

Latino evangelicals call for end to death penalty

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—A leading group of Latino evangelicals has called for an end to state-sanctioned capital punishment, the first national association of evangelicals to do so.

In a unanimous vote, the [National Latino Evangelical Coalition](#) urged its 3,000 member congregations to seek an end to capital punishment across the country.



The National Latino Evangelical Coalition urged its 3,000 member congregations to seek an end to capital punishment. (RNS Photo courtesy of Heather Beaudoin) “As Christ followers, we are called to work toward justice for all,” coalition President Gabriel Salguero said. “And as Latinos, we know too well that justice is not always even-handed.”

The decision came after a years-long discernment process that included prayer as well as dialogue with anti-death penalty groups like Equal Justice USA since at least 2013, Salguero said.

“EJUSA has found that evangelicals are eager to take another look at this issue, reflecting what we’re seeing in the country as a whole,” said Shari Silberstein, executive director of Equal Justice USA.

The vote came days after an Arizona court [exonerated Debra Milke](#), a woman who spent more than two decades on death row.

American support for the death penalty has hit the [lowest levels in 40 years](#), and a 2014 poll by Barna Group showed Christian support for the practice also is waning, especially among young adults. According to Barna, only 5 percent of Americans think [Jesus would support](#) the government’s ability to execute the worst criminals.

Many religious groups, including the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#), oppose the death penalty, but evangelical groups tend to take a more conservative stance.

The 16 million-member Southern Baptist Convention, America’s largest Protestant denomination, issued a resolution in 2000 supporting [“the fair and equitable use of capital punishment.”](#) The Assemblies of God reports opinion among its members is “mixed” but more people associated with the Assemblies [favor it](#) for certain types of crimes.

While the Latino coalition was the first to take this stance, “I don’t think they will be the last,” Silberstein said.

The National Association of Evangelicals supports capital punishment. But its position [hasn’t been updated since 1973](#), and sources within the NAE say leadership is considering a change.

“The truth is that a fallen system does not mete out justice with equanimity,” Salguero said. “The gospel calls us to speak out for life, and our unanimous decision today to call for the end of capital punishment is part of that commitment.”