

to an understanding of the need to reconcile with God and seek forgiveness. In this warden's understanding, heaven has a place for the condemned as well as for the victim.

Sometimes, mercy emerges from the fact that the last words of the sentence are far from the end of the process of justice, which demands meticulous attention to the possibility of error. Multiple appeals can take years, even decades, with many lawyers, courts and judges reviewing a case. Our governor, at his sole discretion, can and does extend mercy through his absolute power of commutation and pardon, which cannot be overturned by anyone.

North Carolina is one of a majority of states whose citizens, including Moravians, have determined the need to draw an ethical and moral line, by law, that allows and supports this exacting judicial process. Moravian citizens have an obligation to obey the law. We also have the right to advocate change in the law to reflect what we believe to be right, just and humane.

Whether one supports or opposes the death penalty is not, of course, only a question of citizenship. Certainly it is a question of individual moral conviction and the understanding of Christian duty. How can and should North Carolina Moravians express those convictions? Some volunteer in prison ministries. Sister McOwat's work with LifeLines is commendable. Some are lawyers and judges, committed to the integrity of the judicial process. Many of us are — and all of us should

be — active participants in the governance of our state, our nation and our church.

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## Rebecca Craver

Thank you, Sister McOwat, for your insightful words and challenge to the North America Moravian Church in regard to the death penalty. I believe that the death penalty has been part of human government for millennia in order to serve as an example and deterrent to murder and other crimes which take away the lives of others. While I believe that we should be held accountable in our societies for actions which demean and take away the lives of our fellow human beings, the death penalty does not serve this purpose. If it was in fact a deterrent then there would be far fewer people on death row this very day. As I read your paper I was in agreement with your arguments against the death penalty and with the facts that you shared to back up your argument. I would like to try and answer the question you posed at the beginning; in hopes of explaining the way one could support the death penalty in the USA.

“I need to understand, as a Moravian, why it is that so many of our Moravian brothers and sisters in the USA feel that the death penalty is both morally and ethically acceptable whereas

most European Moravians take a different view. What is it about our cultures, or belief systems, that makes for this difference?”

The cultural myth of North America is that each individual is free. In that freedom we are all expected to respect the freedom of others by allowing them to carry on their lives unharmed or hindered by another. This freedom also dictates that when an individual does not allow for another to live, then they have given up, *by choice*, the rights inherent to them. In an idealistic and philosophical sense this is true. If we all respected the individual rights and freedoms of others there would be no need for a judicial system because society would carry on without needing to focus on that.

However, the world we live in is much less than ideal. The interpretation of freedom and the equality of all is warped by a history filled with racism, classism, and violence of many kinds; not unlike any other human society that I have heard of. The freedom that would seem to clearly alleviate the need to kill or be killed does not function as it would in its most ideal sense. We tend to use the ideal as the basis for making judgements of what is real in our society.

Clearly there is a disconnect between the ideal and the real which causes the dilemmas you mentioned: killing innocent people, recognizing the reality of the disproportionate amount of people on death row who are poor and disenfranchised, the effect race has on the outcome of trials, and the lack of forgiveness and hope for reconciliation or rehabilitation in

the decision to execute another human being, etc. It is for those same reasons that many United States citizens do not support the death penalty.

It is difficult to go against the myth, in the sense of a defining story of a people group or nation, of freedom in the USA. I believe that our culture holds tight to the ideals of our founders who, not so many years ago, established this government on the basis of inalienable rights and the dignity of humankind. However, throughout those years we have known slavery, civil war, racism, male-dominated discourse and power which we are still experiencing and struggling with. It is a mix of denial, disconnectedness from the victims of capital punishment and privilege that creates the possibility and probability of a positive attitude towards the death penalty among US citizens. If we each knew someone who faced such a sentence I believe our opinions would change significantly. Many North American Moravians can avoid the reality of the injustice of our capital punishment system because there is a large disparity between the privileged and disenfranchised. We must make ourselves see and work for justice in all matters.

I believe that growth is a long process and I appreciate the voices of others who call out my own ideals and thoughts in order that I might re-access my own beliefs to adhere more fully to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we all profess.

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