

# Abolition Sundays

*“Executions harm society by mirroring and reinforcing existing injustice. The death penalty distracts us from our work toward a just society. It deforms our response to violence at the individual, familial, institutional, and systemic levels. It perpetuates cycles of violence.”*

-Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) Social Practice Statement

Capital punishment will be a hot topic in Montana’s legislative session next year. Now is the time to educate ourselves about the issue and join in the effort to end the death penalty for good.

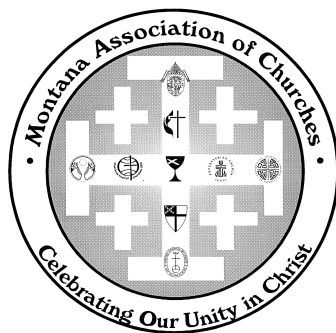
This spring, Bishop Jessica Crist and Montana Synod, along with the Montana Association of Churches and the Montana Abolition Coalition, invite you to participate in an **Abolition Sunday**.

## It’s easy!

In the next two weeks, you’ll receive a call from an Lutheran volunteer, offering support and encouragement. They can help connect you with many wonderful resources to assist your congregation in:

- Preaching on the topic
- Hosting a speaker
- Showing a film
- Facilitating a discussion
- Leading an adult education class
- Having a table with resources after services

Want to get started now? Contact Denver at [denverh@mtabolitionco.org](mailto:denverh@mtabolitionco.org) or (406) 239-3421.



**MONTANA**  
ABOLITION COALITION  
Ending the Death Penalty

[www.mtabolitionco.org](http://www.mtabolitionco.org)

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NEXT WEEK, our congregation will hold an **Abolition Sunday**—a project of the Montana Association of Churches, in partnership with the Montana Synod of the ELCA. This is an opportunity time to learn about, discuss, and take action on the death penalty in Montana.

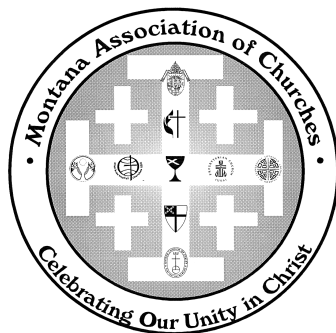
## Take part:

<fill in details about what the church is doing, for instance>

After the service, including a sermon about the death penalty by **Rev. Reverend**, join us in **Congregation Hall** for:

- A special guest speaker, **so-and-so**
- The film, **so-and-so**
- An open discussion
- A table with information and ways to get involved
- **So-and-so**, a grassroots organizer from the Montana Abolition Coalition

Can’t make it next week but want to learn more? Contact Denver at [denverh@mtabolitionco.org](mailto:denverh@mtabolitionco.org) or (406) 239-3421.



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# FAITH & FACTS: THE DEATH PENALTY



## What does the Bible say?

Thou shalt not kill. **(Exodus 20:13)**

Say to them, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live." **(Ezekiel 33:11)**

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. **(Leviticus 19:18)**

Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. **(John 8:3-11)**  
Jesus spares the life of a woman caught in adultery.

You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. **(Matthew 5:38-39)**

You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. **(Matthew 5:43-44)**

## What does the Lutheran Church say?

*Below is an excerpt of a lengthy social practice statement that was adopted at the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in Orlando, Florida, August 28-September 4, 1991.*

### A Climate of Violence

The human community is saddened by violence, and angered by the injustice involved. We want to hold accountable those who violate life, who violate society. Our sadness and anger, however, make us vulnerable to feelings of revenge. Our frustration with the complex problems contributing to violence may make us long for simple solutions.

Such are the circumstances under which we, as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, speak to the death penalty.

### Executions in the United States

Despite attempts to provide legal safeguards, the death penalty has not been and cannot be made fair. The race of the victim plays a role in who is sentenced to death and who is sentenced to life imprisonment, as do the gender, race, mental capacity, age, and affluence of the accused. The system cannot be made perfect, for biases, prejudices, and chance affect whom we charge with a capital crime, what verdict we reach, and whether appeals will be successful.

Since human beings are fallible, the innocent have been executed in the past and will inevitably be executed in the future. Death is a different punishment from any other; the execution of an innocent person is a mistake we cannot correct.

It is because of this church's concern regarding the actual use of the death penalty that we oppose its imposition. The practice of the death penalty undermines any possible moral message we might want to 'send.' It is not fair and fails to make society better or safer. The message conveyed by an execution, reflected in the attention it receives from the public, is one of brutality and violence.

### As a church organized for mission:

We recognize that the government bears responsibility for protecting people, and give it our support in the exercise of this function;

We commend public officials, and others, who shape the vision of a just society and work toward it;

We know the Church is called by God to be a creative critic of the social order, and to speak on behalf of justice, peace, and order;

We urge the abolition of the death penalty, and support alternative and appropriate punishment for capital crime, including the possibility of life sentence without parole;

We call for an ongoing reform of the criminal justice system, seeking means of incapacitation that protect citizens while limiting violence and holding open the possibilities for conversion and restoration, and for education for future responsible citizenship in society;

We direct state public policy offices and the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs to work against the death penalty and for alternative and appropriate punishment for capital crime, such as imprisonment for natural life;

We ask congregations, synods, agencies, and institutions of this church to support the work of state advocacy offices and the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs in effecting the abolition of the death penalty;

We seek ways to work with our ecumenical partners, with other faith groups, and with other organizations with similar goals.

## What do the facts say?

**Since 1973, over 135 people have been released from death row** with evidence of their innocence.<sup>1</sup>

**A 2009 national poll** commissioned by the Death Penalty Information Center found police chiefs **ranked the death penalty last among ways to reduce violent crime**. The police chiefs also considered the death penalty the least efficient use of taxpayers' money.

**A 2009 study found "no empirical support** for the argument that the existence or application of the death penalty deters prospective offenders from committing homicide."<sup>2</sup>

**Over 135 countries have abolished the death penalty** in law or practice. This includes nearly all of Europe, Central and South America, and numerous countries in Africa.

**States that practice the death penalty have higher murder rates** than states that do not. Specifically, in 2006, states that had capital punishment had a 40% higher murder rate than states that did not have capital punishment.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See Staff report, House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, Oct. 1993, with updates from the Death Penalty Information Center,

2. T. Kovandzic, L. Vieraitis and D. Paquette Boots, *Criminology and Public Policy*, University of Texas at Dallas, 2009.

3. See <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org>, keyword: "Deterrence, Consistently Lower Murder Rates"

## What do you say?

### Help start a conversation in your church:

- Sponsor a dialogue on topics related to the death penalty—reconciliation and forgiveness; innocence & wrongful convictions; bias and unfairness in the criminal justice system.
- Host a guest speaker who can share more information and experiences.
- Screen a film about the death penalty and host a "talk back" afterwards.
- Gather materials (fact sheets, petitions, etc.) and organize a table to educate church members and get them more involved.
- Tell your State Representative and Senator that the death penalty does not work in restoring victims or protecting society. Important resources used in pursuing and enforcing the death penalty must be redistributed to increase resources for crime prevention and victims' services.

### Join the Montana Abolition Coalition:

Advocate for replacing the death penalty with life without the possibility of parole by signing up at [www.mtabolitionco.org](http://www.mtabolitionco.org).