

Legislative
Bulletin

NORTH CAROLINA
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES



Faith & the Death Penalty



Faith and the Death Penalty

What scripture says:

- “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 the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Matthew 5:38-39
- “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” Romans 12:19



- "When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” John 8:7
- "But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.” Matthew 12:7

The Council's View on the Death Penalty

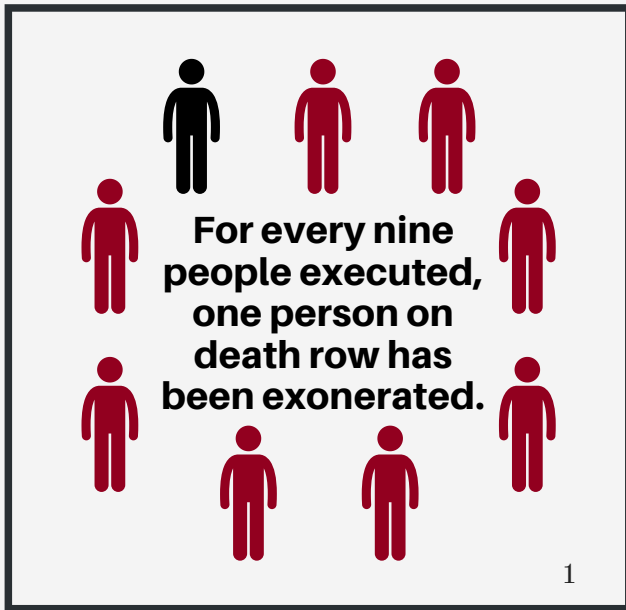
Several times in the past decades, the North Carolina Council of Churches has spoken about the inhumanity and racial bias of capital punishment. We have been on the forefront of this issue for years, from one of our first policy statements in 1970 urging the "abolition of capital punishment" and declaring the "death penalty has been used disproportionately against black people in our society, thereby reflecting classist and racist tendencies in our criminal justice system."

While North Carolina has not carried out an execution in a decade and a half, other states continue to do so. Meanwhile, prisoners sentenced to death in North Carolina remain on death row, uncertain of their fate.

As Christians, we believe the abolition of the death penalty is a moral imperative. In a 1984 policy statement, we said: "We oppose the death penalty because we oppose the spirit of retribution. It is illogical and profoundly irreverent to kill somebody to prove that killing is wrong. . . It creates the illusion of setting things right while in fact creating new victims."

The execution on Good Friday contrives to be repeated. Innocent people are convicted and murdered by the state. Violence and torture are perpetrated under the guise of security. Brutality is used as a weapon of fear to oppress those who long for freedom. Retribution and vengeance create a continuing cycle of violence. We reject this fetishization of violence and long for a world where Christ's death puts an end to death, so there will be possibilities for justice and new life.

Facts about the Death Penalty



SINCE 1977

1,547

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN EXECUTED IN THE U.S.²

43

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN EXECUTED UNDER NORTH CAROLINA'S MODERN DEATH PENALTY.³

IN NC

133 men on death row

2 women on death row⁴

STUDIES HAVE FOUND

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT
TO BE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN
LIFE IMPRISONMENT⁵

PEOPLE OF COLOR

make up more than half of NC's death row prisoners but less than a quarter of the state's population.⁶

A series of death penalty reforms began in 2001.⁷ Nearly three-quarters of people on death row today were tried before 2001 and did not benefit from the reforms. This is immoral and unjust.

North Carolina has the

5th

largest death row in the United States.⁸

Since 1973, more than 180 people have been released from death row when evidence showed their innocence. In North Carolina, 12 people have been exonerated after being sent to death row.⁹

Death Penalty Abolition

Capital punishment is irreversible, yet mistakes happen. The risk of executing an innocent person can never be fully eliminated.

Capital punishment is discriminatory. The weight of the death penalty is disproportionately placed on those from disadvantaged backgrounds or historically excluded groups, especially people of color. The system harshly punishes crimes against white victims and preys on vulnerable defendants who grew up in poverty and trauma, people who have mental illness or intellectual disabilities. People with these underlying issues are often unable to assist in their own defense. There is also widespread discrimination against jurors of color; nearly half of the people on NC death row had an all-white jury or jury with only one person of color. A defendant's likelihood of receiving the death penalty correlates with the victim's race. 54% of NC death row prisoners are Black, whereas the group only comprises of 22% of the state's total population.¹⁰

Capital punishment is not a deterrent to crime. There is no evidence that the death penalty is any more effective in reducing crime than other sentences. A punishment can be an effective deterrent only if it is consistently and promptly employed. Capital punishment cannot be administered to meet these conditions.

Proposed solutions:

- Commute all state death sentences.
- Pass legislation to repeal the statewide death penalty.
- Direct the Department of Public Safety to dismantle the death chamber at Central Prison.



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1. Equal Justice Initiative, Death Penalty, 2021

2. Death Penalty Information Center, Executions Overview, June 2022.

3, 4, 6, 8, 9. North Carolina Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, N.C. Death Penalty Fast Facts, May 2021

5. Death Penalty Information Center, Notable Exonerations, 2017

7. UNC School of Government, The Death Penalty in North Carolina: History and Overview, 2012

10. Appalachian State University Report, The Death Penalty in North Carolina, 2021

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