

Death Penalty

OPTIONS

Delegates will have five pieces of legislation related to the death penalty before them at General Conference. There are two petitions submitted by the General Board of Church and Society 80599-C1-R-255 “Opposition to Capital Punishment” and 80600-C1-R-259 “Seek Moratorium on Capital Punishment”. The third piece of legislation, 81149-C1-R9999, submitted by an individual, is a resolution requesting action specifically in the state Texas and asks General Conference to call upon “the Texas Legislature to abolish the death penalty completely or to stop executions in the state until such time as all capital cases can be tried in a completely equitable way.” Individual petition 81125-C1-164 G, seeks to amend disciplinary ¶164 G on the Death Penalty. All of these legislative options are found in Church and Society 1 legislative committee. The fifth petition, regarding the death penalty, 81514-CO-NonDis, found in the Conferences Committee and submitted by the General Board of Church and Society requires “General Conference to Meet in Places Without Capital Punishment.”

ISSUE

At issue is whether the United Methodist Church should continue and strengthen its commitment to abolish the death penalty and further work with governments and legislative officials for a moratorium on Capital Punishment **OR** amend the current disciplinary statement on opposing the death penalty to state that United Methodists do not oppose the death penalty.

ANALYSIS

The three board of Church and Society committee petitions, “Opposition to Capital Punishment”, “Seek Moratorium on Capital Punishment”, and “Texas Death Penalty” strengthen and add resources to support the United Methodist Church’s 52 year stance against the death penalty.

The first, #80599-C1-R-255 p. 248, calls for the UMC to work in collaboration with ecumenical and abolitionist groups to abolish the death penalty, promote the work of United Methodists Against the Death Penalty to mobilize United Methodists, advocate against the death penalty at the state and national levels, and develop materials on capital punishment.

The second, #80600-C1-R-259 p. 249, slightly modifies the Social Principles and requests that within 40 days of the closing of General Conference, U.S. federal and state governments enact a moratorium on carrying out death penalty sentences. The request would be sent to U.S. federal and state officials by the secretary of General Conference, the Council of Bishops and the general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society immediately upon the close of General Conference.

The third, # 81149-C1-R9999 p.307 requests action specifically in the state of Texas and asks General Conference to call upon “the Texas Legislature to abolish the death penalty completely or to stop executions in the state until such time as all capital cases can be tried in a completely equitable way.”

Petition #81125-C1-164-G p. 192 however **misuses Scripture and Wesley’s writings** to suggest that Jesus and Wesley would both affirm the death penalty as a means to achieve justice. **Jesus clearly repudiates vengeance as a method of behavioral modification.** Several scriptural passages reveal the fact that Jesus had several opportunities to uphold the practice of the death penalty and did not. Jesus intentionally reinterpreted the Old Testament in such a way that upholds the value of all life, including those previously sentenced to die under Old Testament law.

Petition # 81514-CO-NonDis p. 481, found in the Conferences Committee, requires that “General Conference to Meet in Places Without Capital Punishment.” Beginning in 2009 with any special session, and beginning in 2016 with all regular sessions, General Conference would meet in a state or municipality whose laws lack the death penalty or has a moratorium on executions. This would apply within or outside the boundaries of the United States.

The United Methodist Church has stood against capital punishment since 1956. The 2004 *Book of Discipline* powerfully states, “We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore, and transform all human beings.” Nowhere in Scripture do we find Jesus favoring the death penalty as a means to achieve justice. This is the ground on which the United Methodist Church has stood for the last 52 years in speaking out against capital punishment. It is on this ground that we should remain.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

VOTE FOR:

Petition #80599-C1-R-255 p. 248

Petition #80600-C1-R-259 p. 249

Petition #81149-C1-R9999 p. 307

Petition #81514-CO-NonDis p. 481

VOTE AGAINST:

Petition 81125-C1-164-G p. 192