



New Castle Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved the following resolution at the 817th Stated Meeting of Presbytery on September 18, 2012 in Coolspring Presbyterian Church, 24483 Log Cabin Hill Road, Lewes, Delaware.

## **Resolution Supporting New Castle Presbytery Working to Abolish the Death Penalty**

Whereas, the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, taught "let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone" (John 8:7) when asked about a death penalty case and the 171st General Assembly (United Presbyterian Church-1959) declared that "capital punishment cannot be condoned by an interpretation of the Bible based upon the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ,"

Whereas our Lord Jesus Christ was himself a victim of the death penalty: "Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world" (*Book of Confessions*, A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.2.19-22),

Whereas, the 197th (1985) General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) declared "its continuing opposition to capital punishment" and called "upon governing bodies and members to work for the abolition of the death penalty in those states which currently have capital punishment statutes, and against efforts to reinstate such statutes in those which do not;"

Whereas, the American Baptist Churches in the USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Reformed Church in North America, Church of the Brethren, the Episcopal Church, Friends United Meeting, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Orthodox Church in America, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, United States Catholic Conference, and National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA have all independently studied the death penalty and oppose it;

Whereas, scientific studies and the preponderance of evidence show that capital punishment is no more effective than life imprisonment in deterring murder<sup>i</sup>;

Whereas, lengthy trials in death penalty cases can prolong the grief of victims' families. Although closure is never possible, the continual process of due process appeals, forces families to repeatedly confront the gruesome details of the crime. Presbyterians Lorry and June Post have stated that executing someone in their murdered daughter's name would "dishonor" her memory.

Whereas the United States stands isolated in the world community -- the vast majority of countries in Western Europe, North and South America — more than 128 nations worldwide — have abandoned capital punishment in law or in practice with only three countries executing more prisoners than the United States – China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia;

Whereas, taxpayers' money is wasted on death penalty cases. Independent studies have shown that the cost for carrying out the death sentence ranges from \$2 million to \$4 million a year higher, per execution, than the imposition of life sentence;

Whereas, due to its application in unjust, random, and inconsistent ways the American Bar Association, along with over 700 other agencies and organizations, has called for a moratorium;

Whereas, the wrongful execution of an innocent person is an injustice that can never be rectified. Since the reinstatement of the death penalty, at least 138 men and women have been released from death row nationally – some only minutes away from execution<sup>ii</sup>;

Whereas the death penalty is racist, used primarily to punish those who kill whites. Delaware's rate of death sentencing for black defendants and white victims is unusually high; it is 75 percent higher than the next highest states, Georgia and Nevada, more than twice as high as that of South Carolina or Virginia, and more than three times as high as that of its nearest neighbors, Maryland and Pennsylvania.<sup>iii</sup>

**Therefore, New Castle Presbytery supports abolishing of the death penalty in Delaware and Maryland, encourages its congregations to study the death penalty and the church's opposition for it, and will support ecumenical and civic groups such as Maryland Citizens Against State Executions, Delaware Citizens Opposed to the Death Penalty, and Delaware Repeal.**

Presbyterian Church (USA) position on the death penalty:

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/101/capital-punishment/>

All studies cited above come from the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (NCAD)

<http://www.ncadp.org/index.cfm?content=5>

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<sup>i</sup> The South accounts for 80% of U.S. executions, and has the highest regional murder rate. The five countries with the highest homicide rates that do not impose the death penalty average 21.6 murders per 100,000 people. The five countries with the highest homicide rate that do impose the death penalty average 41.6 murders for every 100,000 people.

<sup>ii</sup> CNN reported on May 21, 2012 that “more than 2,000 people have been exonerated of serious crimes since 1989 in the United States, according to a report by college researchers who have established the first national registry of exoneration.”

<sup>iii</sup> A new study published by a group of professors at Cornell University found a high incidence of racial disparities in the operation of Delaware's death penalty. The study examined the state's death penalty since 1972 and found: Of 49 defendants sentenced to death since 1972, 53% were black, 39% were white, and 8% were Hispanic or Native American. In contrast, 69% of Delaware's population is white, 21% is black, and 8% are Hispanic. - Thirty-five of the 49 cases (73%) involved a white victim. Of the current death row inmates, 59% were convicted of murdering white victims and 41% were convicted of murdering black victims.- Of the current death row population in Delaware, 59% are black, 23% are white, and 18% are Hispanic. Combined, the minority population comprises 77% of the state's death row. Nationally, the minority population accounts for approximately 56% of the death row population. [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2019913](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2019913)

Bruce Gillette wrote this resolution with editorial revisions by Carolyn Gillette and Doug Gerdt.