

ISSUES AND ACTIONS

October, 2005



Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.

THE EARTH CHARTER, 1. a

MARCH 1945

Lena Baker, a 44 year old African-American woman and mother of three, from a small segregated town in Georgia, died on March 5, 1945, and her death was a front page event. She was the first woman in Georgia to die in the electric chair, nicknamed “OLD SPARKEY”, after being found guilty of murdering her employer, Ernest B. Knight. An all-white male jury, who deliberated for 30 minutes, found her guilty and did not recommend mercy in their verdict. At the trial, lasting less than six hours, Lena stated that she had shot Knight in self-defense after he had held her against her will and had approached her to beat her with a metal bar. She maintained self-defense until her death.

(Enter “Lena Baker” in your computer search engine or www.washingtonpost.com and read her story.)

AUGUST 2005

Six decades after she was executed for killing a white man in the Jim Crow south, a black woman, Lena Baker, was granted a full and unconditional pardon Tuesday, August 30, 2005, by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Petitions. When the all-white, all male jury did not recommend mercy, the sentence of death by electrocution was mandated by state law. Scheree Lipscomb, Board spokesperson, said the Board did not find Baker innocent of the crime but found that the decision to deny her clemency in 1945, “was a grievous error, as this case called out for mercy.” Meanwhile, Charles Ferguson, the Cuthbert, Georgia district attorney, stated that if Lena Baker were charged with the same crime today, the case would not even meet the requirements for capital punishment! Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the death penalty sentence was receiving its own just reward? The reality is New York and Kansas, for example, having declared the death penalty unconstitutional, are currently re-engaged in a battle for its reinstatement.

A REMINDER: Those who think that the death penalty is applied without error or injustice are deluding themselves.

“I renew the appeal...for a consensus to **end the death penalty.**”

POPE JOHN PAUL II, January 27, 1999

“The death penalty is no more effective a deterrent than life imprisonment... it is also evident that the burden of capital punishment falls upon the poor, the ignorant and underprivileged members of society.”

United States Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall

NO MORE KILLING. SOME FACTS ABOUT CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

*A Philadelphia death penalty study revealed African-American defendants are almost four times more likely to receive the death penalty than other ethnic populations.

*Since 1977 more than 80% of those executed were convicted of killing white victims.

*FBI data revealed that 10 of the 12 states without capital punishment have homicide rates below the national averages.

*879 have been executed since 1976 in the U.S., and over 3,000 are currently awaiting execution.

(www.amnestyusa.org/abolish/aboutdp.html View this site for these facts and more!)

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA

OCTOBER 21- 23, 2005 NATIONAL WEEKEND OF FAITH IN ACTION

Amnesty International invites all faith and interfaith communities and human rights activists throughout the country to devote some time to the death penalty issue. Reach out and initiate a dialogue with your community!

(To learn more about this go to www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction)

ACTION STEPS

1. Engage your faith sharing group in prayers to end the death penalty. Extend the National Amnesty Weekend invitation.
2. Use your computer search engine: enter “Death Penalty” to learn more about the issue and share it with others:
 - a) print copies of articles or give web site addresses to others in your family, prayer or justice group.
 - b) e-mail your friends with the Amnesty web site address and the October 21-23, 2005 invitation.
 - c) urge space be used in your parish bulletin to include a prayer to halt the use of the death penalty.

A TELEVISION FILM ABOUT A GROWING EPIDEMIC

October 24, 2005 on Lifetime Channel, a TV presentation entitled “Human Trafficking.” Check your local TV scheduling for time.

SUBMITTED BY THE SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE