

## Abolition Day - January 30

Is there a disconnect in the mind of the public between the execution of the fetus through abortion and the execution of adults facing capital crimes? Law makers are drafting new rules each year to eliminate abortions in Kansas.

On the other hand, there seems to be a lack of support for the elimination of state-sponsored murder of adults guilty of capital crimes. Our media frequently reminds people of high abortion numbers. No one is invited to see an abortion but many pictures are provided showing vital and moving human figures in the womb that are examples of aborted fetuses.

The execution of adults is viewed by a select number of people but seating is limited. There always is a curtain or blind that can be closed if a public murder becomes messy. Clayton Lockett's execution in Oklahoma went terribly wrong after the lethal injection process began. 43 minutes later he finally died of a heart attack.

Kansas did originally have a death penalty law but was abolished on January 30 1907. To celebrate that event the Kansas Coalition against the Death Penalty designates January 30 each year as Abolition Day. In 1935 a new capital punishment law was written partially in response to a list of famous professional criminals moving through Kansas – such as Alvin “Old Creepy” Karpos, Charles “Pretty boy” Floyd and of course Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker. Hanging was the method of execution during those days, but Governor George Docking gave life sentences to men on death row. He said, “I just don't like killing people.” The last executions in Kansas were held in 1965, the hangings of Richard Hickock and Perry Smith, the infamous killers of the Clutter family.

The current law took effect in 1994. Today ten men are presently appealing their death sentence as the law requires. When the new death penalty law was reinstated, it was estimated that it would cost the state \$2.4 – 4.2 million each year. With our governor and state lawmakers looking for ways to save money, I would hope serious consideration would be given to eliminate the death penalty as a way of saving money. It is estimated that the average cost of just one case ending with the death penalty is \$1,200,000. In contrast the mean cost of incarcerating someone for life is “\$740,000. Eliminating the death penalty saves money.

A recent study showed that under Colorado's capital sentencing system, death is not handed down fairly. It is arbitrary. As a former Colorado judge said, “The death penalty is simply the result of happenstance, the district attorney's choice, the jurisdiction in which the case is filed, perhaps the race or economic circumstance of the defendant.” This is true throughout the nation. This is the reason 18 states have eliminated capital punishment, and governors in many more states will commute death sentences.

But where is the Compassion for the family member who must go through the traumas of the many trials of the man who committed the crime? Where is the compassion for the many who are on death row only because they could not afford a good lawyer? Where is the compassion for all the inmates on death row that may be innocent? Since 1973, 150 individuals in the United States have been released from death row after new evidence found them innocent.

The Charter for Compassion says we must “honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect” especially when the issue of life or death is concerned – whether it is a pre-born fetus or an adult charged with a capital crime.

Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber said, even back in the 1990’s, that the executions he had permitted had neither “made us safer” nor “more noble as a society.” He could not, “participate once again in something I believe to be morally wrong.” I would hope the citizens of Kansas would agree. I have not heard the latest from our governor about his stand on the death penalty. Perhaps he should hear from us about this question.

It is a matter of life and death. We should all choose life.

If you choose to comment, or even submit your own thoughts for our Compassion series, please visit our website at [www.spiritualityresourcecenter.com](http://www.spiritualityresourcecenter.com).

David Carlson, January 2015