

TEACHINGS & RESOURCES

ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Catholic Bishops of Ohio

1996

In this booklet you will find two companion teaching statements on the issue of the death penalty.

The first is our 1996 Ohio Bishops' Statement: "Affirming Justice and Mercy." It reflects recent papal and catechetical teachings calling for "bloodless means" of punishment and the use of the death penalty only in cases of "absolute necessity" - cases which Pope John Paul II calls "very rare, if not practically nonexistent."

This Statement also includes additional emphasis on ministry to victims, increased education, and a call to replace Ohio's death penalty with life imprisonment.

The second document is our Ohio Bishops' 1987 Statement: "Justice and Mercy: Reassessing the Death Penalty." In this, we offer a more detailed framework for moral decision making on this issue. We examine moral principles and the Gospel call to justice, love, mercy and forgiveness.

This booklet also includes study questions and resource listings which we hope will lead you to further reflection, prayer and action on this challenging life issue.

May the Holy Spirit guide and sustain you.

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

Death Penalty Should Not Be Used

The Church has consistently taught that legitimate public authority has the right to impose capital punishment, but it has increasingly taught that such authority ought not use this right.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

“...Punishment has a medicinal value; as far as possible it should contribute to the correction of the offender. If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor.. .public authority should limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.” (Section 2266 & 2267).

Gospel of Life, Pope John Paul II

“...The nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and 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 nonexistent.” (Section 55).

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AFFIRMING JUSTICE & MERCY

Catholic Bishops of Ohio

June 28, 1996

In 1987 we issued a statement “Justice and Mercy: Reassessing the Death Penalty.” We also published several educational booklets as tools for further prayer, reflection and study.¹ In these documents we emphasized our conviction that capital punishment is not the most effective way for today’s society to punish criminals and protect society. It does not rehabilitate; it is no more effective as a deterrent to violence than other less dire penalties; and as a form of retribution, it adds to the confusion in our society about the sacredness of life. We continue to stand by these convictions.

We offer these further reflections now because we know how easy it is to “harden one’s heart” against those persons on death row.

Dear Friends,

One of the most challenging teachings of Jesus Christ was His command for us to love our enemies (Lk.6:27; Matt.5:43). It is so easy for retribution to become revenge; for angers, fears and prejudices to exercise negative influence on our public actions. The very violence that frightens us so much ought not make us proponents of violence.

We are keenly aware of the anger, pain and grief experienced by victims of violent crime and their families. Their sense of loss and outrage can be overwhelming. As Christians, we are called to help victims and their families bear these burdens so that even in the midst of their suffering, they can experience the comfort and support of a caring Christian community.

In our national bishops’ message “Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action,” we lament the increased use of violent measures to deal with difficult social problems. We observe how abortion is used in addressing problem pregnancies; euthanasia and assisted suicide are advocated to cope with burdens of age and illness; and the death penalty is promoted to deal with crime. We write: “A society which destroys its children, abandons its old and relies on vengeance fails fundamental moral tests. Violence is not the solution; it is the clearest sign of our failures.”²

We believe there is a firm and effective alternative to the death penalty; life imprisonment. Such a sentence provides just punishment, helps bring closure to victims' families, eases the burdens on our court system, and will even save our public justice system millions of dollars. Acknowledgment of human dignity and preserving public safety do not need to be contradictory goals.

MORAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Church's commitment to the intrinsic value and dignity of human life is the basis for our opposition to the use of the death penalty. In the 1995 Encyclical Letter "The Gospel of Life," Pope John Paul II cites the Scriptural example of God's punishment of Cain to remind us that "not even a murderer loses his personal dignity." While Cain himself is punished by God, he is not destroyed. The mark of Cain, a visible sign of his offense, was also intended to protect and defend Cain from the violence and hatred of those who might wish to avenge Abel's death. Quoting St. Ambrose, the Pope writes: "God, who preferred the correction, rather than the death of a sinner, did not desire that a homicide be punished by the execution of another act of homicide."³

This does not mean that the Church opposes the punishment of a wrongdoer. Punishment can be a vehicle for the correction and conversion of the sinner, as well as for the restoration of the public order made chaotic by the perpetrated crime. Restitution to the families of victims is a component of such restoration.

Just punishment also incorporates another purpose which is the defense of society and its members. However, if it is not absolutely necessary to use the death penalty to achieve this purpose, we are obligated to use "bloodless means" (Catechism of CC 2267). Pope John Paul II states "the nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and 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 nonexistent."⁵

MINISTRY TO VICTIMS

The Gospel calls us to be healing instruments of God's peace. In the teaching about the Good Samaritan, we learn that we must "see" the victims; compassionately respond to their immediate needs; provide follow-up support; and remember to "return" to further share Christ's healing message of love and forgiveness. Too often our call for compassion and concern for the offender is misread as overshadowing our concern and empathy for victims and their loved ones. Such is not our intent.

We commit the Church's ministry to extend effective outreach and support services to victim families and friends. Abiding with the victim is essential for that person's

physical, emotional and spiritual healing. Never is one's faith in a loving God more vulnerable than when suffering strikes in a swift and meaningless fashion. As bishops, we remind priests and other ministers of the Gospel of our mutual duty to attend quickly to victims in order to pray with them and witness the love of God to them by our compassionate presence.

At the same time, our faith also beckons us not to abandon the offender, to love this person in Christ, and work and pray for his or her moral conversion and rehabilitation. We emphasized in 1987 that no human life, no matter how sinful or lacking in love, is without value. We continue our call for the humane treatment of offenders including access to religious materials and services, family contacts, and physical exercise.

INCREASED EDUCATION

We strongly support increased efforts by pastors, educators and ministers to guide our parishioners in moral decision making. This religious teaching will provide a moral framework necessary for the proper formation of conscience. Such a framework is grounded in Scripture and a consistent set of principles which reflect the sacredness of all human life and a commitment to those things which make life truly human.⁶

CALL TO PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

It is not absolutely necessary for the defense of society and the citizens of Ohio to execute anyone. We believe Ohio's death penalty system, as it stands today, is morally flawed due to racial bias, unequal application and mistaken judgments.⁷ We are deeply concerned that persons with diminished culpability due to mental retardation and/or established suicidal tendencies are being sentenced to death.⁸

We encourage public officials to replace the death penalty with life imprisonment. While public opinion currently favors executions, we believe public opinion on this issue has been shaped by misconceptions, overstated fears, and a desire for easy solutions.⁹

We encourage public officials to direct more time and resources toward promoting rehabilitation, education, and prevention. The answer to crime is not as simple as more prisons and more executions. It also involves constructing a society where every person has the opportunity to participate in economic and social life with dignity and responsibility.

May the redemptive love of God which can change hearts, convert people, and renew all things guide us as we reflect, study, pray and act on this issue.

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO, 1996

FOOTNOTES

1. "Justice & Mercy: Reassessing the Death Penalty;" Sourcebook, Secondary Education Curriculum Guide, Adult Education Guide, Homily Themes & Illustrations. Pastoral Statement. Catholic Conference of Ohio, 1987.
2. "Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action." Catholic Bishops of the United States, U.S.C.C. Office of Publication, November, 1994.
3. "Evangelium Vitae (Gospel of Life): Encyclical Letter on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life." Pope John Paul II. March 25, 1995, Chapter 1, Section 9.
4. "Catechism of the Catholic Church". Libreria Editrice Vaticans, Article 5, The Fifth Commandment Sections 2259-2267.
5. "Evangelium Vitae." Pope John Paul II, Chapter III, Sections 55-56.
6. "Centesimus Annus" Encyclical Letter on the Hundredth Anniversary of "Rerum Novarum." Pope John Paul II. May 2, 1991. "Consistent Ethic of Life." A Letter to Participants of the 1988 convocation on the Consistent Ethic of Life. Catholic Bishops of Ohio, June, 1988.
7. "State Defender's Report." Ohio Public Defender Commission. The Death Penalty Information Center. Washington DC. Radelet, Bedau and Putnam, "In Spite of Innocence" (1992) and Bedau and Radelet, "Miscarriages of Justice in Potentially Capital Cases" Stanford Law Review (1987). "The Morality of Capital Punishment: Equal Justice Under the Law?" Michael E. Endres, Ph.D. Xavier University, Twenty-Third Publications, 1985.
8. "State Defender's Report," Ohio Public Defender Commission and Ohio Supreme Court case files regarding Ohio death row inmates.
9. "Sentencing for Life: Americans Embrace Alternatives to the Death Penalty." Death Penalty Information Center. Washington DC. April, 1993.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name at least two ways people can respond to feelings of outrage, anger and fear which are associated with violent crime.
2. Name three examples cited in the Ohio Bishops' Statement where violent measures are used as a solution to difficult social problems.
3. Name at least three reasons why the Catholic Bishops in Ohio believe life imprisonment is a firm and effective alternative to the death penalty.
4. Describe the "mark of Cain" and explain its significance to the use of the death penalty.
5. Describe the church's teaching about just punishment as it relates to the use of the death penalty.
6. What does the parable of the Good Samaritan teach us about responding to victims of violent crime?
7. Describe the moral framework necessary for the proper formation of conscience.
8. In response to violent crime, name three areas in which public officials ought to direct more of their time and resources

POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Ways to respond to outrage over violent crime include:

- a. Prayerfully reflect upon the teachings of Jesus which call us to love our enemies.
- b. Reach out to support and comfort victims and their loved ones.
- c. Promote nonviolent solutions including restitution.
- d. Work with parish and diocese to develop effective outreach and support services to victim families and friends.
- e. Pray for healing and reconciliation.

2. Examples where violent measures are used as social solutions include:

- a. Abortion to solve problem pregnancies.
- b. Euthanasia and assisted suicide to cope with burdens of age and illness.
- c. Death penalty to deal with crime.

3. Reasons why life imprisonment is an effective alternative include:

- a. Provides just punishment
- b. More consistent with our belief in the intrinsic value and dignity of human life.
- c. Helps bring closure to victims' families.
- d. Eases the burdens on our court system.
- e. Save our public justice system millions of dollars.
- f. Allows for moral conversion and rehabilitation.
- g. Is an available "bloodless" means of punishment.

4. The "mark of Cain" was a visible sign of his offense and was intended to protect and defend Cain from capital punishment. It's significance is as a reminder that "not even a murderer loses his personal dignity" and that God prefers correction over execution.

5. Just punishment as it relates to defense of society obligates society to use “bloodless means” of punishment. Executions may only be used in cases of “absolute necessity” when it is the only means available to defend society. However, today, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are “rare” and practically “nonexistent.” The Ohio Bishops have stated it is not “absolutely necessary for the defense of society and the citizens of Ohio to execute anyone.”

6. The “Good Samaritan” teaches us to:

- a. “See” the victims.
- b. Compassionately respond to immediate needs.
- c. Provide follow-up support.
- d. “Return” to further share Christ’s healing message of love & forgiveness.
- e. Respond quickly to victims of crime.
- f. To pray and witness God’s compassion.
- g. Respond to even our enemies, no matter how sinful or lacking in love.

7. The framework for moral decisions is grounded in Scripture and a consistent set of principles reflecting the sacredness of all human life and a commitment to those things which make life truly human.

8. Public officials ought to promote:

- a. Rehabilitation
- b. Education
- c. Prevention
- d. Helping construct a society where every person can participate with dignity and responsibility.

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JUSTICE & MERCY: REASSESSING THE DEATH PENALTY (1987)

The Present Situation

We are troubled by the increasing use and acceptance of the death penalty throughout the United States, and in particular by the prospect of the resumption of its use in Ohio.

The death penalty has been employed with increasing frequency in our country in recent years. After a moratorium between 1967 and 1977, twelve states¹ have resumed executions. Several other states, including Ohio, have imposed the death sentence and could commence executions.

In Ohio it has been twenty-four years since the last execution of a death sentence. During this time our state law providing for the death penalty was twice determined to be unconstitutional.² The current law was enacted in 1981. Seventy persons have been sentenced and are awaiting the death penalty in Ohio.³

Many conscientious citizens favor the restoration of the death penalty. They are outraged over frequent murders and senseless acts of brutality. They know that the state has the right and the duty to protect citizens by punishing those guilty of violent crime and protecting society from their threat, and that the state must have the means to perform this task effectively.

When the bishops of Ohio addressed this issue in 1977 we stressed our belief that more destruction of human life through capital punishment would not enhance people's respect for the sacredness of the life of every person.⁴

Often people are deluded into believing that problems can be solved through violence and killing. This readiness to end troublesome life is expressed in abortion and euthanasia, in

political terrorism and assassinations, in the murderous policies of some political regimes, in the threat of nuclear war, and even in violent crime itself. Killing may seem to be a solution to the problems of society, but, rather than solving our problems, killing contributes to the lack of respect for human life which is at the source of such problems.

In writing on the death penalty, we invite our Catholic people, all Christians, and all people of good will to reflect with us on this matter and to work with us to promote respect for Life.

Moral Principles

Our opposition to the death penalty is consistent with our religious heritage. In searching the Scriptures for a perspective on any issue we seek the point of the divine teaching rather than proof texts for or against particular practices. There are passages throughout the Scriptures which can be understood to affirm or oppose capital punishment. Often the fact that Jewish law prescribed the death penalty for certain crimes is used as a rationale for its practice today. These laws mandated death not only for murder, but for other crimes as well, including adultery, profaning the Sabbath, and striking one's parents. Yet these were rules of organization appropriate for the Israelite people of that age, and not for all humankind for all ages. The religious contribution of the Biblical injunctions was not that all people who committed a given crime were to receive a given punishment, but that the punishment be restricted and vengeance be purged.

The Biblical principle of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Ex. 21:24) is frequently cited in modern day arguments. It is often forgotten that this was a guard against personal vengeance and disproportionate retaliation: payment must not be made to exceed the actual debt incurred. Thus, only an eye - and not a life - should be required of the person who had destroyed the neighbor's eye. Far from advocating revenge, it emphasized the dignity even of the violent offender.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44), to avoid anger and judgment (5:22-26; 7:1-5). In his encounter with a woman about to be stoned for adultery (John 8:1-10) he refused to condemn, but spoke words of mercy and encouraged her to reform her life. When Christ himself was executed, he prayed for his enemies in his dying words: "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). The apostle Paul repeated this message of forgiveness to the community at Rome, telling them to bless their persecutors, to repay injury with love, and to leave vengeance to God (Rom. 12:14-21). The Scriptures consistently challenge us to be compassionate, forgiving, and respectful of God's gift of life.

In the first centuries of the Church, Christians faced the death penalty as victims, not as executioners. Since they were considered dangerous outsiders, they were often, like their Lord before them, put to death unjustly.⁵ In time an outlook favorable to the death penalty developed in the Church's teaching. The perspective of this teaching was that, given the existence of the death penalty in contemporary legal practices the exercise of

such a penalty must be tempered and limited, that it must meet strict criteria of justice in punishment. The Church insisted that the person to be executed be truly guilty of serious crime; that the sentence be proportional to the crime; that the punishment not be executed in a vindictive spirit; that trial and sentence be carried out by none other than the proper authority; and that the death penalty not be employed when other options were available to protect society and restore order. The Church was not so much mandating the use of the death penalty, as tolerating a policy which society considered normal, and placing a limitation on its exercise.

In the past generation, the Church has been challenged to think further about this difficult issue in the context of our complex situations. Many individual bishops and national and regional conferences of bishops (in Ohio, in many other states, and around the world) have called their people to reject the use of this penalty. Indeed, many other religious communities have stated positions in opposition to capital punishment.⁶ These positions have come about as a result of prayerful reflection on our country's experience with the death penalty and the state of our criminal justice system.

In 1980, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops asserted that under the present circumstances the use of the death penalty does not meet the Church's traditional moral criteria.⁷ While not denying the state's right or authority to carry out such punishment, we concluded that such a right ought not to be exercised. Our conviction was and remains that capital punishment is not the most effective way for today's society to punish criminals and protect society; it does not rehabilitate; it is no more effective as a deterrent to violence than other less dire penalties; and as a form of retribution, it adds to the confusion in our society about the sacredness of life.

Pope John Paul has consistently urged clemency for those condemned to die. He expressed this in his 1983 Address to the Diplomatic Corps⁸ and in calls for mercy for condemned persons in several individual cases, in the United States and in other countries.⁹ His attitude was poignantly expressed in his public forgiveness of Mehmet Au Agca, who had attempted to murder him in 1981.¹⁰ The Holy Father's point of view has been elaborated in the statement of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace¹ and in other authoritative expressions by representatives to the Holy See.²

The Church's traditional teaching on this matter has developed, while remaining true to the fundamental insight of the teaching of Jesus. It has continued to proclaim that God endowed human life with dignity precisely by creating humanity in the Divine image and likeness. Because respect for human life faces an unprecedented crisis today, reflection on the death penalty has taken on a new seriousness, depth and urgency. The new situation has led to new emphases in the Church's teaching. In this century, state power has been misused in horrible ways by regimes which have unjustly used the death penalty on millions; an ethos of abortion and euthanasia has spread like a plague; starvation stalks millions; nuclear war is treated as one among many military options even though it is capable of destroying all human life. It is no exaggeration to say that human life is threatened as seriously in our time as it has ever been threatened.

In such a context, it is important to remember that all persons have value that comes from God, even when they might seem utterly lacking in any value. Therefore, persons convicted of crimes must not be treated as though they were not persons but only objects of fear and vengeance. No human life, no matter how wretched or how miserable, no matter how sinful or how lacking in love, is without value. Precisely when persons appear worthless and expendable and when people are tempted to destroy them, the Church must speak out in defense of their lives.

We advocate working toward a consistent ethic of life - a linkage of life issues which, while recognizing the distinctive aspects of each issue, would place them in the larger moral framework of our obligation to protect and nurture God's holy gift of life. We affirm that the human person's dignity is unrelated to the person's usefulness or society's convenience. We counsel a policy of mercy, not because we minimize or excuse violent criminal acts, but because we believe that our society is enriched when it shows mercy. Justice must be done, but it would be a mistake to employ the death penalty for termination of life is so often and so erroneously seen as the solution to the problem of undesired life.

Healing and Reconciliation

So much of life is broken and wounded by violent crime. Its destructive effects extend to many people and last for many years. We all feel rage and hurt when we, the people we love, casual acquaintances, or any members of our society are confronted or touched by acts of violence. The desire to strike back is strong. Yet Christians know that this response is contrary to the human vocation to love, show mercy, and forgive.

If we seek Divine help, God will transform the desire for revenge or feelings of bitterness which hinder our move beyond such tragedy. Christians believe that all people are challenged to heal society's wounds by making ourselves and our resources available to victims and survivors of violence, by gently leading them to understand that the death of the criminal will not restore life to the murdered or peace to the survivor.

The care and support we give must include the relief of financial distress caused by crime and medical and spiritual aid as well.

Criminal justice personnel can be demeaned by violent crime. Working in a situation of danger, such persons must be given adequate training and compensation. They must also be supported in their efforts to keep lively the insight that all persons are loved by God and that even the life of the criminal is holy. The use of the death penalty will not contribute to this.

Those found guilty of violent crime can also become victims of a wounding situation. Their human dignity, diminished in commission of the crime, is often further diminished by society's response. Society often judges them to be incorrigibly evil, beyond any hope of rehabilitation. Society can cooperate with God's merciful forgiveness by extending the opportunity for conversion. A stay in prison is not intended to be pleasant. But it often becomes inexcusably degrading and demoralizing because of overcrowded and

dangerous living conditions, lack of real correctional or restitutional opportunities, and separation from loved ones.

There are inevitably imperfections in human justice; these are especially serious when human life hangs in the balance. Despite commendable efforts by the United States federal court system, the application of the death penalty remains highly selective. Only a very small percentage of eligible capital cases ever results in the sentence of death, even fewer in an execution.

The burden of this penalty continues to fall heavily on the poor and on members of racial minorities. For example, only one of those currently on death row in Ohio was able to assume the cost of his or her own defense;¹³ over half are black. Finally, miscarriages in the criminal justice system do occur; several studies have concluded that innocent persons have been put to death in the United States.¹⁴ All these problems are particularly disturbing in light of the irrevocability of the death penalty.

Society must be able to protect itself in a secure, just and orderly way. To make it clear that violent crime will not be tolerated, it must create a firm and effective alternative to the death penalty. The rejection of the death penalty will not make society any more vulnerable to violence. In the states which do not have death penalty statutes, murder rates are the same as, or lower than, in capital punishment states; police officers and prison employees suffer no greater rate of criminal assault.¹⁵ Many people believe that capital punishment is the most effective deterrent to murder. However, the majority of the statistical studies does not offer any support for this conclusion.¹⁶ The reasons for violent crime are complex. Reforms in society and in the criminal justice system may help prevent crime; selective use of the death penalty will not.

Society can defend itself without resort to the further taking of life. But meaningful correctional reform must be instituted to achieve this. Such reform must begin with the humanizing of institutional regimens; there must be a reemphasis on offender rehabilitation and, to alleviate overcrowding and more effectively restrain violent offenders, developing community-based alternatives and shorter terms of incarceration for property offenders. We are particularly concerned that all prisoners have access to religious materials and services, family contacts, and physical exercise.

Seeking Changes

We call upon Ohioans to resist the allure of death as the oversimplified solution to public problems. We join with such groups as the Ohio Council of Churches and the Ohio Coalition Against the Death Penalty in encouraging citizen efforts to abolish the practice of capital punishment in our state and country.

We particularly urge our governor to commute capital sentences to long term imprisonment. Effective means have been found elsewhere to integrate death row inmates safely into the general population of maximum security facilities.¹⁷

And so, we submit the following specific recommendations:

- 1. That Ohio Catholics associate themselves with legislative and other actions which would lead to abolition of the death penalty;**
- 2. That the Governor exercise his authority to commute death sentences, while at the same time assuring real punishment of crime and the safety of society;**
- 3. That the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections take significant steps to improve living conditions, especially in maximum security areas;**
- 4. That parish leaders study, discuss, and become as actively involved as possible in the effort to abolish the death penalty;**
- 5. That the study guides and curricula on the issue of the death penalty, which are being developed by the Catholic Conference of Ohio, be used in our adult and secondary level educational programs;**
- 6. That capital punishment be expressly included in the agenda of the life issues, which are at the heart of Catholic social teachings.**

We urge all Ohioans to support and pray for the many persons whose lives are changed by the commission of violent crime and the threat of this dire penalty; victims, survivors, police and prison personnel, judges and jury persons, attorneys, families, persons charged with the awful task of administering the death sentence, and especially in accord with Our Lord's injunction to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:43), persons who have been condemned to die and who have been put to death. The use or threat of capital punishment in Ohio in our time can only lead to the erosion of respect for life in our society. We reaffirm our opposition to the death penalty and we challenge Catholics, other Christians and all people of good will to examine the issue in the light of the fundamental moral issues it involves. We place our opposition to capital punishment in the framework of a consistent ethic of life, an ethic that gives witness to the sacredness and value of every human life from conception until natural death.

FOOTNOTES

1. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Utah.
2. The United States Supreme Court declared the Ohio death penalty statute to be unconstitutional in 1972 in *Crempton v. Ohio*, issued concurrently with *Furmon v. Georgia*, and in 1978 in the companion cases *Lockett v. Ohio* and *Bell v. Ohio*.
3. Ohio Public Defender's Office, December 9, 1986.
4. The Catholic Conference of Ohio, Bishops' Statement on Capital Punishment, March 30, 1977.
5. The law of the Church decreed that judges who sentenced to death and executioners of that sentence were to be excluded from Holy Communion and Holy Orders. This perspective continued even into recent times; the 1917 Code of Canon Law (CIC 984:6) declared that a judge who had pronounced the sentence of death was ineligible for Ordination.
6. See the National Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice, *Capital Punishment: What the Religious Community Says* (Washington, DC: Board of Church and Society, 1978).
7. "Statement on Capital Punishment," *Origins* November 27, 1980.
8. "The Pope's Address to Diplomats: A Voice for the Voiceless," *Origins*, January 27, 1983.
9. *Origins*, March 17, 1983.
10. *Origins*, January 5, 1984.
11. "The Church and the Death Penalty: Study Paper Prepared by the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace at the Request of the U.S. Bishops," *Origins*, December 9, 1976.
12. See John Langan, "Capital Punishment in America Today," *Respect Life* (Committee for Pro-Life Activities, NCCB: Washington, 1984).

13. Ohio Public Defender's Office, December 9, 1986. For a discussion of the significance of this factor, see Joe M. Doss, "Capital Punishment: Morality and the Law," *The Witness*, April 1985.
14. Hugo A. Bedau and Michael Radalet, *Miscarriages of Justice in Potentially Capital Cases*. Medford, MA: Tufts University Press and Gainesville, FL: Florida University Press, 1985. For a concise summary of these findings see the Knight News Service report of the national media conference by Bedau and Radalet, November 17, 1985.
15. New York State Catholic Conference Update, March, 1986.
16. Prior to 1965, when Isaac Ehrlich published the results of his research, not a single study appeared in the literature indicating that the death penalty was a marginal deterrent. In turn, replication of Ehrlich's much criticized study have yielded findings in conflict with his own. It is generally acknowledged that all deterrence research is methodologically imperfect. Nevertheless, it has not been established that the death penalty is a superior deterrent. For example, see Alfred Blumstein, Jacqueline Cohen and Daniel Nagin, eds., "Deterrence and Incapacitations: Estimating the Effects of Criminal Sanctions on Crime Rates" (Washington DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1978).
17. The experience of such states as Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kansas, Michigan and West Virginia which do not have the death penalty illustrates that there need be no insurmountable problem in the integration of capital offenders with other prisoners.

MORAL CRITERIA FOR JUST PUNISHMENT

General Criteria for All Punishment

1. Reform, rehabilitation of the offender.
2. Deterrence of actual or potential criminals.
3. Retribution or the restoration of the order of justice.

Traditional Criteria for Serious Offenses

1. Person must truly be guilty of a serious offense.
2. Sentence must be proportional to the crime.
3. Punishment must not be carried out in a vindictive spirit.
4. Trial and sentence must be carried out by the proper state authority.
5. Punishment must not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity (situations in which it would not be possible otherwise to defend society).
6. Death penalty must not be employed when “bloodless” means are available to protect society.

“A Sourcebook on Capital Punishment in Ohio - 1987”

“Catechism of the Catholic Church - 1994”

“Gospel Of Life - 1995”

COMPASSION AND CARE FOR VICTIMS' FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

Marietta Jaeger's seven-year-old daughter was kidnapped, raped, and brutally murdered. She asked that the murderer be given life imprisonment with psychiatric care.

In struggling with her desires for revenge, she writes:

“the death penalty leaves many victims’ families empty, unsatisfied and unhealed. There is no number of retaliatory deaths which would compensate to me the inestimable value of my daughter’s life, nor would they restore her to my arms.”

Marietta is involved with a group called:

1. Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation
2. PO Box 208
3. Atlantic, VA 23303
4. 804-824-0948

Persons can reach out to victims by:

- Offering compassionate care and support.
- Asking God to transform the desire for revenge or bitterness.
- Make ourselves and our resources (such as counseling & support groups) more readily available.
- Offering relief of financial distress, medical care and spiritual aid.

3

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THE DEATH PENALTY?

(adapted from Florida Catholic Conference)

LOVE

1. Express sympathy for the murder victims, for their brutalization and their loss of life.
2. Express sympathy for the families and friends of victims, for their grief extending through the years.
3. Acknowledge that many intelligent persons in good conscience advocate the death penalty.

STUDY

1. Educate yourself on the Church's position regarding the death penalty, including the Catechism, encyclicals, statements by the NCCB, state conferences and individual bishops.
2. Become aware of the arguments for and against capital punishment by learning facts and myths about the death penalty such as its uneven application, ineffectiveness in deterring crime and prohibitive costs.
3. Understand the legitimate concern about the growth of violent crime and help others to see that the death penalty is not a way to solve this complex problem.

ADVOCATE

1. Work with your diocesan social action offices in communicating your concerns with elected officials and promoting restrictions on the use of the death penalty.
2. Participate in Church-sponsored events and prayer vigils which peacefully witness to our death penalty concerns.
3. Share your concerns with your family members and friends.

WORK / PRAY

1. Work on the root causes of violence in our society such as poverty, racism, breakdown of families and moral values, child abuse and neglect, drug and alcohol abuse, easy access to guns, materialism and the glamorization of violence in entertainment and media.
2. Work to improve the correctional system to make it truly conducive to reform and rehabilitation.

CONTACTS

*EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS * NETWORKING * LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY*

Archdiocese of Cincinnati 513-421-3131

Office of Social Action & World Peace
Family Life

Diocese of Cleveland

Social Action Office 330-535-2787
Website: <http://www.catholic-action.org/>
Pro-Life Office 216-696-6525

Diocese of Columbus 614-241-2540

Department of Social Concerns

Diocese of Steubenville 614-282-6293

Catholic Charities

Diocese of Toledo 419-244-6711

Social Action Office
Family Life/Respect Life Office

Diocese of Youngstown 330-744-8451

Social Action Department
Website: http://www.rc.net/youngstownlcatholic_charities

*VICTIM OUTREACH * COUNSELING * PRISON MINISTRY*

Archdiocese of Cincinnati 513-421-3131

Catholic Charities

Diocese of Cleveland 216-696-6525

Catholic Charities
Family Ministry

Diocese of Columbus

Catholic Social Services 614-221-5891
Family Life 614-241-2560

Diocese of Steubenville 614-282-6293

Catholic Charities

Diocese of Toledo 419-244-6711

Catholic Charities
Jail & Prison Ministry
Family Life

Diocese of Youngstown 330-744-8451

Catholic Charities
Criminal Justice Ministry

DEPARTMENT ON SOCIAL CONCERNS

The Department on Social Concerns is one of four departments under the Catholic Conference of Ohio.

- The Department convenes the diocesan social action and social service directors from each of the Catholic dioceses in Ohio.
- The Department provides the Catholic Bishops of Ohio and Catholic Conference leadership with advice, programs and statements related to social concerns issues.
- It serves and advocates to improve the well-being of the poor and disadvantaged throughout Ohio.
- It responds to state legislative and public policy issues which have an impact on the social concerns needs of people.
- It strives to strengthen networks and relationships among department members, as well as human service providers and advocates throughout the State and Country.

Dept. Director: Jim Tobin

1996 Dept. Officers:

Mr. Tom Choquette, chair, Office of Social Action & World Peace
Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Sr. Joan Michalik, vice-chair, Social Action Office, Diocese of Toledo

Ms. Meg Andersen, vice-chair, Catholic Charities Diocese of Youngstown

Catholic Conference of Ohio Director: Mr. Timothy V. Luckhaupt

Chair Conference Board of Directors: Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk

REASONS TO OPPOSE THE DEATH PENALTY

- All persons have God given value and dignity. No human life, no matter how sinful or lacking in love, is without value.
- Jesus taught and practiced forgiveness and mercy.
- There are better approaches to protecting people from violent crime. Life imprisonment can be a firm and effective alternative.
- The application of the death penalty has been discriminatory toward the poor, the indigent, and racial minorities. Mistakes are possible.
- We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing.

“One of the most challenging teachings of Jesus Christ was His command for us to love our enemies (Lk. 6:27; Matt. 5:43). It is so easy for retribution to become revenge; for anger, fears and prejudices to exercise negative influence on our public actions. The very violence that frightens us so much ought not make us proponents of violence...”

“It is not absolutely necessary for the defense of society and the citizens of Ohio to execute anyone.”

--Catholic Bishops of Ohio 1996