



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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More than 550 Texas Faith Leaders Call for Abolition of the Death Penalty

Interfaith Statement of Opposition to the Death Penalty endorsed by leaders from 25 different faith traditions statewide

Austin, Texas – Today at a press conference at the State Capitol, representatives of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (TCADP) and Texas Impact gathered with faith leaders from across the state to release an Interfaith Statement of Opposition to the Death Penalty and Texas Rabbis’ and Cantors’ Statement of Opposition to the Death Penalty.

More than 550 religious and spiritual leaders statewide have endorsed the Interfaith Statement; among them, the signatories represent 25 different faith traditions, including Baptist, Buddhist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reform Judaism, and United Church of Christ. More than 20 Jewish leaders in Texas endorsed the accompanying Rabbis’ Statement.

Affirming the sanctity of human life and human capacity for redemption, the statements reflect both moral and practical concerns about the death penalty rooted in diverse religious traditions. The endorsing faith leaders call on elected officials to take a closer look at the reality of capital punishment in Texas and seek alternative ways to achieve healing and justice for all those who suffer in the wake of violent crimes. They declare “We should do all we can to make sure our state’s resources are directed towards the improvement of life, not its destruction.”

The signatories on the Interfaith Statement include all active and retired Bishops of The United Methodist Church in Texas and 265 United Methodist ministers from across the state. The United Methodist Church first adopted a statement opposing the death penalty in 1956.

“According to our Social Principles, the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore, and transform all human beings,” said Bishop Joe A. Wilson, who served as Bishop of the Central Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, headquartered in Fort Worth, from 1992 to 2000, and as Bishop-in-Residence at Southwestern University in Georgetown from 2001 to 2013. “The Church cannot accept retribution or social vengeance as a reason for taking human life.”

These statements come at a time of declining use of the death penalty both nationally and in Texas. New death sentences have dropped 80% in Texas over the last 15 years and remain isolated to just a few jurisdictions statewide. Last year the state carried out its fewest executions in nearly two decades. To date this year, three individuals have been put to death and three have received stays of execution. The State of Texas is scheduled to execute Manuel Vasquez on March 11, 2015.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood of Denton, who last year conducted a 200-mile pilgrimage from death row in Livingston to the State Capitol in Austin, said “It is my hope this Interfaith Statement will ignite the moral imagination of all people of faith in Texas so that we might rise up together with one courageous voice and declare the death penalty to be no more.”

Rabbi Susan Lippe of Austin said, “As Jewish leaders, we have grave concerns about the racist and arbitrary application of the death penalty and the possibility of executing an innocent person. With these statements, we declare no more executions in our name.”

The release of the Interfaith Statement occurred in conjunction with the first-ever Texas Faith Leader Advocacy Day on the Death Penalty. Participants are meeting today with legislators to deliver copies of the statement and voice their support for [House Bill 1527](#), sponsored by State Representative Jessica Farrar (District 148 -Houston), which would repeal the death penalty in Texas. Faith leaders will urge the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee to hold a hearing on the bill. State Rep. Jessica Farrar filed HB 1527 on February 17, 2015; she has sponsored similar legislation in every session since 2007.

“Texas Impact is proud to stand in partnership with the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty to heighten the visibility of faith-based opposition to the death penalty and persuade more elected officials and the public at large to embrace alternatives to its use,” said Rev. Tom Heger, a retired Presbyterian pastor from San Antonio and Texas Impact Board Member. “As the state’s oldest and largest statewide interfaith network, we believe faith communities play a critical role in public discussions about the future of capital punishment in our state.”

The text of the Interfaith Statement and full list of signatories, organized by region, is available at <http://tcadp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Final-Interfaith-Statement-of-Opposition-with-signatures-edited-3-25-15.pdf>.

The text of the Rabbis’ and Cantors’ Statement is available at <http://tcadp.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Rabbi-letter-with-signatures-updated-3-25-15.pdf>.

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