

Death Penalty

Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes us and is a sign of growing disrespect for human life. We cannot overcome crime by simply executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life.

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 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, The Gospel of Life*)
- ★ At a time when the sanctity of life is threatened in many ways, taking life is not really a solution but may instead effectively undermine respect for life...Public policies that treat some lives as unworthy of protection, or that are perceived as vengeful, fracture the moral conviction that human life is sacred. (*USCCB, The Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty*)
- ★ 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. (*Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics, Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998, no. 22, USCCB*)

Resources

- ★ **Texas Catholic Conference** Death Penalty page (www.TXcatholic.org/death-penalty.asp)
- ★ **US Conference of Catholic Bishops** Death Penalty page (www.USCCB.org/sdwp/national/deathpenalty)
- ★ **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)
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Death Penalty Facts

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops opposes 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. In the United States, the death penalty is being used with increasing frequency. Texas has executed over 300 people in the last ten years. 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. We also believe that the criminal justice system should work to foster a justice that focuses on reconciliation, and if possible, encourages the re-integration of the condemned person into society.

Texas Death Penalty Statisticsⁱ

- The average time on Death Row prior to execution is 10.26 years; the shortest time on death row prior to execution is 248 days and the longest time is 24 years.
- The average age of those executed is 39; the age of the youngest person executed in Texas is 24 and the age of the oldest person executed in Texas is 66.
- There are five methods of execution in the United States: lethal injection, electrocution, lethal gas, hanging, and firing squad. The State of Texas adopted lethal injection as means of execution in 1977. The offender is usually pronounced dead approximately 7 minutes after the lethal injection begins.
- Racial Statistics of those on Texas Death Row indicate that African Americans are represented at disproportionately high numbers relative to the general population.

Race	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
% on Death Row	30%	41%	28%	1%
% in Population	48%	12%	36%	5%
% Difference between % on death row and % in population	-19%	29%	-8%	-4%

ⁱ "Death Row Information." 6 June 2007. Texas Department of Criminal Justice.
<<http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/stat/deathrow.htm>>.