

Religious Statements on the Death Penalty

Compiled by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer for
A Death Penalty Curriculum

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Pages 1-29 are copied from links found on <http://deathpenaltyreligious.org/education.html> (10 August 2007).

Other pages have notes citing the sources used.

American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

RESOLUTION ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Passed by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches, June 1977.

Until the Gilmore case in 1979, there had been no execution in the United States in 10 years. The ritual taking of life had ceased while debate continued in the courts regarding the constitutionality of capital punishment.

Now that the death laws in some states have been upheld, over 400 persons nationwide face possible execution by hanging, firing squad, asphyxiation, or electrocution. Such punishment has been abolished in Canada and most of Europe, where it is seen as morally unacceptable and a form of cruel and unusual punishment inconsistent with religious and/or ethical traditions.

The majority of those on death row are poor, powerless, and educationally deprived. Almost 50 percent come from minority groups. This reflects the broad inequities within our society, and the inequity with which the ultimate is applied.

This alone is sufficient reason for opposing it as immoral and unjust.

Since further legal actions to stop executions appear unpromising, it is more important than ever that the religious community speak to the moral, religious and ethical implications of killing by the state. Numerous secular and religious groups have recently taken positions in opposition to capital punishment.

THEREFORE, we as American Baptists, condemn the current reinstatement of capital punishment and oppose its use under any new or old state or federal law, and call for an immediate end to planned executions throughout this country.

We urge American Baptists in every state to act as advocates against the passage of new death penalty laws, and to act individually and in concert with others to prevent executions from being carried out.

We appeal to the governors of each state where an execution is pending to act with statesmanship and courage by commuting to life imprisonment without parole all capital cases within their jurisdiction.

American Baptist Churches in the USA
P.O. Box 851
Valley Forge, PA 19482
(610) 768-2000

American Friends Service Committee

STATEMENT ON THE DEATH PENALTY, November, 1976.

The American Friends Service Committee reaffirms its opposition to the death penalty. We base our stand on the Quaker belief that every person has value in the eyes of God and on Quaker testimonies against the taking of human life.

The U.S. Supreme Court decisions of July, 1976, rejected the major constitutional arguments against the death penalty, which had stopped executions in the U.S.A. in the previous decade. These decisions denied that execution is cruel and unusual punishment, citing the passage of death laws by a majority of the states in recent years as evidence that the public does not consider execution to be cruel and unusual. In our view, alleged public support for capital punishment does not diminish the cruelty nor warrant the taking of human life.

The Supreme Court agrees that there is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to crime. It recognized that the continuing demand for capital punishment is in part a manifestation of a desire for retribution. We find it particularly shocking that the Supreme Court would give credence to retribution as a basis for law.

Punishment by death is inflicted most often upon the poor, and particularly upon racial minorities, who do not have the means to defend themselves that are available to wealthier offenders. A minority person convicted of a capital offense is much more likely to pay the extreme penalty than a white person convicted of the same crime. Discretion as to whether to execute continues under the Supreme Court's guidelines, and minority persons will continue to be victims of this discretion. The Supreme Court in its 1976 decision ignores this reality.

The grossly disproportionate number of nonwhites sentenced to be executed and the continuing demand for the death penalty indicate that the death penalty may constitute an outlet for acknowledged racist attitudes. This outlet is now legally sanctioned, but it is nonetheless morally unacceptable.

The death penalty is especially abhorrent because it assumes an infallibility in the process of determining guilt. Persons later found to have been innocent have been executed. This will happen again when killing by the state begins anew.

It is bad enough that murder or other capital crimes are committed in the first place and our sympathies lie most strongly with the victims. But the death penalty restores no victim to life and only compounds the wrong committed in the first place.

We affirm that there is no justification for taking the life of any man or woman for any reason.

American Friends Service Committee
1501 Cherry Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102
(215) 241-7130

American Jewish Committee

STATEMENT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The American Jewish Committee, adopted at the 66th Annual Meeting, May 6, 1972.

WHEREAS capital punishment degrades and brutalizes the society which practices it; and

WHEREAS those who seek to retain the death penalty have failed to establish its deterrent effect or to recognize the fallibility of criminal justice institutions; and

WHEREAS capital punishment has too often been discriminatory in its application and is increasingly being rejected by civilized peoples throughout the world; and

WHEREAS we agree that the death penalty is cruel, unjust and incompatible with the dignity and self respect of man;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the American Jewish Committee be recorded as favoring the abolition of the death penalty.

The American Jewish Committee
165 E. 56th Street
New York, NY 10022
(212) 879-4500

The Bruderhof Communities

STATEMENT ON THE DEATH PENALTY

We oppose the death penalty in all cases, out of reverence for human life and for God, the creator of life. Death is the ultimate enemy of life; we yield to God alone the power over death and life. We ourselves must not presume to shorten the life of any human being. That would be not less than a crime against God. Even Cain, the first murderer, was not given the death sentence, and no man was allowed to kill him.

The statute in Leviticus 24:19-21 states, "When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has disfigured a man, he shall be disfigured. He who kills a beast shall make it good; and he who kills a man shall be put to death." This was meant to limit revenge; no more harm should be done to the offender than he had done to his neighbor. Jesus went further; revenge is to be left to God.

Christians who cite the Old Testament to support capital punishment should ask themselves again why Christ was sent to suffer death for all men, and to rise again. We believe it was to bring a new dimension to human life; the possibility of reconciliation with God through repentance. This gift is offered to all men without exception, and human life was given new dignity and sacredness through it. The death penalty, however, denies Christ's power to transform and restore even the most depraved human being.

We follow our Lord Jesus Christ, who never punished, or imprisoned, or hurt, or executed anyone while he lived on earth, but fought evil by taking suffering on himself. When the death penalty law was quoted to him Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

We are all fallible; our law courts and government no less so than the people who established them or those who function in them. Innocent persons have been executed in the name of the law. That alone should be reason to eliminate the death penalty. And while human justice implies that similar crimes should receive similar punishment, where is the justice in executing about a hundred murderers in a year when there are tens of thousands of murders committed per year in the USA? Further, while there is no proof that the death penalty deters crime (contrary to the claims of some proponents) it does brutalize our society and creates an atmosphere in which crime flourishes.

For all these reasons, we firmly oppose the death penalty, and call for its abolition in the entire world.

Woodcrest Bruderhof
Route 213
Rifton, NY 12471
(914) 658-8351

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Capital Punishment

Adopted by the CCAR at the 90th Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Phoenix, Arizona, March 26-29, 1979.

In 1958 and again in 1960, the Central Conference of American Rabbis stated its opposition to all forms of capital punishment.

We reaffirm that position now. Nothing which we have observed during the intervening years has shaken our convictions that:

a. Both in concept and in practice, Jewish tradition found capital punishment repugnant, despite Biblical sanctions for it. For the past 2,000 years, with the rarest of exceptions, Jewish courts have refused to punish criminals by depriving them of their lives.

b. No evidence has been marshaled to indicate with any persuasiveness that capital punishment serves as a deterrent to crime.

c. We oppose capital punishment under all circumstances.

Central Conference of American Rabbis
355 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017
(212) 972-3636

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

MORATORIUM ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

No. 9131 Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution.

October 25-30, 1991.

I. Theological Rationale:

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But now I tell you, do not take revenge on someone who does you wrong.

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too... You have heard that it was said, 'Love your friends, hate your enemies.' But now I tell you: love your enemies, and pray for those who mistreat you so that you will become children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do right and those who do wrong." Matthew 5:38-39, 43-45 (Good News).

"Whichever one of you committed no sin may throw the first stone at her." John 8:7 (Good News).

"If someone does evil to you, do not pay him back with evil. Do everything possible on your part to live at peace with all. Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's wrath do it. Do not let evil defeat you, instead, conquer evil with good." Romans 12:17-19, 21 (Good News).

II. Other Supporting Evidence

1. We acknowledge that violent, deplorable acts are carried out within our society. We further acknowledge that society must be protected from the perpetrators of such acts.

2. We grant that the seriousness of the crime may well justify punishment. It is morally unsatisfactory and socially destructive for criminals to go unpunished, but the forms and limits of punishment must be determined by moral objectives. Our Christian approach maintains that this need for punishment does not require nor does it justify taking the life of the criminal, even in cases of murder.

3. We believe there is a Christian mandate against capital punishment. We know God's justice and mercy through the teachings of His son, Jesus Christ, who both taught and practiced the forgiveness of injustice. We are called to forgive the murderer as Christ forgives the murderer, as Christ forgives us.

We are called to be reconciled with those who have injured us. Martin Luther King, Jr., stated, "Capital punishment is society's final statement that we will not forgive."

4. Some argue that capital punishment strengthens the ultimate value of human life. We believe, to the contrary, that capital punishment sets an example for other killing.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma, October 25-30, 1991, support a permanent moratorium on capital punishment whether undertaken for deterrence or redress; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that congregations, regions and general units of this church be encouraged to pursue ways to support and implement the intent of this resolution at the national, provincial, state and local levels.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
130 E. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 635-3100

Church of the Brethren

STATEMENTS ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Annual Conference, 1959.

We commend current efforts to abolish capital punishment and call upon Brethren everywhere to use their influence and their witness against it.

Annual Conference, 1975.

(The following statement is part of a much longer paper on "Criminaljustice." It is included in a section of recommendations entitled "Reforming the System.")

"... Brethren are encouraged to work for the following changes: that the use of capital punishment be abolished."

General Board, 1979.

The Church of the Brethren General Board views with deep concern and alarm the resumption of the use of capital punishment. We affirm the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Statements of 1957, 1959, and 1975 which uphold the sanctity of human life and personality, oppose the use of capital punishment, and encourage Brethren to work for the abolition of the death penalty.

We encourage Brethren to express their opposition to capital punishment, especially to governors and state legislators in states where capital punishment has been established or is being considered.

We deplore the taking of human life, whether by the hand of an individual or through the working of a judicial system. We pray, in the spirit of Jesus Christ who calls us to share his ministry of reconciliation, that our society will turn away from the use of capital punishment.

Annual Conference, 1987.

The following excerpts are from a position statement which affirms the brethren's opposition to the death penalty and undergirds it by examining biblical and theological basis as well as practical and social issues involved.

"The death penalty only continues the spiral of violence. Jesus said 'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (Matt. 5:38-39).' Do we not believe this to be true?

The only real way to deter further violence is to cease our claim to a 'life for a life,' to recognize that life and death decisions belong to God, and to seek mercy and redemption of God's lost children.

"In a broader sense, we Christians must lead the United States in a total commitment to nonviolence as public policy. All violent systems, structures, and ideologies should be challenged at their very core.

"Jesus came with a message of redemption and compassion for life, while the death penalty carries a message of condemnation and death."

Church of the Brethren
1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120
(847) 742-5100

The Episcopal Church

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Statement of the 1979 General Conference.

WHEREAS, the 1958 General Convention of the Episcopal Church opposed capital punishment on a theological basis that the life of an individual is of infinite worth in the sight of Almighty God; and the taking of such a human life falls within the providence of Almighty God and not within the right of Man; and

WHEREAS, this opposition to capital punishment was reaffirmed at the General Convention of 1969; and

WHEREAS, a preponderance of religious bodies continue to oppose capital punishment as contrary to the concept of Christian love as revealed in the New Testament; and

WHEREAS, we are witnessing the reemergence of this practice as a social policy in many states; and

WHEREAS, the institutionalized taking of human life prevents the fulfillment of Christian commitment to seek the redemption and reconciliation of the offender; and

WHEREAS, there are incarceration alternatives for those who are too dangerous to be set free in society; therefore be it

RESOLVED, the House of Bishops concurring, that this 66th General Convention of the Episcopal Church reaffirms its opposition to capital punishment and calls on the dioceses and members of this church to work actively to abolish the death penalty in their states; and be it further

RESOLVED, the House of Bishops concurring, that this 66th General Convention instruct the Secretary of General Convention to notify the several governors of the states of our action.

General Convention 1991.

RESOLVED, the House of Bishops concurring, that this 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church reaffirm the position taken in opposition to capital punishment by the 1958, 1969, and 1979 General Conventions; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church oppose federal initiatives to establish constitutional procedures for the institution of the sentence of death for various crimes; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church deplores the expansion of capital offenses by federal legislative action; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church support state and local initiatives to establish a range of community sanctions and services offering alternatives to incarceration and reducing recidivism; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Presiding Bishop's Open Statement on Capital Punishment be sent to the President, the Attorney General, and every member of the Senate and Congress of the United States of America; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church urge the provinces, dioceses, parishes, missions, and individual members of this Church to engage in serious study on the subject of capital punishment and work actively to abolish the death penalty in their states.

The Episcopal Church
815 Second Avenue
New York, NY 10017-4594
(212) 867-8400

Evangelical Lutheran Church in American

A Social Statement on: THE DEATH PENALTY

This social practice statement was adopted by a more than two-thirds majority vote at the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in Orlando, Florida, August 28-September 4, 1991.

A Climate of Violence

Violent crime is as ancient as the human family. Since Cain slew Abel, the blood of countless victims has cried out to the Lord (Genesis 4:10). Our hearts, too, cry out to the Lord who gives life. We grieve with the family and friends of the victim—the violated one.

Violent crime has a powerful, corrosive effect on society. Bonds of trust, the very assumptions that allow us to live our lives in security and peace, break down. Instead of loving, we fear our neighbor. We especially fear the stranger.

The human community is saddened by violence, and angered by the injustice involved. We want to hold accountable those who violate life, who violate society. Our sadness and anger, however, make us vulnerable to feelings of revenge. Our frustration with the complex problems contributing to violence may make us long for simple solutions.

Such are the circumstances under which we, as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, speak to the death penalty. At the request of a number of congregations to synod assemblies, and in response to the memorials of those synods, the 1989 Churchwide Assembly placed the issue of the death penalty on the church's social agenda. Discussions on the death penalty then took place in local churches and at synodical and regional hearings.

Points of View

Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have different points of view with regard to social issues. While the Spirit makes us one in our faith in the Gospel, we can and do vary in our responses to the Gospel.

While we all look to the Word of God and bring our reason to the death penalty issue, we can and do assess it with some diversity. Social statements of our church do not intend to end such diversity by binding members to a particular position. Social statements acknowledge diversity and address members in their Christian freedom.

This church has not finished its deliberation on the death penalty.

Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continue the deliberation, upholding together the authority of Scripture, creeds, and confessions; the value of God-given life; and the commitment to serve God's justice. Members continue their discussion, knowing they have in common the goals of justice, peace, and order.

As a church united in resistance to hate (Luke 6:27), we minister to an often vengeful society. As a Church united in joy over the good news of God's healing grace, we minister to a battered society. As a church heeding the call to

do justice (Jeremiah 22:3), we minister to a broken society. As a church united for mission, we organize ministries of restoration.

An Affirmation

On the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions we hold that, through the divine activity of the Law, God preserves creation, orders society, and promotes justice in a broken world. God works through the state and other structures of society necessary for life in the present age.

The state is responsible under God for the protection of its citizens and the maintenance of justice and the public order. God entrusts the state with power to take human life when failure to do so constitutes a clear danger to society.

However, this does not mean that governments have an unlimited right to take life. Nor does it mean that governments must punish crime by death. We increasingly question whether the death penalty has been and can be administered justly.

Ministries of Restoration

Lutheran theological tradition has maintained that society is ruled by the Law and is influenced and nourished by the Gospel. Renewed by the Gospel, Christians, as the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), are called to respond to violent crime in the restorative way taught by Jesus (Matthew 5:38-39) and shown by his actions (John 8:3-11).

For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, following Jesus leads to a commitment to restorative justice. This commitment means addressing the hurt of each person whose life has been touched by violent crime. Restorative justice makes the community safer for all.

It is because of this church's ministry with and to people affected by violent crime that we oppose the death penalty. Executions focus on the convicted murderer, providing very little for the victim's family or anyone else whose life has been touched by the crime. Capital punishment focuses on retribution, sometimes reflecting a spirit of vengeance. Executions do not restore a broken society and can actually work counter to restoration.

This church recognizes the need to protect society from people who endanger that society: removing offenders from the general population, placing them in a secure facility, and denying them the possibility of committing further crime (i.e., incapacitating them). Our challenge is to incapacitate offenders in a manner that limits violence, and hold open the possibility of conversion and restoration.

Doing Justice

Christians live in anticipation of the day when justice roll[s] down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream (Amos 5:24). In the meantime, God holds governments accountable to ensure justice. In a democracy, where government is by the people, justice is the responsibility of all citizens.

Violent crime is, in part, a reminder of human failure to ensure justice for all members of society. People often respond to violent crime as though it were exclusively a matter of the criminal's individual failure. The death penalty exacts and symbolizes the ultimate personal retribution.

Yet capital punishment makes no provable impact on the breeding grounds of violent crime. Executions harm society by mirroring and reinforcing existing injustice. The death penalty distracts us from our work toward a just society. It deforms our response to violence at the individual, familial, institutional, and systemic levels. It perpetuates cycles of violence.

It is because of this church's commitment to justice that we oppose the death penalty. Lutheran Christians have called for an assault on the root causes of violent crime, an assault for which executions are no substitute. The ongoing controversy surrounding the death penalty shows the weaknesses of its justifications. We would be a better society by joining the many nations that have already abolished capital punishment.

Commitments of This Church

As a community gathered in faith, as a community dispersed in daily life, as a community of moral deliberation, and as a church body organized for mission this church directs its attention to violent crime and the people whose lives have been touched by it.

As a community gathered in faith:

we welcome victims of violent crime and their families, standing with them and for them during their times of grief and anger;

we welcome offenders and their families, supporting them in their recovery;

we welcome partnership with faith communities within the correctional system, joining them in ministries of restoration;

we welcome people who work in criminal justice and their families, recognizing the special burden that accompanies such work.

As a community dispersed in daily life:

we continue to offer ministries of healing and reconciliation to victims of violent crime, to families of victims, and to neighborhoods that have experienced violence;

we recognize and affirm ministries by those who, in word and action, announce the good news to the imprisoned and their families;

we seek further opportunity to serve people caught in cycles of violence, and call for training to respond to the fear and anger of individuals, families, and society.

As a community of moral deliberation:

we invite and encourage moral deliberation on the causes and effects of criminal behavior, the function of punishment, and the role of the criminal justice system—a deliberation grounded in Scripture and informed by reason and knowledge, including the social sciences;

we shall discuss criminal justice in connection with other issues of concern to this church, such as racism, poverty, abuse, and chemical dependency;

we ask that available resource materials be distributed, and that a resource specific to the present statement be developed, printed, and distributed.

As a church organized for mission:

we recognize that the government bears responsibility for protecting people, and give it our support in the exercise of this function;

we commend public officials, and others, who shape the vision of a just society and work toward it;

we know the Church is called by God to be a creative critic of the social order, and to speak on behalf of justice, peace, and order;

we urge the abolition of the death penalty, and support alternative and appropriate punishment for capital crime, including the possibility of life sentence without parole;

we call for an ongoing reform of the criminal justice system, seeking means of incapacitation that protect citizens while limiting violence and holding open the possibilities for conversion and restoration, and for education for future responsible citizenship in society;

we direct state public policy offices and the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs to work against the death penalty and for alternative and appropriate punishment for capital crime, such as imprisonment for natural life;

we ask congregations, synods, agencies, and institutions of this church to support the work of state advocacy offices and the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs in effecting the abolition of the death penalty;

we seek ways to work with our ecumenical partners, with other faith groups, and with other organizations with similar goals.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
8765 West Higgins Road
Chicago, IL 60631
(773) 380-2710

General Association of General Baptists

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Approved by the 1975 General Association.

We believe that it is the duty of government agencies to establish and maintain police forces, courts and facilities for the punishment and rehabilitation of offenders. Citizens should be protected from those who would encroach upon personal and property rights. We respect the basic freedom and rights of persons convicted of crimes, but demand their just penalty as directed by impartial jury and law. We support governmental objectives to prevent or reduce crime, and also oppose social conditions that induce crime. We assert that it is the Christian social concern and objective to develop effective means of rehabilitation for those involved in crime. We believe that a part of the mission of the church is to share the message of Christ with those people so they may be restored, rescued, reinstated and rehabilitated as persons profitable to God and society. Views differ among us and laws differ among states concerning the death penalty. Christians must use prayer and the word of God to arrive at a decision on the rightness or wrongness of the death penalty.

The General Association of General Baptists
100 Stinson Drive
Poplar Bluff, MO 63901
(573) 785-7746

General Conference Mennonite Church

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The position on capital punishment of the General Conference Mennonite Church as adopted at Estes Park, Colorado, July 16, 1965.

In View Of our Christian responsibility to give witness to the righteousness which God requires of all men, we are constrained to set forth our convictions concerning capital punishment.

Our Belief

Since Christ through His redemptive work has fulfilled the requirement of the death penalty, and has given the church a ministry of reconciliation, and in view of the injustice and ineffectiveness of capital punishment as a means for the achievement of the purpose of government, we express our conviction that its use should be discontinued. In view of the prophetic commission given to the church, therefore, we appeal to the Parliament of the Dominion of Canada and to the federal and state governments of the United States, to discontinue the use of the death penalty and to set rehabilitation as the ultimate goal in the treatment of the criminal, expressing a positive attitude to the offender, thus further encouraging the peace and order which under the lordship of Christ the state is commissioned to provide.

Our Confession and Our Prayer

In view of our responsibility as ministers of reconciliation we confess that we have not adequately fulfilled our obligation to work for the abolition of capital punishment or for the reduction of crime in our society. We need to be more faithful in serving persons in prison and in laboring for the reform of prison procedures; for the rehabilitation of released prisoners; and for the improvement of the economic, social, and religious conditions which contribute to the making of juvenile offenders and to the spread of crime.

We pray that in our brotherhood the Spirit may deepen each member's conviction and understanding of his obligation to individual criminal offenders, to the government under which he lives, and to Christ. And we pray that God may grant us wisdom, vision, and courage that as a brotherhood we may engage in this ministry as the Holy Spirit gives us direction.

General Conference Mennonite Church
722 Main Street
Box 347
Newton, KS 67114-0347
(316) 283-5100

The Mennonite Church

STATEMENT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Adopted August, 1965, Kidren, Ohio.

In view of the prophetic commission given to the church as set forth in two recent statements of Mennonite General Conference, A Declaration of Christian Faith and Commitment with Respect to Peace, War, and Nonresistance (1951), and The Christian Witness to the State (1961); in view of the sanctity of human life; and in view of our redemptive concern for the offender, be it

RESOLVED, that we appeal to the parliament of the Dominion of Canada and to the federal and state governments of the United States, to discontinue the use of the death penalty and that we refer to our conferences and congregations for study and discussion of the paper, "A Christian Declaration on Capital Punishment", as prepared by the Peace Problems Committee.

In view of our responsibility as ministers of reconciliation, be it further RESOLVED that we confess that we have not adequately fulfilled our obligation to the offender nor for the reduction of crime in our society. We need to be more faithful in bringing a Christian witness to persons in prison and in laboring for the reform of prison procedures, for the rehabilitation of released prisoners and for the correction of spiritual, economic, and social conditions which contribute to the making of juvenile offenders and to the spread of crime.

We pray that in our brotherhood the Spirit may deepen each member's conviction and understanding of his obligation to individual criminal offenders, to the government under which he lives, and to Christ. And we pray that God may grant us wisdom, vision, and courage that as a brotherhood we may engage in this ministry as the Holy Spirit gives us direction.

The Mennonite Church
421 S. Second Street, Suite 600
Elkhart, IN 46516
(219) 294-7131

The Moravian Church in America

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND THE DEATH PENALTY

Whereas, justice/righteousness is a basic concept of Christianity, and
Whereas, prison populations commonly exceed safe and humane levels,
and

Whereas, some persons who have been convicted of crimes do not need
to be confined to protect themselves or others from physical or property damage,
and

Whereas, halfway houses may effectively serve both as an alternative to
jailing and a means of reducing periods of incarceration and reintegrating jailed
persons into the community, therefore be it

RESOLVED: that this Synod urge congregations of the Northern Province
to give active public support to establishment of halfway houses, and be it further

RESOLVED: that congregations of the Northern Province be encouraged
to receive such halfway houses into their communities and residents of such
institutions into their fellowship, and

Whereas, prison chaplains who bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to
inmates also concern themselves with the welfare of inmates' families, innocent
victims of the criminal's incarceration, therefore be it

RESOLVED: that congregations of the Northern Province become familiar
with the work of prison chaplains and determine ways in which the churches can
help.

RESOLVED: that this Synod oppose the death penalty.

R&E 1982, pp.49-50, R.27, 28, 30, 31

Whereas, this Synod believes capital punishment is against the spirit of
the Moravian Church, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: that the Northern Province of the Moravian Church in North
America put itself on record as being opposed to capital punishment and that the
members of the Moravian church be urged to work for the abolition of the death
penalty.

RESOLVED: that in order that society may be protected, this Synod urges
members of the Moravian Churches of the Northern Province of America to give
support to the continuing improvement of the policies and services which lead to
the rehabilitation of prisoners in the correctional institutions of our country.

JNP 1961. p. 288, R. 5-6
The Moravian Church In America
Northern Province
1021 Center Street
P.O. Box 1245
Bethlehem, PA 18016-1245
(610) 867-7566

The Orthodox Church in America

RESOLUTION ON THE DEATH PENALTY

August, 1989.

WHEREAS Orthodox Christians should be called to go beyond the political, social, and legal issues raised by capital punishment and recognize and address the deeper moral, ethical, and religious questions of the supreme value of human life in a manner consistent with our opposition to abortion and mercy killing, and in all such questions involving life and death the Church must always champion life; and

WHEREAS in an effort to further the respect for all human life and to witness to the redemptive nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ who Himself prevented the legal execution of a woman (John 8:3-11) and realizing that premature death resulting from the application of the death penalty can prevent the rehabilitation, reconciliation, and redemption of the offender; and

WHEREAS, while we recognize the necessity to punish those guilty of violent crime, we also recognize that there is no humane way to execute a human being;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Ninth All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America supports the abolition of the death penalty in this and all countries and does urge our elected and appointed officials in those states where prisoners are still executed to introduce and support appropriate legislation aimed at abolishing the death penalty;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Council requests all governors of states where the death penalty is still in force to halt all further executions according to the power of their office, but that legislative provisions be made for life imprisonment without possibility of parole for those subject to the death penalty;

FINALLY, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Ninth All-American Council of the Orthodox church in America supports and encourages religious bodies, organizations and human rights groups which seek the abolition of the death penalty.

Orthodox Church in America
P.O. Box 675
Syosset, NY 11791
(516) 922-0550

The Rabbinical Assembly

Resolution on Capital Punishment

Whereas, the Torah teaches that all human beings are created in God's image;

Whereas, Jewish tradition upholds the sanctity of life;

Whereas, both in concept and practice Rabbinic leaders in many different historical periods have found capital punishment repugnant;

Whereas, no evidence has been marshalled to indicate with any persuasiveness that capital punishment serves as a deterrent to crime;

Whereas, legal studies have shown that as many as 300 people in this century have been wrongly convicted of capital crimes;

Therefore, be it resolved that The Rabbinical Assembly oppose the adoption of death penalty laws and urge their abolition in states that have already adopted them;

That the Rabbinical Assembly urge the enactment of laws that mandate that some capital crimes be punishable by life imprisonment without parole;

That the Rabbinical Assembly offer support and speak out on behalf of the victims of violent crime and their families;

That the Rabbinical Assembly encourage its members to send this resolution to their appropriate elected officials.

*referred from 1995 Convention Plenum
The Rabbinical Assembly
3080 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
(212) 280-6000

Presbyterian Church (USA)

CONTINUING OPPOSITION TO CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Whereas, the 171st General Assembly (United Presbyterian Church-1959) declared that "capital punishment cannot be condoned by an interpretation of the Bible based upon the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ . . ." and "The use of the death penalty tends to brutalize the society that condones it"; the 177th General Assembly (UPC-1965) called for the abolition of the death penalty; the 106th General Assembly (Presbyterian Church U.S.-1966) proclaimed itself against the death penalty; and the 189th General Assembly (UPC-1977) called upon members to work to prevent executions of persons under sentence of death, to work against efforts to reinstate death penalty statutes, and to work for alternatives to capital punishment; and

Whereas, we believe that the government's use of death as an instrument of justice places the state in the role of God, who alone is sovereign; and

Whereas, the use of the death penalty in a representative democracy places citizens in the role of executioner: "Christians cannot isolate themselves from corporate responsibility, including responsibility for every execution, as well as for every victim" (UPC-1977); and

Whereas, since between July 2, 1976, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Gregg v. Georgia* that capital punishment "does not invariably violate the Constitution," and September 30, 1984, 38 states have approved death penalty statutes and have executed 26 persons; and

Whereas, there are presently over 1,400 persons on death row in the U.S., many of whose rights of appeal are rapidly running out:

Therefore, the 197th General Assembly (1985):

1. Reaffirms the positions of the General Assemblies of the United Presbyterian Church of 1959, 1965, and 1977, and of the Presbyterian Church U.S. of 1966, and declares its continuing opposition to capital punishment.

2. Calls upon governing bodies and members to work for the abolition of the death penalty in those states which currently have capital punishment statutes, and against efforts to reinstate such statutes in those which do not.

3. Urges continuing study of issues related to capital punishment and commends the use of resources available from the Presbyterian Criminal Justice Program.

4. Requests the Stated Clerk to notify the President and the Congress of the United States, and all the state governors and legislatures, of the action taken.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202
(502) 569-5803

Community of Christ (Reformed Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)

DEATH PENALTY STATEMENT

The following was adopted by the Standing High council April 20, 1995 as a statement reflecting its thoughts on the death penalty and is offered to the church for study, discussion, and guidance.

Whereas, society is increasingly alarmed about violent crime and available means to reduce it thus focusing attention on the death penalty as an acceptable legal remedy, and

Whereas, representatives of the church are sometimes called on to state a position on this issue and to join with interfaith groups attempting to offer moral guidance to the public, and

Whereas, data on the effectiveness of the death penalty as a means to deter violent crime is inconclusive, and

Whereas, application of the death penalty too often has appeared to discriminate against the poor, the minorities, and the undereducated, and

Whereas, faith groups of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish traditions, as well as numerous Protestant denominations (Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Brethren, Mennonite, Friends, Disciples, etc.) have rejected or urged extreme caution in adopting the death penalty as a punishment or deterrent for violent crime, and

Whereas, we share the belief of many of these faiths that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross canceled the Old Testament teaching of an eye for an eye, and

Whereas, we share the belief that capital punishment of a person convicted of a crime is an unsatisfactory response which demeans and brutalizes society, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Standing High Council affirms that it is a faithful reflection of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, whom we proclaim, to encourage society not to use capital punishment as a penal response to crime.

World Headquarters
P.O. Box 1059
Independence, MO 64051
(816) 833-1000

Reformed Church in America

RESOLUTION ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Reformed Church in America, adopted by the General Synod of 1965.

That in light of the following reasons this General Synod go on record as opposing the retention of capital punishment as an instrument of justice within our several states, encouraging forward looking study in all areas related to criminology; supporting all efforts to improve our penal institutions, crime prevention agencies and policy procedures, and efforts being made to secure provision of adequate staff and budget for prisons, parole boards and similar institutions:

1. Capital punishment is incompatible with the spirit of Christ and the ethic of love.
2. Capital punishment is of doubtful value as a deterrent.
3. Capital punishment results in inequities in application.
4. Capital punishment is a method to irremediable mistakes.
5. Capital punishment ignores corporate and community guilt.
6. Capital punishment perpetuates the concepts of vengeance and retaliation.
7. Capital punishment ignores the entire concept of rehabilitation. The Christian faith should be concerned not with retribution, but with redemption.

Reformed Church in America
475 Riverside Drive, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10115
(212) 870-2841

Unitarian Universalist Association

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The following General Resolution was passed by a vote of two thirds or more at the 1961 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

WHEREAS, respect for the value of every human life must be incorporated into our laws if it is to be observed by our people; and

WHEREAS, modern justice should concern itself with rehabilitation, not retribution; and

WHEREAS, it has not been proved that fear of capital punishment is a deterrent to crime; and

WHEREAS, human judgements are not infallible, and no penalty should be used which cannot be revoked in case of error, and

WHEREAS, capital punishment has not always been used impartially among all economic and racial groups in America;

Therefore BE IT RESOLVED: That the Unitarian Universalist Association urges its churches and fellowships in the United States and Canada to exert all reasonable efforts toward the elimination of capital punishment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That copies of this resolution be sent to the Governors of all states in which capital punishment has not yet been eliminated, and to the Canadian Minister of Justice.

The following General Resolution was passed by a vote of two thirds or more at the 1979 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

WHEREAS, General Assemblies to the Unitarian Universalist Association have opposed capital punishment by Resolution in 1961, 1966 and 1974; and

WHEREAS, the aforementioned Resolutions have urged complete abolition of capital punishment as inconsistent with respect for human life; for its retributive, discriminatory, and nondeterrent character; and opposed its restoration or continuance in any form; and

WHEREAS, the State of Florida has declared its intent to proceed with the executions of those under capital sentence in Florida prisons, numbering more than one hundred and having begun with the execution of John Spink on May 25, 1979; and

BE IT RESOLVED: That the 1979 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association urges the Governor of the state of Florida to commute all existing death sentences; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the General Assembly urges governors of all other states similarly to commute death sentences to prevent the restoration or continuance of capital punishment.

Unitarian Universalist Association
25 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 367-3237

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Opposing Capital Punishment

We believe it to be the task of the Jew to bring our great spiritual and ethical heritage to bear upon the moral problems of contemporary society. One such problem which challenges all who seek to apply God's will in the affairs of men, is the practice of capital punishment. We believe that in the light of modern scientific knowledge and concept of humanity, the resort to or continuation of capital punishment either by a state or by the national government is no longer morally justifiable.

We believe there is no crime for which the taking of human life by society is justified, and that it is the obligation of society to evolve other methods in dealing with crime. We pledge ourselves to join with like-minded Americans in trying to prevent crime by removal of its causes, and to foster modern methods of rehabilitation of the wrongdoer in the spirit of the Jewish tradition of tshuva (repentance).

We believe, further, that the practice of capital punishment serves no practical purpose. Experience in several states and nations has demonstrated that capital punishment is not effective as a deterrent to crime. Moreover, we believe that this practice debases our entire penal system and brutalizes the human spirit.

We appeal to our congregants and to our co-religionists, and to all who cherish God's mercy and love, to join in efforts to eliminate this practice which lies as a stain upon civilization and our religious conscience.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations
Commission on Social Action
633 3rd Ave., 7th floor
New York, NY 10017
(212) 650-4160

United Methodist Church

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Adopted by the 1980 General Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana.

In spite of a common assumption to the contrary, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," does not give justification for the imposing of the penalty of death. Jesus explicitly repudiated the *lex talionis* (Matthew 5:38-39) and the Talmud denies its literal meaning, replacing it with financial indemnities.

When a woman was brought before Jesus, having committed a crime for which the death penalty was commonly imposed, our Lord so persisted in questioning the moral authority of those who were ready to conduct the execution, that they finally dismissed the charges (John 8:31).

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church condemns ". . . torture of persons by governments for any purpose," and asserts that it violates Christian teachings. The church also through its Social Principles further declares, "we oppose capital punishment and urge its elimination from all criminal codes."

After a moratorium of a full decade, the use of the death penalty in the United States has resumed. Other Western nations have largely abolished it during the twentieth century. But a rapidly rising rate of crime and an even greater increase in the fear of crime has generated support within the American society for the institution of death as the punishment for certain forms of homicide. It is now being asserted, as it was often in the past, that capital punishment would deter criminals and would protect law-abiding citizens.

The United States Supreme Court, in *Gregg v. Georgia*, in permitting use of the death penalty, conceded the lack of evidence that it reduced violent crime, but then permitted its use for purposes of sheer retribution.

The United Methodist Church cannot accept retribution or social vengeance as a reason for taking human life. It violates our deepest belief in God as the creator and the redeemer of humankind. In this respect, there can be no assertion that human life can be taken humanely by the state. Indeed, in the long run, the use of the death penalty by the state will increase the acceptance of revenge in our society and will give official sanction to a climate of violence.

The United Methodist Church is deeply concerned about the present high rate of crime in the United States, and about the value of a life taken in murder or homicide. By taking another life through capital punishment, the life of the victim is further devalued. Moreover, the church is convinced that the use of the death penalty would result in neither a net reduction of crime in general nor a lessening of the particular kinds of crime against which it was directed. Homicide—the crime for which the death penalty has been used almost exclusively in recent decades – increased far less than other major crimes during the period of the moratorium. Progressively rigorous scientific studies, conducted over more than forty years, overwhelmingly failed to support the thesis that capital punishment deters homicide more effectively than does imprisonment. The most careful comparisons of homicide rates in similar states with and without use of the death

penalty and also of the same state in periods with and without it have found as many or slightly more criminal homicides with use of the death penalty.

The death penalty also falls unfairly and unequally upon an outcast minority. Recent methods for selecting the few persons sentenced to die from among the larger number who are convicted of comparable offenses have not cured the arbitrariness and discrimination that have historically marked the administration of capital punishment in this country.

The United Methodist Church is convinced that the nation's leaders should give attention to the improvement of the total criminal justice system and to the elimination of social conditions which breed crime and cause disorder, rather than fostering a false confidence in the effectiveness of the death penalty.

The United Methodist Church declares its opposition to the retention and use of capital punishment in any form or carried out by any means; the church urges the abolition of capital punishment.

See Social Principles Paragraph 68
The United Methodist Church
General Board of Church and Society
100 Maryland Ave, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 488-5600

United Church of Christ

DEATH PENALTY

Resolution of the 12th General Synod of the United Church of Christ, 1979.

WHEREAS the Seventh, Ninth and Eleventh General Synods of the United Church of Christ have declared their opposition to the death penalty as a means of restorative justice; and

WHEREAS such opposition is based on our understanding of the Christian Faith and the New Testament call to redemptive love, mercy, and sanctity of life; and

WHEREAS the death penalty has now been reinstated in thirty-five states resulting in 520 people being confined to death row—132 of whom reside in the Florida State Prison; and

WHEREAS it has been demonstrated that the death penalty is applied discriminately toward Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans; and

WHEREAS 80 percent of men and women on death row could not afford an attorney; and

WHEREAS executions have been resumed recently in Florida; and

WHEREAS we are concerned about possible executions of hundreds of persons in this nation over the next few years; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Twelfth General Synod of the United Church of Christ reaffirm opposition to the death penalty, and that it call upon its brother-in-Christ and United Church of Christ member, the Governor of Florida, to cease the authorization of additional executions in Florida, and further call upon governors of all states to refrain from the authorization of executions;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twelfth General Synod instruct its President to continue to try to communicate directly with the Governor of Florida on its behalf expressing deep pastoral concern and moral anguish over the Governor's role in inspiring the resumption of executions in this country; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all General Synod delegates and visitors from those states wherein the death penalty currently exists be encouraged to petition their governors and state legislators to reconsider and review those existing statutes which legalize the killing of human beings; and

BE IT ALSO FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twelfth General Synod recognize the failure of the Church to affect the moral climate of this nation on this matter where polls indicate a majority of the people both endorse and support capital punishment; and that it enable its instrumentalities and agencies to develop additional resources needed to educate and organize the UCC constituency on this issue; and that the Conferences be encouraged to assist local churches and individual members of the United Church of Christ to engage in serious ethical reflection and prayer-guided action toward the eradication of legalized execution and the creation of a more just and humane society. We will continue to offer our prayers on behalf of our brothers-in-Christ, and our brothers and sisters on death row in hopes we may end further legalized killing.

CALL FOR ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

A resolution of the 22nd General Synod, adopted on July 6, 1999.

WHEREAS, the Ten Commandments teach "Thou shall not kill," placing a profound respect for human life at the center of Jewish and Christian teaching;

WHEREAS, the Scriptures reveal that God desires not vengeance but repentance and Jesus explicitly rejects retribution, calling us instead to transformative forgiveness;

WHEREAS, Jesus challenged the death penalty of his culture, calling on those without sin to cast the first stone;

WHEREAS, Scripture repeatedly calls us to overcome evil with good and to transform hatred with love;

WHEREAS, the good news of Easter celebrates the triumph of life over evil and reminds us of the promise of redemption held out to all of creation;

WHEREAS, the death penalty undermines the fundamental respect for human life by sanctioning the deliberate act of killing an individual;

WHEREAS, the death penalty disregards the power of God's grace and sovereignty in human life which offers the possibility of transforming individuals and circumstances deemed "irredeemable" by human judgment;

WHEREAS, in imposing execution even on those who have been transformed in prison, the death penalty is revealed solely as an instrument of vengeance;

WHEREAS, such an instrument of vengeance negates the stated goal of change and rehabilitation as part of the criminal justice system;

WHEREAS, study after study demonstrates a clear racial and economic bias in applying the death penalty and this arbitrary administration of the death penalty contradicts its use as an instrument of justice (David Baldus "Racial Discrimination in the Administration of the Death Penalty in Georgia" 1986; Gross/Mauro "Discrimination in the Death Penalty" 1982; U.S. General Accounting Office Mauro "Discrimination in the Death Penalty" 1994);

WHEREAS, the financial cost to society of implementing the death penalty is significantly higher than the cost of lifetime incarceration; (Miami Herald "Cost of Execution" early 1980's; Jonathan Gradess, "Costs of Execution in New York" circa 1990)

WHEREAS, studies show that despite efforts to eliminate racial and socioeconomic bias in death penalty sentencing, people of color are still disproportionately represented among the death row population, with African Americans and Latinos and Latinas constituting almost half of the death row population but only 18% of the U.S. population;

WHEREAS, the race of the defendant and the race of the victim continue to be prominent factors in the application of the death penalty, with the death penalty imposed significantly more frequently when the victim is white, a pattern acknowledged by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1987 (McClesky v. Kemp, U.S. Supreme Court, April 12, 1987);

WHEREAS, documented evidence of racial and socioeconomic disparity in the application of the death penalty, as well as inadequate legal representation

of death row prisoners, has led the American Bar Association to call for a moratorium on all executions until such time as death penalty cases are administered fairly;

WHEREAS, the arbitrary administration of the death penalty has led to the unjust execution of at least 23 innocent people since 1900 (Bedau/Radelet Study, Stanford Law Review);

WHEREAS, recent legislation and court rulings have further eroded access and availability of legal assistance and recourse to those charged with criminal offenses, particularly affecting the cases of death row inmates, thus exacerbating the racial and economic bias in the administration of the death penalty;

WHEREAS, judicial jurisdictions are executing more people and speeding the process of executions;

WHEREAS, many denominations and faith groups have long held positions in opposition to the death penalty, but have, with few exceptions, remained largely silent in the face of a record increase in executions and an alarming trend toward executing younger and younger people convicted of crimes;

WHEREAS, the United States is one of only five nations which have executed juvenile offenders in the 1900's (along with Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen) despite international treaties and conventions condemning such a practice;

WHEREAS, some states are considering an even lower age at which the death penalty may be imposed, in light of the Supreme Court ruling which allows the execution of individuals as young as 16;

WHEREAS, the death penalty is prohibited by the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

WHEREAS, the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo (the Puerto Rico Conference of the United Church of Christ) has expressed its opposition to the death penalty;

WHEREAS, the people of Puerto Rico have consistently rejected the death penalty;

WHEREAS, the death penalty has not proven to be an effective deterrent to crime, as evidenced by studies showing that states with the death penalty do not have lower murder rates than states without a death penalty in place;

WHEREAS, there is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty brings about real healing for victims' families and, in fact, public opinion strongly supports life imprisonment without parole along with some form of restitution for victims' families as a more meaningful gesture toward healing;

WHEREAS, many criminal justice and conflict resolution experts have found that the trend toward vengeance and punishment reflected in the increased number of executions in fact undermines the goals of accountability and true restoration by leaving victims' families and the community without a role in the justice process and by preventing the offender from experiencing the full consequence of pain caused; and

WHEREAS, in the midst of a violent world, the lament of Jesus that we would "know the things that make for peace" challenges us to move beyond such instruments as the death penalty to bring about true justice, healing and reconciliation;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the United Church of Christ Office for Church in Society, Commission for Racial Justice and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, in partnership with other national instrumentalities and agencies (and their successor bodies), continue advocacy efforts to address the racial and economic biases in the administration of the death penalty, including efforts to reverse the trend toward limiting access to legal counsel and recourse.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the United Church of Christ and the Office of Church in Society, in cooperation with congregations, conferences, and the national instrumentalities, work with legislators to introduce a "moratorium on executions" legislation in the state and federal legislative bodies;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-second General Synod calls upon United Church of Christ national instrumentalities (and their successor bodies), conferences, associations and congregations to speak out in opposition to the death penalty and work for its abolition, with an immediate focus on abolishing the death penalty for juvenile offenders, the mentally retarded and the mentally ill;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the United Church of Christ Office for Church in Society, Commission for Racial Justice and the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, in partnership with other national instrumentalities and agencies (and their successor bodies), engage in renewed education efforts with United Church of Christ conferences, associations and congregations throughout the United States and Puerto Rico regarding the issue of capital punishment;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be sent to the governor of each state, the leadership of each political party of each state, Puerto Rico, the President of the United States, and each member of the United States Congress; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Twenty-second General Synod of the United Church of Christ reaffirms the long-standing opposition within the United Church of Christ to the death penalty and urges the abolition of capital punishment as a means of working for justice and maintaining a faithful witness to remember "the least of these" our sisters and brothers.

<http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/synod/g22.pdf> pp. 115-117 (10 August 2007).

In addition to these resolutions, the United Church of Christ's General Synods held in 1969, 1973, and 1977 passed resolutions in opposition to the death penalty.

United Church of Christ
700 Prospect Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44115
(216) 736-2100

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons)

Capital Punishment

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regards the question of whether and in what circumstances the state should impose capital punishment as a matter to be decided solely by the prescribed processes of civil law. We neither promote nor oppose capital punishment.

<http://www.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/v/index.jsp?vnextoid=a620b63c092c1110VgnVCM100000176f620aRCRD&vnextchannel=726511154963d010VgnVCM1000004e94610aRCRD&vnextfmt=tab1> (10 August 2007).

Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

In 1967, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod stated its position "that capital punishment is in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions." Resolution 2-38 of the New York convention of the Synod reads as follows:

Whereas, Various church bodies have condemned capital punishment in recent years; and

Whereas, God's Word supports capital punishment (Gen. 9:6; Lev. 24:17; Ex. 21:12; Num. 35:21; Deut. 19:11; Rom. 13:4; Acts 25:11; and

Whereas, The Lutheran Confessions support capital punishment:

Therefore neither God nor the government is included in this commandment, yet their right to take human life is not abrogated. God has delegated His authority of punishing evil-doers to civil magistrates in place of parents; in early times, as we read in Moses, parents had to bring their own children to judgment and sentence them to death. Therefore what is forbidden here applies to private individuals, not to governments. (Large Catechism I, 180 to 181 [Tappert, p. 389])

Therefore be it Resolved, That The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod declare that capital punishment is in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions."

This does not mean that everyone who belongs to the LCMS or is a member of an LCMS congregation is conscience-bound to support the death penalty. Individuals within the LCMS may, for various valid reasons, object to the usefulness and fairness of the death penalty as it is being used or considered within a particular governmental system. Although it is clear from Scripture that the government has the God-given right to use the death penalty, the LCMS has not taken the position that the government must use this right if it determines that some other form of punishment would better serve society at large at a particular time and place.

<https://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2112> (10 August 2007).

Salvation Army

Capital Punishment

The issue of capital punishment is one about which rational and devout Christians can and do disagree. Some would argue for the clear teaching of the Old Testament, pre-dating even the giving of the Mosaic Law (Genesis 9:6), that murder requires the death penalty. Some would argue for "the higher law" of the New Testament as represented by such passages as Romans 12: 17-19.

The Salvation Army in the United States does not adopt an official position for or against the death penalty, but instead urges careful consideration of the question as a matter of conscience, informed by the fullest possible understanding of the Scriptures and by personal guidance from the Holy Spirit as well as by an awareness of the social and personal implications of public policy.

Recommended for approval by the Commissioners' Conference
Approved by International Headquarters

http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn.nsf/vw-search/85256DDC007274DF85256D500063C781?opendocument (10 August 2007)

Assemblies of God

This document reflects commonly held beliefs based on scripture which have been endorsed by the church's Commission on Doctrinal Purity and the Executive Presbytery.

What is the Assemblies of God position on capital punishment?

Opinion in the Assemblies of God on capital punishment is mixed. However, more people associated with the Assemblies of God probably favor capital punishment for certain types of crimes such as premeditated murder than those who would oppose capital punishment without reservation. This consensus grows out of a common interpretation that the Old Testament sanctions capital punishment, and nothing in the New Testament negates maximum punishment as society's means of dealing effectively with serious crimes. As more and more heinous crimes are reported by the media, public sentiment shifts toward capital punishment as a means of reversing the escalating violence and outrageous behavior of criminals and irresponsible citizens.

Some Christians believe capital punishment is mandated, while others believe it is merely permitted. In contrast, there are Christians who feel it is biblically prohibited. Those who believe it is prohibited base their argument on an assumption the New Testament reverses the mandate of the Old Testament prophecy which deals with habitual criminals: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6). However, Romans 13:1-7 implies capital punishment is still permitted under the new covenant. Those who believe capital punishment is permitted but not necessarily required point to the fact that even the Old Testament contains examples of criminal acts that were not punished by death; Cain, Moses, and David all took another man's life, but were not put to death for the killings.

Even though the Bible permits capital punishment, it lays down strict guidelines to keep judgment from being unfair or excessive. Punishment must be commensurate with the crime (Exodus 21:23-25). It must be based on certainty of guilt (Deuteronomy 17:6). It must result from premeditated intent (Numbers 35:22-24). There must be due process; cities of refuge were provided to protect the accused until trial (Numbers 35). Fairness and justice must prevail regardless of wealth or reputation (Exodus 23:6,7). Restraint should be exercised in imposing the death penalty (Ezekiel 33:11).

Deuteronomy 19:21 is sometimes noted as Old Testament support for capital punishment: "Show no pity, life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." But the context in which this statement appears deals with the treatment of proven false witnesses. Under Jewish law, the accusation of two or three witness was all that was needed to convict the accused. The defendant had to prove himself innocent. False witnesses would make a mockery of the system of justice. Once guilt was established, the punishment had to fit the crime, neither exceeding the injury done nor handing down some inconsequential punishment for a serious crime (Exodus 21:12-36, Leviticus 24:17-22).

Both the Old and New Testaments indicate that personal retaliation is not appropriate (Leviticus 19:18; Romans 12:19-13:7). Punishment should be the prerogative of the government/community, not of the individual. No matter how heinous the crime, retaliation just to settle a personal vendetta, is contrary to biblical principles. Proponents of capital punishment give three possible reasons to mandate the ultimate sentence: (1) deterrence of potential offenders who might be inclined to commit a major crime, (2) deterrence of a criminal who if free might repeat the same offense; an executed murderer could not murder again, (3) retribution or repayment to victims or society for losses sustained because of the crime.

CONCERNS:

One of the alternatives to capital punishment for a despicable crime such as murder is life imprisonment without parole. Life imprisonment without parole for these criminals ensures their future victims, if any, would not be innocent law-abiding citizens. However, the cost of such lifetime maintenance and the number of criminals needing incarceration are genuine concerns for a society that is already heavily taxed.

There is room in the church for honest differences of opinion concerning the use of capital punishment. However, all believers should seek to apply biblical principles in reaching their conclusions: the sacredness of human life (of the criminal as well as of the victim), the need of all mankind to repent, and the power of God to transform even the most violent sinners. These truths must be balanced with the obligation of government to protect its citizens, helping them to live quiet and peaceful lives.

http://www.ag.org/top/Beliefs/contempissues_08_capital_punish.cfm (10 August 2007).

Southern Baptist Convention

[Editor's note: As far as I can tell, the SBC has not issued a statement on capital punishment. However, on their "The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention" website (erlc.com), there is an article by Reggie Ecarma on capital punishment. I quote it in part.]

Proponents and opponents of capital punishment claim the moral high ground, asserting that their position is good and good for the people. Jesus said that goodness resides in God alone, stating, "There is only One who is good" (Mk 19:17) and "No one is good-except God alone" (Mk 10:18). This good God created each person in his image (Gen 1:26-27) and directed that "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen 9:6). Also, God orders "life for life" (Ex 12:23; Deut 19:21) and "whoever kills a man must be put to death" (Lev 24:21).

One may claim that these commands have been made null and void by Jesus, however Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Mt 5:17). Jesus continues, "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least" (Mt 5:19). As God's creation laws, the Ten Commandments, particularly the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder" remains. Again, Jesus said "You know the commandments: 'Do not murder'" (Mk 10:19; Lk 18:19).

If God has ordered and continues to direct the death penalty for murder, which has been affirmed by Jesus, then who applies the ultimate penalty? According to Genesis, God has commanded "man" (Gen 9:6). But not just any man. Romans 13 specifies that individuals who have been designated as governing authorities are ordained by God to wield the "sword," bringing "judgment" and "terror" to those who do wrong (Rom 13:2-3). Such an authoritative man is actually "God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer," to bring justice for the sake of God's image in each murdered individual. He who rebels against God's order and his authorities in this life and death matter actually is "rebellious against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves" (Rom 13:2). What shall we say then?

<http://erlc.com/article/capital-punishment> (10 August 2007).

United States Catholic Conference

STATEMENT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT:
COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND WORLD PEACE
March 1, 1978.

The use of the death penalty involves deep moral and religious questions as well as political and legal issues. In 1974, out of a commitment to the value and dignity of human life, the Catholic bishops of the United States declared their opposition to capital punishment. We continue to support this position in the belief that a return to the use of the death penalty can only lead to the further erosion of respect for life in our society.

Violent crime in our society is a serious matter which should not be ignored. We do not challenge society's right to punish the serious and violent offender, nor do we wish to debate the merits of the arguments concerning this right. Past history, however, shows that the death penalty in its application has been discriminating with respect to the disadvantaged, the indigent and the socially impoverished. Furthermore, recent data from corrections resources definitely question the effectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent to crime.

We are deeply troubled by the legislative efforts being undertaken under the guise of humanitarian concern to permit execution by lethal injection. Such a practice merely seeks to conceal the reality of cruel and unusual punishment. We find this practice unacceptable.

The critical question for the Christian is how we can best foster respect for life, preserve the dignity of the human person and manifest the redemptive message of Christ. We do not believe that more deaths are the response to the question. We therefore have to seek methods of dealing with violent crime which are more consistent with the Gospel's vision of respect for life, and Christ's message of God's healing love. In the sight of God, correction of the offender has taken preference over punishment, for the Lord came to save and not to condemn.

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<http://deathpenaltyreligious.org/education/statements/catholicconference.html> (10 August 2007).

From the Roman Catholic Catechism

2266 The efforts of the state to curb the spread of behavior harmful to people's rights and to the basic rules of civil society correspond to the requirement of safeguarding the common good. Legitimate public authority has the right and duty to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense. Punishment has the primary aim of redressing the disorder introduced by the offense. When it is willingly accepted by the guilty party, it assumes the value of expiation. Punishment then, in addition to defending public order and protecting people's safety, has a medicinal purpose: as far as possible, it must contribute to the correction of the guilty party. St. (Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II-II,64,7, *corp. art.*)

2267 Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor.

If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.

Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm - without definitely taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself - the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity "are very rare, if not practically nonexistent." (John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* 56)

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a5.htm#2266 (10 August 2007)