

N C A D P Lifelines

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL COALITION TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY • NUMBER 98 • WINTER 2009

Training for the Long Run Provides a Worthwhile Workout For a Large Team of Abolitionists at Annual Conference

Almost three hundred abolition activists representing 32 Affiliates of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty attended Training for the Long Run, NCADP's annual conference. The 296 participants, one of the the movement's largest gatherings in the past year, met in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in January and came from 37 states. Co-sponsored by Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, the event focused on helping members of the anti-death penalty community continue the race to abolition. Through workshops and plenary sessions, keynote addresses, documentary films and news conferences, attendees networked, learned campaign strategies and tactics and were moved by the intensity of the experience and the cohesion and depth of the movement.

Deborah Belknap, attorney and instructor at Keystone University said: "It was exciting to be among people of so many different backgrounds and experiences who all share the same goal. The passion and energy of the speakers and participants was amazing. I left feeling more motivated than ever to work toward ending the death penalty."

Maureen Fisher, a student at Point Park University and intern with Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty said, "In addition to the amazing presentations, I had the chance to meet and get to know many people whose lives are forever changed by the lasting consequences of the death penalty. The conference became a powerful educational tool for me and has further motivated me to expand outreach and understanding in my community. I am grateful I had this opportunity and look forward eagerly to participating in the organization's ongoing activities."

Addressing the conference, NCADP Executive Director Diann Rust-Tierney commended the activists for their perseverance and effectiveness. "What you do has never been done before. We are on a path to end the death penalty in every state—states that have very few or no people on death row, who executed few if any people, as well as states that have death rows of hundreds and who have



Participants in NCADP's conference and awards dinner joined keynote speaker Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ (center), and John Carr of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, who accepted the Lighting the Torch of Conscience Award on behalf of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

dozens of executions scheduled. I know of no other movement that is doing what we are doing—building the popular will to repeal laws state by state in order to change the way we respond to one of the most difficult and frightening things that a human can face—murder."

Each year the conference's centerpiece is the Awards Dinner that recognizes the movement's leaders and activists. For 2009, Abolitionist of the Year was New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine who signed the legislation that abolished the death penalty in his state. The action resulted in the first repeal of capital punishment in the nation in more than 40 years. Accepting the honor for the Governor was his chief counsel, William J. Castner.

Washington, D.C. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick was honored with the Lighting the Torch of Conscience Award for his work which expresses the value that the death penalty is incompatible with standards of compassion and justice. Accepting for the Cardinal, who was called away to Gaza in attempt to intervene in that conflict, was John L. Carr, executive director of the Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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A Message from Diann Rust-Tierney

As this issue of *Lifelines* goes to press, efforts to repeal the death penalty are moving forward in no less than seven states-- Colorado, Kansas, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire and New Mexico. In still others, death sentences continue to decline and policymakers and the public are taking a closer and more focused look at the payoff for keeping capital punishment. And while there is an effort in Alaska to roll the clock back by decades to reinstate the death penalty, a savvy core of experts in that state stands poised and ready to defeat a proposed measure that enjoys little public support.



NCADP has made supporting its Affiliates a priority. These local leaders and others do the heavy lifting to change and repeal death penalty laws. In addition to our Annual Conference and other training venues such as the Abolitionist Leadership Training Institute, we are in daily contact with activists around the country by phone and e-mail (and Abe Bonowitz, our wonderful and tireless Director of Affiliate Support is racking up an impressive number of frequent flyer miles).

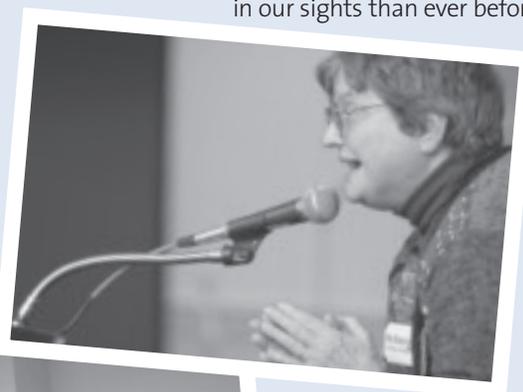
The strategy is working—give concerned citizens at the local level the tools they need to make their voices heard, connect with like-minded individuals and reach beyond themselves to build common ground with members of the larger community who share our commitment to safe, healthy communities, personal accountability and responsibility. And, like them, we believe we must have both fairness and equality before the law and compassionate and effective response to the tragedy of violent crime. The energy and commitment is homegrown—we help connect the dots and build the larger community of individuals and organizations that are making a difference.

At the national level we continue to sharpen and drive the debate on capital punishment. Thanks to the marvelous work of Communications Director Margaret Summers, we have stepped up our outreach to traditional and targeted news media and are increasing our presence online including a weekly column on the Huffington Post. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/diann-rusttierney>.

In this issue you'll read about our recent training conference in Harrisburg, gain insights from one of NCADP's phenomenal

Board members, and be introduced to a new program called "Rachel's Fund," which will help our Affiliates reach out to murder victims' families and the families of death row prisoners by participating in a joint online fundraising effort.

We are beginning to see the fruit of the efforts of so many courageous people before us as well as the labor of our own hands. Now is the time to lean in even more, and push a little harder to reach the goal of abolition that is clearer in our sights than ever before.



Sister Helen Prejean (top) announced the formation of the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Death Penalty at the conference. Miriam Thimm Kelle of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty (left), Beth Wood of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation, and Marty May of Ohioans to Stop Executions at a conference workshop.

We can, we are doing this!

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diann Rust-Tierney".

Diann Rust-Tierney

For the latest updates be sure you are on NCADP's e-abolitionist e-mail list by clicking on the "join us" button at www.NCADP.org, or watch for news items and blog posts on our site. You can also include your e-mail address with your contribution to support NCADP's assistance to its Affiliates using the envelope included with this issue of *Lifelines*.

NCADP Lifelines

NCADP *Lifelines* is published quarterly by the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, the nation's oldest organization devoted exclusively to abolishing capital punishment. Founded in 1976, NCADP unifies a network of more than 100 Affiliate organizations, dedicated advocates and volunteers, and prominent national human and civil rights organizations in the fight to end the death penalty in the United States.

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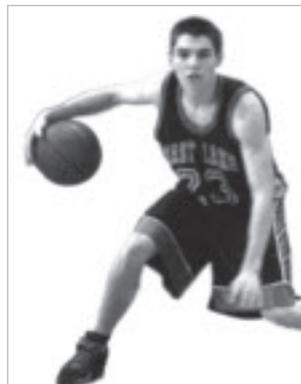
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Death Penalty Poetry

When Dustin McGahee was assigned a debate topic in American History, the 18-year-old high school junior chose capital punishment. At first he thought he might defend the "pro" side of the issue because he felt that an individual who commits murder deserved death himself. After some research and learning that innocent people can be, and are, executed, the Clearwater, Florida student changed his mind. Dustin felt that the money spent on executions would better be spent rehabilitating prisoners. "Through education and life experiences in playing basketball, I met a diversity of people, which opened my eyes to the fact that there are those who rely on human rights and those who would take them away from everyone who is different from themselves."

As Dustin learned more about the death penalty and its place in the human rights environment, he expressed his feelings in this poem.



Ride it Out

BY DUSTIN MCGAHEE

*We ride it out
Just awaiting the day
That brings the route to death
While the government pays*

*Enough money to support a new life
For a life time
But meanwhile it's spent
Just to cut off a life line*

*Now it's my time
And I've been assigned
To be the nail under a
Hostile heavy hammer divine*

*But it's not my choice
And it's not my time,
Subject to a jury
Who can't make up their mind*

*So I try and I grind
To improve and design
A great ten-year plan
But all I'm given is nine*

*Time's up, clock struck
The top like it's midnight
Like I've struck the bottom
And I'm ready to ignite*

*So now it's official
Like a referee whistle
And these walls are just telling me
It's all because of a pistol*

*That somebody shot
And now I'm the one gettin' it
All for a crime...
I didn't even commit.*

© 2008 Dustin McGahee

Among other honorees were Lorry Post of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation, a Lifetime Achievement Award, and Judge John J. Gibbons, attorneys Henderson Hill and George Kendall, Federal Community Defenders Robert Dunham and Michael Wiseman, and the Defender Association of Philadelphia Homicide Unit, who received Outstanding Legal Service Awards.

Three documentary films were shown and told in dramatic detail of the burdens of a Texas death row chaplain who ministered to 95 prisoners before their execution, a death row survivor who spent nearly 18 years on death row for a crime he had nothing to do with, and the impact on murder victim families of the loss of loved ones and their personal rejection of revenge through capital retaliation.

At the Death House Door recounted the journey of Reverend Carroll Pickett, who served 15 years at the notorious Walls prison unit in Huntsville, Texas. The film earned NCADP's 2009 Public Education Award for Steve James and Peter Gilbert of Kartemquin Films.

A second film, Juan Melendez 6446, presented a story that exposes the legal system where wrongful convictions are a reality. By focusing on the experiences of Juan's mother, the film highlighted the stark human consequences seldom considered when contemplating the death penalty.

The number in the title of the film represents the number of days Juan Melendez spent in prison before he was released.

The third documentary, 70 X 7 The Forgiveness Equation, explores the beliefs of two families as they cope with whether or not to forgive the perpetrator of the crime. One of the individuals whose tragic story is related is that of Bud Welch, whose 23-year-old daughter Julie, was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995. Like Juan Melendez, Welch is a board member of NCADP.

Tanya Greene, Training and Assistance Counsel for the National Consortium for Capital Defense Training, developed and coordinated a concurrent program providing continuing legal education credits for capital defenders, which drew 34 attorneys.

In addition to giving the keynote address at the Awards Dinner, Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, presided over a news conference at which she announced the formation of the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Death Penalty, a new initiative that links lay Catholics at the grassroots level taking up the challenge set by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to end capital punishment. The group will collaborate with established anti-death penalty organizations and the Catholic bishops to educate the country's 67 million Catholics about the moral and practical reasons why capital punishment must be ended.



Henderson Hill (clockwise, left) of Ferguson Stein Chambers Gresham & Sumter received one of the 2009 Outstanding Legal Service Awards. Abe Bonowitz of NCADP advises workshop attendees on effective event planning and membership mobilizing techniques.



NCADP board member Juan Melendez, freed from death row after nearly 18 years, participates in a panel discussion on organizing Spanish-speaking communities. Attorney Judi Caruso looks on.

To honor the memory of Rachel King, who received NCADP's other 2009 Lifetime Achievement Award, Rust-Tierney introduced Rachel's Fund, a fundraising vehicle that will enable local anti-death penalty organizations to assist family members of murder victims and others affected by capital punishment.

The dozens of workshops, panels, individual presentations and caucuses provided practical and comprehensive information to Affiliate leaders and their staffs. Among these were workshops devoted to designing a strategic plan, working with law enforcement professionals to change attitudes about the death penalty, developing strategies for reducing death sentences, working with death row family members, and advanced fundraising techniques.

A series of caucuses, informal gatherings of constituents interested in a particular issue, were also held during the conference. These brought together individuals with a particular interest in international anti-death penalty efforts, a Southern States and a Pennsylvania caucus and one devoted to mental illness issues.

The next NCADP conference will take place in Louisville, Kentucky January 14-17, 2010 and will be co-sponsored by the Kentucky Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. Further information will be available soon on NCADP's website, ncadp.org.



Capital Quotes

“Over the past several months, the Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment has seriously considered the seven topics it was charged with examining as well as several others that Commissioners deemed relevant. . . The Commission's findings and recommendations are consistent with the evidence and information it received.

“The present administration of capital punishment shows substantial disparities in its application based on race and jurisdiction. These disparities are so great among and between comparable cases that the death penalty process is best described as arbitrary and capricious. It is neither fair nor accurate. The costs of capital cases far exceed the costs of cases in which the death penalty is not sought. These resources could be better used elsewhere. The effects of prolonged capital cases take an unnecessary toll on the family members of victims. The risk of executing an innocent person is, in the Commission's view, a real possibility. One of our own Commissioners, Kirk Bloodsworth, spent two years on Death Row and nearly nine total in prison for a crime he did not commit. He was finally exonerated by DNA evidence. Nationwide, 130 Death Row prisoners have been exonerated. New DNA laws do not completely eliminate the risk of other innocent people being wrongfully convicted and sent to Death Row the way that Commissioner Bloodsworth was. While DNA testing has become a

widely accepted method for determining guilt or innocence, it does not eliminate the risk of sentencing innocent persons to death, since, in many cases, DNA evidence is not available, and even when it is available, it is subject to contamination or error at the scene of the offense or in the laboratory.

“For all of these reasons—to eliminate racial and jurisdictional bias, to reduce unnecessary costs, to lessen the misery that capital cases force victims of family members to endure, to eliminate the risk that an innocent person can be convicted—the Commission strongly recommends that capital punishment be abolished in Maryland.”

FROM THE MARYLAND COMMISSION ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT'S FINAL REPORT TO THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY, DECEMBER 12, 2008

“Americans are just beginning to focus on miscarriages of justice in capital offenses and the fact that our nation, in all likelihood, continues to execute innocent people. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor—like myself, a supporter of capital punishment—in 2001 stated: 'If statistics are any indication, the system may well be allowing some innocent defendants to be executed.' Since she made that comment, several more people have been shown to be innocent after being sentenced to death.”

FORMER U.S. SENATOR JOSEPH TYDINGS (MD)
BALTIMORE SUN
AUGUST 22, 2008

Yes We Can!

I want to help NCADP in its fight to end the death penalty! *All contributions are 100% tax deductible.*

\$1000 \$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 \$35 Other

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Q&A With Jane Bohman

One of the turning points in anti-death penalty history was the commutation of death sentences in Illinois by Governor George Ryan in 2003. Deeply involved in that momentous event was Jane Bohman, then head of the Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. For the Illinois Coalition, Jane played a major role in designing and managing the campaign to commute all Illinois death sentences that ultimately emptied death row. Now, after eight years of movement work and another seven years of working as an associate attorney for a law firm which handled legal matters for the United Auto Workers, Jane has left the Illinois Coalition and is now living in Ohio where she is a consultant.



A graduate of the Chicago-Kent College of Law from which Jane was awarded the Abraham Lincoln Marovitz Public Interest Alumni Award in 2004, she earned a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Chicago. For her leadership role in the successful death penalty commutation campaign, she was named one of Chicago's Most Influential Women in 2004 by Crain's Chicago Business.

Lifelines asked Jane Bohman about her work to end capital punishment and where the movement is headed.

Q: What got you started in anti-death penalty work?

A: I started in law school, when I worked for a law firm that took on a case as part of the American Bar Association's effort to get representation for inmates who had no state-provided representation. The case was eventually won in the United States Supreme Court, but I realized that summer that I was going to be a union lawyer, so I did not get deeply involved again until later. I did try to educate other law students about the death penalty, and especially about the flaws in the Illinois system through sponsoring speakers through the National Lawyers Guild.

Q: As you look back on your career, what gives you the most satisfaction?

A: The most satisfaction comes from raising awareness of the failures in the Illinois system. I got involved with the Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty in the late 1990's, as the crisis of wrongful conviction was reaching a crescendo. We worked very hard for a moratorium on executions, and

obtaining that was such a relief. Working for the Illinois Coalition meant having the opportunity to engage the public, and the genuine concern of citizens who had no personal connection to this problem but who took time to educate themselves and act gave me a lot of hope for change.

The greatest moment was the commutation of all Illinois death sentences and the pardon of four innocent men from death row in 2003. Not only because we had worked with the families of the inmates, so I knew what this meant to them but also because we had been able to publicize the cruelty and futility of the system. That had a real impact. It was particularly incredible to watch the exonerated inmates from all over the country come to Illinois and share their stories and march for hours in the winter cold to dramatize what was at stake. It was an unforgettable time and I had a chance to work with great attorneys, activists and families of the inmates and of murder victims' families who did not want the death penalty.

Q: You'll continue serving on the board of NCADP. What moti-

vates you to stay involved?

A: I am excited about the way NCADP is engaging state organizations and providing them with the resources to be effective advocates for abolition. As a state director, I benefited from this new emphasis, and I look forward to supporting our fantastic staff as they continue this innovative work. I have seen so much progress and want to help in whatever way I can as more and more states move closer to abolition.

Q: From your Illinois experience, what galvanized you during this period?

A: Death penalty work is very challenging due to all that is involved. The Illinois Coalition does extensive research on pending Illinois cases and so I saw so much suffering in just keeping track of our current cases. What always gave me hope was that as I went around Illinois, the public cared so much about the injustices in our system and that those whose pain was so real, the exonerated, family members of defendants and murder victims, were willing to travel with me and speak about such awful events

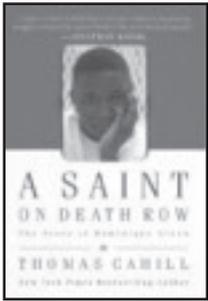
and turn them into something positive. There are also tremendously committed people at the Illinois Coalition who serve on our board and who volunteer and provide such energy and support. We have had great successes such as the ongoing moratorium and commutation that gave us the impetus to keep going, but it is really the people who gave me strength.

Q: What do you see as the strengths of the movement?

A: Again, I think the people are the strengths of this movement, both the professionals on the staff of NCADP and the national and state organizations, as well the thousands of volunteers who devote their passion to such a challenging issue. NCADP's focus on strengthening the state organizations and giving support to those close to abolition will push the movement to greater victories and that will keep the momentum going. We have seen such a growth in funding and support over the years and the increased strategy work across the nation will ensure these victories.

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Books From the Death Penalty Library



A Saint on Death Row: The Story of Dominique Green, by Thomas Cahill, Doubleday, 2009, \$18.95.

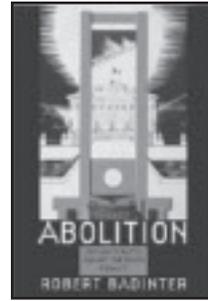
It's not often a reader finds blurbs from Sister Helen Prejean, Desmond Tutu and Jonathan Kozol on the same dust jacket. Thomas Cahill's new book has drawn the praises of these three human and children's rights advocates. Cahill writes about

Dominique Green, executed in 2004, who while he admitted taking part in a robbery, insisted he did not pull the trigger. Cahill met Green in the last year of his life, at the suggestion of a former colleague.

"Justice in our country is a set-up for people with the money to pay lawyers," Cahill writes. "In certain parts of the country, such as Texas, the 'justice' system is so stacked against the poor that they have no way of getting justice. The right question to ask about a convict is not 'Did he do it?' but 'Did he receive a fair trial' and 'Were his appeals handled fairly?'"

The publisher says, "A Saint on Death Row will introduce you to a young man whose history, innate goodness, and final days you will never forget. It also shines a necessary light on America's racist and deeply flawed legal system. A Saint on Death Row is an absorbing, sobering and deeply spiritual story that illuminates the moral imperatives too often ignored in the headlong quest for justice."

Sister Prejean: "If you read his story, you will never forget Dominique Green, nor will you ever feel the same way about our courts, our prisons, and our criminal justice system. This book is a life-changer."



Abolition: One Man's Battle Against the Death Penalty, by Robert Badinter, Northeastern University Press, 2008, \$29.95.

First published in France in 2000, and translated into a half-dozen languages, Abolition was written by one of that country's most prominent attorneys and the individual largely responsible for abolishing the death penalty in France. Robert Badinter agreed to

represent any convict facing the death penalty, and between 1975 and 1980 succeeded in getting six death sentences overturned. "Badinter's book focuses very much on his own personal crusade against the death penalty, describing with passion the cases in which he played a major role in attempting to save the accused from the guillotine...This is a remarkable book, and one which will inspire all those who, like Badinter, consider the death penalty to be a 'crime d'etat,'" writes Helen Trouille in Modern & Contemporary France.



Thinking, talking and writing about the ultimate punishment continues to be of substantial interest to the American public. Lifelines reports on two books which help influence the national conversation.

Q: Where could the movement be more effective?

A: Every social justice movement has its challenges. This issue in particular brings out tremendous emotion and solving the death penalty crisis does not mean that the suffering of violent crime will

stop. I can't really say where we are not effective, but I do know that there is such inspiring effort to try to be sensitive to all parties to this issue and that the more we can engage across the board with those who deal with the death penalty, the closer we will be to reaching our goal.

Q: What messages resonate best with the public?

A: Messages vary so much by the state or region where the death penalty abolition work is going on. The Illinois Coalition always emphasized the flawed system in the state that simply cannot be fixed. We carefully

documented this and presented it in professional annual reports that established our credibility. I personally believe that humility and openness are the hallmarks of successful engagement. The issues at stake require them.



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Save The Date: NCADP's Next Annual Conference



JANUARY 14-17, 2010

THE SEELBACH HILTON HOTEL

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

NCADP Launches Rachel's Fund



At the Annual Conference in January, NCADP announced the launch of Rachel's Fund. Named after our colleague, the late Rachel King, the national Rachel's Fund and local Race to Heal Initiative will encourage local anti-death penalty activists to learn more about the needs and services available to families touched by crime and violence – murder victims' families and the families of people on death row – and provide tangible financial support to nonprofit organizations serving those needs.

Never before has an effort been made to combine direct support for both the victims of violence and abolition activists. We are enthusiastic about the possibilities for providing increased resources to organizations serving the needs of families struggling to deal with the terrible aftermath of violence and help them develop relationships with local organizations at the forefront of working to repeal the death penalty.

As we launch Rachel's Fund, we are looking for supporters to join us in Rachel's Champion Circle. Your gift of \$1,000, or your pledge to raise \$1,000 by June 30, 2009, will enable us to create the resources local groups and chapters will use to successfully spread Rachel's message of reconciliation in local communities across our nation. Please contact Chris Rutledge at (202) 331-4090 or chris@ncadp.org for further details.