

# *i dream a world...*

Religious Organizing Against the Death Penalty  
American Friends Service Committee  
1501 Cherry Street • Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Brooke Matschek, Program Assistant  
(215) 241-7137 • [bmatschek@afsc.org](mailto:bmatschek@afsc.org)  
[www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org) • [www.deathpenaltyreligious.org](http://www.deathpenaltyreligious.org)

Dear teacher or administrator:

Stemming from our belief that there is that of God in everyone, Quakers and the American Friends Service Committee have a long history of opposition to the death penalty. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. also rejected the death penalty as a violent institution, just as he rejected racism, a prominent characteristic of capital punishment in the United States. Dr. King dreamt of a world that others said was merely a fantasy. He envisioned the “beloved community” where people of all races, classes, and walks of life could coexist in peace.

His vision inspired the *I Dream a World* project. By connecting Dr. King’s teachings on nonviolence with the death penalty, *I Dream a World* seeks to engage young people in broadening our understanding of peace.

This coming January, in honor of Dr. King’s legacy, the American Friends Service Committee will host an exhibit featuring the art and writing of local middle and high school students expressing their reactions and thoughts on justice, non-violence and capital punishment. The exhibit will be on display at the Friends Center in Center City throughout the month of January, with a special event on Saturday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>. On this day we will have a discussion about capital punishment and share the poetry, writings and other art created by youth.

Students may submit art expressed through poetry, essays, short stories, drawings, paintings, collages, sculptures, music, videos and more. This is an ideal project – large or small – for classes focused on history, visual art, government, religion, English, music and even theater.

I have enclosed a number of suggested activities for you to use as ideas and starting points in developing the project at your school. Also enclosed are basic guidelines for submitting work as well as background information on Dr. King and the history of the *I Dream a World* project.

I hope that you will help us bring this project to students in your school and I am eager to work closely with you and your school. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Truly,

Brooke Matschek  
Program Assistant

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## ***Suggested Activities***

This list is just a starting point to help generate ideas. If you would like more ideas or help putting an idea into action, please contact the AFSC National Criminal Justice Program.

- Bring a speaker to your class or school and ask students to respond. A short list of potential speakers in, or near, Philadelphia is found on the other side of this sheet.
- Show a movie such as *Dead Man Walking* and lead a discussion afterwards. The AFSC has a *Dead Man Walking* study guide that can help you frame a discussion.
- Do a clothesline project. Collect t-shirts and art supplies and have students decorate t-shirts with their thoughts on peace, violence, justice and capital punishment.
- Host a poetry slam at the school during lunch or after school one day. Students can read poetry, make up poetry or just share poetic thoughts. Periodically interject facts and information on the death penalty, peace, non-violence or justice to ensure that the theme stays on topic.
- Decorate cards of hope and peace directed to politicians, murder victim family members, death row inmates or their families. (These can then be mailed after the exhibit.)
- Create postcards calling for the abolition of, or moratorium on, the death penalty for students to sign and send to their elected officials.
- Have the school devote a story, page or edition of the school newspaper to understanding capital punishment. Columns could focus on general information, the morality of capital punishment, the story of one person whose life was affected by murder or the death penalty, survey responses to a question about the death penalty and more.

A short list of possible speakers near Philadelphia who can speak from a variety of perspectives of the death penalty (please contact the AFSC if you have any questions or would like to know of additional people in the area):

- **Ray Krone**, 602-309-9494, innocent man from PA who was on death row in Arizona.
- **Nick Yarris**, 267-738-8377, innocent man on PA death row for 22 years.
- **Sam Angell**, 215-928-0520, Quaker and lawyer who works as a public defender.
- **Jeff Garis**, 215-724-6120, executive director of Pennsylvania Abolitionists United Against the Death Penalty (PAUADP.)
- **Brenda Kemp** or **Elizabeth Judge**, mothers with children on death row. Call Peggy Simms, 215-724-6120, at PAUADP.
- Family member of someone who was murdered but opposes the death penalty (you may call Brooke Matschek at AFSC for suggestions.)
- **Reverend Doctor Robert E Koenig** or **Reverend Norma Koenig**, 610-649-0848, ministers and activists.

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***"Art Exhibit"***

## ***Submission Guidelines***

- All students, grades 6-12 are eligible to participate.
- Students may submit art expressed through any medium (poetry, essays, short stories, drawings, paintings, collages, sculptures, music, videos, etc.)
- While the AFSC is unconditionally opposed to the death penalty, art need not advocate for the end of capital punishment. Rather, the AFSC seeks thoughtful exploration of the many sides of peace, justice and the death penalty. However, given our position, submissions explicitly supporting capital punishment or violence of any form may not be displayed.
- Submissions must be mailed/delivered to:  
**American Friends Service Committee  
National Criminal Justice Program  
1501 Cherry Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102**
- Submissions must be received no later than **Dec. 15, 2004**.
- Submissions must include:
  - title for the piece (if there is one)
  - artist's name;
  - artist's school;
  - artist's grade/age; and
  - artist's **and** guardian's contact information.
- Art submitted will be displayed at the Friends Center in Center City, Philadelphia during the month of January. Due to space limitations, the AFSC may not be able to feature every submission.
- Items will be returned to artists in February, 2005. For items to be returned, artists must provide the AFSC with a mailing address and contact information. If an item is impractical to mail (heavy, fragile, etc.), the artist must make arrangements to pick up the piece.
- The AFSC may photograph, scan or transcribe all submissions for archival and promotional purposes. No submissions will be used for any purpose without the consent of the artist.

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## **History**

The Religious Organizing Against the Death Penalty Project is pleased to present the *I Dream A World* campaign. This campaign focuses on how we, as a society, can envision and create a world based on finding solutions to the problems of violence that don't resort to perpetuating the cycle of violence. One of the greatest models we have for envisioning a different kind of world is the example of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love...it creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers... Capital punishment is society’s final assertion that it will not forgive.”  
-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Most of the world has abolished the practice of the death penalty. Yet the United States continues to condemn men, women, and children to death. Nearly all of the people this country executes are poor and/or people of color. Additionally, many of them suffer from mental retardation or mental illness.

The use of capital punishment is an example of how we as a nation continue to try to solve social justice issues with the use of violence. The death penalty is a microcosm of the problems society has with violence in general. It is for these reasons that the American Friends Service Committee has made it a priority to work toward its abolition.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. rejected the violence of the death penalty, as have many of his family members. To build on his legacy, the Religious Organizing Against the Death Penalty Project (ROADP) launched the *I Dream A World* campaign on the January 2002 MLK holiday. We are hoping that communities will continue to organize around Dr. King’s birthday in January and February’s Black History Month, calling on the courageous tradition of organizing within religious and youth communities.

One of the primary elements of the project is specific outreach to young people. Additionally we are working with faith communities. Further descriptions of these efforts are outlined on the reverse of this page. Initial outreach for these campaigns occurred throughout 2002 and 2003. We are now working to create a more lasting coalition of faith communities, student organizations, and other groups that will help grow the movement against the death penalty in a sustainable and long-term manner.

**Young people:** Often young people's voices are discounted or ignored; through this project we seek to educate and empower youth and students to recognize and enhance their own abilities. Young people have powerful voices, and they deserve to be heard.



- As a part of the *I Dream a World* campaign, youth will be encouraged to submit drawings of what justice looks like to them, as well as drawings of leaders, such as Dr. King, that inspire them.
- Junior and senior high school youth will be encouraged to write essays focusing on how Dr. King would be involved in addressing the issue of the death penalty if he were alive today.
- The collected essays and drawings will be compiled in booklets that can be delivered to legislators and other key officials to demonstrate the concerns and wishes of youth.
- The drawings and essays will be displayed in churches and other public settings.
- We also ask that young people become involved in the public sphere by educating themselves about the legislative process and contacting their elected representatives to express opinions about issues of great importance.
- We encourage young people to use the *I Dream a World* student organizing packet to continue educating themselves on the issues surrounding capital punishment and to share that knowledge with their peers.

**Faith-based communities:** Religious leaders such as Rev. Bernice King, Rev. James Lawson, Sister Helen Prejean, Arun Gandhi, Rabbi David Sapperstein and Rabbi Leonard Beerman have called for an end to the death penalty.



- As a part of the *I Dream a World* campaign, AFSC is calling on other religious leaders to educate their congregations about the immorality of the death penalty by preaching sermons, leading prayer services, and facilitating discussions.



- We encourage everyone to send cards to government officials calling for an end to capital punishment.
- We ask people to reach out to correspond with and/or visit those on death row.
- We must also remember to provide support to victims of violence.

