



# Peace Offerings

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**Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.**

## Father John Dear Visits Little Rock with Message of Peace

Father John Dear, a Catholic priest and internationally known peace activist, is scheduled to speak in the chapel at Morris Hall, St. John's Catholic Center, 2500 N. Tyler Street at 6:30 pm Wednesday, April 19. His topic will be **Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace**. Father John will speak again on Thursday, April 20 at noon at the Clinton School of Public Service, 1200 President Clinton Ave., on **Peace, Politics and Protest**. All are invited. No admission charge.

For over 35 years, Father Dear has traveled the world teaching, organizing and practicing non-violence. In the tradition of Gandhi, Dr. King and Jesus of Nazareth, his main pur-

pose in life has been the pursuit of a more peaceful and just world. As the very "embodiment of a peacemaker," he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He also helped draft Pope Francis' January 1, 2017 World Day of Peace message, which was the first statement on nonviolence in the history of the Catholic Church. Father Dear has written over 35 books, including *The Beatitudes of Peace*, *Seeds of Nonviolence* and *The Nonviolent Life*.

John Dear is on the staff of Pace e Bene. For more information on how to become involved with Father Dear's work on nonviolence, you can contact:

[www.campaignnonviolence.org](http://www.campaignnonviolence.org).



**Fr. John Dear**

Every September, Fr. Dear organizes a national week of action, with nearly 1000 nonviolent demonstrations against poverty, war, racism and environmental destruction across the USA. A former Jesuit, he was ordained in 1993 and is now a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, CA. He currently lives in New Mexico. You can learn more about Fr. Dear at [www.johndear.org](http://www.johndear.org).

## Crimes of the State: Seven Men Scheduled for Execution in April

There were initially eight men on death row scheduled to be executed in the state of Arkansas over a period of 10 days in April, 2017. Their names are Don Williams Davis, Stacey Johnson, Jack Harold Jones,

Ledell Lee, Jason McGehee, Kenneth Williams, Marcel Williams and Bruce Ward. This past week, a federal judge ordered a hold on McGehee's execution on April 6 after the AR Parole Board voted to rec-

ommend that he be granted clemency. The judge ruled that the state did not have enough time to consider this recommendation, so currently McGehee has been taken off the list of those to be executed this month. Governor Asa

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### Crimes of the State (cont)

Hutchinson has refused to grant clemency in any of these cases. It should be noted that no state has executed so many death row inmates so quickly since the death penalty was reinstated by the US Supreme Court in 1976. These men are scheduled to be executed on April 17, 20, 24, and 27 unless the court or governor intervenes. All of these inmates were sentenced to death before 2000. Since that time, they have been appealing the death sentence via all legal avenues available to them. The reason for this unheard of scheduling of mass executions has to do with the fact that one of the drugs used in Arkansas's three-drug lethal injection protocol will expire at the end of April.

The drug set to expire is the first drug used—Midazolam (Versed). There is a great deal of controversy over whether Midazolam is even an appropriate drug to use in executions. Other states have discontinued use of this drug as it has been known in some cases to be ineffective in rendering the victim unconscious before other drugs are injected, leading to excruciating pain that can last for prolonged periods of time before death.

Pax Christi Little Rock has been active, along with several other peace and social justice groups, in protesting the deaths of these men at vigils taking place at the Govern-

nor's mansion on a daily basis. The Catholic Church and the Conference of Bishops called for an end to the death penalty over 25 years ago. Pope Francis has made it clear that "capital punishment is unacceptable. . . It is an offence to the inviolability of life and to the dignity of the human person which contradicts God's plan for man and for society and His merciful justice, and it fails to conform to any just purpose of punishment. It does not render justice to the victims, but rather foments revenge." (3/20/2015). PCLR will continue this protest and vigil, urging others who are opposed to this violent and inhumane act to join us.

## Why Abolish the Death Penalty?

The Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (ACADP) is invested in halting the execution of the seven men currently on death row. They sponsored a town hall meeting at 6:30 on Thursday, March 30 in which 5 panel members responded to questions asked by the audience. Pax Christi LR members attended this meeting in solidarity with all there who opposed the death penalty. PCLR bases it's opposition to the death penalty on scripture and Catholic teachings. In addition to this rationale, ACADP presented several other reasons why the

death penalty should be no longer implemented.

### 1. Innocent People have been Convicted and Executed

Since 1976, over 1400 executions occurred in the US, but 156 people were also released from death row. That's one exoneration for every ten executions. On average, these innocent people spent 11.3 years on death row before being exonerated.

### 2. The Death Penalty is Unfair and Arbitrary

Studies continually show race plays a major role in the application of the death penalty. Arkansas has executed 195 people since the state began keeping records. Of those executed, 134 were black males. Additionally, those convicted of killing white victims are much more likely to receive the death penalty than those convicted of



Protest outside of the Governor's Mansion in LR

killing black victims. The death penalty also targets lower income offenders. The American Bar Association, a conservative group of nearly 400,000 lawyers, has called for a halt on executions, due in part to the failure to provide adequate counsel and resources to capital defendants. Almost all the people on death row were too poor to afford their own attorneys at trial. These low income defendants were appointed lawyers, some of whom were overworked,



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Why Abolish the Death Penalty (cont)

underpaid, or lacked the necessary experience to handle death penalty cases.

3. The Death Penalty is More Expensive Than Life Without Parole

Although Arkansas has not yet studied the costs associated with the death penalty, other states have found capital punishment to be very costly, diverting millions of dollars from programs and agencies that protect the public and save lives. The most rigorous cost study in the

found that a single death sentence in Maryland costs almost more than \$2 million more than a similar non-death penalty case. And Maryland is not alone. Studies in more than a dozen states show that the death penalty can be up to six times more expensive than sentences of life without parole.

4. Capital Punishment Does Not Deter Crime

A New York Times survey found that over the past 20 years, the homicide rate in

death penalty states was 48-100% higher than in non-death penalty states. A recent poll showed police chiefs rank the death penalty last as a way of reducing violent crime— behind curbing drug use, hiring more police officers, and reducing guns on the street. Eighty-seven percent of criminology experts agree that the death penalty fails to deter crime.



Save the Date



Msgr. Jack Harris, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Morrilton and chaplain for the death row inmates who are scheduled for execution later this month, will be the speaker at our next Pax Christi Little Rock Board meeting on Thursday, May 11. Our board meeting will start at 6 pm and Msgr. Harris will begin his talk at 7 pm. There is no charge and all are invited to attend.

100 Backpacks Donated to Jericho Way

Pax Christi Little Rock has the most creative and generous membership. Back in February, after our presentation by Jan Nelson from Jericho Way, one of our board members (who wishes to remain anonymous), got the great idea of buying 100 backpacks with the Pax Christi LR logo, stuffing them full of food, hygiene items, and clothing, and donating them to Jericho Way. This anonymous board member simply said she wanted the people at Jericho Way to have something other than a plastic trash bag to carry some of their possessions around with them. Several members got together spontaneously to help stuff the backpacks. Fun was had by all!

