite your support and involvement in these initiatives!

To sign up to be involved with one or more of these priorities, complete the [online form](#) at the link or call the TCADP office at 512-441-1808.

Ask Texas Clergy to Sign our Interfaith Statement of Opposition to the Death Penalty

In order to demonstrate the depth and breadth of faith-based opposition to the death penalty in Texas, TCADP seeks to release an Interfaith Statement to the media, to elected officials, and to the public at large during the next regular session of the Texas Legislature in 2015. We also seek participants in a "Faith Leader Lobby Day on the Death Penalty". **All Texas clergy are invited to sign the [interfaith sign-on letter](#).**

Promote the Regional Speakers' Tours

TCADP will host speaking events in Houston/College Station, Austin/San Antonio, and Dallas-Fort Worth in the Fall of 2014 featuring exonorees, murder victim family members and families of death row inmates. If you would like to help coordinate

Are you connected with a Ministerial Alliance, Interfaith Group, or Texas Faith Leaders?

TCADP seeks your involvement in securing signatures on our Interfaith Statement of Opposition to the Death Penalty. Please support our efforts in the following ways:

- Share the [sign-on letter](#) with any clergy you know and ask them to share it with their colleagues;
- Let us know about religious conferences, interfaith meetings, or clergy events in your area between now and the end of the year;
- Reach out to ministerial alliances or ecumenical groups in your area and ask them to host a TCADP representative at one of their meetings.

Contact Vicki McCuiston regarding specific ways to engage local faith leaders in your communities, 512-441-1808, info@tcadp.org.

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Thank You, Members, Donors, and Partners for Justice!



"A Faithful Pilgrimage to Abolish the Death Penalty": Rev. Wes Magruder, Lynn Walters, and Rev. Jeff Hood walked 32 miles from the Dallas County District Attorney's Office to the Tarrant County Courthouse on Friday, February 21, 2014, the day before the TCADP 2014 Annual Conference "Lighting the Way" in Fort Worth.

speakers for local venues, please contact the state office. TCADP is particularly interested in non-traditional locations and providing speakers to regularly scheduled meetings and groups.

Encourage Membership Growth and Diversity

Download a ["Count Me In" form](#), circulate it at your faith or civic meeting, and mail completed forms to TCADP. TCADP is actively seeking support from across political, civic, and religious spectrums to increase our reach and impact. Criminal justice professionals and...

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Scheduled Executions

May

13 Robert Campbell [Act Now.](#)

Attend a [Texas Execution Vigil](#) on the day of a scheduled execution.



From the Executive Director

Dear TCADP Members and Supporters,

This spring I eagerly awaited the arrival of the April 2014 issue of *Texas Monthly* magazine. While I always look forward to reading the magazine's in-depth stories about Texas politics and culture, I was particularly interested in this issue, having learned that it would include a feature entitled "The Murders at the Lake." I've heard bits and pieces about the Lake Waco murders over the years from a variety of acquaintances and wanted the full story.



"The Murders at the Lake" recounts the complicated and still mystifying case of the murders of three teenagers – Kenneth Franks, Jill Montgomery, and Raylene Rice – at Lake Waco in 1982. The ensuing investigation and prosecutions resulted in the conviction of four defendants: Muneer Deeb and David Spence, who were sentenced to death; and brothers Tony and Gilbert Melendez, who were sentenced to life after confessing to the crimes to avoid the death penalty (both men later recanted their confessions). Only Tony Melendez is alive today.

In 1991, Muneer Deeb's conviction was overturned on the basis of hearsay evidence used against him. At his second trial, he was found not guilty and released from prison. Deeb died in 1999 – he is one of twelve people in Texas to be exonerated from death row.

Despite the best efforts of defense attorneys, the case of David Spence went in the opposite direction, leading to his execution in 1997, a year in which Texas put 37 people to death.

This story presents many familiar hallmarks of cases involving wrongful convictions and wrongful executions, including junk science, jailhouse informants, police misconduct, and coerced confessions. At the end of the day, we don't know if David Spence was wrongfully put to death for his role in the murders, but for me, the article raises too many doubts.

In commenting on "The Murders at the Lake," *Texas Monthly* Editor Jake Silverstein writes:

"It is important to keep capital cases like this alive and under scrutiny, not only because murders should be solved and the perpetrators put away but also because if we the people are going to punish a man with execution, we the people should be prepared to relentlessly reexamine, when the facts warrant it, whether or not he is actually guilty."

I know I'm not willing to live with a system that tolerates this level of uncertainty. I'm also unwilling to live with a system that refuses to learn from past mistakes, as evidenced by the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles recent rejection of a posthumous pardon request from the family of Cameron Todd Willingham (see *Death Penalty Developments* on page 5 for more details).

I strongly encourage you to take time to read the *Texas Monthly* article on the Lake Waco murders, form your own opinion, and share it with friends, family members, and coworkers. We the people must demand a system that is more accountable, more transparent, more accurate, and more just.

In gratitude,

TCADP Seizing the Momentum

TCADP Seizing the Momentum is published quarterly by the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, the only statewide grassroots advocacy organization dedicated solely to ending the death penalty in Texas. It is available online and twice a year in print.

Subscription Information: *TCADP Seizing the Momentum* is distributed to TCADP members and allies. To find out more about the organization and become a member, visit our website at www.tcadp.org.

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Volunteers

Thanks so much to the following individuals who have volunteered in the TCADP Office or provided administrative support in recent months: Herb and Angela Diener, Tom and Jean Egan, Sam Johnson, Mike Renquist.

We are immensely grateful for your assistance!



Calendar of Events

April

24 TCADP Houston Chapter meeting, 6:00pm
26 TCADP table at Houston Peace Festival
29 **El Paso** Chapter Meeting; Juan Diego Room in the
Ministry Center of St Pius X Catholic Church, 1050 N
Clark St, 7:00pm; elpaso@tcadp.org

May

6 "Witness to Death: A Hearing of Kathy Cox", 7:00-
9:00pm, Holy Covenant UMC, **Carrollton**, TX (more
info on page 8).
13 Scheduled Execution: Robert Campbell **Act Now**.
14 TCADP table at Restorative Justice Conference,
College of Biblical Studies, **Houston***
25-27 TCADP info at Texas Annual Conference UMC,
Houston*
27 TCADP "Fair and Just" Lunch series, St. Anne's Catholic
Church, **Houston**, 12:30pm
27 **El Paso** Chapter Meeting; Juan Diego Room in the
Ministry Center of St Pius X Catholic Church, 1050 N
Clark St, 7:00pm; elpaso@tcadp.org
28 **Austin** TCADP Lunch discussion 12:00pm **RSVP**
31 TCADP Board Meeting, **Austin**

June

1-3 TCADP info at North Texas Annual Conference UMC,
Richardson
13 Anthony Graves to speak at Rio Texas Annual
Conference UMC Social Justice Luncheon, **Corpus
Christi**, Noon.*
19-22 TCADP booth at Texas Black Expo, **Houston***
27-28 TCADP booth at Texas Democratic Party
Convention, **Dallas***

Full event descriptions can be found at
<http://tcadp.org/get-involved/attend-events/>.

*Members interested in helping TCADP staff an outreach
table should contact Vicki at info@tcadp.org or
512-441-1808.

**Are you aware of regional or local civic and
religious conferences/festivals
that allow exhibitors?**

**Share these opportunities with TCADP
so we can continue to reach new people!
info@tcadp.org or 512-441-1808**



If Only I Knew What to Say: Fears and Common Mistakes

As someone who has not experienced the murder of a loved one first hand but works daily with people who have, I will address in this article some fears and common mistakes encountered in working with people who have had loved ones taken by violence.

Possibly the most common mistake is avoiding contact with family members in the first place. Many people, in and out of the abolition movement, express admiration for my work because they can't imagine being exposed to the painful stories of our members. The stories I find most painful are the stories of the isolation many family members feel following the murder; isolation because people are afraid to reach out, afraid of doing or saying something wrong. Yes, family members of murder victims have painful stories – incredibly violent and painful stories – but they also have some of the most inspirational stories of courage and resilience; my life is richer for knowing our members and hearing their stories.

Once one has gotten over the initial fear of engaging with people who have intimately experienced murder, there are some things to avoid and some things to keep in mind:

- Listen to their stories attentively and compassionately – don't interrupt, be careful about interjecting your thoughts and feelings.
- Do your best not to appear shocked, horrified, or outraged – remember it's not your story and not your pain.
- Avoid saying anything that resembles, "I know how you feel" – even if you have experienced a sudden loss of a loved one, it is not the same.
- Pay attention to how your questions and comments are received and adjust your conversation accordingly. Questions such as "What was his/her name?" or "Do you have a favorite memory?" are often welcome.
- Be aware of words that often cause difficulty for victim/survivors:
 - lost – many people feel strongly that their loved one was *taken* not *lost*,
 - closure – most survivors of murder will tell you there is never closure only a spectrum of healing that is a very individual experience; many prefer a word like "resolution,"
 - forgiveness – this is a very personal experience that people must come to on their own, if they come to it at all; implying that a person should or must forgive can be a form of re-victimization and can actually interfere with healing.
- When talking about the abolition movement, it is important to stay victim focused. Helping to create a justice system that better addresses the needs of family members and communities following violent crime is why many of our members engage in abolition work.
- Family members of murder victims' are more than just family members of murder victims. Ask about their children, grandchildren, and work just as you would with a friend or co-worker.

"The stories I find most painful are the stories of the isolation many family members feel following the murder; isolation because people are afraid to reach out, afraid of doing or saying something wrong."

Above all else it is important to remember that when you do make a mistake, when you inadvertently put your foot in your mouth, handle it the way you would within any other relationship in your life – simply acknowledge your mistake and apologize.

We at [Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation](#) (MVFR) and our sister organization, [Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights](#) (MVFHR), understand that communicating with family members of murder victims can be daunting – no one wants to cause more pain or victimization. Both organizations are excellent resources within the death penalty abolition movement to help you learn and feel more comfortable interacting with family members of murder victims.



Submitted by Marcelle Clowes – Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation Member Engagement Coordinator

Read more "Voices of Texas" - <http://tcadp.org/what-we-do/victims-outreach/>

Death Penalty Developments as of April 21, 2014



Texas has executed 7 people to date in 2014, out of 17 executions nationwide. The three executions carried out in April used a new supply of pentobarbital that the Texas Department of Criminal Justice obtained this spring. Officials have refused to name the source of the new drug supply and the U.S. Supreme Court has declined to intervene in legal challenges to force disclosure.

To date this year, there have been four new death sentences, three of which were imposed in Harris County:

- On February 20, 2014, a Harris County jury sentenced George Curry to death for the slaying of 19-year-old Edward Virappen during a robbery at a Popeye's Chicken in May 2009.
- Brandon Daniel was sentenced to death in Travis County on February 28, 2014 for the murder of Austin Police Officer Jaime Pedron in 2012. According to the *Austin American-Statesman*, jurors spent more than eight hours deliberating on his punishment ("Brandon Daniel sentenced to death," February 28, 2014). This is the first new death sentence in Travis County since 2011.
- On March 14, 2014, a Harris County jury sentenced Juan Balderas to death for murdering 16-year-old Hastings High School freshman Eduardo Hernandez in 2005. The shooting was allegedly part of a string of gang-related crimes committed by Balderas and other suspects over the course of a year. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, jurors deliberated more than 10 hours over two days before sending Balderas to death row ("Houston man sentenced to death in 2005 crime spree," March 14, 2014).
- Jeffery Prevost was sentenced to death by a Harris County jury on April 4, 2014 for the 2011 slaying of his girlfriend Sherry White and her son, Kyle Lavergne. Prevost reportedly confessed to the crime and pled guilty.

Harris County did not send anyone to death row in three of the last six years; three people were sentenced to death there in 2011.

Earlier in the year, on February 5, 2014, an El Paso County jury rejected the death penalty for Christian Martinez after finding him guilty of capital murder in the 2011 deaths of Amalia Flores, 58, and her daughter Jovana Flores, 20. Ten of the twelve jurors agreed that mitigating evidence warranted a sentence other than death.

In April, the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles denied a request for a posthumous pardon for Cameron Todd Willingham, despite strong evidence of his innocence of the crime for which he was executed in 2004. Serious doubts remain as to whether the fire that took the lives of his three young daughters was caused by arson. In addition, new evidence uncovered by the Innocence Project strongly suggests that jailhouse informant Johnny Webb received a deal from Navarro County District Attorney John Jackson in exchange for his testimony against Willingham at trial.

According to the [Innocence Project](http://www.innocenceproject.org), "This new evidence also strongly suggests that Jackson, who had since become a district court judge, deceived the Board of Pardons and Paroles and the Navarro County District Attorney's Office about the existence of a deal, which had they known about, would have almost certainly spared Willingham's life." Learn more at <http://www.innocenceproject.org>.

An editorial by the *Dallas Morning News* called the board's rejection of the posthumous request to pardon Willingham "a blown opportunity" and noted that without an examination of the board's clemency process, "Texans may never be assured whether breakdowns might happen again."

"Short of weighing the evidence anew, the board at least should examine its own conduct from 2004 as a court of last resort before Willingham died.

Did the governor's appointed board properly weigh experts' reports that arson work in the case reeked? Were there enough red flags to recommend a reprieve to the governor?

Too bad the board has ducked those questions. The governor may never know if he was well-served. And Texans may never be assured whether breakdowns might happen again."

-- Dallas Morning News, "Editorial: Good and bad news in effort to upgrade criminal justice," April 11, 2014



Can Social Media Increase Anti-Death Penalty Engagement?

Yes. Engaging support for grassroots organizations looks very different today in the world of online

communications. High priority messaging or breaking developments used to take days or even weeks to be communicated to supporters but now can turn on a dime and be trending in a matter of moments.

With the development of Twitter, Facebook, Google+, YouTube, LinkedIn... nonprofits can now share their messaging very easily with limited resource investment. Supporters engaged with “the cause” help spread the word to their own social networks and, like a pebble dropped in a pond, the ripples can keep going and going.

TCADP has developed a presence on several social media sites to engage new supporters and expand membership, share breaking news and engagement opportunities, and communicate priorities.

TCADP followers on Facebook are attending meetings and trainings. Twitter supporters are becoming members and donating.

TCADP’s impact on social media sites and in search engine performance are raised exponentially when our supporters share a post or image, comment on a discussion, or share a link to our website. **Sharing a post, something that takes a supporter less than a minute to do, could lead to multiple new members engaged with TCADP.**

Ways to Increase Your Social Media Impact:

1. On Facebook, when sharing a TCADP image or post, consider making the post “public”, so your friends can share it too. The ripple from the pebble in the pond can’t continue if there is a security wall.
2. Research the data about the death penalty or TCADP before you post. Being accurate and informed can help avoid a mess. And stay on topic.
3. When posting, use hashtags so more people can see what you are saying. This can really increase the “ripple”. #deathpenalty #execution #innocence
4. Tag groups or people in the post that you want to make sure see what you are posting. Again— this increases the “ripple”.
5. Include images, links, and “Share” or “Please RETWEET” to increase response.
6. Some discussions can get heated. Do not feel you have to argue with folks, but it certainly never hurts to provide accurate information.

Want to know more or be involved in TCADP’s social media rapid response team? Contact Vicki at info@tcadp.org or complete the form at <http://tcadp.org/social-media-team/>.

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 Twitter: www.twitter.com/TCADPdotORG
 Google+: <https://plus.google.com/+TcadpOrg/>
 Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/tcadp>
 LinkedIn: [Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty](http://www.linkedin.com/company/tcadp)
 Blog: www.tcadp.org/blog

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**Breaking news,
events, things you
should know! RETWEET!**



“Priority Initiatives” cont. from page 1.

festivals and conferences that would welcome TCADP participation, please provide the information to the state office. Also look for [membership gatherings](#) in your area, such as our bi-monthly luncheons in Austin and Houston. *Your social media networks can be instrumental in achieving this goal; see above for helpful tips.*

Engage in Outreach with Conservatives

TCADP Board Member Pat Monks is actively involved with [Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty](#), a national network of Conservatives seeking to advance dialogue on the death penalty. Do you identify as Conservative and want to support these efforts? Email info@tcadp.org or call 512-441-1808 to learn how you can get involved.

Join the TCADP Lobby Corps

Members of TCADP’s citizen Lobby Corps were active at the State Capitol throughout the 83rd Texas Legislature and continue to build relationships with lawmakers as we lay the foundation for our advocacy in 2015. We will solicit applications for our third class of Lobby Corps members later this summer. [Learn more](#) about our efforts during the last legislative session.

...victim family members willing to share their perspectives are also high priorities for outreach. If you are aware of local

Thank You for Your Generous Support

Page 7, Spring 2014



TCADP thanks the following individuals and organizations for your generous contributions between January 11 and April 18, 2014. Your financial support is critical to all of the activities and events described in this newsletter. We are particularly grateful to those of you who contributed to our [2014 Amplify Austin](#) fundraising campaign!

Please let us know if we have inadvertently left you or your spouse/partner off of this list. We apologize in advance if we missed anyone.

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* signifies [Partner for Justice](#) or Sustaining Member, TCADP's recurring donation programs





Witness to Death: A Hearing of Kathy Cox and a Training from Center for Theological Activism

May 6, 7:00-9:00pm
Holy Covenant UMC
1901 Peters Colony Rd.
Carrollton, TX 75007

[Facebook Event to Share.](#)



Kathy Cox is 90 years old, has witnessed over 60 executions and currently ministers to 40 persons on Texas Death Row. For over 65 years, Cox has worked for social change from within her denominational home of the Salvation Army. Participants will gather to hear Cox's story, to share their own stories, and be activated in the fight to abolish the death penalty.

This event is sponsored by [Holy Covenant United Methodist Church](#), [Center for Theological Activism](#) and [TCADP](#).



Kristin Houlé, TCADP Executive Director presented the [2014 TCADP Courage Award](#) to Rep. Terry Canales on March 25 at the State Capitol. Thank you Rep. Canales and congratulations!

Where is my TCADP Newsletter? Please note that this year TCADP will be printing and “snail” mailing two issues of our quarterly newsletter—Winter and Fall editions. All four issues will continue to be emailed to our members and available on the [website](#). Please make sure we have your current contact info - <http://tcadp.org/get-informed/receive-email-updates/>. Thank you for continuing to support TCADP in determining the best use of resources provided by our members and financial supporters.

Three Easy Ways to Help TCADP Light the Way to Abolition

Partner for Justice. Set up recurring donations to be repeated monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, or annually and linked automatically to your credit card or checking account. This option allows you to spread out your gift over the course of a year and provides a steady source of income for TCADP. [Learn more about this program.](#)

Sustaining Membership. Avoid the hassle of dues renewal notices and save on stamps by signing up for a Sustaining Membership at the Student, Individual, Household, or Organizational Level. This option will automatically renew your membership (through your credit card or checking account) each year on a date you choose.

Annual Membership. This option will renew your membership for one year, at the level you choose.

You can also send a check or money order (payable to TCADP) to: TCADP; 2709 S. Lamar Blvd., #109, Austin, TX 78704.

