

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Beyond a Reasonable Doubt

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Troy Anthony Davis was put to death by lethal injection at 11:08 pm on Wednesday, September 21, 2011 in Jackson, Georgia. At the moment of his death, he appealed to supporters to continue to work to find the person who really murdered Mark MacPhail in 1989. Troy maintained his innocence throughout his 22 year fight for justice while sitting on death row. Messages on his behalf came from leaders and organizations everywhere, including former President Jimmy Carter, Pope Benedict XVI, Amnesty International, and the NAACP. Thousands joining in prayer vigils all over the world sent pleas for a reconsideration of his case. Just reconsider it.

There are many, many reasons to oppose the death penalty. One is the potential for human error. None of us is perfect. We make mistakes, more often than we'd like to admit. We are convinced about something at one moment, only to realize later that we may have been wrong. It takes a courageous person to confess publicly that he or she made a mistake. That is precisely what happened in the Troy Anthony Davis case. Seven of the nine persons who claimed to have been eye witnesses to the murder of Mark MacPhail signed legal affidavits saying they were wrong. That leaves two people and one of them has confessed to friends that he is the person who really killed MacPhail.

There was no physical evidence presented in Davis' trial. A murder weapon was never found. Three jurors have now said that they were not convinced of Davis' guilt. Even the judge and prosecutor in his murder trial have acknowledged that they had their own doubts about his guilt. There was serious reasonable doubt that Davis was guilty of this crime and he was executed anyway.

The exposure of all the flaws in his case raises many questions. How was he convicted, beyond a reasonable doubt, with no physical evidence? Why was he sentenced to death? Why was he never given the opportunity to prove his innocence after the witnesses started coming forward? Up to the moment of his death, he addressed the MacPhail family once again proclaiming his innocence.

Beyond a reasonable doubt is the requirement for sentencing someone to death. In the case of Troy Anthony Davis, there was simply too much doubt. Brian Kammer, one of Davis' attorneys, said the state may have executed an innocent man. "I think Georgia has shamed itself in a very profound way by failing to err on the side of life when there is meaningful, significant doubt."

We cannot forget Troy Anthony Davis. We must continue to search for the real killer in this case, not only to clear the name of Troy Davis, but for the sake of Officer MacPhail's family who deserve to know the truth. We must also be willing to admit that there was too much doubt because there are many others waiting on death row facing similar circumstances. Troy Davis is symbolic of how justice does NOT work for all people in our current system.

Remember Paul's letter in Romans 12:19 (The Message), "Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it." Killing someone to avenge a killing is not ours to do. God knows, we make mistakes.

churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.