

Death Penalty

LEAD:
DON PLUMMER

Since 1958, Episcopal Church General Conventions have been on record as rejecting the death penalty. In 1976, when the Supreme Court of the United States reinstated the death penalty, Atlanta Episcopal Bishop Bennett Sims joined his Roman Catholic counterpart in opposing the resumption of executions. Successive General Conventions, including in 2018, have reasserted the Episcopal Church's opposition to capital punishment.

In his 2020 For Faith Lenten message, Bishop Rob Wright called for ending Georgia's death penalty: "*One behavior we must abandon is the Death Penalty. We must confess that we chose ignorance, indifference, or vengeance as individuals and as a state in this matter. And we must be clear there is no justification for Capital Punishment in the life and teaching of Jesus. None!*"

The Episcopal Church is not alone in its opposition to the death penalty. In 2018, the Roman Catholic Church revised its teaching on the death penalty, calling capital punishment "an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person" and deeming it "inadmissible" in all cases. Georgia has an active Catholic death penalty repeal organization.

Most Christian denominations oppose the death penalty. Read their positions: United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Baptist Churches USA, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and The United Church of Christ.

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HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Learn more:

<https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/state-and-federal-info/state-by-state/georgia>

<https://www.gfadp.org/home>
<https://www.prisonfellowship>

Reasons to end the Death Penalty: see next page

LEARN

"May the groans of the prisoners come before you; with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die."

Psalms 79:11

PRAY

Donate to:
Prison Fellowship
The Southern Center for Human Rights

Follow legislation to end the death penalty and write to your representatives to advocate for abolishing it.

ACT

Reasons to End the Death Penalty

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Error: Our criminal justice system is not perfect. According to a 2014 nationwide study, at least 4% of those sentenced to death in the United States are innocent. "The 161 people and counting who have been exonerated due to their innocence since 1973 exemplify that fact." ([Catholic Social Teaching & the Death Penalty](#)) For every 9 people who have been executed since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, one person has been exonerated after being proven innocent.

Arbitrary: The death penalty is arbitrarily isolated to only a small geographic area. Roughly two percent of this nation's counties have produced most of all executions imposed since 1976 (52 percent) and of prisoners awaiting execution on death row (56 percent). The determination of a death sentence can be as arbitrary as the county in which you commit a crime. The death penalty has been equated to a geographical lottery; and does not conform to the demands of a just and peaceful society.

Disproportionate: More than half of the people on death row in this country are people of color. Black or Latino defendants are significantly more likely to get the death penalty than their white counterparts. The race of the victim of a crime often plays a role in the use of the death penalty. Nationally, almost half (47%) of all murder victims since the 1970s have been black. Yet, for cases ending in a death sentence, only 17% of murder victims have been black. Even more upsetting is the fact that at least 60% of the 161 exonerees are either black or Latino.

Capital punishment is for the poor. Almost all death row inmates were unable to afford their own attorney at trial. "Court-appointed attorneys often lack the experience necessary for capital trials, are overworked, and underpaid." (["The Necessity and Legitimacy of Pope Francis' Complete Ban ..."](#)) This often results in poorly handled cases where mitigating factors and tools such as DNA evidence, Severe Mental Illness, or Intellectual Disability may not be brought up.

Those with Intellectual Disability and Severe Mental Illness are likely to receive the death penalty. Not only must these individuals overcome societal barriers to daily living, but they are also much more likely to become victims of crime and at special risk for wrongful conviction. In 2002, death penalty for persons with Intellectual Disability was determined unconstitutional, yet those with severe mental illness can still be killed. Even individuals with serious intellectual disabilities are still sentenced to death and executed. In 2017 alone at least 20 of the 23 people executed (87%) had evidence of mental illness, intellectual disability, brain damage, or severe trauma.

Expense: The death penalty costs an exorbitant amount more than non-capital cases. More than a dozen states have found that death penalty cases are up to 10 times more expensive than comparable non-death penalty cases. These taxpayer dollars could be spent attending to the needs of victims of crime and addressing issues as to why people commit crimes in the first place.

Misinformation: The death penalty does not make us safer. Over 85% of the nation's top criminologists believe the death penalty is not a deterrent. In fact, in many states where the death penalty has been abolished the murder rate has fallen significantly. Many law enforcement officials argue that the death penalty does not serve as a deterrent and only re-directs vital resources away from addressing the real cause of crime.

The death penalty does not bring healing to victims' families. The necessarily long, complex death penalty trial process can force families to re-live their trauma and pain.