



Stay Human

Rev. Michael Neuroth
Minister of Racial Justice

During my time in seminary, I was involved in a collective effort to abolish the death penalty. One of my professors, Dr. Mark Taylor, shared with us the album *Stay Human* by hip-hop/reggae artist Michael Franti and Spearhead. The album offered a scathing critique of the criminal justice system and capital punishment. It included snippets of a fictional radio show, “Stay Human Radio,” that was interwoven between songs of outrage, struggle, and hope. The radio show centered on “Sister Fatima,” a black woman who was wrongly convicted of murder and executed by the state.

Although Sister Fatima’s story is fictional, it is one that has all too often been reality in our nation’s history. According to the [Death Penalty Information Center, over 200 former death-row prisoners have been exonerated due to wrongful convictions over the past 50 years](#). Our nation shamefully stands as one of only a small number of countries that still executes its citizens. Last year, only 17 (out of 193 nations) performed executions according to [Amnesty International](#). The United States remains [deeply divided](#) over capital punishment, with 23 states having abolished the practice. I remember celebrating the moment in 2007 when New Jersey banned it. Sadly, it remains [legal federally and in 27 states across the country](#). That must change.

The death penalty has recently come into view again with news of Christa Pike surviving two cruel attempts at lethal injection in a failed execution in Tennessee. Last week, “Secretary of War” Pete Hegseth also announced that Major Nidal Hasan, a former Army psychiatrist convicted of murdering 13



people on the Fort Hood military base in 2009, would be executed by firing squad and that his execution would be livestreamed to the public. While President Trump on October 15th rescinded the public viewing, the firing squad remains – and so does the message. In his article “[The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America](#),” Dr. Mark Taylor argues that all executions are essentially “theatrics of terror” used by the state to instill fear.

We are at a crossroads moment in our nation that calls us to hold on to our humanity. Artificial intelligence, unending war and genocide, and toxic polarization are among the many challenges pulling us apart. Moral challenges that beg the question: who do we want to be as a people, as a society, and as a nation? In times like this, we must remember that God created us in God’s own image (ima-g-o dei). We violate that image of God when we take another life. As Christians, we follow an incarnated Jesus who was fully human and was executed brutally and publicly by the state; a Christ who today calls us to stand with him against empire and against violence; a Savior who calls us to stay human in this moment.

Staying human in 2026 is no small thing. It requires us to reach out to one another, to be with nature to remember who we were created to be. We must not grow numb to the forces that seek to strip us of our full humanity and our call to love one another as God loves us. To stay in the struggle, we must also stay human. As Franti reminds us, the “harder they hit us, the louder we become / kinda like the skin on a drum.” Stay human, friends.

Take action: Support [the Federal Death Penalty Prohibition Act](#) (or go to bit.ly/ucc-end-capital-punishment) and support the “[For Whom the Bells Toll](#)” campaign.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Michael Neuroth serves as the Director of the UCC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy in Washington, DC.

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