

Dear Governor Abbott,

In your Inaugural Address to the people of Texas, you highlighted your Christian faith. Citing Paul's Letter to the Romans, you described your faith as the source of inspiration and strength that helps you persevere through times of trial and tribulation. Citing Matthew's Gospel, you drew attention to Jesus' teaching that with God, all things are possible.

I'm writing to ask you to draw on your faith now to persevere with due diligence in the pursuit of justice and truth by granting clemency to Texas Death Row prisoner, Rodney Reed, whom the State of Texas is scheduled to kill on March 5, 2015. The evidence points to the very real possibility that Mr. Reed did not commit the crime for which he was convicted. If Mr. Reed is innocent, and if the State of Texas does kill him, then the State of Texas—and all the citizens for whom it acts, including you and me—will be guilty of the gravest of crimes: killing an innocent man.

As you know, Mr. Reed was convicted of the 1996 murder of Stacey Stites in Bastrop, Texas, and his conviction was based on semen DNA evidence. However, no other physical evidence linked him to the murder, and Mr. Reed has maintained that he and Ms. Stites were having an affair, which accounted for the presence of his DNA.

Due to inadequate representation and prosecutorial misconduct, Mr. Reed, did not get a fair trial, even though his very life was at stake. His trial included hidden eyewitness testimony, misleading expert witness testimony, and the failure of the defense to call either an alibi witness or multiple witnesses that could have testified to the affair between Mr. Reed and Ms. Stites.

Since Mr. Reed's trial, investigators have uncovered evidence that points to Ms. Stites' then-fiancée and former Giddings police officer Jimmy Fennell, Jr. as the perpetrator of this crime. Mr. Fennell failed two polygraph tests on the question of whether he strangled Ms. Stites. Witness testimony and DNA evidence collected at the site where Ms. Stites was found point to the involvement of Mr. Fennell's known associates. Mr. Fennell is currently in prison for sexually assaulting a woman in his custody while policing in Georgetown, TX.

Mr. Reed is pursuing new DNA testing on several crucial pieces of evidence—including the belt with which Stacey was strangled—that have never been tested for DNA. These tests could very well prove Mr. Reed's innocence. Mr. Reed is also pursuing a new state appeal based on changed medical testimony about the DNA that convicted him, testimony that could also prove his innocence.

New laws passed in the last two legislative sessions concerning DNA testing in Texas speak to the importance of both pre- and post-conviction testing. In 2013, when you served the State of Texas as Attorney General, you supported a bill for pre-conviction DNA testing, saying, "Texans may disagree about the death penalty, but one thing all Texans can and should agree upon is that no innocent person should be executed in Texas." Governor Abbott, I call on you to stand by these words today

The God for whom all things are possible is the God who commands truth and justice, the God who commands that we do all in our power to ensure that we do not kill an innocent man for a crime he did not commit. It is still possible to ensure that truth and justice prevail in the case of Rodney Reed by insisting on the full disclosure of the evidence pertaining to Stacy Stites' murder. As Governor, you have the power to make this possible. Please use your power by granting clemency to Rodney Reed.

Sincerely,

Rev. Tom VandeStadt
Congregational Church of Austin, United Church of Christ