



## Let the One Who Is Without Sin Cast the First Stone

The federal government has not executed anyone for 17 years. Public support for the death penalty has declined. 21 states have abolished it's use for all crimes. Several other states have a moratorium on executions. Even so, the Trump administration restarted federal executions this month. Daniel Lee was killed July 13, Wesley Purkey was killed July 16, and Dustin Lee Honken was killed July 17. "As courts and judges haggled back and forth about the lives of individuals, any semblance of respect for life was shattered. According to his lawyers, Mr. Lee was strapped to a gurney for the final four hours of his life, while the legal challenges played out. Wesley Purkey suffered from mental illness and dementia, leaving many to question his awareness of what was happening to him." (Rachel Gross. "Death Row Support Project Reflects on First Federal Executions In 17 Years". Church of the Brethren *Newsline*. 7-18-2020.) Media witnesses said Honken's execution seemed to take longer than the other two (Mark Berman. "Justice Department Carries Out 3<sup>rd</sup> Federal Execution In Four Days". Washington Post [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/justice-dept-carries-out-third-federal-execution-in-four-days/2020/07/17/5afba3fa-c86f-11ea-8ffe-372be8d82298\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/justice-dept-carries-out-third-federal-execution-in-four-days/2020/07/17/5afba3fa-c86f-11ea-8ffe-372be8d82298_story.html).) The U.S. is the only country in the Americas that continues to carry out executions. Only Belarus and Russia in Europe have not abolished the death penalty. (Cornell Law School: Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide. <https://www.deathpenaltyworldwide.org/>) By the end of 2019 a majority of countries (106 of them) had abolished the death penalty and more than two thirds (142 of them) had abolished its use in law or practice (Amnesty International. "Death Penalty In 2019: Facts & Figures". <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/death-penalty-in-2019-facts-and-figures/>)

In the U.S. 173 prisoners on death row were exonerated and released between 1973 and 2019; nine of them in Ohio (Death Penalty Information Center <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/innocence#resources>). A 2014 National Academy of Sciences study found that as many as 1 in 25 people on death row are probably innocent. (Pema Levy. "One in 25 Sentenced to Death in the U.S. Is Innocent, Study Claims". *Newsweek*. 4-28-2014) Being sentenced to death has more to do with a person's ability to pay for a good lawyer; where the crime took place; the prejudices of law enforcement and the courts; the quality of the investigation of the case; and the race of the accused and the victim, than it does with the crime committed. 52% of all death sentences imposed and 56% of all prisoners on death row are in only 2% of the counties in the country (ACLU). Texas uses the death penalty more than any other state. The frequency of death sentences issued does not reflect a higher crime rate in those counties. Evidence indicates that the use of the death penalty does not detour crime. The financial cost of the death penalty is far higher than a life sentence, not to mention the strain on victim and the accused's families. Many victim's families are among those who do not support the death penalty.

In our 1987 statement on the death penalty, the Church of the Brethren said our understanding of God's will for us upholds the sanctity of human life and personality. "The Church of the Brethren is a New Testament church, interpreting the Old Testament in light of the New." We affirm our faith foundations in Israel's history but see it "through the renewing mind of Christ, who provides our pattern for living." The emphasis is on personal accountability and forgiveness. Only the sinless one can take life (John 8:7-11), putting the taking and giving of life only in God's hands. (Gen. 9:5). "Instead of passing judgement, Christ offers justice in the form of renewing, life-giving redemption." "There is an element of God in each of us, and so we must hold all human life as sacred. To take the life of any person is to destroy what has been created by God and redeemed by Christ. To admit that there are those who are beyond saving is to deny the ultimate power of redemption, the cross and the empty tomb." ([www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1987deathpenalty.html](http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1987deathpenalty.html)).

**Pray** for everyone who is quick to judge and all people in need of the renewing power of forgiveness. **Also**, continue to pray for those grieving COVID-19 loses & those put at risk of the virus by location, lack of protective measures, attitudes, or complacency.



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