

A POLICY STATEMENT *of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America*

ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

Adopted by the General Board
September 13, 1968

In support of current movements to abolish the death penalty, the National Council of Churches hereby declares its opposition to capital punishment. In so doing, it finds itself in substantial agreement with a number of member denominations which have already expressed opposition to the death penalty.

Reasons for taking this position include the following:

- (1) The belief in the worth of human life and the dignity of human personality as gifts of God;
- (2) A preference for rehabilitation rather than retribution in the treatment of offenders;
- (3) Reluctance to assume the responsibility of arbitrarily terminating the life of a fellow-being solely because there has been a transgression of law;
- (4) Serious question that the death penalty serves as a deterrent to crime, evidenced by the fact that the homicide rate has not increased disproportionately in those states where capital punishment has been abolished;
- (5) The conviction that institutionalized disregard for the sanctity of human life contributes to the brutalization of society;
- (6) The possibility of errors in judgment and the irreversibility of the penalty which make impossible any restitution to one who has been wrongfully executed;
- (7) Evidence that economically poor defendants, particularly members of racial minorities, are more likely to be executed than others because they cannot afford exhaustive legal defenses;

(8) The belief that not only the severity of the penalty but also its increasing infrequency and the ordinarily long delay between sentence and execution subject the condemned person to cruel, unnecessary and unusual punishment;

(9) The belief that the protection of society is served as well by measures of restraint and rehabilitation, and that society may actually benefit from the contribution of the rehabilitated offender;

(10) Our Christian commitment to seek the redemption and reconciliation of the wrong-doer, which are frustrated by his execution.

Seventy-five nations of the world and thirteen states of the United States have abolished the death penalty with no evident detriment to social order. It is our judgment that the remaining jurisdictions should move in the same humane direction.

In view of the foregoing, the National Council of Churches urges abolition of the death penalty under federal and state law in the United States, and urges member denominations and state and local councils of churches actively to promote the necessary legislation to secure this end, particularly in the thirty-seven states which have not yet eliminated capital punishment.

103 FOR 0 AGAINST 0 ABSTENTIONS