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RAIN STATEMENT

A Call for Abolition of the Death Penalty

The Religious Alliance in Nevada (RAIN) is a coalition of 5 Christian judicatories (denominations) in the State of Nevada—the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Reno and Las Vegas, The ELCA Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA) in Nevada, the United Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada. RAIN advocates the position of the national church bodies that it represents and which have openly and publicly declared their opposition to the use of the death penalty.

Following these positions (noted below), RAIN opposes the death penalty because:

- 1) taking of human life diminishes us as a people and erodes human dignity;
- 2) the use of the death penalty is immoral and places the state in the role of God; the government does not have an unlimited right to take life;
- 3) it is unjustly applied, falling heavily on the poor, the disadvantaged and people of color;
- 4) the death penalty has not been proven to deter capital crime, but perpetuates and sanctions violence, increasing society's desire for vengeance;
- 5) life in prison without parole is a more appropriate punishment and offers the offender an opportunity for redemption and correction of his inhuman behavior.

In addition, RAIN wishes to emphasize that the death penalty system is broken and does not foster justice, having permitted the execution of innocent people. Studies also have shown that a death sentence costs more than life imprisonment. While RAIN opposes the death penalty, we will minister in greater support and healing of the victims' families at their terrible loss.

Episcopalian Tradition

The Episcopal Church of the USA has reaffirmed its stand against the death penalty in 1958, 1969, 1979, 1991, and 2000. Episcopalians believe that the death penalty is contrary to the concept of Christian love revealed in the New Testament. In 1990, Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning said: "The taking of human life diminishes us as a people. We all hate the crime of a person who would take another life. But in using the death penalty against the one who has taken a life means we end up committing the very act we found so repugnant in the first place. And thus we are diminished, both in the sight of God and one another. The taking of human life, for whatever reason, is an affront to God."

Roman Catholic Tradition

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, comprised of the American Roman Catholic Bishops, has stated that the use of the death penalty is immoral and contrary to Christian teaching, because it results in a disrespect for life and is unjustly applied, particularly with regard to the disadvantaged, the indigent, and the socially impoverished. The Bishops said: "The critical question for the Christian is how we can best foster respect for life, preserve the dignity of the human person and manifest the redemptive message of Christ. We do not believe that more deaths are the response to the question. In the sight of God, correction of the offender has taken preference over punishment, for the Lord came to save and not to condemn." As Pope John Paul II stated January 27, 1999, in St. Louis, Missouri, "I renew the appeal for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary."

ELCA Lutheran Tradition

In a "Social Statement on the Death Penalty" adopted by more than a two-thirds vote at the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1991, the delegates noted that "God holds governments accountable to ensure justice." Violent crime is a reminder of human failure to ensure justice for all members of society. Yet, the **existence of capital punishment has had no provable impact on the breeding grounds of violent crime.** The death penalty exacts and symbolizes the ultimate in personal retribution, distracting "us" from our work toward a just society. It **perpetuates cycles of violence** and deforms society's response to violence at the individual, familial, institutional, and systemic levels. **The government does not have an unlimited right to take life.** Because of the ELCA Lutheran Church's commitment to justice, Lutherans oppose the imposition of the death penalty, believing "it is not fair and fails to make society better or safer."

United Methodist Tradition

In 2000, the United Methodist Church readopted its statement against the death penalty. Methodists have declared that **they cannot accept retribution or social vengeance as a reason for taking human life.** It violates a Christian's deepest belief in God as the Creator and the Redeemer of humankind. There can be no assertion that human life can be taken humanely by the state. Indeed, in the long run, **the use of the death penalty by the state will increase the acceptance of revenge in our society and will give official sanction to a climate of violence.** Methodists are also concerned that **the death penalty falls unfairly and unequally upon an outcast minority.** In short, "the United Methodist Church declares its opposition to the retention and use of capital punishment in any form or carried out by any means . . . and urges [its] abolition ." Section 231, Book of Resolutions, UMC.

Presbyterian Tradition

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has declared its opposition to the death penalty in 1959, 1965, 1966, 1977, and 1985. Presbyterians believe that **the government's use of death as an instrument of justice places the state in the role of God,** who alone is sovereign; and the use of the death penalty in a representative democracy places citizens in the role of executioner. "Christians cannot isolate themselves from corporate responsibility, including responsibility for every execution, as well as for every victim." Accordingly, the Presbyterian Church calls upon the governing bodies of every state to work for the abolition of the death penalty. See: 197th General Assembly, 1985, Resolution Continuing Opposition to Capital Punishment.

The judicatories of RAIN are not the only faith communities opposed to the death penalty. In a booklet produced by the Religious Organizing Project Against the Death Penalty in January, 2000, a total of 32 official statements of religious organizations opposed to the death penalty have been compiled. They include a wide diversity of religions and denominations, both Christian and Jewish.

RAIN will continue to support efforts to abolish the death penalty in Nevada, because at the heart of the beliefs of those who worship and participate in its congregations is the notion that these faith communities are committed to show the love of God through compassion, understanding, and respect for their neighbor, believing in the inherent dignity of each human person made in the image of God.