

Every month since February 1987 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 several times every week for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. You can see TCTV's schedule at [www.tctv.net](http://www.tctv.net).

You can also watch the program described below (and more than 90 of our previous interview programs and special programs) at the Olympia FOR's website, [www.olympiafor.org](http://www.olympiafor.org). Simply click the TV programs link to reach [www.olympiafor.org/tv\\_programs.htm](http://www.olympiafor.org/tv_programs.htm), scroll down, and click the program you want to watch.

Many of our website's TV program listings also include a .pdf document describing the program.

## FEBRUARY 2010

### “DEATH PENALTY: NEW PROGRESS TOWARD ABOLITION”

by GLEN ANDERSON, PRODUCER AND HOST OF THIS TV SERIES

The Olympia FOR's TV series has focused a number of programs on the death penalty, but our February 2010 program is the first one that focuses on a lot of good news. Two states recently abolished the death penalty and several other states are making good progress in that direction. Also, the abolition movement is becoming more diverse, and more constituencies – including law enforcement officers and a prominent legal organization – have recognized that the death penalty is not workable.

This month's program begins with fresh news about some of the death penalty's problems, including the recent confirmation that Texas did indeed execute an innocent man. In 2004 Texas executed Cameron Todd Willingham for killing his three daughters by burning down his house. Willingham insisted that he was innocent from the very beginning, during his trial, and after he was convicted and sentenced to death in 1992. After 12 years on death row he was executed in 2004.

The local prosecutor's so-called expert had not used adequate scientific procedures to conclude that the fire had been arson. Finally a forensic expert examined the evidence and found that the fire was not arson, but had had an accidental origin, so no crime had occurred, and Texas executed an innocent person. This was a terrible embarrassment for Texas Governor Rick Perry, who had refused

to give clemency and made the execution occur. Recently, when the Texas Forensic Science Commission was proving Willingham's innocence, Gov. Perry removed some members from the Commission and appointed some who would agree with him. This cover-up showed that truth and justice are not the death penalty's goals.

Our February TV program also reviews recent problems with using lethal injection and new political opposition to the death penalty, which costs much more than life without parole.

State and local governments are realizing that this expensive system is a drain on taxpayers' dollars during this time of budget crises. Public opinion has been shifting away from the death penalty.

Prosecutors are charging fewer cases as capital crimes, and juries are handing down fewer death sentences.

Most of this program will look at new progress in the growing movement to abolish the death penalty in many states.

When New York State's death penalty was thrown out by a court, the state deliberated carefully in response to much grassroots organizing and public testimony and decided not to bring it back.

New Jersey abolished the death penalty after having spent a great many millions of dollars putting people on death row but never executed anyone. Again, extensive grassroots organizing and public pressure were crucial for moving New Jersey to abolish it.

New Mexico abolished it.

An abolition bill passed one of Montana's Republican-controlled legislative bodies.

Maryland limited the death penalty to very narrow circumstances, making it very rare in the future.

North Carolina enacted the Racial Justice Act, which will allow defendants to avoid death sentences if they can show racial bias.

Connecticut passed repeal legislation through both legislative houses (by a whopping 90-56 in the House), but the governor vetoed it.

Colorado passed repeal legislation through its House and fell only one vote short in the Senate.

Progress also occurred in Kansas, New Hampshire, Kentucky, and California.

In January the American Law Institute formally concluded that the death penalty is unworkable and irretrievably broken, and the ALI gave up trying to devise legal tweaks to allow it to continue. The ALI is made up of about 4,000 judges, lawyers and law professors, and it devises nationwide legal standards for various complex systems. The ALI had devised the legal framework for the laws that states began enacting in the mid-1970s to bring back the death penalty after the US Supreme Court had abolished it in 1972, and it has been fine-tuning its efforts to balance justice in individual death penalty cases with standardized procedures to avoid arbitrariness. Now the ALI has given up on the death penalty altogether.

Our exceptionally well informed guest, Sarah Craft, re-recommends grassroots organizing, face-to-face conversations, focusing on the costs, recognizing that victims' families are not helped or satisfied by the death penalty, and listening to law enforcement officers who recommend better uses for our scarce tax dollars.

Sarah is active with Equal Justice USA, a nationwide nonprofit organization. She recently moved to Seattle to help Washingtonians work to abolish our state's death penalty. Contact Equal Justice USA at [www.ejusa.org/signup](http://www.ejusa.org/signup) or its new Seattle office, (206) 453-3478.

An excellent nationwide resource is the Death Penalty Information Center, [www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)

**The Olympia FOR's Committee for Alternatives to the Death Penalty meets at an easy-to-find location in Tumwater near the end of each month.** You can find our next meeting date and easy directions to find the location at [deathpenalty@olympiafor.org](mailto:deathpenalty@olympiafor.org).

We belong to the Washington Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, [www.abolishdeathpenalty.org](http://www.abolishdeathpenalty.org) (206) 622-8952. We also relate to the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty at [www.ncadp.org](http://www.ncadp.org).