
Faith Leader Calls on Governor Brownback to Repeal the Kansas Death Penalty in 2012.

Re: Abolish the Death Penalty in 2012

Pastor Peter Goerzen recently published a letter he sent to Governor Brownback, calling on the Governor to make replacing the death penalty a priority for 2012.

The letter, which can be read in full at <http://www.breadoftomorrow.org/2011/08/death-penalty-a-letter-to-governor-brownback/>, lists the following four reasons that Governor Brownback should replace the Kansas death penalty with life without parole in 2012:

1. The Death Penalty is poor fiscal responsibility. A 2003 legislative report found that cases resulting in a death sentence have a median cost 70% higher than that of non-death penalty murder cases. The life-without-parole sentence offers the same public protection without the additional fiscal strain. In a climate of budget shortfalls and major spending cuts, it is disturbingly ironic that programs and institutions promoting life, hope, and future are being cut, while the costly death penalty remains untouched...This funding could be invested so much better elsewhere: community development, support for victims' families, restorative justice that truly rehabilitates previous offenders before they commit more serious crime, teachers and community leaders who invest themselves in the

lives of children, etc. – initiatives to improve life rather than destroy it.

2. The Death Penalty distorts and cheapens justice. There is no convincing evidence that the death penalty is a deterrent against violent crime. With its bias against poor people, minorities, and certain locations, the death penalty distorts justice. Moreover, the death penalty cheapens justice by trading its noble claims for those of a much different desire: retribution.

We do ourselves and our culture a great disservice when we confuse justice with retribution.

Justice puts an end to cycles of violence through restoration and healing, while retribu-

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-Pastor Peter Goerzen

tion merely continues the cycles of our murderous desire. We know that “an eye for an eye” does not represent the fullness of God’s desire for humankind. Some suggest that the death penalty brings justice by providing closure for victims families, but lengthy legal processes in

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which families persistently relive their trauma do not provide closure, and the death penalty does not bring justice...Vengeance can never bring justice; the closest we can come is to offer our steadfast compassion and love to victims' families while ensuring that perpetrators may not murder again (e.g. life without parole).

3. The Death Penalty is morally bankrupt. Its oft-cited inner logic of "killing people because killing people is wrong" skews morality toward revenge and formally contributes to a culture of vengeance and death. It does not honor the conviction that all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore within God's sovereign purposes and ability to redeem. Public policy should not stand in the way of that possibility. Denominations and organizations from across the Christian tradition have articulated their moral, Biblical, and theological opposition to the death penalty.

4. The life without parole sentence adequately accomplishes the State's task to restrain evil, ensuring that violent offenders may never murder again. It honors God's sovereign privilege to act redemptively, both in victims' families' lives for healing and hope, and in offenders' lives for repentance and transformation. Unlike the death penalty, it at least provides the opportunity for the State to seek reparation in the case of wrongful conviction and punishment. It is a far less costly process, and eases the burden on victims' families, who must relive their trauma throughout the appeals process. While this sentencing option, like the death penalty, does not offer any corrective to preju-

dice in the legal system and does not work to disrupt the conditions that lead to violent crime, it does offer a significant fiscal, moral, and just alternative to the death penalty. Americans favor life in prison plus work with earnings going to victims' families over the death penalty by a factor of two-to-one.

As a faith leader, I commit myself to the work of sustainable community development, character formation, compassion for victims and all who suffer, and love for enemies. I hope that you also will take this opportunity to move our State away from policies of death, and toward initiatives for life, preventing violent crime before it happens by minimizing its causes.

Sincerely,

Pastor Peter Goerzen

Grace Hill Mennonite Church (Member, Western District Conference of Mennonite Church USA)