

## **Open Letter from Faith Leaders Regarding the 1,000<sup>th</sup> Execution in the United States Since the Reinstatement of Capital Punishment**

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To Whom It May Concern:

We, the undersigned faith leaders, reflecting the rich diversity of faith traditions and spiritual practices observed in the United States, stand together in expressing our deep concern that nearly 1,000 executions have occurred in this country since the reinstatement of capital punishment in 1976.

We join with many Americans in questioning the need for the death penalty in our modern society and in challenging the effectiveness of this punishment, which has consistently been shown to be ineffective, unfair, and inaccurate. The death penalty not only applies disproportionately to the poor and to people of color, but also continues to make fatal mistakes, with 122 people now freed from death rows across the country due to evidence of wrongful conviction. As the number of executions increases, the likelihood that we have, or that we will, execute an innocent person becomes a near certainty.

Many organizations of victims' family members, such as Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights, are saying that the death penalty offers them nothing. With the prosecution of even a single capital case costing millions of dollars, the cost of executing 1,000 people has easily risen to billions of dollars. In light of the serious economic challenges that our country faces today, the valuable resources that are expended to carry out death sentences would be better spent investing in programs that work to prevent crime, such as improving education, providing services to those with mental illness, and putting more law enforcement officers on our streets. We should make sure that money is spent to improve life, not destroy it.

The United States continues to be one of the top executing nations in the world and is out of step with the majority of its global allies on this issue. We would be a better society by joining the many nations that have already abolished the death penalty.

As people of faith, we take this opportunity to reaffirm our opposition to the death penalty and to express our belief in the sacredness of human life and in the human capacity for change. We urge our elected officials at the federal and state levels to take a closer look at the reality of capital punishment in America and seek ways to achieve healing and restorative justice for all those who suffer because of violent crimes.

Sincerely,

*[Institutional affiliation is for identification purposes only. These signatures do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the named faith communities.]*

### National Organization Heads

1. Jim Winkler, General Secretary, The General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church
2. Rev. William G. Sinkford, President, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
3. Rob Keithan, Director, Washington Office for Advocacy, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
4. Rabbi Marla J. Feldman, Director of the Joint Commission on Social Action of the Union for Reform Judaism and Central Conference of American Rabbis
5. Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
6. Rev. Phil Jones, Director of the Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office
7. Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory, Director, Washington Office Presbyterian Church (USA)

8. David A. Robinson, Executive Director, Pax Christi USA
9. Bob Edgar, General Secretary, National Council of Churches
10. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, Chairperson, Justice and Advocacy Commission, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
11. The Rev. Dr. John Edward Nuesse, Executive Secretary for Missionary Support Services, General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church
12. Rev. Sala W.J. Gonzalez-Nolan, Minister for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ
13. Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston, Director, Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ), Coordinator, Disciples Center for Public Witness
14. Rev. James F. Schrag, Executive Director, Mennonite Church USA
15. J. Ron Byler, Associate Executive Director, Mennonite Church USA
16. Susan Mark Landis, Peace Advocate, Mennonite Church USA, Executive Leadership
17. Rev. J. Daryl Byler, Director, Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
18. Rolando L. Santiago, Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
19. David Whettstone, Legislative Associate For Domestic Affairs, Mennonite Central Committee US Washington Office
20. Mary Ellen McNish, General Secretary for the American Friends Service Committee
21. Pat Clark, Executive Director, Fellowship of Reconciliation
22. Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
23. Charles and Pauline Sullivan, Co-Directors, International-CURE
24. Frank and Ellen McNeirney, National Coordinators, Catholics Against Capital Punishment
25. T. Michael McNulty, SJ, Justice and Peace Director, Conference of Major Superiors of Men
26. Brother Brian Halderman, S.M., Society of Mary, Marianist Province of the United States
27. Very Rev. David B. Powers, Sch.P. Provincial, Piarist Fathers USA Province
28. The Rev. Dr. Paul H. Sherry, Coordinator, The National Council of Churches Anti-Poverty Program