

(On 24 June 2012, during its 230th Session, the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted points 1-4 of the following resolution. The introductory material provided background for delegates but, following Conference rules, was not voted upon and should not be cited as actions by the Conference.)

Eliminate the Death Penalty

Whereas, scripture affirms that all people are created in the image of God (Gen 1.26-28);

Whereas, our United Methodist “Social Principles” state that "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 (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person’s life ends."¹

Whereas, the “Social Principles” further states that "We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings."²

Whereas on the only occasion where Jesus was confronted with the issue of the death penalty (the story about the woman alleged to have been caught in adultery, John 8:3-12), he rebuked her accusers, saying “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Whereas the United States is the only western industrial democracy that continues to impose the death penalty;

Whereas in 2000 the Virginia Annual Conference adopted a resolution “Calling for A Moratorium on the Death Penalty”;

Whereas in 2002 the Virginia Annual Conference adopted a resolution “Calling for Moving Forward with Study and Action on the Death Penalty”;

Whereas the alleged deterrent value of the death penalty is not supported by empirical evidence;³

Whereas after working at the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections for over 32 years, including serving as Director 2001-2010, during which he observed the execution of 33 persons, now retired Terry Collins recently called for removal of the death penalty which he characterized as “often inefficient”, “always time-consuming”, and “not a fiscally responsible policy” since it is more expensive than life imprisonment without parole which “offers justice that is swift, certain, effectively severe and perhaps more sensitive to the needs of healing victims’ families” who can then achieve closure and no longer be faced with the painful task of attending appeals hearings;⁴

Whereas on January 11, 2011 the Illinois Legislature voted to repeal the state’s death penalty and apply remaining funds in the Capital Litigation Trust Fund toward murder victims’ services and law enforcement;⁵ the *Chicago Tribune* on March 2, 2011 reversed years of editorial support for capital punishment and called for abolishing the death penalty in Illinois,⁶ and on March 9, 2011 Governor Pat Quinn signed legislation repealing the death penalty in Illinois, stating that after talking with people on both sides of the issues – prosecutors, judges, elected officials, religious leaders, families of murder victims, people on death row who were exonerated and ordinary citizens – “I have concluded that our system of

imposing the death penalty is inherently flawed. The evidence presented to me by former prosecutors and justices with decades of experience in the criminal justice system has convinced me that it is impossible to devise a system that is consistent, that is free of discrimination on the basis of race, geography or economic circumstances, that always gets it right.”⁷

Whereas since 1973 a total of 140 persons have been released from death row on evidence of their innocence, including one in Virginia, strongly reminding us of the danger of committing the irreversible wrong of killing an innocent person;⁸

Whereas a 2010 poll clearly found that a majority of 61 percent “would choose a punishment other than the death penalty for murder, including life with no possibility of parole and restitution to the victim’s family (39%), life with no possibility of parole (13%), or life with the possibility of parole (9%).”⁹

Whereas police chiefs have ranked the death penalty last when presented with a list of ways to reduce violent crime and considered the death penalty to be the least efficient use of taxpayers’ money,¹⁰ and

Whereas life without parole provides the safety and security society seeks in capital cases,

Be it hereby resolved that the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church:

1. Affirms the historic position of The United Methodist Church which states that “we oppose capital punishment and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.”¹¹
2. Calls for elimination of the death penalty in Virginia.
3. Requests the Governor and members of the General Assembly to prepare and enact legislation that will eliminate the death penalty in the Commonwealth.
4. Requests Bishop Kammerer or her successor to invite other religious bodies and non-government organizations to join us in actively seeking the elimination of the death penalty in Virginia.

¹ ¶ 164.V.G, “Social Principles”, *United Methodist Book of Discipline 2008*.

² ¶ 164.V.G, “Social Principles”, *United Methodist Book of Discipline 2008*.

³ Although the South accounted for 80 percent of all executions in the U.S. in 2010, it nevertheless had the highest murder rate of 5.6 per 100,000; conversely, the Northeast, with less than 1 percent of all executions, tied with the West for the lowest murder rate of 4.2 per 100,000. Death Penalty Information Center, “Fact Sheet” (4Oct2011).

⁴ Terry Collins, “Justice system can be improved by removing ultimate penalty,” *Columbus Dispatch*, January 25, 2011.

⁵ Death Penalty Information Center, “Press Release” (6Feb2011).

⁶ Editorial, *Chicago Tribune*, 3Feb2011. www.chicagotribune.com (14Feb11).

⁷ “Statement from Governor Pat Quinn on Senate Bill 3539” < www.deathpenaltyinfor.org/documents/ILGovernorStatement.pdf> (4Oct2011).

⁸ Death Penalty Information Center, “Fact Sheet” (6Feb2012).

⁹ Death Penalty Information Center, “Fact Sheet” (6Feb2012).

¹⁰ Death Penalty Information Center, “Fact Sheet” (6Feb2012).

¹¹ ¶ 164.V.G, “Social Principles”, *2008 Book of Discipline*.