



DEATH PENALTY FACTS

There is no evidence that the death penalty deters violent crime.

- To the extent that there is any correlation between imposition of the death penalty and violent crime, the incidence of violent crime and murder of law enforcement officers is greater in states with the death penalty.
- The average murder rate is 5.3 in death penalty states and 2.8 in states without the death penalty (murder rate is murders per 100,000 population). As a region, the South accounts for more than 80% of the executions and has the highest murder rate. The Northeast carries out less than 1% of the executions and has the lowest murder rate. (2004 FBI Uniform Crime Report)

More information on murder rates by state is available from the Death Penalty Information Center: www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

Grim statistics tell the story.

- The number of executions since reinstatement of the death penalty in 1973 exceeds 1,000.
- The national death row population is greater than 3,300.
- The Florida death row population is more than 370.
- The United States is alone among western democracies in retaining the death penalty for crimes less than treason. In employing the death penalty, it finds itself in company with countries such as China, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Life without parole is an effective and less expensive alternative to the death penalty.

- All death penalty states (other than New Mexico) offer life without parole as a possible sentence in capital cases.
- Lifetime incarceration costs far less than the death penalty. The cost of imposing the death penalty has been estimated as 2- to 6-times greater, \$3.2 million versus \$750,000 for one person (Miami Herald, 1988).

Victim's families deserve our special care and concern.

- Repaying cruelty with cruelty does not bring healing. Killing the guilty does not bring back or honor the dead.
- The finality of execution means that great care must be exercised in its application. As a result, there are often long delays between a finding of guilt and execution, thus prolonging the involvement of the victim's family in a legal process in which they are pressed to maintain a hostile stance toward the criminal. This process may actually delay "closure" for the family.

Execution of innocents is a real danger.

- The U.S. Supreme Court ruled it is constitutional to execute an innocent person if constitutionally required procedures were followed (*Herrera v Collins*).
- "More often than we want to recognize, some innocent defendants have been convicted and sentenced to death." Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, 2001.

Mainline religious denominations oppose use of the death penalty.

- Although prosecutors routinely use "an eye for an eye" and similar biblical texts in urging the death penalty, scripture scholars refute this interpretation.
- Attempts to support the death penalty with the Bible rest on verses taken in isolation and ignores the broader context of both the Old Testament and the teaching of Christ in the New Testament that call us to protect life, practice mercy, and reject vengeance.

Statements of religious bodies are available on-line:
www.deathpenaltyreligious.org

Application of the death penalty is deeply flawed.

- More than 120 death row inmates in 25 states have been exonerated since the death penalty was reinstated in 1973.
- "Florida leads the nation in death row exonerations. Since 1973, the State of Florida has exonerated twenty-two death row inmates, significantly more than any other state. Combined, these death row inmates served approximately 150 years in prison before being released..." American Bar Association, "Florida Death Penalty Assessment Report"
- Defendants in many states get poor legal advice unless they can afford counsel with death penalty experience.
- In Florida, a unanimous decision by the jury is NOT required to recommend death, only a simple majority vote.

Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty

For resources to help individuals, parishes and dioceses participate in this national campaign, visit:
www.ccedp.org

For additional information on the death penalty in Florida contact:

Florida Catholic Conference
201 W. Park Ave., Tallahassee, FL 32301-7715
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CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHING ON THE DEATH PENALTY

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor.

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. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, 2267*)

Pope John Paul II

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 has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal I made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary. (*Pope John Paul II, Mass in St. Louis, MO, January 27, 1999*)

Bishops of Florida

The abolition of the death penalty would help to break the cycle of violence. It would manifest belief in the unique dignity of every individual and the sacredness of human life. It would acknowledge God as the Lord of life and it would be more consonant with the spirit of the Gospel. (*Bishops of Florida, Pastoral Statement, Protection, Punishment, But Not Death, 1990*)

United States Catholic Bishops

Increasingly, our society looks to violent measures to deal with some of our most difficult social problems – millions of abortions to address problem pregnancies, advocacy of euthanasia and assisted suicide to cope with the burdens of age and illness, and increased reliance on the death penalty to deal with crime. We are tragically turning to violence in the search for quick and easy answers to complex human problems . . . We are losing our respect for human life . . . We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing. (*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Pastoral Statement, Confronting A Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action, 1994*)

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. (*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics, No. 22, 1998*)

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. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty, 2005)

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