

CATHOLIC TEACHING ON THE DEATH PENALTY

“Our witness to respect for life shines most brightly when we demand respect for each and every human life, including the lives of those who fail to show that respect for others. The antidote to violence is love, not more violence.”

—USCCB, *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998), no. 22

In its traditional teaching as summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Church affirms the right and duty of legitimate public authority “to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense” (no.2266). Recourse to the death penalty is not absolutely excluded (see no. 2267): the death penalty is not intrinsically evil, as is the intentional taking of innocent life through abortion or euthanasia (see nos. 2271, 2277). Nevertheless, the Church teaches that in contemporary society where the state has other non-lethal means to protect its citizens, the state should not use the death penalty (see no. 2267).

In his encyclical *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II asserted that punishment “ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent.”

The *Catechism* also makes clear that if other ways exist to protect society, the death penalty should not be permitted: “If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people’s safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person.

A Culture of Life and the Death Penalty,
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 2005

DEATH PENALTY IN OHIO

- ◆ As of October 2010, there are 149 men and 1 woman on Ohio’s death Row.
- ◆ Since 1999, forty-one persons have been executed in Ohio.
- ◆ **Mistakes occur.** Since 1973, 138 persons in 26 states have been released from death row with evidence of innocence. Five were from Ohio. Since 1981, in Ohio, about one-quarter of the death sentences are overturned in appeals.
- ◆ Race plays a factor. In Ohio, and throughout the U.S., offenders who kill a white person are more likely to be sentenced to death than if they kill a person of color.
- ◆ The death penalty is more expensive than life imprisonment. The cost of a single death penalty case from arrest to execution ranges from \$3 Million to \$7 Million. The average cost for life imprisonment in Ohio is around \$1 Million.
- ◆ Better alternatives exist. Other states and other countries have found alternatives to executions. More than half of the countries in the world no longer use the death penalty.
- ◆ The Ohio General Assembly should abolish the death penalty.

Source: *Ohio Public Defenders, Death Penalty Information Center*

- ◆ *The death penalty is unnecessary and arbitrary. It is not absolutely necessary for the safety of the citizens of Ohio to execute anyone.*
- ◆ *There are better approaches to protecting people from violent crime. Long-term imprisonment can be a firm, effective and just alternative.*
- ◆ *All persons have human value and dignity, regardless of their actions.*
- ◆ *The application of the death penalty has been discriminatory toward the poor, the mentally disabled and racial minorities.*
- ◆ *Mistakes are occurring. Innocent persons have been sentenced to death in our country.*
- ◆ *The death penalty system is fallible, costly, time consuming and uneven. Ohio's system should be studied prior to any more executions.*

For a wide range of resources to help individuals, parishes and dioceses participate in the **“Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty”** go to www.ccedp.org.

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CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN TO END THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY

