

The Death Penalty -- Capital Punishment

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Welcome & Opening Prayer for Life

Facilitator opens meeting with a “thank you” to all who have attended, introduction of new members, and a prayer. It is important that all participants feel welcomed and participate within their own comfort level.

Opening Prayer: A Prayer to Abolish the Death Penalty

*God of Compassion,
You let your rain fall on the just and the unjust.
Expand and deepen our hearts
so that we may love as You love,
even those among us
who have caused the greatest pain by taking life.
For there is in our land a great cry for vengeance
as we fill up death rows and kill the killers
in the name of justice, in the name of peace.
Jesus, our brother,
you suffered execution at the hands of the state
but you did not let hatred overcome you.
Help us to reach out to victims of violence
so that our enduring love may help them heal.
Holy Spirit of God,
You strengthen us in the struggle for justice.
Help us to work tirelessly
for the abolition of state-sanctioned death
and to renew our society in its very heart
so that violence will be no more. Amen.*

*--Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J.
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Presentation and Evangelization/Catechesis – Capital Punishment

NOTE: The Powerpoint presentation is available online for download.

- ❖ The presentation file has been updated into the same PDF format as this session outline so it should be just as easy to access. If no laptop/projector is available, a printout of individual slides can also be copied/printed and used as both a presentation and as a handout for participant notes.
- ❖ The content in the slide presentation is designed to be straight-forward but also to allow flexibility.
- ❖ The comprehensive nature of the written facilitator notes below has been provided to allow for diversity among groups, for an extended and on-going education, and for later reference on the topic. **Therefore, it is possible that all the content included in the facilitator notes will *not* be covered in a single session. Please review the information below for each slide and then create a presentation that is your own based on the needs of your particular group.**
- ❖ If necessary, the Respect Life Office can answer any questions or provide guidance on any topics in the slide deck. Please contact the Respect Life Office at (816) 756-1850 or francis@diocesksj.org if you cannot access the on-line files.

Slide 1 Introduction Capital Punishment / Death Penalty

Slide 2 Topics for Discussion

- The process of capital punishment
- Uncovering the costs and risks associated with our capital punishment system
- Consider the effectiveness and morality of capital punishment from the Church's perspective
- Learn what you can do to get involved

Slide 3 Methods of Capital Punishment

Hanging

Until the 1890s, hanging was the primary method of execution used in the United States. Hanging is still used in Delaware and Washington, although both have lethal injection as an alternative method of execution. For execution by this method, the inmate may be weighed the day before the execution, and a rehearsal is done using a sandbag of the same weight as the prisoner. This is to determine the length of 'drop' necessary to ensure a quick death. If the rope is too long, the inmate could be decapitated, and if it is too short, the strangulation could take as long as 45 minutes. The rope, which should be 3/4-inch to 1 1/4-inch in diameter, must be boiled and stretched to eliminate spring or coiling. The knot should be lubricated with wax or soap "to ensure a smooth sliding action," according to the 1969 U.S. Army manual. (The Corrections Professional, 1996 and Hillman, 1992)

Immediately before the execution, the prisoner's hands and legs are secured, he or she is blindfolded, and the noose is placed around the neck, with the knot behind the left ear. The execution takes place when a trap-door is opened and the prisoner falls through. The prisoner's weight should cause a rapid fracture-dislocation of the neck. However, instantaneous death rarely occurs. (Weisberg, 1991)

If the inmate has strong neck muscles, is very light, if the 'drop' is too short, or the noose has been wrongly positioned, the fracture-dislocation is not rapid and death results from slow asphyxiation. If this occurs the face becomes engorged, the tongue protrudes, the eyes pop, the body defecates, and violent movements of the limbs occur. (The Corrections Professional, 1996 and Weisberg, 1991)

Electrocution

Seeking a more humane method of execution than hanging, New York built the first electric chair in 1888 and executed William Kemmler in 1890. Soon, other states adopted this execution method. Today, electrocution is not used as the sole method of execution in any state. Electrocution was the sole method in Nebraska until the State Supreme Court ruled the method unconstitutional in February 2008. For execution by the electric chair, the person is usually shaved and strapped to a chair with belts that cross his chest, groin, legs, and arms. A metal skullcap-shaped electrode is attached to the scalp and forehead over a sponge moistened with saline. The sponge must not be too wet or the saline short-circuits the electric current, and not too dry, as it would then have a very high resistance. An additional electrode is moistened with conductive jelly (Electro-Creme) and attached to a portion of the prisoner's leg that has been shaved to reduce resistance to electricity. The prisoner is then blindfolded. (Hillman, 1992 and Weisberg, 1991)

After the execution team has withdrawn to the observation room, the warden signals the executioner, who pulls a handle to connect the power supply. A jolt of between 500 and 2000 volts, which lasts for about 30 seconds, is given. The current surges and is then turned off, at which time the body is seen to relax. The doctors wait a few seconds for the body to cool down and then check to see if the inmate's heart is still beating. If it is, another jolt is applied. This process continues until the prisoner is dead. The prisoner's hands often grip the chair and there may be violent movement of the limbs which can result in dislocation or fractures. The tissues swell. Defecation occurs. Steam or smoke rises and there is a smell of burning. (Hillman, 1992 and Weisberg, 1991)

U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan once offered the following description of an execution by electric chair, "...the prisoner's eyeballs sometimes pop out and rest on [his] cheeks. The prisoner often defecates, urinates, and vomits blood and drool. The body turns bright red as its temperature rises, and the prisoner's flesh swells and his skin stretches to the point of breaking. Sometimes the prisoner catches fire....Witnesses hear a loud and sustained sound like bacon frying, and the sickly sweet smell of burning flesh permeates the chamber." (Ecenbarger, 1994)

At postmortem, the body is hot enough to blister if touched, and the autopsy is delayed while the internal organs cool. There are third degree burns with blackening where the electrodes met the skin of the scalp and legs. According to Robert H. Kirschner, the deputy chief medical examiner of Cook County, "*The brain appears cooked in most cases.*" (Weisberg, 1991)

Remember, this was the method of execution that was developed because hanging was determined to be too inhumane!

Gas Chamber

In 1924, the use of cyanide gas was introduced as Nevada sought a more humane way of executing its inmates. Gee Jon was the first person executed by lethal gas. The state tried to pump cyanide gas into Jon's cell while he slept. This proved impossible because the gas leaked from his cell, so the gas chamber was constructed. (Bohm, 1999)

Today, five states authorize lethal gas as a method of execution, but all have lethal injection as an alternative method. A federal court in California found this method to be cruel and unusual punishment. For execution by this method, the condemned person is strapped to a chair in an airtight chamber. Below the chair rests a pail of sulfuric acid. A long stethoscope is typically affixed to the inmate so that a doctor outside the chamber can pronounce death. Once everyone has left the chamber, the room is sealed. The warden then gives a signal to the executioner who flicks a lever that releases crystals of sodium cyanide into the pail. This causes a chemical reaction that releases hydrogen cyanide gas (Weisberg, 1991). The prisoner is instructed to breathe deeply to speed up the process. Most prisoners, however, try to hold their breath, and some struggle. The inmate does not lose consciousness immediately. According to former San Quentin, California, Penitentiary warden, Clifton Duffy, "*At first there is evidence of extreme horror, pain, and strangling. The eyes pop. The skin turns purple and the victim begins to drool.*" (Weisberg, 1991). Caryl Chessman, before he died in California's gas chamber in 1960 told reporters that he would nod his head if it hurt. Witnesses said he nodded his head for several minutes (Ecenbarger, 1994). According to Dr. Richard Traystman of John Hopkins University School of Medicine, "*The person is unquestionably experiencing pain and extreme anxiety...the sensation is similar to the pain felt by a person during a heart attack, where essentially the heart is being deprived of oxygen.*"

The inmate dies from hypoxia, the cutting-off of oxygen to the brain (Weisberg, 1991). At postmortem, an exhaust fan sucks the poison air out of the chamber, and the corpse is sprayed with ammonia to neutralize any remaining traces of cyanide. About a half hour later, orderlies enter the chamber, wearing gas masks and rubber gloves. Their training manual advises them to ruffle the victim's hair to release any trapped cyanide gas before removing the deceased. (Weisberg, 1991)

Lethal Injection

In 1977, Oklahoma became the first state to adopt lethal injection as a means of execution, though it would be five more years until Charles Brooks would become the first person executed by lethal injection in Texas on December 2, 1982. Today, 35 of the 36 states that have the death penalty use this method. When this method is used, the condemned person is usually bound to a gurney and a member of the execution team positions several heart monitors on this skin. Two needles (one is a back-up) are then inserted into usable veins, usually in the inmate's arms. Long tubes connect the needle through a hole in a cement block wall to several intravenous drips. The first is a harmless saline solution that is started immediately. Then, at the warden's signal, a curtain is raised exposing the inmate to the witnesses in an adjoining room. Then, the inmate is injected with sodium thiopental - an anesthetic, which puts the inmate to sleep. Next flows pavalon or pancuronium bromide, which paralyzes the entire muscle system and stops the inmate's breathing. Finally, the flow of potassium chloride stops the heart. Death results from anesthetic overdose and respiratory and cardiac arrest while the condemned person is unconscious. (Ecenbarger, 1994 and Weisberg, 1991)

Medical ethics preclude doctors from participating in executions. However, a doctor will certify the inmate is dead. This lack of medical participation can be problematic because often injections are performed by inexperienced technicians or orderlies. If a member of the execution team injects the drugs into a muscle instead of a vein, or if the needle becomes clogged, extreme pain can result. Many prisoners have damaged veins resulting from intravenous drug use and it is sometimes difficult to find a usable vein, resulting in long delays while the inmate remains strapped to the gurney. (Ecenbarger, 1994 and Weisberg, 1991)

Firing Squad

Firing squad still remains a method of execution in Utah if chosen by an inmate before lethal injection became the sole means of execution. The most recent execution by this method was that of John Albert

Taylor. By his own choosing, Taylor was executed by firing squad in Utah on January 26, 1996. For execution by this method, the inmate is typically bound to a chair with leather straps across his waist and head, in front of an oval-shaped canvas wall. The chair is surrounded by sandbags to absorb the inmate's blood. A black hood is pulled over the inmate's head. A doctor locates the inmate's heart with a stethoscope and pins a circular white cloth target over it. Standing in an enclosure 20 feet away, five shooters are armed with .30 caliber rifles loaded with single rounds. One of the shooters is given blank rounds. Each of the shooters aims his rifle through a slot in the canvas and fires at the inmate. (Weisberg, 1991).

The prisoner dies as a result of blood loss caused by rupture of the heart or a large blood vessel, or tearing of the lungs. The person shot loses consciousness when shock causes a fall in the supply of blood to the brain. If the shooters miss the heart, by accident or intention, the prisoner bleeds to death slowly. (Hillman, 1992 and Weisberg, 1991)

Slide 4 Crimes Punishable by Death in the U.S.

- 8 U.S.C. 1342 Murder related to the smuggling of aliens.
- 18 U.S.C. 32-34 Destruction of aircraft, motor vehicles, or related facilities resulting in death.
- 18 U.S.C. 36 Murder committed during a drug-related drive-by shooting.
- 18 U.S.C. 37 Murder committed at an airport serving international civil aviation.
- 18 U.S.C. 115(b)(3) Retaliatory murder of a member of the immediate family of law enforcement officials.
- 18 U.S.C. 241, 242, 245, 247 Civil rights offenses resulting in death.in death.
- 18 U.S.C. 351 Murder of a member of Congress, an important executive official, or a Supreme Court Justice.
- 18 U.S.C. 794 Espionage.
- 18 U.S.C. 844(d), (f), (i) Death resulting from offenses involving transportation of explosives, destruction of government property, or destruction of property related to foreign or interstate commerce.
- 18 U.S.C. 924(i) Murder committed by the use of a firearm during a crime of violence or a drug-trafficking crime.
- 18 U.S.C. 930 Murder committed in a Federal Government facility.
- 18 U.S.C. 1091 Genocide.
- 18 U.S.C. 1111 First-degree murder.
- 18 U.S.C. 1114 Murder of a Federal judge or law enforcement official.
- 18 U.S.C. 1116 Murder of a foreign official.
- 18 U.S.C. 1118 Murder by a Federal prisoner.
- 18 U.S.C. 1119 Murder of a U.S. national in a foreign country.
- 18 U.S.C. 1120 Murder by an escaped Federal prisoner already sentenced to life imprisonment.
- 18 U.S.C. 1121 Murder of a State or local law enforcement official or other person aiding in a Federal investigation; murder of a State correctional officer.
- 18 U.S.C. 1201 Murder during a kidnapping.
- 18 U.S.C. 1203 Murder during a hostage taking.
- 18 U.S.C. 1503 Murder of a court officer or juror.
- 18 U.S.C. 1512 Murder with the intent of preventing testimony by a witness, victim, or informant.
- 18 U.S.C. 1513 Retaliatory murder of a witness, victim, or informant.
- 18 U.S.C. 1716 Mailing of injurious articles with intent to kill or resulting in death.
- 18 U.S.C. 1751 Assassination or kidnapping resulting in the death of the President or Vice President.
- 18 U.S.C. 1958 Murder for hire.
- 18 U.S.C. 1959 Murder involved in a racketeering offense.
- 18 U.S.C. 1992 Willful wrecking of a train resulting in death.
- 18 U.S.C. 2113 Bank-robbery-related murder or kidnapping.
- 18 U.S.C. 2119 Murder related to a carjacking.
- 18 U.S.C. 2245 Murder related to rape or child molestation.
- 18 U.S.C. 2251 Murder related to sexual exploitation of children.
- 18 U.S.C. 2280 Murder committed during an offense against maritime navigation.
- 18 U.S.C. 2281 Murder committed during an offense against a maritime fixed platform.
- 18 U.S.C. 2332 Terrorist murder of a U.S. national in another country.
- 18 U.S.C. 2332a Murder by the use of a weapon of mass destruction.
- 18 U.S.C. 2340 Murder involving torture.
- 18 U.S.C. 2381 Treason.
- 21 U.S.C. 848(e) Murder related to a continuing criminal enterprise or related murder of a Federal, State, or local law enforcement officer.
- 49 U.S.C. 1472-1473 Death resulting from aircraft hijacking

Slide 5 Journey to an Execution

After being convicted of a capital crime, your case goes to the penalty phase where the jury decides whether the death penalty should be imposed. The convicted prisoner is then transferred to the prison where "Death Row" is. When on death row, the inmate is allowed only one appeal. This process can take years and after a judgment of death has been pronounced, the defendant's appeal process must pass four basic levels/stages of reviewing his conviction and sentence:

1. Automatic Appeal
2. State Habeas Corpus Petition
3. Federal Habeas Corpus Petition
4. Clemency

The appeal process is intended to guard a citizen's Constitutional Rights (state and federal) and demands a defendant has access to every level of America's court system (due process). Once the appeal has been used and the clemency denied, an execution date is set. The execution method depends on the state where the convict is.

Before the execution, the prisoner is often allowed to visit with family and visit with a minister or a priest. Although there is a minister on staff at the prison, the convicted is able to see an outside minister or priest as well. After the visit with family and a minister or priest, the convicted is able to have his/her last meal. Usually they are able to order their last meal but each meal must not be more than \$40. Some meals of note in the past have been:

- 12 candy bars and some ice cream
- A hearty breakfast of eggs and a huge amount of very salty bacon
- Lobster tail, butterfly shrimp, baked potato, strawberry cheesecake, and sweet tea
- Chocolate and vanilla ice cream cups, shared with the prison superintendent and manager
- A dozen deep-fried shrimp, a bucket of original recipe chicken from KFC, french fries, and a pound of strawberries

Slide 6 Once Again...Our "Culture of Death"

- Briefly discuss the factors that lead so many in our society to have such a disregard for human life.
- Can you be pro-death penalty *and* pro-life?

Slide 7 The Cost of Capital Punishment

- The U.N. (United Nations) opposes the death penalty; therefore, the United States is in violation of U.N. regulations by simply having a death penalty.
- The California death penalty system costs taxpayers \$114 million per year beyond the costs of keeping convicts locked up for life. (L.A. Times, March 6, 2005)
- In Maryland, an average death penalty case resulting in a death sentence costs approximately \$3 million. The eventual costs to Maryland taxpayers for cases pursued 1978-1999 will be \$186 million. Five executions have resulted. (Urban Institute 2008).
- The most comprehensive study in the country found that the death penalty costs North Carolina \$2.16 million per execution *over the* costs of sentencing murderers to life imprisonment. The majority of those costs occur at the trial level. (Duke University, May 1993).
- Enforcing the death penalty costs Florida \$51 million a year above what it would cost to punish all first-degree murderers with life in prison without parole. Based on the 44 executions Florida had carried out since 1976, that amounts to a cost of \$24 million for each execution. (Palm Beach Post, January 4, 2000).
- In Texas, a death penalty case costs an average of \$2.3 million, about three times the cost of imprisoning someone in a single cell at the highest security level for 40 years. (Dallas Morning News, March 8, 1992)

Slide 8 The Business of Capital Punishment

On January 28th 2011, Hospira Inc., the sole U.S. company that manufactured sodium thiopental, an anesthetic used by states in order to execute prisoners, terminated production of the drug. This has left many states with a shortage, delaying some executions. Significantly, hospitals will now be denied access to a drug with important medical uses.

On February 10, Swiss-based drug company Novartis, which makes a generic version of sodium thiopental, announced it would forbid its distributors from exporting the drug to the U.S.

Many state prison officials have begun looking overseas for sodium thiopental. In January, the FDA announced it would not regulate drugs imported for lethal injection. However, using an unregulated anesthetic in lethal injection may violate the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment because if the initial anesthetic fails to work properly, then the other drugs will cause extreme pain. On February 2nd, a suit was filed against the FDA seeking to prevent unregulated drugs from being used in executions.

Ohio and Oklahoma have switched to a different anesthetic, pentobarbital. Yet the company that produces the only injectable form of this drug, Lundbeck, has also objected to their drug being used for capital punishment.

Slide 9 The Risk of Capital Punishment

Darryl Burton was exonerated after spending 24 years in a Missouri prison for a crime he did not commit. His ordeal began in 1984, when he was falsely identified as the suspected gunman in a homicide at a St. Louis gas station.

Despite an absence of any motive and reliable eyewitness accounts which identified the shooter as a light skinned African American significantly shorter than Mr. Burton, the prosecution was able to present testimony from "professional witnesses" which ultimately secured Darryl's conviction. A "professional witness" is someone, usually another criminal, who has been offered incentives by state prosecutors to testify a certain way.

Darryl has attributed his wrongful conviction to the poor efforts of his public defender, including her refusal to present evidence that another man committed the crime and her refusal to attempt to impeach the "professional witnesses." Darryl Burton was found guilty of capital murder and armed criminal action. With sentences imposed concurrently, Darryl would not have been eligible for parole for 75 years.

Darryl obsessively studied the law, late into the night, and for years he wrote and filed hundreds of legal pleadings, motions, and letters asking for help to correct his wrongful conviction. Darryl attributes the strong Christian faith he found in prison and his spirituality helped him survive.

Darryl eventually contacted an organization that expressed a willingness to take on his case but they had a ten year waiting period before they could help him. After ten years, the organization agreed reinvestigated his case, interviewed witnesses and gathered evidence, including recantations from the witness who testified against him at trial. This evidence was presented to a United States District Court, but his petition was denied. On appeal to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, the judge provided an extraordinary decision expressing sincere regret that the Eighth Circuit could do no more to help Darryl, although they believed he may actually be innocent. The court's hands were tied by "confounding" procedural hurdles erected by Congress to limit the effectiveness of Federal Habeas Corpus Petitions. Eventually Darryl's lawyers filed a Rule 91 petition in a Missouri State Court and were granted a hearing. Darryl's attorneys presented all the evidence that could have been presented at his trial, in addition to new evidence, some of which was kept hidden from his original public defender.

Darryl has revealed to groups during speaking engagements how in late August of 2008, the warden visited him in his prison cell and told him he (the warden) had a court order that he was to release Darryl. Darryl was so shocked that he could not remember walking through the last two doors to his freedom, that he was frightened by how quickly his lawyer drove him away from the prison, and how he was skeptical of TGIF fried mozzarella sticks. Today, Darryl proudly revealed how his faith has kept him emotionally grounded and helped him forgive the people that wrongfully brought him to prison and why fried mozzarella sticks will always be one of his favorite foods.

Slide 10 The Other Victims of Capital Punishment

In most cases, the victim's family feels the murderer 'deserves' death because they want revenge for the death of their loved one. They let the revengeful feeling overtake their thoughts and desire nothing more than to see the convicted individual die. When the execution takes place, the family finds themselves still hurting and desiring their loved one back. The death penalty will not bring back their loved one, instead another person has been killed and yet another family is suffering the same way they are.

A Family's Account

After her brother became Baltimore's 21st murder victim of 2007, Erricka Bridgeford couldn't wait for the police to find the person who did it. Bridgeford dreamed of spitting in the murderer's face. Male relatives

thought of even more violent ways of exacting vengeance, she said.

After she saw her brother's lifeless body, however, something changed. *"Rage turned into confusion,"* said Bridgeford, speaking at a March 13 interfaith prayer service to end the death penalty in Maryland. *"Confusion erupted into devastation. Devastation morphed into regretful acceptance. Acceptance birthed a sad wisdom."* That wisdom told her that taking the life of the person who killed her brother wouldn't bring him back.

She would have no part in promoting the death penalty. It would bring nothing but one more dead body, she said, and it wouldn't bring her peace. *"I want life in return for my brother's death,"* she said. *"He is worth forgiveness in return for violence. He is worth healing in return for devastation."*

Slide 11 Christ's Execution

- Briefly discuss how Christ's death is similar/different than executions today.

Slide 12 What Does Scripture Say?

"From oppression and violence he redeems their souls; and precious is their blood in his sight"
- Psalm 72: 14-

Slide 13 What Does the Church Say?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

2265. Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm. For this reason, those who legitimately hold authority also have the right to use arms to repel aggressors against the civil community entrusted to their responsibility.

2266. The efforts of the state to curb the spread of behavior harmful to people's rights and to the basic rules of civil society correspond to the requirement of safeguarding the common good. Legitimate public authority has the right and the duty to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense. Punishment has the primary aim of redressing the disorder introduced by the offense. When it is willingly accepted by the guilty party, it assumes the value of expiation. Punishment then, in addition to defending public order and protecting people's safety, has a medicinal purpose: As far as possible, it must contribute to the correction of the guilty party.

2267. 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.

Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm -- without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself -- the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity "...are very rare, if not practically non-existent." (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 56)

Slide 14 What Does the Vatican Say?

"We are still a long way from the time when our conscience can be certain of having done everything possible to prevent crime and to control it effectively so that it no longer does harm and, at the same time, to offer to those who commit crimes a way of redeeming themselves and making a positive return to society. If all those in some way involved in the problem tried to develop this line of thought, perhaps humanity as a whole could take a great step forward in creating a more serene and peaceful society."
Pope John Paul II, July 9, 2000

"It cannot be overemphasized that the right to life must be recognized in all its fullness, ...[we must enact laws and public policies that] take into account the high value that a human being has at every moment of

existence. In this context, I joyfully welcome the initiative by which Mexico abolished the death penalty in 2005, and the recent measures adopted by some Mexican states to protect human life from its beginnings.“
Pope Benedict XVI, July 10, 2009

The administration of the death penalty is often seen as a major sign of some of the failings within the American criminal justice system. Capital punishment is cruel, unnecessary, and arbitrary; it often has racial overtones; and it fails to live up to our deep conviction that all human life is sacred. 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.

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.

We must join with those who are working to end the death penalty—in their witness at prisons as people are executed, in state capitals across our land, in courtrooms and prisons around the nation, and in Congress, where efforts to abolish or limit the death penalty are being debated. We need to support calls for a moratorium on executions and welcome the courage of leaders who have implemented or are working to address the clear failings of the death penalty.

We know this is not an easy matter. Catholic teaching has developed over time and there have been diverse views on the application of these principles. However, as we begin this new millennium, Pope John Paul II, the U.S. Catholic bishops, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church together express the strong conviction that capital punishment should no longer be used since there are better ways to protect society, and the death penalty diminishes respect for human life.

We are encouraged by small but growing signs that support for the death penalty is eroding and that capital punishment is being reconsidered. People are asking if we are really safer in states where executions are so regular that they hardly rate news coverage. People are asking whether we can be sure that those who are executed are truly guilty, given the evidence of wrongful convictions and poor representation in death penalty cases. We welcome legislation to address these issues as a way to focus on the unfairness of the death penalty. But most of all, we are asking whether we can teach that killing is wrong by killing those who have been convicted of killing others. It is time to abandon the death penalty—not just because of what it does to those who are executed, but because of how it diminishes all of us.

We cannot overcome what Pope John Paul II called a "culture of death," we cannot reverse what we have called a "culture of violence," and we cannot build a "culture of life" by state-sanctioned killing.

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.

We ask all Catholics—pastors, catechists, educators, and parishioners—must join in rethinking this difficult issue and committing ourselves to pursuing justice without vengeance. With our Holy Father, we seek to build a society so committed to human life that it will not sanction the killing of any human person

Slide 15 Outreach Opportunities

Briefly discuss how each of us can become directly involved in the death penalty issue...

- Educate family, friends, and fellow students
- Contact your legislators about sponsoring a ban on capital punishment in your state
- Get involved with the Social Justice team in your school or parish
- Discuss with your teachers, parents, pastor, or parish lay ministers the possibility of developing a group-sponsored prison pen pal or visitation program. This is an outreach opportunity that *must* be coordinated with a parent, teacher, or other adult.
- Volunteer with the local Catholic Charities Turn-Around program that provides clothes and other assistance to newly released inmates to help them find a job and integrate into society.

Slide 16 Summary

- Now understand the process of capital punishment
- See the shortcomings and risks associated with the current national and state-wide capital punishment systems

- Can talk confidently about the effectiveness and morality of capital punishment from the Church's perspective
- Now aware of what you can do to get involved

Closing Prayer

Slide 17 Prayer for All Life

Loving God,

We thank you for the gift of life you gave and continue to give to us.

Merciful God,

We ask your pardon and forgiveness for our failure to respect and foster all forms of life in our world.

Gracious God,

We pray that with your grace, we will revere, protect, and promote all life
and that we will be sensitive to the lives of those sentenced to death.

We pray, too, that all who make decisions about life in any form will do so with wisdom, love, and courage.

Living God,

We praise and glorify you as Father, Source of all life,
as Son, Savior of our lives,
and as Spirit, Sanctifier of our lives.

Amen