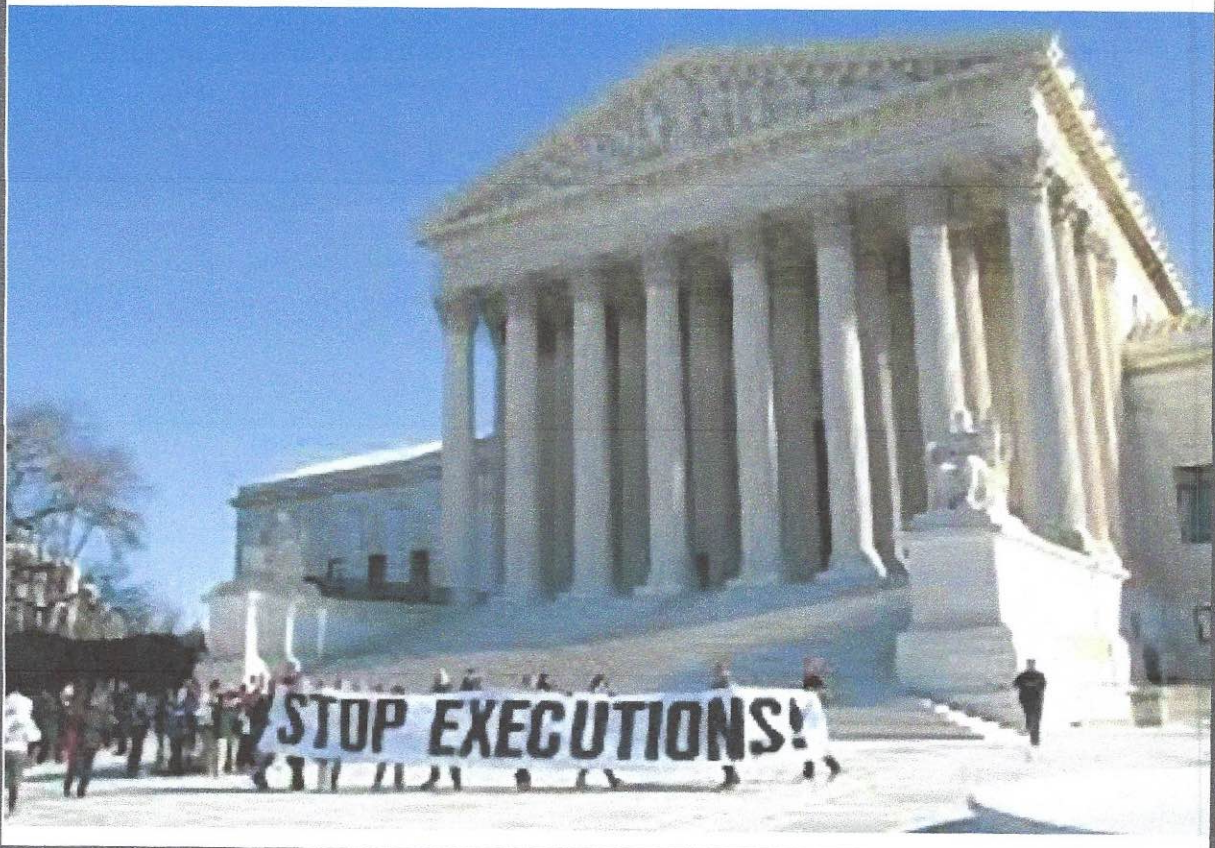




Peace Out! Week Eighty-three







## Commentary on federal executions being carried out in Indiana.

Offered by NEC member Kathy McGregor and Don Davis, a condemned man at Varner Prison in Arkansas.

Don Davis has spent almost 30 years on Arkansas' death row. He wrote a letter to me last week that I can only assume was written as renewed feelings about his own fate came up during the federal executions being carried out in Indiana. Perhaps, also, as demonstrations fanned out across the country when the video of George Floyd's execution was televised all over the world. In that letter he wrote: *I need a favor and I know that you are the one who needs to do it. I know how you feel about executions but if the state is going to have them should it not be televised? If the state is going to do it in the name of the people should not the people get to see what they are paying for? How can they say it is a deterrence if no one can see it? What about the cost? This issue needs to be talked about anyway one can talk about it.*

Don is one of five men whose appeals have run out and are "eligible for execution" once the state obtains the drugs necessary to put a man to death.

Don was to be the first of eight men executed on April 17, 2017. He was taken to the "quiet room" just steps away from the death chamber and had his last meal of fried chicken and mashed potatoes before he was granted a last-minute stay of execution. This was the second time since 2006 he received a stay this close to being executed.

Don wrote the following piece for me to read at a town hall meeting organized by the Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty in Little Rock prior to the mass executions that were to be carried out just after Easter 2017. Don has written extensively over the past few years about how solitary confinement has caused him to face his crimes so that he may become the man he is today – remorseful, forgiven by God, and redeemed:

*Hello. My name is Don Davis and I am a death row prisoner who has been sentenced to Death by lethal injection for a murder that happened in 1990.*

*First, I think it is important for you to know that I know who and what I was 25 years ago. I do not believe that I am the same person that I was. I do not believe that the*



*state ever executes the same man that they convicted. It is hard for me to believe that after all these years of being in this cage that I have not grown in some kind of way. Maybe not in the same way as a person who is out in the world would, but I have done the best I could under the sentence of death.*

*I know better than most how society looks at us. Most think we are nothing but monsters who have nothing to contribute. Society has been trying to kill me for 25 years. The leaders in our society have been thinking of ways to kill men who are sitting down here in a cage cut off from the world - a place of darkness and depression; a sewage of dejection where words like love, compassion, and empathy are swallowed up with words like hate, trash, plague, animal. A place somewhere between life and death.*

*How do you do 25 years in a single man cell in solitary confinement without going completely crazy? I will say that I have held up better than most. One way I think I have made it through is a good imagination. I have been places. I have done and seen things that people who are free have never done. I have built a world on a far-away planet seven times bigger than Earth. I have been the quarterback in the Super Bowl (Cowboys) and yes...we won. I have been what I consider to be a real man. One who puts his family first – that works all his life so that his family will have a place to call home; food on the table; clothes to wear...making sure his family is safe from people like I was 25 years ago.*

*Imagination is a powerful instrument that one can use to escape solitary confinement. If you want to kill a person on death row without using drugs, find a way to stop imagination. Game over.*

*I believe in the Bible. I believe that God is the true God. I believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God. I believe that God sacrificed his son, Jesus Christ, for the sins of all men. This means everyone. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, "everyone but Don Davis." What I read was "to whomever asks for forgiveness with a sincere heart, if you are truly repentant of your sins, then forgiveness shall be given." This is what I believe. Not only do I believe this, it is what I do every day of my life. As I Am – Don Davis, Death Row, April 2017*

### **Prayer to End the Use of the Death Penalty**

God of compassion,  
You let your rain fall on the just and the unjust.  
Expand and deepen our hearts  
So that we may love you as you love,

Even those among us  
Who have caused the greatest pain by taking life.  
For there is in our land a great cry for vengeance  
As we fill up death rows and kill the killers  
In the name of justice, in the name of peace.  
Jesus, our brother,  
You suffered execution at the hands of your state  
But you did not let hatred overcome you.  
Help us reach out to victims of violence  
So that our enduring love may help them heal.  
Holy Spirit of God,  
You strengthen us in the struggle for justice,  
Help us to work tirelessly  
For the abolition of state-sanctioned death  
And to renew our society in its very heart  
So that violence will be no more.  
Amen.

Sister Helen Prejean CSJ