

## Event on October 17 2018 concerning the Death Penalty in the USA at the Church of the Holy Ghost near the Bern Railroad Station

A flyer of this event can be viewed on [www.speakbird.ch](http://www.speakbird.ch)

I have known the guest speaker Dr. Elizabeth Vartkessian for a long time. You can find lots of information in the Internet about her at *Elizabeth Vartkessian and ARC inc*, and under [linkedin.com/in/elizabeth-vartkessian](https://www.linkedin.com/in/elizabeth-vartkessian). She is a Professor of Law at the University at Albany. Our first email correspondence dates back to 2005. At that time I understood very little about what her work with prisoners condemned to death involved. We first met in Huntsville and both remember very clearly the bench we sat on and the sunny weather, as we talked about what connects us on this dark topic. Huntsville is the place in Texas where the execution chamber is located. It is my understanding that protests against the death penalty are also often held there. In the last weeks there have been at least two, or so I have read. In the year 2018, the USA is in fifth place worldwide in the number of executions held. The exact statistics are available online, there are also many books on the topic.

My feedback on this event: Just the fact that Liz Vartkessian was willing to come to Bern considering her busy professional schedule is most commendable. On the actual evening and also on Thursday I learned a lot of previously unknown facts about American justice. Some of the information came within the framework of the interview with ACAT, for which I would like to express my gratitude for being able to be present. The interview will be sent to me and it will appear on my homepage. In addition, my „education“ in this area continued in less formal, but nonetheless very informative conversations on Thursday in Bürenpark and at impromptu coffee breaks here and there. Now I am even more convinced that the address given to me through the organisation lifespark back in 2000 led me to the right path. The lecture and detailed answers given by Liz Vartkessian strengthened me in my unflinching involvement to fight the death penalty in the USA. The fact that one of the largest countries in the world, which prides itself on being very democratic and Christian, tolerates the execution and lifelong isolation of prisoners is totally unacceptable to me. The information gathered strengthens my will to continue. Again there is a lot of material on this topic to be found in the Internet and in books.

With this event we wanted to give detailed information on the topic and hope to encourage more people to correspond with prisoners on Death Row. Hundreds of prisoners in isolation still await their execution or a possibly milder sentence, they are without work, without contacts. They are waiting for letters, which can open a window to the world for them. There is a very touching film by Rolf Lyssy „Writing Against the Death Penalty“. He made part of this film in 2002 with Ursula Corbin on Death Row in Texas. Ursula Corbin corresponds specifically with prisoners, who otherwise have no correspondents.

My sincere thanks go to the parish of Bern's Church of the Holy Ghost for offering an „open door“ for this event and to Pastor Andreas Nufer for his empathetic and spontaneous moderation of the discussion with the people attending and thank you also for the apero offered. And to you, the representatives of lifespark, many thanks for your help given in the background and especially to you, the visitors, my very special thanks.

If you would like to know more about my penpal Larry E. or have additional information on this topic, you are welcome to contact me.

*(Translated by Heidi Uetz. Sophia and Heidi know each other through lifespark. Heidi has been an active member of lifespark for 16 years, has had several penpals and still translates and proofreads texts for the organization.)*

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