

TELE VISION ON PRO GRA MS

For more than 27 years the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation has produced one-hour TV programs on issues related to peace, social justice, economics, the environment, and nonviolence. The Olympia FOR's program airs on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. Each program airs every Monday at 1:30 p.m. and every Wednesday at 5:00 p.m. and every Thursday at 9:00 p.m. for a full month. This creates **THREE OPPORTUNITIES EVERY WEEK** to watch each program.

You can also watch the program described below (and about 100 of our previous interview programs and special programs at the Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org, after they have debuted on TCTV. Simply click the **TV programs** link, scroll down, and click the program you want to watch. Many of our website's monthly TV program listings also include a .pdf document describing the program.

MAY 2014:

“THE DEATH PENALTY IS UNJUST AND IS BEING ABOLISHED”

by GLEN ANDERSON, PRODUCER AND HOST OF THIS TV SERIES

→ A much more thorough description is posted next to the May 2014 program title at www.olympiafor.org/tv_programs.htm and also in our website's Death Penalty section, www.olympiafor.org/death_penalty.htm

Washington State is one of 32 states that can sentence people to death. The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's May 2014 program flows through a clear sequence of information about the death penalty, explained by Glen Anderson, who has studied the death penalty for decades.

- The program begins by quickly summarizing how the death penalty **fails to deliver** on what it promises, but instead **causes more problems**.
- Then the program quickly explains why **we would be safe without the death penalty**.
- All of that happens in the first third of this TV program. **Most of the rest of the program provides fresh information with a long-range view showing that we really are making progress toward abolishing the death penalty.**

The death penalty does not deliver what it promises. People have suggested several reasons for having the death penalty, but the TV program explains why none of these justifications stand up to the facts:

- The death penalty does not deter murder.
- The death penalty does not provide justice.
- Nor does the death penalty help the victim's family.
- The death penalty does not get used on "the worst of the worst."
- The death penalty does not save money.

What's worse than failing to deliver what the death penalty promises is that the death penalty makes existing problems worse, and it causes even more problems. The TV program briefly explains each of these:

- The death penalty escalates the cycle of violence.
- Innocent people are sentenced to death – and some are executed.
- Limiting appeals would cause even more innocent people to be executed.
- The death penalty has severe bias by race and class.
- It's not efficient.

Even though the death penalty fails to deliver on what it promises but causes additional problems, some people think we need the death penalty in order to be safe. However, this fear wrongly assumes that the death penalty is even available for many murder cases, so repealing it would leave a great void. **Actually, the death penalty is available only in very limited cases, and it does NOT protect us, so we would be just as safe WITHOUT it.**

The death penalty law is written so tightly that very few homicide cases could even qualify for having a death sentence being possible. The vast majority of homicides are already covered by state laws that provide for prison sentences through the regular sentencing procedures. Also, nearly all death penalty cases come from just four counties (King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap). The other 35 counties almost never use it. It is practically irrelevant to ask how we would get by without the death penalty. We already are living without the death penalty.

Furthermore, even when death sentences are imposed, the offender is very unlikely to be executed, so – in effect – we already impose life sentences instead of the death penalty. Washington executed nobody for nearly three decades from the mid-1960s through 1992. Since then we have executed only five persons, a few are currently on death row, and dozens of death sentences have been overturned because of serious errors. Therefore, the death penalty is practically irrelevant in Washington, except for wasting a lot of court time and taxpayers' money.

Washington State Law already provides an alternative to the death penalty. For the very rare kinds of homicide cases that could result in the death penalty, the default sentence already is a life sentence without any possibility of parole.

Eighteen states in the US, all of the European Union nations, and a growing number of other countries around the world do not use the death penalty at all, so they are already effectively living well without the death penalty. Effective solutions already exist. The death penalty just keeps us stuck in an unjust past.

More and more people are figuring out that the death penalty is wrong. Six states abolished the death penalty from 2007 to 2013. The TV program explains that over a longer historical timeline, we have significantly reduced the death penalty's use.

Much of the following information came from the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), the US's very best source of information about the death penalty. See DPIC's well organized information at www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

Executions in the U.S. peaked in the 1930s. Even the recent "tough-on-crime" mania never caused as many executions in the modern era as occurred in the 1930s. Racial bias and other gross inconsistencies were even worse at that time than later – but still so bad by 1972 that the U.S. Supreme Court overturned all states' death penalty laws. States wrote new laws, so the death penalty started coming back in 1976. Death sentences increased until peaking at 315 in 1996, but they declined since then to 80 in 2013.

Likewise, the number of executions in the U.S. also peaked during the 1990s – 98 executions during 1999 – but declined since then to 43 executions in 2011, 43 again in 2012, and 39 in 2013.

Public opinion surveys over the years showed that public support for the death penalty peaked in 1994 and has declined since then, for reasons such as:

- Too many innocent people are sentenced to death. (From 1973 to December 2013, **143 persons** were released from death row because they were wrongfully convicted – basically, they were innocent!)
- Crime rates have been declining for a number of years, so there is less public pressure for mindless "tough on crime" punishments, and more willingness to consider facts not just fear.
- More people are concerned that the death penalty discriminates on the basis of race, economic class, and other factors.
- A growing factor is that more people – especially state legislators and governors – understand that the death penalty is more expensive than a sentence of life without parole.

The trend toward reducing and abolishing the death penalty is really worldwide. About 2/3 of the world's nations no longer practice the death penalty. Some nations have repealed their death penalty laws, and others just never use them. In 2011 **only 20** nations executed anyone. Sadly, **the U.S. stands alone as the only Western democracy** that still practices the death penalty. China executes more people by far than any other nation – in fact, more than all other nations combined. In recent years, the other nations that execute the most people in any given year typically include **Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen**, and the US.

Excellent sources of information exist.

If you live in the greater Olympia area and want to connect with the grassroots movement to abolish the death penalty, the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's **Committee for Alternatives to the Death Penalty** invites you to join us. We meet one evening each month to educate ourselves and to organize outreach activities to educate the public. For information contact us at (360) 352-0695 or (360) 491-9093 or deathpenalty@olympiafor.org

The Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org, has a Death Penalty section with a tremendous amount and variety of information. See www.olympiafor.org/death_penalty.htm

Our website's resource titled "**Death Penalty Information Resources**" (available in both Word and .pdf versions) lists the contact information for some of the best regional and national organizations working on this.

We especially recommend the **Death Penalty Information Center** at www.deathpenaltyinfo.org