



Eliminate the Death Penalty !

What is the death penalty and how effective is it – what do the facts say?

- In Virginia the death penalty may be imposed on any person convicted for the “willful, deliberate and premeditated” killing of another person.
- With 110 executions since 1976, Virginia is second only to Texas in the number of executions.
- The U.S. is the only western industrial democracy that continues to impose the death penalty.
- Nationwide, there have been 143 exonerations from death row since 1973.
- Studies have found that the alleged deterrent value of the death penalty is not supported by empirical evidence.
- Studies have also found that the imposition of the death penalty is racially discriminatory, much more likely to be imposed on a black person for killing a white person than on a white person for killing a black person; more likely to be imposed on the poor than on the rich, and far more costly than life without parole which provides the safety and security that society seeks.
- Whether the death penalty is imposed depends more on the location of the trial than the heinousness of the crime.
- Public opinion is shifting: a 2010 poll found that a majority of 61 percent “would choose a punishment other than the death penalty for murder.”

What does the Bible say?

The Old Testament teaching of ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth’ (Exod 24:20) is sometimes used to justify the use of the death penalty. But this use takes the teaching out of context, where it was intended to limit punishment to the harm suffered, and ignores many other teachings in the Bible about God’s commandments and the biblical call to imitate God’s generosity:

- All people are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27).
- You shall not kill (Exod 20:13).
- Say to them, ‘As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live’ (Ezek 33:11).
- Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her (John 8:7b).
- You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt 5:43-44).
- This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (John 15:12).

What does The United Methodist Church say?



- We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings. . . . When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person’s life ends. 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. For this reason, we oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes. *Social Principles of The United Methodist Church 2009-2012*, ¶164.G.
- 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 Creator and the Redeemer of humankind. . . . there can be no assertion that human life can be taken humanely by the state. . . . 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 Book of Resolutions 2008*, 686.
- The Virginia Annual Conference has adopted resolutions “Calling for A Moratorium on the Death Penalty” (2000); “Calling for Moving Forward With Study and Action on the Death Penalty” (2002); “Eliminate the Death Penalty (2012).

What do You say?

- What you say depends on what you believe and know – keep growing in your faith and becoming more informed.
- Promote a study in your church of *Capital Punishment: A Faith-Based Study* (available from Cokesbury).
- Encourage your church to sponsor a public program on issues related to the death penalty.
- Link up with groups working for alternatives to the death penalty – join Virginia UMs for Alternatives to the D.P.
- Contact your state legislators and the Governor, urging elimination of the death penalty.
- Oppose all executions through prayer and vigils.
- Reach out in compassion and love to help heal the harm caused by violence and murder.