



**Connecticut Conference
United Church of Christ**

125 Sherman Street
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**Testimony in Support of HB 6425 "An Act Revising the Penalty for Capital Felonies and SB
1035 "An Act Repealing the Death Penalty"**

Submitted by Reverend Charles Wildman, Interim Conference Minister of the Connecticut
Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Throughout my forty years in pastoral ministry, I argued against the death penalty. In that long
period, hundreds of people have been executed. In Connecticut, the debate rages on.

What justifies the taking of the life of someone accused of a heinous crime? I cannot find a faithful
rationale. Granted, some crimes are unspeakably horrible. My heart goes out to the Cheshire family
whose lives were brutally taken in an afternoon of pure evil. But how does the taking of the lives of the
perpetrators atone for the damage done? "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life" only
leaves everyone maimed or dead.

This conclusion may have influenced Jesus' new teachings. Considering the commandment,
"Thou shalt not kill," in the context of his society, he likely saw that killing only made things worse.
Ghandi adopted a pure pacifist position against all war and violence no matter how well justified by
context. Each of us must react to this logical extension of the commandment when it comes to self-
defense against threats to ourselves or our loved ones; or to the demands of war time. God's forgiveness
and grace are available to everyone who sincerely repents. Jesus did not promise that discipleship would
be easy.

Capital punishment presents a justice issue. It is no accident that the majority of those who have
been executed are from minority communities where poverty and substance abuse are rampant. Economic
injustice is an incubator for violence. Recent media reports assert that one in three Black young men will
be incarcerated sometime during late adolescence or early adulthood. And these are the very people who
cannot afford quality legal representation leading to often ill-trained and overburdened public defenders
taking their cases. New DNA testing has revealed that false convictions and executions are not
uncommon. We will never know how many innocent lives have been taken.

Human life is cheapened for all of us when we turn our backs on Jesus' teaching and sociological facts
concerning the death penalty. Fear and emotional reactions to ugly crimes must not lead us to lash out in
anger. For the well-being of our families, communities and ourselves, prayer and clear thinking must
finally govern our decision on the death penalty- and hopefully lead us to express our views to elected
officials and work with the growing effort in our state to influence the outcome of the next votes.

The Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ is the largest Protestant denomination in th
state with 250 churches statewide and well over 100,000 members.



God is still speaking.

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