

End the Use of the Death Penalty

The Texas Catholic Conference *supports abolition or a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in Texas.*

Like all affronts to the dignity of life, the death penalty diminishes humanity. Church teaching on the life and dignity of every human person should guide all our decisions about life, including the use of the death penalty. We cannot overcome crime by executing criminals nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. We are called to reflect on what the Lord's command, "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13) means for us today.

A Texas Bishop Speaks:

"We believe that capital punishment contributes to a climate of violence in our state. This cycle of violence has been diminished by life imprisonment without parole. The words of Ezekiel are a powerful reminder that repentance not revenge, conversion, not death are better guides for public policy on the death penalty than the current policy of violence for violence, death for death."



-Bishop Curtis Guillory, Diocese of Beaumont

Church Teaching

- ★ If non-lethal means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, authority will limit itself to such means, as they are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2267)
- ★ The Church's stance on capital punishment has always been based on the responsibility to protect society. St. Thomas Aquinas says that legitimate civil authority is obliged to defend people from a dangerous criminal. At the same time, he cautions, "The execution of the wicked is forbidden wherever...the wicked are not clearly distinguished from the good." Besides reminding us of well-known cases where innocent people were condemned to die, this should remind us that as Christians we are urged not to see anyone as irredeemably wicked." (*Divine Mercy and the Death Penalty*, Most Reverend Robert W. Finn)
- ★ The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform. (*Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae*)
- ★ 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)

Resources

- ★ **US Conference of Catholic Bishops** Death Penalty page (www.USCCB.org/sdwp/national/deathpenalty)
- ★ **Catholics Mobilizing** proclaims the Church's unconditional pro-life teaching and its application to capital punishment and restorative justice (www.CatholicsMobilizing.org) **Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.shtml)
- ★ **Restore Justice** offers a place of compassion and assistance, resources and services and educational information for anyone who is affected by crime (www.RestoreJustice.com)

The Texas Catholic Conference (TCC) is the association of the 15 Roman Catholic dioceses of the State of Texas, and is the Official Public Policy Voice of the Catholic Bishops of Texas.

Andrew Rivas, Executive Director • Jennifer Carr Allmon, Associate Director • Margaret McGettrick, Education Director

Death Penalty Facts

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops oppose the use of the death penalty as a means of punishment or a deterrent to crime because there are alternative means to protect society available to us. Although use of the death penalty in the United States is decreasing, the State of Texas continues to lead the nation in terms of the number of executions carried out each year." These statistics and policies reflect legislative action at the federal and state levels that is adopted by legislators seeking to appear "tough on crime" in response to often sensational media coverage of crime.

Those who commit terrible, violent crimes must be incarcerated, both as just punishment and in order to protect society. We stand in solidarity with victims and their loved ones. However, when it comes to matters of life and death, morality and common sense call for justice, mercy, and for careful safeguards. Showing mercy does not mean neglecting the administration of justice or that people will go unpunished. Showing mercy does mean exhibiting compassion toward all of our brothers and sisters, and providing them with an opportunity for atonement and rehabilitation.

Texas Death Penalty Statistics

- ★ The State of Texas has carried out more than 460 executions since 1982, accounting for more than one third of all U.S. executions since 1977.ⁱ
- ★ Death penalty trials are vastly more expensive than cases in which prosecutors seek life without parole. Some death penalty cases have forced counties to raise taxes or withhold employee raises.ⁱⁱ
- ★ Eleven people have been released from death row in Texas due to evidence of their wrongful conviction. There also is strong evidence that several individuals in Texas have been wrongly executed.ⁱⁱⁱ
- ★ New death sentences have dropped more than 60% in Texas over the last six years; more than half of all Texas counties have not sent a single person to death row.^{iv}
- ★ Racial Statistics of those on Texas Death Row indicate that African Americans are sentenced at disproportionately high numbers relative to the general population.

| Race | White (non Hispanic) | Black | Hispanic | Other |
|--|----------------------------|-------|----------|-------|
| % on Death Row^{iv} | 30% | 39% | 30% | 1% |
| % in Texas Population^v | 47% | 12% | 37% | 6% |
| % Difference between % on death row and % in population | -17% | 27% | -7% | -5% |

(Last updated July 22, 2010, 82nd Legislative Session)

ⁱ "Executions." 1 July 2010. Texas Department of Criminal Justice. <www.tdcj.state.tx.us/stat/annual.htm>.

ⁱⁱ Death penalty cases more expensive than lifetime imprisonment, but local CDA says cost never a consideration" By Logan Carver, *The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, 13 December 2009.< www.lubbockonline.com/stories/121309/loc_535156806.shtml>.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Innocence Project, <www.innocenceproject.org/content/2170.php>.

^{iv} "Gender and Racial Statistics of Death Row Offenders." 2 July 2010. Texas Department of Criminal Justice. <www.tdcj.state.tx.us/stat/racial.htm>.

^v "State and County QuickFacts." 22 April 2010. U.S. Census Bureau. <www.tdcj.state.tx.us/stat/racial.htm>.