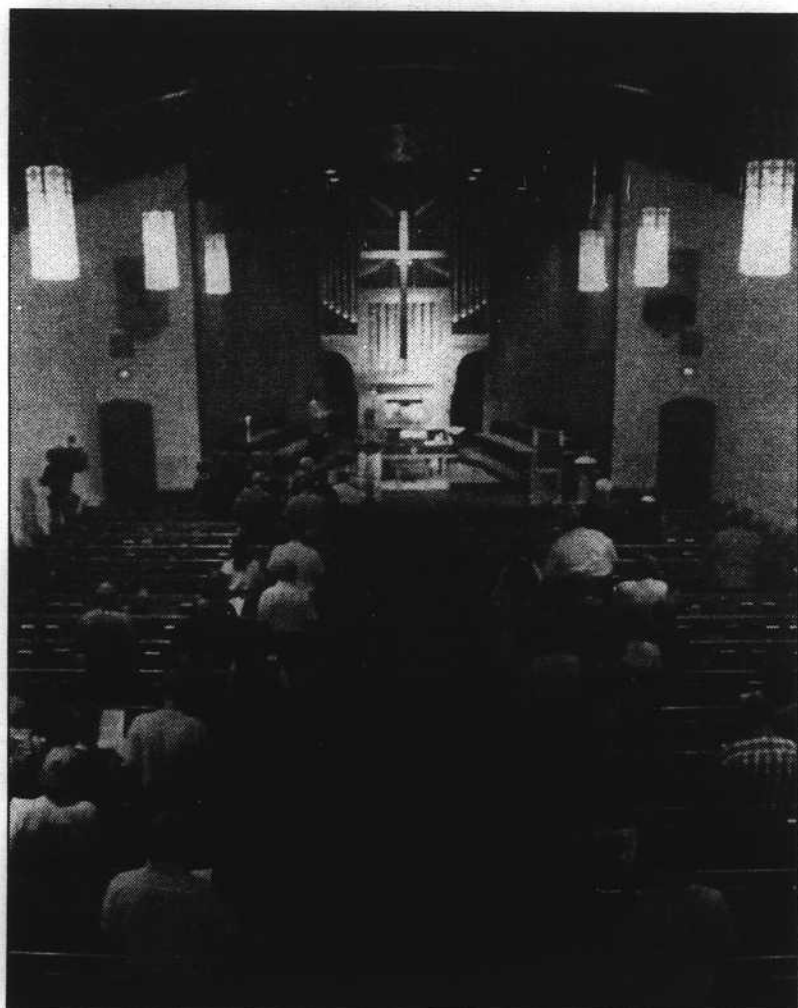




Tanna Kinnaman/DN  
 Sheri VanMeveren, from Eagle, shares a quiet moment with her daughter, Alicia, before an interfaith prayer service at Christ United Methodist Church Tuesday.

# Praying for change

*Lincoln church-goers banded together the night of John Joubert's execution, hoping that next time, Nebraskans will make a different choice*



Mami Speck/DN  
 Tuesday night about 80 people attend an interdenominational service at Christ United Methodist Church to protest the death penalty.

By Heidi White  
 Staff Writer

Sarah and T.J. Kripal believe in respecting life in all of its stages, including those of a man condemned for killing children.

The couple, both members of Amnesty International, attended an interfaith prayer service held Tuesday night at Christ United Methodist Church, 4530 A St., to show their support for the abolition of the death penalty.

"We both believe that the death penalty is wrong, that killing is wrong, whether it's done by an individual or the state," Sarah said.

The vigil was held just hours before convicted child-killer John Joubert was executed in Nebraska's electric chair early Wednesday morning.

More than 80 people attended the service, where religious leaders of different faiths read scriptures, led prayers and songs and shared personal stories relating to the death penalty.

Sarah said she had no personal sympathy for Joubert, but she did not believe that his life should be taken.

"Sun shines on the bad as well as the good," she said.

Kristy Abraham, coordinator for Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty, attended the service to join in praying against capital punishment for moral and religious reasons.

Abraham said the death penalty challenged the sanctity of life. She also said it was arbitrarily applied, racist and that some innocent people were wrongly executed.

She said there were a lot of supporters of the death penalty who changed their mind after the execution of Harold Lamont Otey on Sept. 2, 1994. She also said that she thought every execution brought abolition of the death penalty closer.

"I think when people start becoming educated on the issue, they see the death penalty is wrong,"

she said.

Marj Marlette, a member of the Unitarian church, said that she felt anguish because she thought it was wrong to kill, that it was getting worse all the time.

"We're so disgusted by violence in society, but we as a society contribute to it by sanctioning killing as a retribution," she said.

Ruth Thone, a Quaker, said she was holding in her grief concerning executions.

"I started crying earlier today," Thone said. "One murder does not justify another."

Rev. Jay Vetter of Christ United Methodist Church, said there was no doubt Joubert's crime was terrible, and his heart goes out to the community of Bellevue and the victim's families.

However, Vetter said he was against the death penalty because it contradicts his faith and understanding of the redemption of God's love, and that it doesn't help to overcome the violence in our nation.

Reverend Stephanie Ahlschwede of Trinity United Methodist Church, who spoke at the service, said it was very helpful to hear words of encouragement from other people.

"I came here feeling sick to my stomach and really depressed and sad, but now I'm feeling peaceful, restful and hopeful about it," Ahlschwede said.

She said although the victim's families have been through terrible things, the circumstances leading to Joubert's execution did not challenge her faith that the death penalty is wrong.

The Kripal's, who are Catholic, hold the same belief.

Sarah said Catholic bishops and Pope John Paul II speaking out against the death penalty helped to reinforce her beliefs.

T.J. said the death penalty is an injustice. "God said 'Whatsoever you do to the rest of my brothers, you do unto me,'" he said.