

A RESOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTION
EXPRESSION OF OPPOSITION TO MASSACHUSETTS SENTENCES OF LIFE
IMPRISONMENT WITHOUT OPPORTUNITY FOR PAROLE

Presented by Christ's Community Church, Chicopee and First Congregational Church, UCC, Ashfield

- 1 WHEREAS the desolation of hopelessness is recorded in the book of Lamentations, “He has made my teeth grind on gravel,
2 and made me cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, ‘Gone is my glory, and
3 all that I had hoped for from the Lord’,” (Lamentations 3:16-18);
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- 5 AND WHEREAS hope comes to prisoners from Jesus’ reading of the Isaiah scroll, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
6 because he has anointed me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go
7 free” (Luke 4:18);
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- 9 AND WHEREAS our Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ aspires to bring about the justice of Jesus;
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- 11 AND WHEREAS the sentence of life without opportunity for parole is known as “Life without Hope” or “The Other Death
12 Sentence,” or, in the words of the late former governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, in defending his position against the
13 death penalty, “Death by Incarceration”;
- 14 AND WHEREAS while federal death penalty trials are still held in Massachusetts, there is little interest among Massachu-
15 setts citizens for reviving the Massachusetts death penalty, which has not been responsible for executing anyone since 1947;
16
- 17 AND WHEREAS former Annual Meetings have passed resolutions opposing the death penalty in our 163rd Annual Meeting
18 (1962), 164th Annual Meeting (1963), 183rd Annual Meeting (1982); 191st Annual Meeting (1990), 192nd Annual Meeting
19 (1991), and in our 199th Annual Meeting (1998);
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- 21 AND WHEREAS 1,035 inmates in Massachusetts prisons were serving the sentence of life without opportunity for parole,
22 on January 1, 2016;
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- 24 AND WHEREAS a major expense of our Massachusetts prison system is the care of elderly inmates who would be unlikely
25 to commit a crime if released, and whose incarceration costs may increase from \$50,000/yr. for a healthy inmate to up to
26 \$150,000/yr. for a seriously ill inmate;
27
- 28 AND WHEREAS Massachusetts people are serving the sentence of life without opportunity for parole for convictions
29 resulting from a first degree murder, for being an accomplice to a felony in which a person was unintentionally killed and
30 where the accomplice played a minor role (e.g. get-away driver); for a third felony conviction for 18 various crimes not
31 resulting in a death but which carry a possible sentence of up to life even when the first two felony convictions were for
32 lesser crimes; and for being wrongfully convicted of murder though factually innocent;
- 33 AND WHEREAS commutation for those sentenced to life without parole are very close to non-existent, the last such
34 commutation in Massachusetts occurring in 1997;
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- 36 AND WHEREAS Massachusetts people serving life without opportunity for parole, their families, loved ones and
37 communities are organizing against this sentence;
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- 39 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 218th Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of
40 Christ go on record in opposition to the sentence of life without opportunity for parole, urging that all life sentences include
41 parole opportunity;
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- 43 AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Conference distribute this resolution to all member churches of
44 the Massachusetts Conference, to all members of the Massachusetts legislature, to Attorney General Maura Healey, and to
45 Governor Charlie Baker.
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- 47 **MA DOC Prison Population Trends 2015*