

## DEATH PENALTY: AN INCONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE



On Wednesday September 21, Troy Davis of Georgia and Lawrence Brewer of Texas were executed by their state authorities. One man, Davis, maintained his innocence until his last breath. Nearly all of the evidence against him presented at trial was later dismissed or recanted. The other man, Brewer, a white supremacist, took particular pride in the murder he inflicted upon a black man.

It is understandably likely that these two executions provoke a different response within us. The case of Davis may give us pause to question the fairness of the death penalty. The case of Brewer may strengthen our argument for the necessity of the death penalty as punishment for a heinous crime, vengeance for the victim and the victim's family.

Our upbringing, our political values, our personal sense of right and wrong all affect how we view the death penalty. Our faith, the Catholic Church, however, is very clear that "...today it is clear that the death penalty no longer serves a useful purpose in protecting the sanctity of human life." *Life Matters: The Death Penalty*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, 2011.

Avowing that life matters means opposing abortion. Opposing unjust war and attacks against noncombatants. Opposing physician-assisted suicide.

Acknowledging that life matters means opposing the death penalty.

"Ending the death penalty would be one important step away from a culture of death and toward building a culture of life." *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005

Here in Oregon, Gary Haugen, a twice-convicted killer is scheduled for an evaluation of his mental competency on September 27<sup>th</sup>. Haugen's execution date was originally scheduled for August 16<sup>th</sup> but was postponed because of the uncertainty that he was sufficiently competent to waive his rights to appeal.

As residents of Oregon, one of the least church-ed states, we have an opportunity to raise our collective voices, to let our faith guide our politics, to seize the opportunity to embrace the culture of life, intentionally, and oppose the use of the death penalty as punishment for even abhorrent crimes. We have the opportunity to oppose the execution of Gary Haugen.



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