

No. 0324

(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

RESOLUTION ON THE DEATH PENALTY

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

Theological Statement

We believe the death penalty to be contrary to God's passion for justice. Criminal action is a reflection of human brokenness and sin. Many of our responses to criminal action continue the cycle of brokenness and sin in our society. God created life and thus, it is holy. The intentional taking of life denies God's intent for humanity. We believe this to be the case with the death penalty.

We are a church committed to following Christ, who was and is on the side of the oppressed. As we seek to become an anti-racist/pro-reconciling body, we recognize that disproportionate numbers of poor and people of color are executed. We understand that the same God who calls us to hold each other accountable also calls us to continuously work to be more just and humane.

WHEREAS, the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has often spoken in opposition to the death penalty (resolutions 8554, 7534, 7344) and has called for a moratorium on the death penalty (resolution 9131); and

WHEREAS, there are members and friends of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who have experienced the murder of loved ones and there are members of our congregations with loved ones in prison convicted of violent crimes; and

WHEREAS, a high percentage of people on death row are poor and powerless and have often received inadequate defense at their trials; and

WHEREAS, a disproportionate number of people on death row are people of color, reflecting the presence of systemic racism with the U.S. criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, the use of the death penalty does not reduce the rate of violent crimes in our communities and may encourage additional violence; and

WHEREAS, an increasing number of nations of the international community have condemned and abolished the death penalty as cruel and unusual punishment; and

WHEREAS, the former governor of the State of Illinois, George Ryan, commuted the sentences of all prisoners on death row out of concern that some innocent people might suffer the death penalty;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina, on October 17-21, 2003:

1. Calls upon elected officials to abolish the death penalty in the United States; and
2. Encourages Disciples of Christ members and congregations in the U.S. and Canada to become advocates for the abolishment of the death penalty; and
3. Invites members, congregations, regions and general units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to share resources for education and advocacy. Access to accumulated resources will be available through Disciples Home Mission; and
4. Calls upon congregations to create ministries to support and nurture those who have lost loved ones to violent criminal action as well as for families with loved ones on death row.