

## **General Board of Church and Society Statement on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Methodist Church's Opposition to the Death Penalty**

At the 1956 General Conference, The Methodist Church stated, "We stand for the application of the redemptive principle to the treatment of offenders against the law, to reform of penal and correctional methods, and to criminal court procedures. We deplore the use of capital punishment."

We celebrate this prophetic statement and the fact that The Methodist Church was one of the first denominations in the United States to formally come out against the death penalty. The United Methodist Church maintains a strong stand against capital punishment as exemplified in the Book of Discipline,

We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings. The United Methodist Church is deeply concerned about crime throughout the world and the value of any life taken by a murder or homicide. We believe all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore, we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that the possibility of reconciliation with Christ comes through repentance. This gift of reconciliation is offered to all individuals without exception and gives all life new dignity and sacredness. For this reason, we oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.

In Matthew 25:38-39, Jesus pointedly refutes revenge as a basis of justice and commands his followers to compassionately serve even their enemies. In John 8:1-11, Jesus exonerates and redeems the woman caught in adultery who was to be put to death. Jesus refuses to uphold the use of the death penalty and as his followers we are called to do the same.

Therefore, we urge all United Methodists in their churches to practice transformative love, to comfort the victims of crime, to humanize those convicted of crime, and to advocate for an end to the death penalty in our criminal justice system.