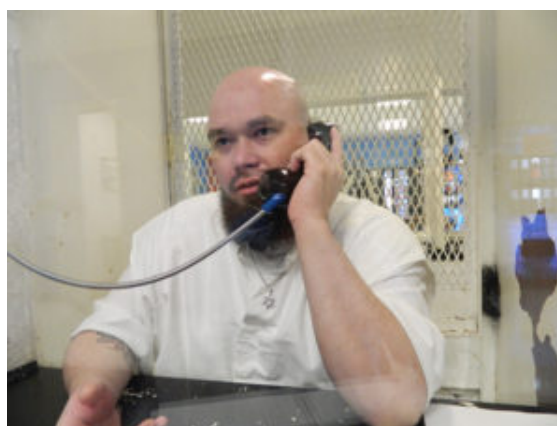


Pastor reflects on Texas Death Row ministry

October 24, 2022

The first time Pastor Dana Moore set foot behind the walls of a prison was to visit a Texas Death Row inmate.

“I had visited a few church members—unfortunately—in county jail a handful of times, but I had never been to a prison before,” said Moore, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Corpus Christi.



When John Henry Ramirez was executed Oct. 5, his pastor, Dana Moore, stood beside him in the death chamber, praying and laying one hand upon him. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Once a month for the next five years, he traveled to the Allan B. Polunsky Unit to visit John Henry Ramirez, who was sentenced for the 2004 stabbing death of convenience store clerk Pablo Castro.

When [Ramirez received a lethal injection Oct. 5](#), Moore stood beside him

inside the death chamber in Huntsville, praying and reaching out to touch him—a right Ramirez secured from a [U.S. Supreme Court ruling](#).

Moore began making regular visits to see Ramirez when a couple in his church who had been visiting him no longer were able to make the 300-mile trip to Livingston.

“My opportunity to meet John was a God-given opportunity for ministry, and when God gives the invitation, you have to respond to it,” Moore said. “It’s not a ministry I sought out. ... I had to take advantage of the opportunity to serve.”

As a state-designated spiritual adviser, Moore will continue to make monthly treks from Corpus Christi to Livingston to visit six men on Texas Death Row.

Far-from-ordinary lives

When Moore first began visiting Death Row inmates, he was struck not by how different they are but by how similar they are to anyone else.

“We have a tendency to demonize them, but they seem just like anybody else you would meet. I was surprised by how ordinary they are,” he said.

However, he learned, their lives are far from ordinary.

“They are locked down 22 hours a day. They have no physical contact from another human being, other than when an officer puts handcuffs on them to move them, and they spend all their time in a very small cell,” Moore said.

“They can’t touch grass. Everything around them is concrete. They are totally isolated. That has to work on their minds.”



Pastor Dana Moore of Second Baptist Church in Corpus Christi (Baptist Press).

Moore also noted he was surprised how gracious and understanding the inmates on Death Row can be, particularly toward someone they know cares about them.

He recalled one time when he was on the way to a monthly visit at the Polunsky Unit when he received a phone call, informing him the daughter of a couple in his church had taken her own life.

“I thought for just a second, and then made a U-turn and headed back home to be with them,” Moore recalled. “When the two men I was supposed to visit that day found out why I didn’t make it, they were totally understanding. In fact, they said they would have been disappointed in me if I hadn’t done what I did.”

‘They carry a lot of anxiety’

Ministry to an inmate awaiting execution is significantly different than ministry to someone who is dying of natural causes, he noted.

“There are other people involved [in an execution] to make sure it takes place. It’s not a gradual process of getting progressively sicker. The inmate knows, ‘I am perfectly healthy until I am injected with drugs that will put me to sleep and then kill me.’ They carry a lot of anxiety about that,” he

said.

Moore's convictions about the death penalty did not change in the last five years of ministry on Death Row.

"I already had changed my views on capital punishment years ago. The goals that it is supposed to achieve can be done in other ways. ... The Old Testament was a very different time period than today," he said.

Moore knows not everyone in his congregation shares his opposition to capital punishment, but the church has been overwhelmingly supportive of him and his Death Row ministry, he said.

"One of the men from our church who visits the prisons is pro-death penalty, and the experience didn't change his mind. It [opposition to the death penalty] is not a prerequisite for this kind of ministry," he said.

Regardless of their views about capital punishment, Moore hopes Texas Baptists will pray for the men on Texas Death Row, for the [field ministers](#) who provide them ongoing spiritual direction and for God to continue to work in the lives of everyone involved.

"There is a revival going on at the Polunsky Unit. Pray that it will keep going," he said. "Pray for those who know Christ already, and pray for the lost, that they will come to know him."

He will pray for those who are awaiting execution.

"That's hanging over them all the time," he said.