

WHEREAS: The Free Methodist Church values the worth of all humans, stating in the *BOD* ¶ 3221 that we will do so “regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, color, socio-economic status, disability, or any other distinctions (Acts 10:34-35) and will respect them as persons made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and redeemed by Christ’s death and resurrection”, and

WHEREAS we believe and state in that same paragraph that Christ “ministered to all without distinction and His death on the cross was for all (John 3:16; Romans 5:8)”, and

WHEREAS that same paragraph declares, “We are therefore pledged to active concern whenever human beings are demeaned, abused, depersonalized, enslaved or subjected to demonic forces in the world, whether by individuals or institutions (Galatians 3:28; Mark 2:27; 1 Timothy 1:8-10)”, and

WHEREAS in *BOD* ¶ 3222 entitled “The Sanctity of Life” we give guidance regarding reproductive technology (¶ 3222.A), abortion (¶ 3222.B), euthanasia (¶ 3222.C), and “other ethical dilemmas”, particularly pertaining to issues rising from advances in medical technology (¶ 3222.D), all under the stated conviction about “the inherent worth of human life”, and

WHEREAS this same paragraph counsels that “Christians may not determine their rights and privileges only by the extent of the permissiveness of the law of the state”, and

WHEREAS in our statements on “The Sanctity of Life” we say in ¶ 3222.B “that human life, whether in vitro, mature or senile, is sacred because life exists in relation to God”, and

WHEREAS in our statements in ¶ 3222.C we say that we “must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living” and that “there is no such thing as a ‘useless’ life” and that “the value and worth in our lives rests primarily in our relationship with a God who loves us”, and

WHEREAS the *BOD* ¶ 3221.A. speaks specifically “with regard to poverty” and *BOD* ¶ 3221.B speaks specifically “with regard to racism”, and

WHEREAS capital punishment is not applied equally across racial and other divides, disproportionately being utilized among the poor and persons of color¹, and

WHEREAS capital punishment is often justified as a deterrent to violent criminal activity, research shows this to be false², and

1 For example, (1) A study by the United States General Accounting Office on Death Penalty Sentencing found that in 82% of the cases reviewed, race of the victim was found to significantly influence the likelihood of receiving the death penalty, i.e., in interracial cases an Anglo who murdered an African-American was placed on death row 21 times whereas an African-American who murdered an Anglo was placed on death row 290 times. (2) Prof. Jack Boger and Dr. Isaac Unah of the University of North Carolina found that defendants whose victims are white are 3 ½ times more likely to be sentenced to death than those with non-white victims, saying, "The odds are supposed to be zero that race plays a role.... No matter how the data was analyzed, the race of the victim always emerged as an important factor in who received the death penalty." (3) Though African-Americans make up only 13 percent of the nation’s population, 42 percent of death row inmates are African-American, and 34 percent of those executed since 1976 have been African-American. (4) The Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations declared in 2017 that “if you are poor, the chances of being sentenced to death are immensely higher than if you are rich.... In practice it is really a penalty reserved for people from lower socio-economic groups. This turns it into a class-based form of discrimination in most countries.”

2 According to a December 2018 report by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, research indicated that nations that eliminate the death penalty saw a decrease in the amount of violent crimes such as murder. Further, the report concluded that “death penalty advocates’ fears that the state relinquishing the ultimate punishment will embolden potential criminals, or at least weaken deterrence, prove to be unfounded in light of this evidence.”

WHEREAS the Old Testament statements that urge or legislate capital punishment belong to an earlier stage in the process of biblical revelation that preceded the emergence of the notion of punishment in the afterlife and thus assumed that any full and vigorous punishment must be enacted in the present life, a view that has been superseded by the concept of future judgment as taught in the New Testament, and

WHEREAS Paul's reference to rulers who "bear the sword" (Romans 13:4) was not intended to advocate capital punishment but simply expresses, in vivid language understandable according to the practices of the Roman Empire, the appropriate exercise of criminal sanctions by governmental authorities, and

WHEREAS the biblical insistence that "the Lord is forbearing, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9) suggests the divine desire that we should do nothing to cut short a life in such a way as to foreclose the possibility of repentance, and

WHEREAS capital punishment, commonly referred to as the death penalty, ends once and for all the possibility of awareness of sin, confession of sin, and restoration to new life, and

WHEREAS in our clear statements on "The Sanctity of Life" we currently take no position on the death penalty,

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED:

That the following be included as the new paragraph 3222.D, entitled "Capital Punishment":

The Free Methodist Church is deeply grieved when any life is taken by murder. We believe that persons who commit these or other horrendous crimes should be justly punished by just laws. Nevertheless, we believe that all human life is sacred, created by God, and therefore we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends. In well documented studies innocent people have become condemned and executed, in which cases a sentence meant to bring justice becomes an additional and irreversible form of injustice. For these reasons, the FMC deems the death penalty as currently applied to be inconsistent with our commitments to the sanctity of life.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

that current paragraph 3222.D entitled "Other Ethical Dilemmas" be subsequently moved to paragraph 3222.E.