

Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty

In November 2005 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) approved *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*, a statement calling for an end to the use of the death penalty. In doing so, they echoed the late Pope John Paul II, who made the same appeal in St. Louis during his 1999 visit to the U.S.

Catholic social teaching, as expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 2267) and other statements of the Vatican and the bishops, makes clear that the use of the death penalty cannot be justified when the state has other ways to protect society from those who commit violent crimes.

Why End the Death Penalty Now?

- ❖ The death penalty in the U.S. is deeply flawed. Roughly 3500 inmates in state, federal and military prisons are on death row in 38 states. Since 1973 more than 115 people on death row have been exonerated.
- ❖ The death penalty is unfairly applied due to many factors, including where a crime is committed, the race of the victim and offender, and the quality and the costs of legal defense.
- ❖ Catholics are re-examining and changing their minds about the use of the death penalty. Many public opinion polls reveal that less than half of all Catholics now support the use of the death penalty, down substantially from past years.
- ❖ The death penalty diminishes all of us. Its use ought to be abandoned not only for what it does to those who are executed, but what it does to us as a society. We cannot teach respect for life by taking life.
- ❖ Recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court have held that it is unconstitutional to execute persons who are mentally retarded and those who committed crimes as juveniles. The Court has also ruled that defendants are entitled to have a jury decide whether to impose the death penalty.

- ❖ According to Amnesty International, in 2005 over 2100 people were executed in 22 countries. 94% of them were killed in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia...and the United States. Amnesty has called the death penalty “the ultimate, irreversible denial of human rights.” In executing people as we do, our nation is not among good company.
- ❖ Additional information supporting these statements can be found at the USCCB’s Campaign to End the Death Penalty website: www.ccdep.org.

What Can I Do?

As part of the “Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty” you can

- ❖ **PRAY** for victims of crime and their families, those who have been wrongly convicted, and those awaiting execution.
- ❖ **LEARN** about Catholic social teaching and criminal justice policies in Wisconsin and the United States.
- ❖ **EDUCATE** people in your parish and community about Catholic social teaching and the criminal justice system.
- ❖ **ADVOCATE!** Here in Wisconsin, the State Legislature has approved the placement of an advisory referendum to restore the death penalty for certain crimes on the November 2006 ballot. Our state has not had capital punishment for over 150 years. There is no conclusive evidence that it deters violent crime or makes our communities safer. There *is* substantial evidence that people can be mistakenly executed and that the death penalty will be imposed disproportionately on the poor and on racial and ethnic minorities. It also elevates vengeance and punishment over other important values such as equity, rehabilitation and reconciliation.