

Christian Liturgy/Worship Resources for Death Penalty Remembrance, Lament, and Solidarity

(Compiled for Non-commercial Use by Faith Leaders and Churches)

As we acknowledge the injustices of our death penalty system, we invite faith leaders and communities to remember and pray for all those affected by this system. Below are resources that can be used for a vigil focused on the death penalty or incorporated into regular services. While they can be used at any time during the year, we encourage their use on Palm/Passion Sunday and through Holy Week as we remember the imprisonment and execution of Jesus. We also encourage their use during the Advent season, when we cry out for God's justice to transform our world and our relationships with one another. We encourage communities of faith to keep vigil during executions. For those of you following the story of Kelly Gissendaner, who is awaiting execution on death row, we include a special prayer for her, for her victim, and for all involved in her case.

Litany or Topics for Intercessory Prayer

(Please adapt this and any other prayers for the needs of your community.)

We remember all of those executed in the year 2015:

Andrew Brannan, Johnny Kormondy, Charles Warner, Arnold Prieto, Warren Hill, Robert Ladd, Donald Newbury, Walter Storey, Manuel Vasquez, Cecil Clayton as well as their families, who mourn their loss.

We remember that some of these men had intellectual disabilities or mental illnesses. (updated information can be found at <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/FactSheet.pdf>)

**We seek your mercy. We cry out for your justice, O God.
Grant us wisdom to work for a more just world.**

We remember their victims and the victims' families who mourn their loss:

Kyle Dinkheller, Gary McAdams, Adrianna Waller, Rodolfo and Virginia Rodriguez, Paula Moran, Myra Wright, Joseph Handspike, Vicki Garner, Aubrey Hawkins, Jill Frey, Juanita Ybarra, Christopher Castetter.

**We seek your mercy. We cry out for your justice, O God.
Grant us wisdom to work for a more just world.**

We remember all those involved in the execution of those on death row:

prison staff, lawyers, chaplains, pharmacists, physicians, judges, state attorney generals, governors, and boards of pardons and paroles.

**We seek your mercy. We cry out for your justice, O God.
Grant us wisdom to work for a more just world.**

We remember all those who wait on death row and all those incarcerated, including children in juvenile justice facilities.

We remember all those held in isolation and other inhumane prison conditions.

**We seek your mercy. We cry out for your justice, O God.
Grant us wisdom to work for a more just world.**

We remember individuals and organizations that actively work to prevent violence and to create the conditions for peace and just relationships.

We lament the lack of support and services for so many who require help and the unfair distribution of resources that contribute to violence in our world.

**We seek your mercy. We cry out for your justice, O God.
Grant us wisdom to work for a more just world.**

We remember Jesus, God's beloved child, executed on the cross and for the two executed on his right and his left.

We remember that there is nothing that can separate anyone from the love of God, not a crime, nor a prison cell, nor an execution chamber.

**We seek your mercy. We cry out for your justice, O God.
Grant us wisdom to work for a more just world.**

Gracious and merciful God,
reveal to us the creative, restorative, and life-giving power of your justice through Jesus Christ, who comes to set the captives free,
and in the power of your Spirit, the comforter, the advocate, the breath of life.
Amen.

Litany for an End to the Death Penalty

God of Life, we come before you recognizing that our acquiescence to the death penalty has degraded all of society. By allowing the disrespect of the human life of one criminal, we have weakened our respect for the dignity of the lives of all people. By infringing on the right to life of one of your children, we have infringed on the rights of all human citizens of this world.

We are a broken society. The fabric of our society is pulled and torn from all directions as the voices of the world tempt us to give in to hate, to seek revenge, and to disrespect human life. We pray for our society, that it may be transformed to respect the dignity of the human person, and in doing so, respect the dignity of life. We pray to the Lord . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

We pray for all elected officials, that they may govern with compassion and create policies that promote life instead of death and reconciliation instead of hate. We pray to the Lord . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

For all victims of terrible crimes and their families, that they may experience healing and God's love during a very difficult time . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

For the prison system, that we might work to transform it into a system of restoration and healing. We pray to the Lord . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

For all prison employees, that they may respect prisoners as fellow human beings and encourage them on their journey of transformation and growth, We pray to the Lord . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

For all prisoners, that they may have the courage not to become embittered or hopeless, and that they may seek what is life-giving. We pray to the Lord . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

For all on death row, that they might find comfort in God and in the work of so many to prevent future killings of criminals. We pray to the Lord . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

That all may be saved from cruel and unusual punishment, and that this treatment may be seen as incompatible with the dignity of human persons and be finally abolished, we pray to the Lord . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

We pray for the strength, in the midst of many societal voices that encourage us to seek revenge, that we will instead commit ourselves to a persistent and principled witness against the death penalty, against a culture of death, and for the Gospel of Life. We pray to the Lord . . .

God of Life, hear our prayer.

God of Life, transform our spirits and melt the hardness in our hearts. Inspire us to work for justice. Inspire us to be healers of society and reconcilers of people. Help us to uphold life.

Amen.

Justice Litany

(adapted and compiled for Black History Month by St. Paul's Episcopal, Atlanta from *Intercessions For The Christian People* by Gail Ramshaw, Third Sunday of Advent B, and *A Litany for Those who Aren't Ready for Healing* by Yolanda Pierce)

Pleading for God's gift of a renewing Spirit, let us offer our prayers to God, saying:

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

That our lives may be songs of praise and thanksgiving rising from joyful hearts and proclaiming in every word we speak and gesture.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

That all those in our world held in captivity or any form of slavery may find liberation from the chains that bind them and new freedom for their hearts.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child...someone's beloved son.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

May we accept with courage God's anointing of our lives to share in the divine mission of rescue for the world, bringing justice and joy to all peoples.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

God, in your mercy. Show us our own complicity in injustice. Convict us for our indifference. Forgive us when we have remained silent. Equip us with a zeal for righteousness.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

May we reverently offer in service to the world the ministry of light which we hold in fragile human hands, this sharing in the saving work of Christ the Light.

Lord in your mercy, *hear our prayer.*

May the mercy of God which lasts from age to age may wash over us and bless us and stir up in us the bold courage to be its faithful prophets in our world.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Priest:

Send the Spirit of Jesus upon us, O God, that we may be your songs of peace and joy in this world. We pray in the name of the one who is our peace and joy, Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Invitation to Pray for Kelly Gissendaner

Kelly Gissendaner is on death row for her involvement in Gregory Owen's murder of Doug Gissendaner. We invite you to uphold all parties involved in prayer.

- **Kelly.** That she will be sustained by the Love that has transformed her and held by the compassion she has extended to others.
- **The Gissendaner family.** For those broken by the loss of son and father, a wrong that can never be made right. For those who begged for the life of their mother, daughter and granddaughter. The names of Kelly's children are Kayla, Dakota, and Brandon.
- **The prison staff.** For those who enact the will of the state, both in its desire for rehabilitation and its desire for order, for they are not immune to the force of these decisions. Lee Arrendale State Prison in Alto, GA, employs numerous correctional officers and support staff, many of whom know and care about Kelly. Susan Bishop is the prison chaplain.
- **Kelly's friends and fellow inmates.** Kelly completed the 12-week Cognitively-Based Compassion Training course and graduated from the Theology Certificate Program at Arrendale, which is sponsored by the Atlanta Theological Association. 21 people appeared on Kelly's behalf at her clemency hearing. Both here and abroad there are those who have had the privilege of crossing paths with Kelly and bearing witness to a life transformed.
- **Kelly's lawyers.** The Georgia Public Defenders have worked tirelessly.
- **State and federal judicial staff.** There are many, from judges to clerks, who will be going over Kelly's case in the next short while.
- **Gregory Owen.** He is incarcerated at a facility in Washington state, and living with the responsibility for the end of one life at his hands, and the end of another life by his plea deal. He is eligible for parole in eight years.
- **Prisoners at Jackson.** Particularly the ones on death row who will go through the death watch lockdown once again.
- **Georgia.** And all her voting citizens in whose name we kill.

Hymns and Songs

Canticle of the Turning (My soul cries out), For the Healing of the Nations Hosea	Text: Rory Cooney, Music: Irish traditional
I Want Jesus to Walk with Me	Text: John Wade, Arr. Philip Roberts
Jesus, remember me	Text: Gregory Norbet, Arr. Carolyn Sternowski
Lord you give the Great Commission	Text and Music: African-American Spiritual
Nothing is Lost on the Breath of God	Text: Taize community, Music: Jacques Berthier
O Healing River	Text: Cyril Taylor, Jeffery Rowthorn
	Text: Colin Gibson, Music: Colin Gibson
	Text: anonymous, Music: traditional North American
Precious Lord, Take My Hand	Text: Thomas A. Dorsey, Music: George N. Allen
Steal away	Text and Music: African-American Spiritual
The Cry of the Poor (Psalm 34)	Text and Music: John Foley
There is a Balm in Gilead,	Text and Music: African-American Spiritual,
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy	Text: Frederick W. Faber, Music: Calvin Hampton (recommended) or Lizzie S. Tourjee
You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd	Text: Sylvia Dustan, Music: Picardy (French Carol)
We are Called	Text: David Haas, Arr. Gary Daigle
Were You There	Text and Music: African-American Spiritual
What Does the Lord Require	Text: Albert F. Bayley, Music: Larry Warkentin
Will the Circle be Unbroken	Text and Music: Tony Alonso

Scripture Readings

John 8:1-11
Matthew 9:9-13
Romans 8:1-6
Romans 8: 31-39
Psalm 51
Psalm 95
Psalm 130

Psalm 146

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

² I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

³ Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.

⁴ When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.

⁵ Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,

⁶ who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;
⁸ the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
⁹ The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The Lord will reign for ever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!

Psalm 103

Of David.

¹ Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.
² Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
³ who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
⁴ who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
⁵ who satisfies you with good as long as you live*
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶ The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
⁸ The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.
¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
¹³ As a father has compassion for his children,

so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

¹⁴ For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵ As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.

¹⁷ But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,

¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.

¹⁹ The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰ Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
obedient to his spoken word.

²¹ Bless the Lord, all his hosts,
his ministers that do his will.

²² Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Psalm 46

To the leader. Of the Korahites. According to Alamoth. A Song.

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present* help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Selah

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵ God is in the midst of the city;* it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.

⁶ The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

Selah

⁸ Come, behold the works of the Lord;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ ‘Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.’

¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

Selah

Poetry resources

I Dream a World, Langston Hughes

Lord, Lord, Open Unto Me, Howard Thurman (selection from *Meditations of the Heart*)

Open unto me, light for my darkness
Open unto me, courage for my fear
Open unto me, hope for my despair
Open unto me, peace for my turmoil
Open unto me, joy for my sorrow
Open unto me, strength for my weakness
Open unto me, wisdom for my confusion
Open unto me, forgiveness for my sins
Open unto me, tenderness for my toughness
Open unto me, love for my hates
Open unto me, Thy Self for myself
Lord, Lord, open unto me!

This website has a variety of art and writing, including poems, from men and women on death row: <http://www.humanwrites.org/wr-index.php>