

Faith Statements On The Death Penalty Of The Religious Community

Statements, resolutions, and positions have been compiled from a variety of sources. We are making every attempt to be as inclusive as possible, we recognize that this list may be incomplete and invite you to add to this list. Email your faith statement, resolution and position to the CPF Northern California Coordinator terrymc@igc.org or Southern California Coordinator: EDEBode@la-archdiocese.org

Religious Groups/People of Faith That Have Expressed Opposition to the Death Penalty

BUDDHIST

Buddhist Peace Fellowship

“Society is like a dense fabric, made of many intertwined threads. Murder is like a violent tear in the fabric. The death penalty is like trying to repair the tear by cutting away at the fabric when we should take care to weave the many split threads back into the fabric. ...We oppose all executions, in keeping with the First Precept of Buddhism, which says not to harm any living thing.” www.bpf.org

Engaged Zen Foundation (2004)

“The First Precept of Buddhism goes something like this: ‘I am reverential and mindful of all life, I am not violent and I do not kill.’” www.engaged-zen.org

CHRISTIAN

Baptist

Alliance of Baptists (2000)

“Even if the problems with the application of the death penalty could be corrected, as members of a forgiven people we now speak out to oppose the use of the death penalty in our country and around the world. ...we call upon churches actively to pursue ministries that promote healing and justice for victims of crime, while opposing pseudo-solutions, such as the death penalty, which perpetuate violence, hatred and revenge. http://www.allianceofbaptists.org/Death_penalty.htm

American Baptist Church, USA (1982)

“Therefore, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches recommends the abolition of capital punishment in those states which still practice it and urges churches and members of our American Baptist constituency to support groups and agencies working for the abolition of capital punishment in those governmental jurisdictions of the U.S. where it is still authorized by law.” www.abc-usa.org

Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America (2000)

“We, therefore, urge our members to seek God’s justice and denounce the use of the death penalty. We encourage them to remember all those harmed by the violence of crime. ...Jesus Christ calls the church to a ministry of reconciliation and justice. As part of the community of faith, the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America joins with many other voices in following that call. To this end, we denounce the use of the death penalty and urge our members to seek justice for all those who suffer because of violent crimes.” www.bpfna.org

The Bruderhof Communities

We oppose the death penalty in all cases, out of reverence for human life and for God, the creator of life. ...For all these reasons, we firmly oppose the death penalty, and call for its abolition in the entire world. www.bruderhof.com

Catholic

Archdiocese of San Francisco (Statement of the Most Reverend John C. Wester, Apostolic Administrator, on day of execution of Stanley Tookie Williams, 2006)

... We believe that the community would be protected by such punishment and that to continue the cycle of violence by killing undermines society's commitment to respect the God-given dignity of every human person. I quote Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his visit to St. Louis: "A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform."... (for full statement go to www.californiapeopleoffaith.org, faith communities - catholic section)

Dominican Sisters of San Rafael 2000

We, the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, are committed to a stance of nonviolence. We hold a vision which reverences and affirms the inherent dignity of every person and work to transform attitudes and systems which deprive people of dignity. Therefore, we declare our opposition to the death penalty...Joining our voices to those who call for an immediate moratorium on the death penalty, we take our stand on the side of life and pledge ourselves to do what we can to see that the death penalty is abolished in our land. www.sanrafaelop.org/whatwestandfor/corporatestances.htm

Pax Christi (2001)

"Pax Christi reaffirms its 1981 Seamless Garment position in support of all life. The consistent ethic of life opposes the death penalty...and anything that threatens life." www.paxchristiusa.org

Roman Catholic Diocese of San Jose (Statement by Bishop Patrick McGrath on the Impending Execution of Michael Angelo Morales 2006)

...I call upon Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to provide clemency to Michael Morales. I do so, not to diminish in any way the severity of the crime for which Mr. Morales has been convicted, but because of the barbarity of the penalty of death - to anyone - in a society in which other means can be employed to protect its people from those who have committed heinous crimes. ...Let us work together and reject the death penalty and look for other ways of dealing with violent crime, ways which are truly effective and which are consistent with a basic and fundamental respect for the dignity of all human life. (for full statement go to www.californiapeopleoffaith.org, faith communities - catholic section)

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2005)

"Since 1980, the USCCB has taken a strong and principled position against the use of the death penalty in the United States. We oppose the use of the death penalty not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes, but for how it affects society; moreover, Pope John Paul II, in both The Gospel of Life and the revised Catechism of the Catholic Church, states that our society has adequate alternative means today to protect society from violent crime without resorting to capital punishment." www.usccb.org

U.S. Catholic Conference

...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. ...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.... United States Catholic Conference, Committee on Social Development & World Peace, 3211 4th Street NE Washington, DC 20017(202) 541-3000.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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. www.disciples.org

Church of the Brethren

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 www.brethren.org

Church Women United

THEREFORE, Church Women United declares its opposition to the retention and use of capital punishment in any form or carried out by any means; we urge the abolition of capital punishment. FURTHER, the members of the Executive Committee council are urged to write or wire their Senators urging them to oppose the reinstatement of the death penalty in any form. *Church Women United 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 500 New York, NY 10115 (212) 870-2347*

Community of Christ (from Roper v. Simmons amicus brief, 2004)

“Based on the action of its highest legislative body, the Community of Christ opposes the death penalty and prefers to seek ways to achieve healing and restorative justice.” www.cofchrist.org

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (from Roper v. Simmons amicus brief, 2004)

“The protection of human rights and the inherent worth of every person and of all human life are of paramount importance and basic principles in the moral teaching of the Greek Orthodox Church. These principles require us to oppose the death penalty for juvenile offenders.” www.goarch.org

EPISCOPAL

The Episcopal Church, USA (1979)

“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.” www.episcopalchurch.org

The Episcopal Diocese of California

Resolved: that this 149th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California reaffirms the Church's opposition to the death penalty expressed at its General Conventions of 1958, 1979, and in recent times and; be it further. Resolved: that this Convention adopts and pledges to circulate the July 1998 Statement of Conscience from the California People of Faith Working against the Death Penalty. Explanation: In recognition of the call to see "Christ in all persons", we ask this Convention to urge all members of the Church to join with other people of conscience to relieve the suffering of crime victims and their families and to work actively to abolish capital punishment. www.episcopalbayarea.org

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1991)

“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.” www.elca.org

MENNONITE

General Conference of Mennonite Church 1965

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.

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

The Mennonite Central Committee (1982)

“We believe the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches must act to enhance respect for human life, and that this cannot be done through executions.” www.mcc.org

Mennonite Church USA (2001)

“Jesus’ death on the cross was the final payment for sin—a final sacrifice that made unnecessary other forms of sacrifice, including the human sacrifice that we call capital punishment. Jesus showed us that salvation from sin lay in forgiving the enemy, not in getting even by imitating the enemy’s wickedness.” www.mennoniteusa.org

The Moravian Church in America (1982)

“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.” www.moravian.org

Mormons for Equality and Social Justice (2003)

1. Calls upon all states to abandon the practice of capital punishment.
2. Calls upon the U.S. Congress to declare capital punishment cruel and unusual punishment by federal statute, and therefore unconstitutional.
3. Urges that all statutes addressing law enforcement, due process, and incarceration be based on security for society and rehabilitation of offenders, not on retribution.” www.mcsj.org

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (1988)

“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 Churches in the U.S.A. reaffirms its opposition to the death penalty and supports legislation that seeks to eliminate racially-biased sentencing.” www.nccusa.org

The Orthodox Church in America

“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.”

www.oca.org

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (1985)

“THEREFORE, the 197th General Assembly (1985): Reaffirms the position 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.” www.pcusa.org

Reformed Church in America (1965)

“That in light of the following reason 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 effort being made to secure provision of adequate staff and budget for prison, parole boards and similar institutions...” www.rca.org

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (from Roper v. Simmons amicus brief, 2004)

“The SCLC’s founding president, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., believed that the death penalty both violates human rights and is a symptom of violence in society which could never serve as a remedy to violence. Additionally, the SCLC has opposed the death penalty because of its discriminatory application to the poor and people of color.”

www.sclcnational.org

United Church of Christ (1979)

“BE IT RESOLVED that the Twelfth General Synod of the United Church of Christ reaffirm opposition to the death penalty.” www.ucc.org

United Methodist Church (2004)

“We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings. The United Methodist Church is deeply concerned about crime throughout the world and the value of any life taken by a murder or homicide. We believe all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore, we must see all human life as significant and valuable. 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.” www.umc.org

Fellowship of Reconciliation

Fellowship of Reconciliation

“As people of religious and ethical conscience, we seek the restoration and renewal of wrong-doers, not their deaths.”

www.forusa.org

Jain

Statement by Manish Shah, Lifelong Jain, Board of Trustee, Parliament of the World Religions (2001)

“Jainism, which does not espouse belief in a creator god, has as its ethical core the doctrine of ahimsa, or no injury to all living creatures, and as its religious ideal the perfection of man’s nature, to be achieved predominantly through the monastic and ascetic life. ...The death penalty is not consistent with the teachings of Lord Mahavira and the Jain faith. Ahimsa teaches reverence for all life. A respect for another’s life is respect for one’s own life. This is what it means to experience the dignity of our own life. When we as a society cannot bear to cause pain to anyone is when we stop violating the laws of life. On this basis, capital punishment must be abolished.”

Jewish

The American Jewish Committee (1972)

“WHEREAS capital punishment degrades and brutalizes the society which practices it...NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the American Jewish Committee be recorded as favoring the abolition of the death penalty.”

www.ajc.org

American Jewish Congress (from Roper v. Simmons amicus brief, 2004)

“The American Jewish Congress is an organization of American Jews founded in 1918 to protect the civil, political, religious, and economic rights of American Jews and all Americans. It has opposed the death penalty in the United States because it believes that, given the current state of the criminal justice system, it cannot be administered in ways that comply with elementary notions of justice and fairness.” www.ajcongress.org

Central Conference of American Rabbis (1979)

“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... We oppose capital punishment under all circumstances.” www.ccarnet.org

Congregation Rodef Sholom, San Rafael, CA Statement by Frank Leidman

Our rabbis, Rabbi Stacy Friedman and Rabbi Michael Lezak, and our board of directors, unanimously support a time out on executions. I am also here as a representative of the Progressive Jewish Alliance, with its 2500 members across California. I am here to let the public know that the seven thousand reform Jews in California that I speak for stand against the imposition of the death penalty by a California criminal justice system that is broken and in need of fixing. ...justice is not served in California by the imposition of the death penalty. ...The Jewish position on the death penalty in California today is clear. It is unjust, it is unfair, it does not assure against the state-sanctioned death of innocent people. Jews favor a moratorium on the death penalty because it is not morally justified in the system that now exists. We will speak clearly. We will speak loudly. We will speak the truth to power. We will speak to our elected leaders, and we will encourage social action to repair the world and to repair **the** California criminal justice system. Until that is accomplished, we will urge a time out on executions. 170 No. San Pedro Road in San Rafael, California 94903. 415.479.3441 www.rodefsholom.org

National Council of Synagogues (from Roper v. Simmons amicus brief, 2004)

“Our contemporary Jewish religious and moral leaders have developed a consensus that the practice of capital punishment is unacceptable in our time. ...Our tradition teaches that vengeance and retribution neither heal pain nor comfort the bereaved. Responding to violence with violence only breeds more violence and suffering. Though we understand society’s concerns with punishing the guilty by meting out death as a form of retributive justice, we as religious people are

California People of Faith Working Against the death penalty www.californiapeopleoffaith.org

called to a higher moral ground, seeking punishments that allow for healing, reconciliation and penance. The death penalty annihilates the possibility of reaching this higher ground, all the more so in the case of juvenile executions.”

The Rabbinical Assembly (1995)

“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.” www.rabbinicalassembly.org

Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1959)

“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.” www.urj.org

Native American

Yvonne Swann, International Indian Treaty Council Information Office, San Francisco, CA “I am a member of the Sinixt/Arrow Lakes Nation. ...The death penalty was imposed on my people from the day that the colonizers first set foot on this land. ...We don’t believe in the death penalty. If we did, there wouldn’t be any other people here but the indigenous peoples. We believe in sharing. We are a loving and peaceful people.”

Quaker Groups

American Friends Service Committee (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.” www.afsc.org

Friends Committee on National Legislation (1987)

“We seek abolition of capital punishment, because it violates the sacredness of human life and our belief in the human capacity for change. This irreversible penalty cannot be applied equitably and without error. Use of the death penalty by the state powerfully reinforces the idea that killing can be a proper way of responding to those who have wronged us. We do not believe that reinforcement of that idea can lead to healthier and safer communities.” www.fcnl.org

Friends United Meeting (1960)

“We look with favor upon the renewed efforts in our time to abolish capital punishment, [and] 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.” www.fum.org

Sikh

Nemi Jain – Sikh Scholar (2003)

“Executing [an individual] is against Sikh values of love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness.”

Unitarian Universalists

Unitarian Universalist Association (2005 Statement of Conscience)

“The first two Principles of Unitarian Universalism address the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. Consistent with these fundamental principles, a new corrections policy must place a primary emphasis on community alternatives. ... Appalled by the gross injustices in our current criminal justice system, we the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association commit ourselves to working in our communities to reform the criminal justice and correctional systems and effect justice for both victims and violators.”

www.uua.org

Religious Groups/People of Faith That Have Expressed Concerns about the Death Penalty and/or Support a Moratorium

Christian

National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (2004)

“NBCUSA, Inc. calls on President Bush and the governors of our nation that have not called a moratorium on the death penalty to do so.” www.nationalbaptist.com

Interfaith Councils

Marin Interfaith Council

...support legislation in the California legislature for a moratorium on the death penalty in California. Marin County is ground zero: ... All of our faith traditions teach respect for the dignity of every human life. We believe the death penalty diminishes us all. Furthermore, capital punishment is prone to errors, and is biased by factors such as race, the quality of legal representation, and the county in which the crime was committed. Questions exist about the death penalty's effectiveness, accuracy, and fairness, because a disproportionate number of condemned prisoners are poor and people of color. ... Marin Interfaith Council Board of Directors. 2006. www.marininterfaithcouncil.org

Jewish

Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (2000)

“While traditional Judaism clearly contemplates and condones the death penalty as the ultimate sanction within a legitimate legal system, Judaism simultaneously insists that capital punishment be administered by a process that ensures accuracy as well as justice; our valuing of human life as infinite demands no less. ... Thus, we support putting an execution moratorium in place and the creation of a commission to review America's death penalty procedures and any reforms needed to ensure that our justice system lives up to that name.” www.ou.org

Muslim

Muslim Public Affairs Council (from Roper v. Simmons amicus brief, 2004)

“The Quran does sanction the use of the death penalty in certain circumstances. However, this is circumscribed by a variety of factors. Two being, the injunction to be merciful is emphasized throughout the Quran, and even in capital cases of murder, the Quran clearly states that it is better to forgive, but most men are not capable of that. A democratic polity, however, can choose to enshrine this divine mandate to be merciful with the law itself by forgoing the death penalty in its entirety. Our reading of the Islamic texts supports such a conclusion.” www.mpac.org

Dr. Azizah Y. al-Hibri - Islamic Scholar (2001)

“In principle, capital punishment is not prohibited in Islam. Capital punishment in Islamic law, however, has its own dhawabit (checks and balances). For one, this punishment is not imposed unless due process has been observed in a fair trial, and extenuating circumstances were fully considered. ...it is an established fact that the burden of capital punishment in the United States falls disproportionately on minorities... This bias is not only racial, but economic as well.” www.karamah.org

Dr. Shaid Atha - Islamic Scholar (2004)

“We must consider capital punishment from the aspect of a giver of life and death. “He who created life and death, that He many test which of you is best in deed. Her is the mighty, the forgiving,” (Qur’an 77:2) “No one can die except by God’s permission, the terms being fixed as by writing.” (Qur’an 3:145) Life is sacred. “Do not take the life which God had made sacred except in (the course of) justice.” (Qur’an 6:151) ...Thus is it clear that the giver of life and death is God Himself alone, and anyone acting on His behalf must act according to His principles.”

Religious Groups/People of Faith That Have Explicitly Not Taken a Position on the Death Penalty

Christian

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1996)

“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.” www.lds.org

The General Association of General Baptists (1975)

“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.” www.generalbaptist.com