

The Riverside Church



*Interracial • International • Interdenominational
Open • Affirming • Welcoming*

The Riverside Church Statement Against the Death Penalty

WHEREAS The Riverside Church is a member of the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A., and the United Church of Christ, both of which have called for the abolition of the death penalty;

WHEREAS The Mission & Social Justice Commission of The Riverside Church has made the abolition of the death penalty a top national priority for the past three program years;

WHEREAS The Mission Statement of The Riverside Church states that we are pledged to “action for peace and justice, the realization of the vision of the heavenly banquet where all are loved and blessed,” the congregation ratifies the following statement against the death penalty:

We believe the death penalty directly countermands God’s charges to us as Christians and citizens of God’s world and is an inappropriate punishment for any crime.

God has called us to act justly and love mercy (Micah 6:8). The death penalty is not applied justly. Virtually all persons on death row are poor; there is a disproportionately high percentage of people of color and mentally disabled who are waiting to be executed. The death penalty leaves no room for human error in the judicial process, and we know that many errors are made in the complicated prosecution of a capital crime.

God has called us to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19). We are all made in the image of God, and God wants us to live. Without life, there is no opportunity for redemption.

“Vengeance is mine,” says the Lord (Deuteronomy 32:35). The death penalty accomplishes only vengeance. Statistically the death penalty does not lessen the rate of the crime committed. The prosecution of death penalty appeals and the maintaining of facilities for death are more expensive than maintaining a perpetrator for a lifetime in prison. Those working within the execution system are deeply wounded by participating in ritualized murder.

Jesus the Christ was given a sentence of death by vengeful people. We can honor his life by working for the abolition of the death penalty throughout our nation.

We at The Riverside Church join with our faithful brothers and sisters of virtually all denominations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in working for an end to state-sanctioned executions.

Adopted by the Mission & Social Justice Commission on April 8, 2002

Approved by the Church Council of The Riverside Church April 22, 2002