

Faith Community

Responses to the

DEATH PENALTY



www.TCADP.net

Governor Leroy Collins, May 1986
Governor of Florida 1955 – 1961

Who gets executed is still a freakish thing, and depends on wealth, power and many unusual circumstances. Most who are killed are poor and friendless.

Citizens of Florida, I say the death penalty is Florida’s gutter of shame. We have more people in jails and prisons than all but a few states. These are signs of failure. They are calling for constructive action, not inhuman violence by state action to satisfy society’s revenge.

Making tougher laws, executing more people, keeping more and more in jail for longer terms, may make Floridians feel better, but revengeful, violent acts by the states, never have, and never will, influence people to live by a higher moral code of conduct.



Talbot “Sandy” D’Alemberte, January 2013
President Emeritus, Florida State University
President, American Bar Association, 1991 - 1992

Honestly, I have never believed in capital punishment. Even as a young boy, it seemed to me that the state should not take the lives of its citizens, but my opinion was not informed.

Since I have been a lawyer, I have worked on four capital post-conviction cases and have observed the way the system works. My conviction that capital punishment is wrong has been strengthened by this experience for, like so many others with actual experience, I have concluded that the system is random, arbitrary and -- to use Governor Collins’ characterization -- “freakish.” I believe with the great Georgia lawyer, Steve Bright, who says “Actual execution is reserved not for those who committed the worst crimes but for those who had the worst lawyers.” It is the poor and minorities that suffer most under this freakish system.

I greatly fear that, when history looks back on our justice system in the years hence, people will ask, “Why was it that the United States -- unlike all other nations in Western civilization -- maintained capital punishment even when there was such clear evidence of its arbitrary application?”

Table of contents

Page

1. American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
1. American Friends Service Committee
2. American Jewish Committee
2. Buddha Dharma Education Association
3. Buddhist Peace Fellowship
3. Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
4. Church of the Brethren
4. Episcopal Church
5. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
6. Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops
7. Florida Council of Churches
8. Friends United Meeting
9. General Conference Mennonite Church
9. The Moravian Church
10. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A
11. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
12. Reformed Church in America
13. Unitarian Universalist Association
13. United Church of Christ
14. United Methodist Church
15. TCADP Mission



American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

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 in 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.

Valley Forge, Pennsylvania 1982



The American Friends Service Committee

Reaffirms its opposition to the death penalty. We base our stand on the Quaker belief that every person has a value in the eyes of God and on Quaker testimonies against the taking of human life.

The US 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.

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.

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

It's 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 Jewish Committee (AJC) 2012

While Jewish Biblical tradition mandates the imposition of capital punishment under certain rare circumstances, Rabbinical interpretation of that tradition has required such procedural assurances with respect to the application of the death penalty that Rabbinical interpretation, in effect, virtually prohibits it. Thus, AJC opposes capital punishment in general as cruel, unjust and incompatible with the dignity and self-respect of man.

• • • • •

Buddha Dharma Education Association

As capital punishment entails killing and therefore requires breaking the first Precept it is incompatible with Buddhist ethics and Buddhist social

and legal philosophy. The Buddha described the judges of his own time as practicing wrong livelihood as they often handed down cruel or lethal punishments. Throughout history there have been devout Buddhist monarchs who have abolished capital punishment, often on the advice of monks, although such reforms have always been exceptional.



Buddhist Peace Fellowship 2008

We believe that capital punishment not only fails to serve as deterrence to violence and murder, but that it nourishes the seeds of violence that exist within each of us.

We believe that there is no fair or practical way to arrive at a sentence of death.



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 1975

... BE IT RESOLVED, that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) expresses its opposition to the use of the death penalty in the criminal justice system of the United States of America and its various states, and calls for the repeal of all laws and statutes that permit its usage. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that every congregation of the Christian Church be encouraged to utilize educational materials at every possible occasion to facilitate thoughtful discussion regarding the use of capital punishment, that each congregation in those states which have capital punishment statutes contact any elected legislator who is a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) making them aware of current statutes that permit the use of the death penalty, that those congregations communicate to their own Governor their encouragement and personal support of the Governor's use of his/her sentence to life imprisonment should an execution become imminent; and that all appropriate systems of influence be utilized to repeal all federal statutes which permit capital punishment.

.....
Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, 1987

The following excerpts are from a position statement that affirms the Brethren's opposition to the death penalty and undergirds it by examining the 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.”

.....
Episcopal Church

Statement of the 1979 General Convention

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 a 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.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

At the 1991 Church wide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America the Social Statement, “The Death Penalty” was approved. This social statement remains the official teaching document of this church addressing the matter of the death penalty.

The statement acknowledges “the state is responsible under God for the protection of its citizens and the maintaining of justice and public order.” Yet, the social statement also affirms that this does not mean that “governments have an unlimited right to take life.” The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America “increasingly questions whether the death penalty has been and can be administered justly.”

Our church prefers to place our commitment and focus upon the important matter of restorative justice.

In Christ and His Love,
The Rev. Edward R. Benoway, Bishop
Florida-Bahamas Synod, ELCA

September 12, 2012



Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops

Does society really make a coherent statement against killing by killing?

The argument has been made that the application of the death penalty represents the legitimate self-defense of society from an unjust aggressor, i.e. the murderer. And, historically, the Church has conceded the point that the state can rightly apply capital punishment when absolutely necessary, i.e., when otherwise impossible to defend society. There is, in Church teaching, no moral equivalence between the execution of the guilty after due process of law and the willful destruction of innocent life that happens with abortion or euthanasia. However, Pope John Paul II has pointed out in *Evangelium Vitae* (no. 56): given the organization of today's penal system and the option of imposing life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, such an "absolute necessity" is "practically non-existent".

Also, it is difficult to defend the "necessity" of executing someone when often his accomplice, in exchange for information or testimony, is given through plea bargaining a lesser sentence. And while some loved ones seek "closure", it is hard to see how capital punishment as "social retribution" or "institutional vengeance" really serves the purpose of punishment which should be designed to redress the disorder caused by the offense. The death penalty cannot bring the victims back to life.

Even from a purely pragmatic or utilitarian point of view, the death penalty cannot be defended. It is not an effective deterrent to crime. Texas has executed more criminals than any other state; yet, it still has one of the highest murder rates in the nation. And the death penalty is not cost effective. It costs the state less to imprison someone for the remainder of his natural life than to execute him.

Given that it is irreversible, society has rightly provided that it be applied only after lengthy and expensive legal appeals.

Willful murder is a heinous crime; it cries to God for justice. Yet, God did not require Cain's life for having spilt Abel's blood. While God certainly punished history's first murderer, he nevertheless put a mark on him to protect Cain from those wishing to kill him to avenge Abel's murder (cf. Gn 4:15). Like Cain, the condemned prisoner on death row — for all the evil of his crimes — remains a person. Human dignity — that of the convicted as well as our own — is best served by not resorting to this extreme and unnecessary punishment. Modern society has the means to protect itself without the death penalty.

The commutation to life imprisonment would serve the common good of all by helping break our society's spiral of violence — for the “eye for an eye” mentality will just end up making us all blind.

Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski

President of the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops

January 18, 2013



Florida Council of Churches

The Florida Council of Churches and its constituent churches are agreed in our opposition to the death penalty. It seems inconceivable to most that Jesus of Nazareth would want the death penalty for any reason. We encourage all of the members of all of the churches of Florida to ask the question that is so popular with our young people today: “What would Jesus do?” regarding the death penalty. Recall that he said, while dying on the cross, “Father, forgive them”.

Florida law provides two options for the courts when a person has been found guilty of murder in the first degree (the only crime for which the death penalty is the punishment). One is death; the other is life in prison with no possibility of parole. Murderers in Florida will never be freed.

There are more than 3000 studies that show that societies that have the death penalty tend to increase the level of violence throughout and that the death penalty is not a deterrent to crime.

Let's look for spiritual solutions, in the spirit of Christ, and encourage our lawmakers to abolish the death penalty—in the name of Christ.

The following is a statement (2013) from the Rev. Russell L. Meyer, Executive Director, Florida Council of Churches:

Generally speaking the churches of the Florida Council of Churches are against the death penalty, based on denominational positions that question: a) the racial bias by which it is applied, b) the exorbitant cost of the legal structure need to support it, c) the falsehood of it as a deterrent especially in the case of crimes of passion, and d) theologically as an inappropriate witness to a loving God.



Friends United Meeting

Friends accept the Biblical teachings that every human life is valuable in the sight of God, that man need not remain in his sinful state but can repent and be saved, that God loves the sinner and takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked,” but longs “that the Wicked turn from his way and live.” (Ezekiel 22:1 1)

We oppose capital punishment because it violates the gospel we proclaim, and promotes the evils of vengeance and injustice through the agencies of government intended to advance righteousness and justice. We believe the Christian way to deal with crime is to seek the redemption and rehabilitation of the offender, promote penal reform and work more diligently at the task of preventing crime.

As capital punishment is abolished, we recognize that society must be protected against release from prison of those unredeemed spiritual life, or whose condition of mental or physical health, would endanger others.

We look with favor upon the renewed efforts in our time to

abolish capital punishment, urge our members individually, and our Monthly and Yearly Meetings to unite with others in the task for removing the death penalty from the statute books of the various states, provinces, and central or federal governments, and the United Nations.



General Conference Mennonite Church 2001

A RESOLUTION: THE DEATH PENALTY

In view of our Christian responsibility to value all human life we are compelled to set forth our opposition to all capital punishment. WHEREAS

-The General Conference Mennonite Church called for “federal and state governments...to discontinue the use of the death penalty” at Estes Park, Colorado, July 16, 1965;

-The Mennonite Church called for “federal and state governments... to discontinue the use of the death penalty” at Kidron, Ohio, August 1965;

-The criminal justice system has sent innocent people to death row, and the death penalty is applied in a racially-discriminatory fashion, and disproportionately to some of society’s most vulnerable people; and

- We acknowledge the deep grief of families of murder victims and victims of capital punishment laws: hold them in our prayers; commit ourselves to walk with them;

-Therefore we resolve that Mennonite Church USA appeal to state and federal governments to abolish the death penalty



Moravian Church

(Northern Province, North America)

Resolved that the Northern Province of the Moravian Church in North America put itself on record that the members of the Moravian Church be urged to work for the abolition of the death penalty.

(Southern Province, North America)

Statements (2013) from The Rev. David Guthrie, President, Provincial Elders' Conference, Moravian Church in America, Southern Province:

The Southern Province Synod ... does not have an official statement in opposition to the death penalty.

Our Province is a member church of the Florida Council of Churches, which on several occasions has issued statements opposing the death penalty in Florida.[See Florida Council of Churches]



National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

In 1968 the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. declared its opposition to capital punishment, reasoning that “economically poor defendants, particularly members of racial minorities, are more likely to be executed than others because they cannot afford exhaustive legal defenses.” In 1976 the NCC reasserted “the conviction expressed in the policy statement of 1968 that the death penalty is wrong,” observing that “the ultimate sanction continues to fall more heavily on minorities and those who cannot afford extensive legal defense.”

In 1979 the NCC again acted against capital punishment, asserting that “the penalty of death should not be imposed, in any case, on any person as punishment for wrong-doing, nor be part of any state or federal penal code.” In its agenda for action it called for the revision “of criminal codes and their application to exclude race, class, and sex bias - including the abolition of capital punishment.” At the governing board meeting in May, 1987, the Commission on Justice and Liberation brought an issue paper on “Racism and the Death Penalty” to the Unity and Relationships Cluster and distributed Amnesty Internationals report, United States of America, the Death Penalty, to the full governing board in order to bring new visibility to the issue.

Many member communions have adopted policies in opposition

to the death penalty and have further been involved in the efforts of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty to eliminate state-sanctioned executions in the United States....

In light of its long-standing opposition to capital punishment, and recognizing the necessity for making incremental efforts to eliminate the death penalty, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. reaffirms its opposition to the death penalty and supports legislation that seeks to eliminate racially biased sentencing.

The National Council further expresses its pastoral concern for victims of crimes, for those who are under death sentences and their families, and for all those whose lives are affected by crime and the criminal justice system.



Presbyterian Church (USA)

Whereas, the 17th 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); ...

Therefore, the 197th General Assembly (1985);

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.

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.

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



Reformed Church in America

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.



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 non- deterrent character; and opposed its restoration or continuance in any form;



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

United Church of Christ

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 redemption, love, mercy, and sanctity of life; ...and

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

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; ...

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.



United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church in its “Social Principles” officially opposes capital punishment and urges its elimination from all criminal codes....

WHERE THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH STANDS

“We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore, and transform all human beings,” the Social Principles statement says. While expressing concern about the crime and the value of life taken by murder or homicide, delegates to the most recent General Conference in 2008 reaffirmed the church’s position that “all human life is sacred and created by God.” United Methodists are urged to see all human life as “significant and valuable”....

When governments implement the death penalty the life of the convicted person is “devalued and all possibility of change in that person’s life ends”, the statement declares. “We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that the possibility of reconciliation with Christ comes through repentance. This gift of reconciliation is offered to all individuals without exception and gives all life new dignity and sacredness.”

[Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2008]

The church is further convinced that capital punishment neither results in the net reduction of crime or in the number of homicides. Scientific studies, conducted over more than sixty years, overwhelmingly have failed to show that capital punishment deters homicide more effectively than imprisonment.

[Book of Resolutions, 2008}



Tallahassee Citizens Against the Death Penalty

MISSION

Tallahassee Citizens Against the Death Penalty coordinates and encourages the efforts of local individuals and groups to promote alternatives to the death penalty. Our members represent diverse backgrounds and persuasions but are united by the conviction that capital punishment is bad public policy.

There are several purposes that TCADP does NOT have:

1. It does not underestimate the seriousness of crimes that have been committed or maintain that all those on Death Row are innocent.
2. It does not seek to minimize the suffering of the families and friends of the victims of crime.
3. It does not seek to spare criminals from punishment but to impose more appropriate forms of punishment.

Opposition to the death penalty often draws members into other issues related to criminal justice. Members become engaged in such activities as helping families of inmates, working to improve prison conditions, and maintaining contact with prisoners on Death Row. TCADP also cooperates with other organizations that have related interests: Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty; the Florida Coalition Against the Death Penalty; Citizens United for Alternatives to the Death Penalty; and local, state, and national organizations working for a moratorium on the death penalty.

HISTORY

The organization came into being in the 1970s, at the time that capital punishment was reinstated in Florida. Founded under the name Citizens' Coalition against the Death Penalty, it has existed under a variety of names during its decades of existence. It is considered to be the oldest grass roots organization in Florida whose purpose is to replace the death penalty.

MEMBERSHIP

Everyone who shares TCADP's commitment and asks to be added to the mailing list is considered a member

ACTIVITIES

TCADP seeks to influence public opinion and governmental policy at all levels by every legitimate means. Regular activities include the following:

- Regular communication with government officials in the hope of affecting public policy
- Letters to the editor, press releases, radio and television interviews, and other uses of the media to educate the public
- Public gatherings at the time of executions, to register our protest. At the hour of each execution, members gather in front of the Governor's Mansion for a candlelight vigil and protest. On the following working day, members meet in the Rotunda of the Capitol at noon for a service to remember both the person who has been executed AND that person's victim or victims.
- Public gatherings on other occasions to call attention to the issue
- Periodic communication among members (e-mail, USPS, telephone, website, face book) about matters of common concern

For more information, please visit

www.tcadp.net or find us on Facebook.



**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



Church of the Brethren

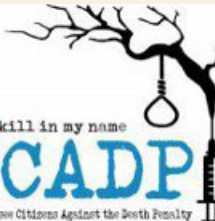


CHRISTIAN
REFORMED
CHURCH



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Quaker values in action



BUDDHIST PEACE FELLOWSHIP
Cultivating Compassionate Action