

# ILLINOIS CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES

## PUBLIC POLICY RESOLUTION

### *“ABANDON THE DEATH PENALTY”*

**Unanimously approved by the General Board on November 30, 2005**

**Ratified by the Judicatory Executives on January 31, 2006**

The Illinois Conference of Churches, a state ecumenical body composed of 31 jurisdictions of fifteen Christian denominations with five million members spanning the Protestant, Anabaptist, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox traditions, is troubled by our society's ready acceptance of punishment by execution. Although it may be conceded by some that the State in extreme circumstances may invoke the death penalty, nevertheless, from a Christian ethical perspective, we regard the death penalty to be problematic and unacceptable. As Christians, we believe that every human being is created in the image of God. Although human sin can tarnish this image, we believe that the promise of redemption is offered to everyone who repents of sin. As the Bible cautions: *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.”* (Romans 12:17)

From this Christian perspective, we are led to conclude that the death penalty does not provide justice. Instead, the death penalty perpetuates inhumane retribution, fosters feelings of revenge and exacerbates a cycle of violence that envelops the convicted offender and the families of the victim and the accused with increased anger and anguish. We believe that the death penalty in the USA is objectionable because it discriminates against people of color and those who have the least capacity for presenting an effective defense. We believe that the death penalty represents an unacceptably violent response by the State to the most severe crimes. Thus, the Illinois Conference of Churches proclaims that:

- WHEREAS, a consensus exists across the Christian faith traditions of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches calling for society to abolish the death penalty; and
- WHEREAS, the Religious Leaders of the Illinois Conference of Churches issued an ecumenical appeal in 1997 calling for a moratorium on the death penalty in Illinois; and
- WHEREAS, the Governor of Illinois in 2000 declared a moratorium on the death penalty in response to evidence that revealed the innocence of a number of prisoners on Death Row; and
- WHEREAS, statistics indicate that a high proportion of those consigned to death row are the poor and powerless; and
- WHEREAS, the death penalty dehumanizes a society by its imposition upon individuals who are mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed; and
- WHEREAS, it recently has been demonstrated that many on death row were unjustly convicted due to defects in the judicial system and lack of adequate defense; and
- WHEREAS, the Illinois Governor's Commission on Capital Punishment declared “that no system, given human nature and frailties, could ever be devised or constructed that would work perfectly and guarantee absolutely that no innocent person is ever again sentenced to death”;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:** The Illinois Conference of Churches calls upon elected officials, community leaders, and all people of good will to abolish the death penalty from our criminal justice system in the State of Illinois and within our nation.

**AFFIRMED BY THE JUDICATORY EXECUTIVES OF  
THE FOLLOWING MEMBER CHURCHES  
OF THE ILLINOIS CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES**

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Region of IL/WI  
Church of the Brethren, District of IL/WI  
Episcopal Church, Diocese of Chicago  
Episcopal Church, Diocese of Quincy  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Central/Southern Illinois Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Metropolitan Chicago Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Northern Illinois Synod  
Greek Orthodox Church, Metropolis of Chicago  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Synod of Lincoln Trails  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Blackhawk Presbytery  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Southeastern Illinois Presbytery  
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Western Yearly Meeting  
Roman Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Chicago  
Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Belleville  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Joliet  
United Church of Christ, Illinois Conference  
United Church of Christ, Illinois South Conference  
United Methodist Church, Northern Illinois Conference