

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

Until the Gilmore case in 1977, there had been no execution in the United States in 10 years. The ritual taking of life had ceased while debate continued in the courts regarding the constitutionality of capital punishment.

Now that the death laws in some states have been upheld and some executions have taken place, thousands¹ of persons nationwide face possible execution by hanging, firing squad, asphyxiation, injection, or electrocution. Such punishment has been abolished in Canada and most of Europe, where it is seen as morally unacceptable and a form of cruel and unusual punishment inconsistent with religious and ethical traditions.

As Christians living and participating in our society, we reaffirm and are acutely aware of:

- a. the sacredness of life and the obligation to "overcome evil with good" as taught in the Scriptures;
- b. the hope and possibility of all to come under the redeeming and transforming action of God;
- c. the fallibility of human agencies and legal justice;
- d. the immorality and injustice of capital punishment for persons later proven innocent;
- e. some inexcusable inequities before the law, enabling many persons of higher status and resources to avoid the death penalty while some persons without these resources are unable to avoid the penalty. The majority of those on death row are poor, powerless, and educationally deprived. Almost 50% come from minority groups. This reflects the broad inequalities within our society, and the inequity with which the ultimate penalty is applied. In review of studies regarding race and death sentencing from 1972 to 1988, the Federal Accounting Office found a "pattern of evidence indicating racial disparities in the charging sentencing, and imposition of the death penalty."²
- f. the lack of clear support through the available evidence that capital punishment has a deterrent effect;
- g. the conviction that the emphasis in penology should be upon the process of creative, redemptive rehabilitation, rather than on primitive retribution.

Therefore, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches recommends the abolition of capital punishment in those states which still practice it and urges churches and members of our American Baptist constituency to support groups and agencies working for the abolition of capital punishment in those governmental jurisdictions of the U.S. where it is still authorized by law.

We as American Baptists, condemn the reinstatement of capital punishment and oppose its use under any new or old state or federal law, and call for an immediate end to planned executions throughout this country.

We urge American Baptists in every state to act as advocates against the passage of new death penalty laws, and to act individually and in concern with others to prevent executions from being carried out.

We appeal to the governors of each state where an execution is pending to act with statesmanship and courage by commuting to life imprisonment without parole all capital cases within their jurisdiction.

We urge American Baptists to expand their advocacy against capital punishment from the state level to the federal since the U.S. Congress has increased significantly the number of federal capital crimes in recent years.

Adopted by the American Baptist Convention - 1958 and 1966
Affirmed as American Baptist Churches Resolutions - September 1980
Combined and Reaffirmed by the Executive Committee of the General Board - March 1982
(General Board Reference # - 8064:3/82)
Modified by the Executive Committee of the General Board - September 2000

POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights - December 1976

As American Baptists we declare the following rights to be basic human rights, and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights:

9. The right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person, and to be protected against discrimination without regard to age, sex, race, class, marital status, income, national origin, legal status, culture or condition in society;
13. The right to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention and torture; the right to a just and open trial with the opportunity to confront accusers and the right to humane treatment if incarcerated;