



Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange Congregational Stance on the Abolition of the Death Penalty March 2000

Whereas Catholic social teaching calls us to oppose capital punishment:

Pope John Paul II's Evangelium Vitae calls for alternative means to defend and protect society, concluding that "as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases (meriting execution) are very rare, if not practically nonexistent." The 1997 Catechism of the Catholic Church echoes this teaching.

- The U.S. Catholic Conference concluded in 1979 that "the Church's commitment to the value and dignity of human life leads us to oppose the use of the death penalty" and that it "has been discriminatory toward the poor, the indigent, and racial minorities." (Political Responsibility: "Choices for the 1980's" – USCC statement.)
- The Leadership Conference of Women Religious has called on its membership to "work at all possible levels to abolish this inhumane and futile form of punishment."

Whereas there is ample evidence that the death penalty is applied in a racist manner.

- In 1987, in *McCleskey vs. Kemp*, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to act on data demonstrating the continuing rarity of racial bias.
- In 1990, the US General Accounting Office reported "a pattern of evidence indicating racial disparities in charging, sentencing and imposition of the death penalty."
- Nationwide, 82% of those put to death had been convicted of murdering a white person even though people of color are the victims in more than half of all homicides.
- The US Congress has failed repeatedly to pass the Racial Justice Act, which would allow prisoners to challenge their death sentences using standards normal in civil racial discrimination cases.

Whereas death sentences are reserved for the poor:

- About 90% of all those persons facing capital charges cannot afford their own attorney
- No state has met standards developed by the American Bar Association (ABA) for appointment, performance and compensation of counsel for indigent prisoners.

Whereas prisoner appeals have been severely curtailed, increasing the risk of imprisonment and execution of innocent people:

- In a series of rulings since 1991, the Supreme Court has drastically restricted the rights of death row prisoners to appeal their convictions and death sentences in federal courts, even in cases where prisoners present compelling evidence of innocence.



Whereas the ABA has concluded that administration of the death penalty is “a haphazard maze of unfair practices with no internal consistency” and has called for a moratorium on executions.

Now, therefore, **BE IT RESOLVED THAT:**

We commit to the abolition of the death penalty. As a matter of conscience, morality and respect for the dignity of life, we cannot support the practice of executions as a function of the state.

We pledge to pursue, in league with other persons of conscience, the repeal of all statutes which authorize the state to take human life as a penalty imposed by the criminal justice system.