

My name is Dan Bryant, I am the senior minister of First Christian Church of Eugene and a past President of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, a statewide association of 16 Christian denominations, and the current co-chair of EMO's Public Policy Committee. In that capacity that I had the opportunity along with the bishops and regional executives of several denominations to meet with the Governor of Oregon in September of 1996 shortly before the execution of Douglas Wright. Our group spoke for nearly 30 minutes of the reasons why we opposed the death penalty and why we were asking the Governor to commute the sentence of Mr. Wright to life in prison. Throughout the meeting, the Governor remained silent, and the execution proceeded. That Governor of course was John Kitzhaber. Sixteen years later, Governor Kitzhaber ended his silence on the topic. Little could I have known then that two years later my own mother would fall victim to a brutal murder just miles from my home in Eugene.

No one knows the pain of losing a loved one like those families who have been through a murder. It is sudden, brutal, unnatural. It rips your inside right out of you and leaves a hole that may grow smaller in time but it never goes away. Five years later her killer died while under the care of the state hospital. His death did nothing to bring closure, relief or any sense of justice to me and my family. To the contrary, he died just after I had picked up forms to apply for permission to visit him. I longed to know what he could tell me of those last six hours of her life after I last saw her when she was trying to help him cope with his mental illness, before he lost his senses and stabbed to death the one person he always said that he trusted and loved his entire life, for my mother was his aunt.

Why do I remain opposed to the death penalty? The raw facts should be disturbing to anyone. Just to cite three. 141 people on death row exonerated with evidence of their innocence since 1973 in this country. African-Americans more than twice as likely to be executed as Caucasians. The cost of execution up to ten times the cost of life in prison. Historically Christian teaching has held that capital punishment should only be used as a last resort to defend the good of society. Today the reverse is true. In an era of declining public resources for basic human services, education and public safety, capital punishment has become a detriment to the good of society, wasting scant public resources for a questionable purpose. Given our imperfect judicial system, racial bias in the system and the cost of implementation, continued use of capital punishment is not only illogical, it is immoral.

It is for these and many more reasons that denominations including my own plus American Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Quakers, Mennonites, Unitarians, Jews, Catholics and many more have all gone on record as opposing capital punishment. Please see the partial list of declarations from some of these groups which I have attached to my statement.

I am thankful that our family never had to face the horror of the death penalty for mother's killer. Why? Because my faith opposes the taking of human life. Because nothing can be gained by adding to death. Because you can fight evil with evil, but you can never win. Because only good can overcome evil. Because love is stronger than hate, forgiveness is better than anger. Because we add nothing to life by adding more acts of death. Because Mom literally gave her life trying to help her killer. I know she would want us to choose life for all and death for no one.

I urge you to support a repeal of the death penalty.

Dan Bryant  
Senior Minister  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
Eugene, Oregon

For the House Judiciary Committee  
February 26, 2013

.....  
I'd like to add this brief statement from retired Senator Frank Morse who could not be with us today. I would note that Sen. Morse was a good friend of my mother's. He writes,

My thoughts on the DP as follows:

"I am opposed to the death penalty for the following reasons.

FAITH - Love, forgiveness, and reconciliation are the pillars of my Christian faith. The death penalty is not consistent with what I believe.

FISCAL - The cost of implementing the death penalty far exceeds the cost of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

FINALITY - Our justice system is not perfect and there is no correcting a mistake with the death penalty.

Life without the possibility of parole is consistent with FAITH, FISCAL and FINALITY and it makes a lot more sense to me."

Retired Oregon Senator Frank Morse

## **Religious Declarations on the Death Penalty**

### **American Baptist**

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.

*--General Board of the American Baptist Church, USA 1982*

### **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

We believe that Christians can no longer justify support of the practice of capital punishment ... [which is] not a real protection to society but only a crude form of vengeance or retributive justice. Christian justification of punishment is always found in the hope of rehabilitation of the offender; since dead people cannot be rehabilitated we can in no way defend capital punishment on Christian grounds.

*--International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), 1957*

We believe the death penalty to be contrary to God's passion for justice.... God created life and thus, it is holy. The intentional taking of life denies God's intent for humanity.

*--General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 2003*

### **Church of the Brethren**

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). ... 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.

*--Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, 1987*

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

Despite attempts to provide legal safeguards, the death penalty has not been and cannot be made fair. ... Death is a different punishment from any other; the execution of an innocent person is a mistake we cannot correct. It is because of this church's concern regarding the actual use of the death penalty that we oppose its imposition. The practice of the death penalty undermines any possible moral message we might want to 'send.' It is not fair and fails to make society better or safer. The message conveyed by an execution, reflected in the attention it receives from the public, is one of brutality and violence.

*--Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991*

### **National Council of Churches**

The National Council of Churches has firmly stated its opposition to the death penalty and continues to do so since ultimate judgment rests with God, the creator of life.

*--Statement by the Rev. Dr. Robert Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, 2000*

### **Presbyterian Church**

Capital punishment cannot be condoned by an interpretation of the Bible based upon the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ. ... [U]se of the death penalty tends to brutalize the society that condones it.

*--171<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), 1959*

Capital punishment is an expression of vengeance which contradicts the justice of God on the cross.  
--190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), 1978

### **Roman Catholic Church**

We believe that in the conditions of contemporary American society, the legitimate purposes of punishment do not justify the imposition of the death penalty. Furthermore, we believe that there are serious considerations which should prompt Christians and all Americans to support the abolition of capital punishment. Some of these reasons have to do with evils that are present in the practice of capital punishment itself, while others involve important values that would be promoted by abolition of this practice.... [W]e believe that abolition of the death penalty is most consonant with the example of Jesus...  
--National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1980

### **Union for Reform Judaism**

We believe that there is no crime for which the taking of human life by society is justified, and that it is the obligation of society to evolve other methods in dealing with crime. 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 [of capital punishment] which lies as a stain upon civilization and our religious conscience.  
--Union of American Hebrew Congregations Biennial Convention, 1959

### **Unitarian**

Holding capital punishment as inconsistent with human life on account of its retributive, discriminatory, and non-deterrent character, General Assemblies of the Unitarian Universalist Association have opposed capital punishment restoration or continuance in any form (1961, 1966, 1974, and 1979). ... As a community of faith promoting justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, we call for an end to the death penalty.  
-- 39<sup>th</sup> Annual General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association, 2000

### **United Church of Christ**

The Twenty-second General Synod calls upon United Church of Christ national instrumentalities... to speak out in opposition to the death penalty and work for its abolition, with an immediate focus on abolishing the death penalty for juvenile offenders, the mentally retarded and the mentally ill; [and] reaffirms the long-standing opposition within the United Church of Christ to the death penalty and urges the abolition of capital punishment as a means of working for justice and maintaining a faithful witness to remember "the least of these" our sisters and brothers.  
--General Synod of the United Church of Christ, 1999

### **United Methodist Church**

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, 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 and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.  
--The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2004

For more statements from religious groups, go to [www.pdfap.org](http://www.pdfap.org) (People of Faith Against the Death Penalty)