

FACTS ABOUT THE DEATH PENALTY

When you consider your position and feelings about the death penalty and the assumptions they are based on, you may want to consider the following facts:

Innocent people are condemned to death.

Between 1900 and 1992, 416 innocent persons were convicted and sentenced to death in the United States. In Massachusetts, at least 18 innocent people were convicted and sentenced to death since 1900; three of those people were executed. Since 1973, 112 death row inmates across the country have been exonerated based on evidence of their innocence. To put these statistics into perspective, since 1976 there have been 891 executions; as of July 1, 2003, 3525 people were on death row.

See www.amnestyusa.org/abolish; www.deathpenaltyinfo.org; *Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty, Inc., "Help Keep the Death Penalty Out of Massachusetts"*; www.ncadp.org; Pax Christi, "Sentenced to Die, Still Children of God".

The death penalty is racially biased and arbitrary.

While whites and blacks are murdered in equal numbers in the United States, the death penalty is far more likely to be imposed when the victim is white; 80% of the executions since 1976 resulted from the murder of a white victim. A disproportionately large number of death row inmates and inmates executed since 1976 are black. Decisions to seek and apply the death penalty vary statistically from state to state and county to county, depending on such factors as the local political climate, the attitudes of prosecutors and the availability and quality of defense lawyers.

The death penalty costs far more than life imprisonment.

The costs of a death penalty case are at least 3-5 times as high as the costs of convicting and incarcerating a person for life. Most of the costs of a death penalty case are incurred during the trial and sentencing proceedings. The sentencing hearing itself becomes a separate and lengthy trial, requiring experts on both sides. Figures in all states where studies have been conducted show that the costs of prosecuting a death penalty case are far greater than the costs of prosecuting a non-capital case. These excess costs are not very efficient, since most death penalty prosecutions do not result in death sentences, and a low percentage of those that do actually result in an execution.

See www.amnestyusa.org/abolish; www.deathpenaltyinfo.org; www.icadp.org.

The death penalty does not deter crime in general or murder in particular.

From 1980 through 2000, the homicide rate in states with the death penalty was 48% to 101% higher than the rate in states without the death penalty. The average homicide rate per 100,000 people in states with capital punishment is about 6.6, while it is 3.5 in abolitionist states. Many state studies have documented an increase in homicide rates following reinstatement of the death penalty; in Canada, the rate has decreased by 27% since that country abolished the death penalty in 1976.

See www.deathpenaltyinfo.org; www.ncadp.org; Pax Christi, "Sentenced to Die, Still Children of God".

The United States is one of the few countries in the world that retains uses the death penalty.

Since 1976, when the United States reinstated the death penalty, three other countries per year have abolished the death penalty. While many countries still retain the death penalty on their books, most do not use it practice. The United States, South Korea, Japan, and India are the only democratic industrialized countries that still permit capital punishment. United States, China, Iran and Saudi Arabia account for over 80% of the executions recorded by Amnesty International. Most European countries have abolished the death penalty and will not extradite anyone, including terrorists, to the United States to face the death penalty. Even fewer countries allow executions for crimes committed by juveniles. Since 2000 the only countries known to have executed juvenile offenders are China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Pakistan--and the United States, where 13 juvenile offenders have been executed since 1998.

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The death penalty does not provide closure to victims' family members.

The death penalty encourages the family of victims to spend their whole being waiting to see the state kill the killers, in the belief that the execution if and when it comes, will somehow make them feel better. In fact, the 90% of victims' family members whose perpetrators receive lesser sentences, are able to get the court proceedings behind them in a short time and go on with their lives. They are more fortunate than those whose lives become focused on looking forward to the death of another human life.

The death penalty cannot be put on a scientifically foolproof footing with DNA testing.

DNA is available in only about 15% of murder cases, meaning that the vast majority of murders, regardless of the atrocity involved, cannot be solved this way. And even when DNA evidence is available, it can at best place the defendant at the scene of the crime. It cannot tell when the defendant was there nor what his or her actions were while there. DNA cannot solve all the problems inherent in determining guilt or innocence, let alone determine the appropriate punishment for a particular murder.

In 1997, the return of capital punishment to Massachusetts was defeated by a tie vote in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Since then, new bills to reinstate the death penalty have been introduced — and narrowly defeated — in every legislative session. In the past year, Governor Mitt Romney has made it clear that reinstatement of capital punishment is high on his agenda. We believe that the death penalty focuses on the end of the cycle of violence, instead of the beginning — replacing prevention with punishment, exacerbating the violence in our society rather than reducing it. In addition, the death penalty takes funds from important programs such as educational enrichment, nutrition programs, juvenile programs, correctional education, and community policing. Leaving aside these political considerations, there is a more basic reason to oppose the death penalty. We believe that those who are guilty, even of the most heinous crimes, are still sacred in the eyes of God and that the application of the death penalty is a form of murder, the deliberate killing of another human being.

"We oppose capital punishment not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes but for what it does to all of us as a society. Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes all of us and is a sign of growing disrespect for human life. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life."

From [A Good Friday Appeal to End the Death Penalty](#)
US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999

WHAT CAN I DO?

● Tell your local, state, and national officials where you stand.

For help in finding out how to contact them, you can use the following websites:

US Representative:

www.visi.com/juan/congress

US Senator:

www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Massachusetts Elected Officials:

www.wheredoivotema.com/bal/myelectioninfo.php

● Voice your concerns to the Attorney General

at 10th St and Constitution Ave, NW, Washington, D.C. 20530
phone (202)514-2001 or fax (202)514-4371.

● Support those candidates who oppose the death penalty.

● Educate yourself — and others.

Check out the websites to find speakers available to address local groups.

● Become a member of one of the groups opposing the death penalty and encourage your friends to join.

“The universal abolition of the death penalty would be a courageous reaffirmation of the belief that humankind can be successful in dealing with criminality and of our refusal to succumb to despair before such forces, and as such it would regenerate new hope in our very humanity.”

From [Vatican Declaration to World Congress on the Death Penalty](#), June 2001

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Websites

Catholics Against Capital Punishment: www.cacp.org

Diocese of Joliet, IL – Peace and Social Justice Ministry:
www.paxjoliet.org/abolishing_illinois_death_penalty.htm

Amnesty International Faith in Action Against the Death Penalty:
www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction

Community of Sant’ Egidio: www.santegidio.org/en/pdm

Mass Citizens Against the Death Penalty: www.mcadp.org

Death Penalty Information Center: www.deathpenaltyinfo.org

Citizens United for Alternatives to the Death Penalty:
www.cuadp.org

Continued Reading

Banner, Stuart. [The Death Penalty: An American History](#).
Harvard University Press, 2003

Bedau, Hugo (editor). [The Death Penalty in America: Current Controversies](#). Oxford Press, 1998

Bosco, Antoinette. [Choosing Mercy: A Mother of Murder Victims Pleads to End the Death Penalty](#). Orbis Books, 2002

Costanzo, Mark. [Just Revenge: Costs and Consequences of the Death Penalty](#). Worth Publishing, 1997

Hanks, Gardner. [Against the Death Penalty: Christian and Secular Arguments Against Capital Punishment](#). Herald Press, 1997

Megivern, James J. [The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey](#). Paulist Press, 1997

Prejean, Helen. [Dead Man Walking](#). Vintage, 1994

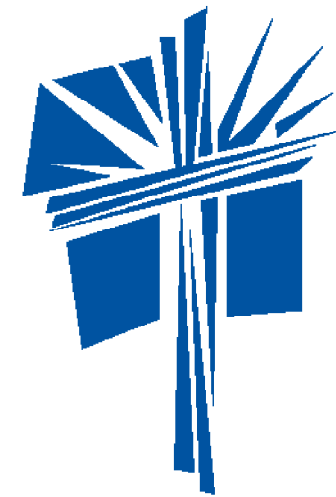
Zimring, Franklin. [The Contradictions of American Capital Punishment](#). Oxford Press, 2003

Contact Our Lady’s Parish

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THE DEATH PENALTY

*Feelings,
Facts, & Faith*



“Capital punishment feeds the cycle of violence in society by pandering to a lust for revenge. It brutalizes us, and deadens our sensitivities to the precious nature of every single human life.”

Most Rev. David B. Thompson
Bishop of Charleston, S.C., December 3, 1998.

Information on the Death Penalty
Justice and Peace Committee
Our Lady Help of Christians Parish