

**The Presbytery of the Western Reserve**  
**A Call to Place a Moratorium on Capital Punishment in the State of Ohio**  
**March 31, 2008**

General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church have repeatedly produced and adopted statements that unequivocally oppose capital punishment (1959, 1965, 1966, 1977, 1985, 2000; see attached):

“Capital punishment is an expression of vengeance which contradicts the justice of God on the cross.” (190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1978) of the PCUS)

“Believing that capital punishment cannot be condoned by an interpretation of the Bible based upon the revelation of God’s love in Jesus Christ, that as Christians we must seek the redemption of evil doers and not their death, and that the use of the death penalty tends to brutalize the society that condones it, the 171<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (1959): Declares its opposition to capital punishment...”

Similarly, the Presbytery of the Western Reserve has also repeatedly voiced its opposition to capital punishment. In 2000, Overture 00-90 to the 212<sup>th</sup> General Assembly from the Presbytery of the Western Reserve was adopted. It reaffirmed the General Assemblies’ historic opposition to capital punishment, and called for an immediate moratorium on all executions in all jurisdictions that impose capital punishment.

Currently there is a movement in the State of Ohio to call for a moratorium on all executions until such a time as legislation is adopted:

1. that guarantees policies and procedures that eliminate any risk that an innocent person might be executed;
2. that ensures all trials and hearings with the death penalty as a sentence option would be administered fairly and impartially in accordance with due process;
3. and that the execution of mentally disabled persons and persons under the age of 18 would be prohibited.

**Although the Presbytery of the Western Reserve remains resolute in its outright opposition to capital punishment under any circumstance, we nonetheless call upon the Governor and our representatives in the State of Ohio to enact a moratorium on all executions until legislation is adopted that meets these three criteria.**

**Be it further resolved that copies of this resolution shall be forwarded to the Governor of the State of Ohio and our State Representatives.**

Date Resolved: \_\_\_\_\_

## **History of The Presbyterian Church and Capital Punishment**

### 171<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (UPCUSA, 1959) Statement:

Believing that capital punishment cannot be condoned by an interpretation of the Bible based upon the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ, that as Christians we must seek the redemption of evil doers and not their death, and that the use of the death penalty tends to brutalize the society that condones it,

The 171<sup>st</sup> General Assembly:

Declares its opposition to capital punishment,

Calls upon the judicatories and members of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America to work for the abolition of the death penalty in their respective states,

Urges the judicatories to seek the improvement of our various penal institutions and systems to the end that society may be protected and persons convicted of crime be rehabilitated...

### 178<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (PCUS, 1966) Statement:

The General Assembly goes on record as favoring the discontinuance of the use of capital punishment; and [directs] that the various governors and legislatures within the bounds of our church be notified of this decision.

### 189<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (UPCUSA, 1977) Statement:

1. Calls upon judicatories and members of the United Presbyterian Church to:
  - a. Work to prevent the execution of persons now under sentence of death and further use of the death penalty;
  - b. Work against attempts to reinstate the death penalty and state and federal law, and where such laws exist, to work for their repeal;
  - c. Work for the improvement of the justice system to make less radical means available for dealing with persons who are a serious threat to themselves and to the safety and welfare of society.

### 190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (PCUS, 1978) Statement:

Capital punishment is an expression of vengeance which contradicts the justice of God on the cross.

### 197<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (PC(USA), 1985) Statement:

1. Reaffirms the positions of the United Presbyterian General Assemblies of 1959, 1965, and 1977, and of the Presbyterian Church U.S. of 1966, and declares its continuing opposition to capital punishment.
2. Calls upon governing bodies and members to work for abolition of the death penalty in those states which currently have capital punishment statutes...

204<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1992) Statement:

2. Commends senatorial approval by the United States of America of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, regretting, however, the refusal to accept an end to capital punishment...

209<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1997) Statement:

The capital punishment situation in the United States continues to dramatize the relevance of past Presbyterian policies.

211<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1999) Statement:

**CAPTIAL PUNISHMENT:** Numerous General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor bodies have called for the abolition of the death penalty. The worsening capital punishment situation in the United States continues to dramatize the relevance of these Presbyterian policies.

212<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2000) Statement:

1. Reaffirm[s] the positions of the 171<sup>st</sup> (1959), 177<sup>th</sup> (1965), and 189<sup>th</sup> (1977) General Assemblies of the United Presbyterian Church and the 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1966) and the Presbyterian Church U.S., and the 197<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1985) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and declare its continuing opposition to capital punishment.
2. Calls for the immediate moratorium on all executions in all jurisdictions that impose capital punishment.
3. Directs the Stated Clerk of our General Assembly to communicate the call for an immediate moratorium and our continuing opposition to capital punishment to the President of the United States, our representatives in Congress, as well as the governors and legislators of the thirty-eight states with persons incarcerated while awaiting execution.

## **The Presbytery of the Western Reserve and Capital Punishment**

Overture 00-90.

On Seeking an Immediate Moratorium on All Executions in All Jurisdictions that Impose  
Capital Punishment –  
From the Presbytery of the Western Reserve.

Recommendation [Approved by the Assembly with amendment]

The Presbytery of the Western Reserve respectfully overtures the 212<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2000) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following:

1. Reaffirm the positions of the 171<sup>st</sup> (1959), 177<sup>th</sup> (1965), and 189<sup>th</sup> (1977) General Assemblies of the United Presbyterian Church, and the 106<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1966) of the Presbyterian Church U.S., and the 197<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1985) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and declare its continuing opposition to capital punishment.
2. Call for an immediate moratorium on all executions in all jurisdictions that impose capital punishment. [, the moratorium declarations to remain in place until the jurisdiction implements policies and procedures ensuring that execution cases are administered fairly and impartially, in accordance with due process, and in such manner as to minimize the risk of innocent persons being executed.]
3. Directs the Stated Clerk of our General Assembly to communicate the call for an immediate moratorium and our continuing opposition to capital punishment to the President of the United States, our representatives in Congress, as well as the governors and legislators of the thirty-eight states with persons incarcerated while awaiting execution.

Commentary related to the amendment (section 2):

The ACSWP, ACREC, and the ACWC advise that opposition to the death penalty has been a long-standing policy of the PC(USA), as well as its predecessor bodies. To call for a moratorium as a temporary measure, while study is conducted for fair and impartial administration of capital punishment, suggests that under certain conditions the General Assembly would agree that executions could be administered, which is contradictory to existing PC(USA) unconditional opposition to the death penalty.