Faith & the Death Penalty
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What scripture says:

- “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 the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on
  the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Matthew 5:38-39

- “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is
  written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” Romans 12:19

- "When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let
  anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”
  John 8:7

- "But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you
  would not have condemned the guiltless.” Matthew 12:7

The Council's View on the Death Penalty

Several times in the past decades, the North Carolina Council of Churches has spoken about
the inhumanity and racial bias of capital punishment. We have been on the forefront of this
issue for years, from one of our first policy statements in 1970 urging the "abolition of capital
punishment" and declaring the "death penalty has been used disproportionately against black
people in our society, thereby reflecting classist and racist tendencies in our criminal justice
system."

While North Carolina has not carried out an execution in a decade and a half, other states
continue to do so. Meanwhile, prisoners sentenced to death in North Carolina remain on death
row, uncertain of their fate.

As Christians, we believe the abolition of the death penalty is a moral imperative. In a 1984
policy statement, we said: "We oppose the death penalty because we oppose the spirit of
retribution. It is illogical and profoundly irreverent to kill somebody to prove that killing is
wrong… It creates the illusion of setting things right while in fact creating new victims."

The execution on Good Friday contrives to be repeated. Innocent people are convicted and
murdered by the state. Violence and torture are perpetrated under the guise of security.
Brutality is used as a weapon of fear to oppress those who long for freedom. Retribution and
vengeance create a continuing cycle of violence. We reject this fetishization of violence and long
for a world where Christ’s death puts an end to death, so there will be possibilities for justice
and new life.
For every nine people executed, one person on death row has been exonerated.

**Facts about the Death Penalty**

Since 1973:
- 1,532 people have been executed in the U.S. 2
- 43 people have been executed under North Carolina’s modern death penalty. 3

**In NC**:
- 133 men on death row
- 2 women on death row 4

Studies have found capital punishment to be more expensive than life imprisonment 5

People of color make up more than half of NC’s death row prisoners but less than a quarter of the state’s population. 6

A series of death penalty reforms began in 2001. 7 Nearly three-quarters of people on death row today were tried before 2001 and did not benefit from the reforms. This is immoral and unjust.

North Carolina has the 4th largest death row in the United States. 8

Since 1973, more than 180 people have been released from death row when evidence showed their innocence. In North Carolina, 12 people have been exonerated after being sent to death row. 9
Death Penalty Abolition

Capital punishment is irreversible, yet mistakes happen. The risk of executing an innocent person can never be fully eliminated.

Capital punishment is discriminatory. The weight of the death penalty is disproportionately placed on those from disadvantaged backgrounds or historically excluded groups, especially people of color. The system harshly punishes crimes against white victims and preys on vulnerable defendants who grew up in poverty and trauma, people who have mental illness or intellectual disabilities. People with these underlying issues are often unable to assist in their own defense. There is also widespread discrimination against jurors of color; nearly half of the people on NC death row had an all-white jury or jury with only one person of color. A defendant’s likelihood of receiving the death penalty correlates with the victim’s race. 54% of NC death row prisoners are Black, whereas the group only comprises of 22% of the state’s total population.10

Capital punishment is not a deterrent to crime. There is no evidence that the death penalty is any more effective in reducing crime than other sentences. A punishment can be an effective deterrent only if it is consistently and promptly employed. Capital punishment cannot be administered to meet these conditions.

Proposed solutions:

- Commute all state death sentences.
- Pass legislation to repeal the statewide death penalty.
- Direct the Department of Public Safety to dismantle the death chamber at Central Prison.