



MONTANA SYNOD

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Dear Montana Synod Congregations,

The death penalty is probably one of the most controversial topics in our society today. Montana and Wyoming, like so many other states, has provisions for capital punishment in our laws. Many citizens, and many Christians firmly believe in the importance of capital punishment.

Many Christians, however, and many citizens are against the death penalty for a variety of reasons. The reasons range from the practical—the relative costs, the possibility of error, the irreversibility—to the ethical—taking a life does not bring back a life, violence begets violence.


The ELCA adopted a social statement on capital punishment in 1991, providing various positions, but ultimately opposing the use of the death penalty. The Montana Association of Churches, an association of 10 major judicatories, also has a position paper against the death penalty, and been working for a number of years to convince lawmakers to replace the death penalty with life in prison without possibility of parole.

Working closely with the congregations of the Montana Association of Churches is the Montana Abolition Coalition, who provides advice and resources to interested congregations. The Montana Abolition Coalition and the Montana Association of Churches are encouraging member congregations to have an “Abolition Sunday” sometime during Lent. The Abolition Coalition will provide appropriate materials to assist congregations wishing to have an Abolition Sunday.

If your congregation is interested in having an Abolition Sunday, or if you wish to have one in conjunction with other churches in your community, please contact the Abolition Coalition at (406) 239-3421, or denverh@mtabolitionco.org. I would certainly be interested in hearing from you if you intend to pursue this, as well. The Abolition Coalition is particularly hopeful that congregations in Kalispell, Great Falls, Havre, Livingston, Arlee, Jordan, Circle, Laurel, Hamilton, and Billings will participate. Of course all congregations are welcome to participate. And no one has to.

The ELCA is a church that takes stands on social issues of the day, after prayer, study, dialogue and negotiation. You do not have to agree with a particular stand in order to be a part of this church. We acknowledge ambiguity and do not claim always to be right. But we do work to be faithful and respectful. And it is in this spirit that I offer you this opportunity to engage the issue of capital punishment.

In Christ,



Jessica Crist, Bishop