



THE ADVOCATE

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word Social Concerns /January-February 2009

DEATH PENALTY UPDATES

Over the past several years, the issues surrounding the death penalty have slowly been changing.

States with the death penalty.....36

States without death penalty.....14

The Governor of Maryland is trying to outlaw the death penalty in Maryland.

The number of executions is decreasing from a high of 98 in 1999 to 37 in 2008.

Texas has the highest number of executions with 424 since 1976

The number of death sentences per year has dropped drastically since 1999 with 284 down to 111 in 2008

Executions for juveniles and mentally retarded persons were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2005.

There were 51 women on death row as of December 31, 2007.

Criminologists view of the death penalty as a deterrent

Yes 12%

No 84%

Police Chiefs place the death penalty last in reducing violent crime

Support for Life without Parole

Prefer death penalty.....47%

Prefer life without parole.....48%

No opinion.....5%

59 countries have the death penalty

91 countries have abolished it

(Death Penalty Information Center 2009)

Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty

The Catholic Campaign to end the death penalty was established by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in 2005. As explained by the Bishops, the campaign is based on Catholic teaching that offers a unique perspective on crime and punishment. It begins with the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victims and offenders. It affirms our commitment to comfort and support victims and their families. It also acknowledges the God given dignity of every human life, even those who do great harm.

The Catholic Campaign recommends 4 things .

1. Pray for victims of crime and their families and those awaiting execution.
2. Learn about Catholic teaching on the death penalty.
3. Educate people in your parish/community
4. Advocate for abolition through legislation

The following is an interview with Charles Mamou who is on death row. Sr. Benedict and I have the privilege of visiting him regularly .

Before we begin, allow me to open with a scripture from 3rd John Chapter 1 verse 2, "Dear Friend, I know that your spiritual life is going well. I pray that you also may enjoy good health, and I pray that everything else may go well with you."

My name is Charles Chucky Mamou, Jr. and it is an honor and pleasure to be allowed to share my thoughts and views with you all. I sincerely thank you all and Sister Margaret for this opportunity.

1. Describe the experience of your first day on Death Row. November 17, 1999. Unfortunately, it's a day and a moment in past-time I can not forget. That day was filled with a lot of "fear" Fearful of the unknown, for humans tend to fear what we do not know. There was also a lot of confusion, as my

thoughts ran amok often phantasmagorical. I can recall riding in the white T.D.C.J. van, specially build with padded iron and steel bars-shaped into a zoo-like cage. I'll admit, I was naive and highly uneducated about the system (Death Penalty) for which I was condemned. What I'm trying to say is, I thought my first day on Death Row would be my last, as I had convinced myself into believing that I would be murdered via execution, as soon as I arrived on the infamous Texas Death Row. Sure, my thoughts were pseudo-thoughts, but it was I felt then. The sense of fear is a mental cancer. The type of feelings that keep you awake without any want or need for sleep. Sweat ran down my face from my forehead like the raging waters from the Niagara Falls..yea, I was terrified; because I did not want to die for a crime I did not do- for a self defense act that was not a crime. When the van stopped, I became torn, literally and figuratively- in that I had to decide quickly on my options that I could take. The wild liberated me from within wanted me to fight those, with physical aggression, who dare attempted to throw me into onto a gurney-drowning my body with poisonous drugs, murdering me without pause as to whether I was guilty or innocent. Human or "something" else.

Now I know my viewing audience sit he Religious nature, but what I'm about to reveal isn't to flatter, nor is it designed to gain remorseful sympathy. I'm only recalling what I experienced then. Having been born, raised and reared in a Catholic home environment. I knew of God. It was just my prodigality that kept me from accepting the God that I knew to be. But at the moment or that warm and Sunny November day-when my mind dared my will to fight never mind the fact I was shackled from my ankles to my waist and from my waist to my box-up hands, my body was at peace. If that makes sense. I've come to believe, that at the moment I experienced the 'comforter' that Jesus spoke about. It's the only logical explanation I've concluded, that makes sense of how I was able to control myself when I was constantly stripped nude, mocked and ridiculed, and threatened by the officers daily; without any form of physical retaliation on my part. Now don't get it twisted, I was not content on dying that day-whether

assured that I would live past that day. That I would not become a fresh coffin within old dirt.

From the van to Death Row I went, escorted by several officers like a human spectacle, the way Joseph Merrick (aka the Elephant Man) was paraded through the sea of people who aim to make fun of a man who had no control over the way he looked. Like Joseph, I too was rendered helpless. Feeling uncomfortable, as officers and other non-death row inmates stopped to stare at my arrival. There would be no echoes, nor shouts of "Dead Man Walking!" but you didn't need to hear it, to sense it. Once I approached my designated section, where I would be placed into a single man cage, I as I reflect back do recall an "odd" sight of normalcy in the form of food. But not any type of food, i.e. chicken. There on the floor in a blue food tray laid a half eaten piece of baked chicken. A leg-quarter to be exact. I can honestly say that my fears were temporarily replaced with hunger. I wanted some baked chicken badly. I thought I was going to walk into a rough, miserable and gloomy environment. You know, all the grinding of the teeth, cries for help or mercy and etc. Instead; I heard laughter, sounds of life not death. Men who gave me plenty of food, stamps clothes and stationary, as a way of displaying their hospitality. An act of kindness that became a ritual towards all those who recently came to Death Row. I found men who worked on their cases, started religious group meetings, spent time drawing or crafting. America's worse of the worst criminals. Not even close, Many are very much rehabilitatable not as the state would have you believe.

2. Do you have Friends on Death Row? I used to have friends. Now, I just consider other inmates as associates. What I want to clarify is, that the year of 2006 saw many men that I did consider friends a memorial-memory year. They were all executed during that year. My oldest daughter's mother once told me many, many years ago, "d not get too close to the other guys, because their misery will become your own." At the time I paid her no mind, as what she said had little credence. That changed on Thursday, August 31, 2006 around 6:30 p.m. when Derrick Frazier, aka Hassan was pronounced dead by lethal injection. And as a man, I'm not ashamed to tell you all that I cried recklessly as my ears heard the disheartening news on my radio. Here was a man that helped me shun away from ignorant ideologies of not wanting to correspond with others. He encouraged me to help him form a successful newsletter called O.L.I.F.E. in 2004. and he helped me see a whole new world, full of compassionate and loving people to which I now love and cherish. Experiencing what I did in 2006 I've chosen to be somewhat anti-social. I mean, I will engage in enough conversation with other inmates to remain sociable but in this environment, I have chosen to be inmate friendless. Communication on Death Row would be considered a sign of complete "madness" because inmates tend to yell or shout wildly from their semi-solid doors, just to say hello to another. Thus, another reason why I stay to myself, I do not like loud noise. There is no physical contact here with other Death Row inmates, no group recreation, no cellmates, no TV's no access to any physical interactions.

3. Describe a typical day on Death Row. Well I suppose it's safe to say that a typical day begins about 4:00 a.m. breakfast time. Sure that's early and it probably wouldn't be so bad if the food was actually good, warm or hot. We mostly get banal pancakes five times a week. From that unnecessary awakening it's sort of hard to fall back to sleep. So I'll lay on my bunk, allowing my mind to plan my day. By 8:00 a.m. I'm up washing my face, brushing my teeth and finding enough strength to deal with the nudity of my existence within these solitary living quarters for more than ten years now. I'm not a morning person, so it takes a little time for me to find my normal senses. Besides shower and the two hours we can get alone, inside another cage which is deemed recreation we spend twenty one and a half hours alone in our designated cells. I write a lot, read books and "think." These things that tend to appear boring to many mundane people of the free world is actually the only forms of normalcy or sanity that we can indulge in. Giving an added blessing by way of a weekly visit that pretty much sums up a typical day for me. My existence is highly repetitious.

4. What has kept you spiritually alive during your solitary confinement? Guilt! Remorse! Redemption! Now before you all catch the heebie jeebies allow me to explain clearly. I believe that if anyone (confined or not) is to venture into one's Spirituality, then all self-truths are revealed, unmasked and forever before oneself. Such truths and such desires to become a better person, or a better brother to allow all mankind a being, 'inner-being' motivates me into great humbleness. I am piously willing to be a spiritual nirvana. In that I have made peace with my past mistakes, my sins and my acceptance of one God an one Savior Jesus Christ. It was the Apostle Paul who once declared that he was the chief of sinners. Sin bathes us all, in this life. I am no exception. I have guilt for the times as a little boy- in 5th. grade I stole lil Johnny's pencil. To my young adult life of being unfaithful to my girlfriend. to my lying tongue and Benedict Arnoldesque past ways My want and need to promote a new me to society, encourages me a lot. It energizes the possibilities that my future shall unfold. Remorse does not ill me, and nor is it a mental panacea that solves all for me. But it does educate and discipline my old ways of thinking when such nature tends to arise. I am innocent of the charges that have placed me on Death Row, which was an incident that involved drugs. Which makes me regret ever getting involved with drug dealings.

5. What would you like our readers to know about you? A great philosopher and author, Paulo Coelho once wrote, "When I had nothing more to loose, I was given everything. When I ceased to be who I am, I found myself, when I experienced humiliation and yet kept on walking , I understood that I was Free to choose my destiny." This saying is my aphorism. My life force, my Mona Lisa, the story of who I am today in mind, body and spirit.

6. What could our readers do to help these on Death Row? Pray for us all. More importantly, pray that this judicial-murderous system becomes abolished, for it's not a deterrent to crime or hideous acts of violence. ON a more compassionate level, I suppose the hands-on involvement by concerned readers, by writing to the men and women on Death Row, would truly be a great help. In some cases visiting them would be highly co-apatetic. There are many ways to help and get involved. Not every man nor woman on Death Row is innocent and not all are guilty. The majority of people on Death Row are very much rehabilitable and some due to misprints in man written laws are on Death Row and their crime is simply having knowledge of a crime. Not the murder in question. And on that note I'd like to thank you all for allowing me to invade your life. I come in peace, cause peace is within me. Love to all, May god bless *you all*.

*****8

New Book by David Atwood. DETOUR TO DEATH ROW

The story of David's 15 year effort to abolish the death penalty in Texas.

The Advocate is published by the Office of Social Concerns

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