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March 14, 2004

We, the Council for Ecumenical Student Christian Ministries, take this opportunity at our Spring 2004 Board Meeting to write and remind you of our firm opposition to capital punishment in the United States and around the world. We rest this opposition upon our unwavering reverence for the sanctity of human life and in accordance with position statements from the governing bodies of our member and associated denominations: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)¹, the Episcopal Church², the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America³, the Presbyterian Church (USA)⁴, The United Methodist Church⁵ and, United Church of Christ⁶.

We believe that the Death Penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights.

We believe that a return to the use of the death penalty can only lead to the further erosion of respect for life in our society.⁷

We believe that Christ through his sacrifice has given humanity and the Church a ministry of reconciliation, not revenge.

We believe that the Death Penalty is ineffective and observe that lifting the brief moratorium on capital punishment has done little or nothing to stem murder rates in the U.S.⁸

We believe that the irreversibility of capital punishment poses too great a risk to the innocent and observe that over one hundred individuals on death row have now been exonerated.

We believe that capital punishment is inequitable and observe that the majority on death row today are minorities, the poor, and the uneducated.

¹ "Moratorium on Capital Punishment." No. 9131 Sense-of-the-Assembly Resolution of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). October 25-30, 1991.

² "Capital Punishment." General Convention (of the Episcopal Church). 1979.

³ "A Social Statement on: The Death Penalty." Adopted by the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Orlando, Florida. August 28 – September 4, 1991.

⁴ "Continuing Opposition to Capital Punishment." Adopted by the 197 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). 1985.

⁵ "Capital Punishment." General Conference (of the United Methodist Church). 1980.

⁶ "Death Penalty." 12th General Synod of the United Church of Christ. 1979.

⁷ United States Catholic Conference, "Statement on Capital Punishment: *Committee on Social Development and World Peace*," March 1, 1978.

⁸ www.aiusa.org/abolish

We believe that the Death Penalty is in direct contradiction with our faith in a loving and forgiving God, and call upon you and the people of the United States to abolish the death penalty, and in doing so bring us into fellowship with modern West, into compliance with the U.N. International Declaration on Human Rights, and into a ministry of rehabilitation and reconciliation. As a body of young Christians, we add our voices to the many others that plead for abolition and demand that the state not kill in our name. The Council for Ecumenical Student Christian Ministries condemns the death penalty and instead supports continued efforts to attack crime at the roots – to fight against poverty, prejudice, ignorance, and injustice.

In all that we decide and in all that we do, we seek to be open to the Holy Spirit and to adhere to the teachings of the Lord set forth in Holy Scripture. Once again, we call upon the state and its respect for humanity to do all that it can to abolish the death penalty.

In Christ's Peace,

The Council for Ecumenical
Student Christian Ministry
(undersigned)