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# Know the FACTS About...

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## *Capital Punishment in Pennsylvania*

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Says the Lord God, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live.  
--Ezekiel 33:11 (NAB)

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Approximately 3,500 inmates sit on death row in state, federal and military prisons across the country. In Pennsylvania, 218 men and 5 women are on death row. The last Pennsylvania execution was in July 1999.

These inmates are convicted of serious and violent criminal acts. They deserve punishment for their crimes, but it is not necessary for society to put them to death.

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### **Society can appropriately punish without having to rely on execution.**

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The Church is committed to upholding the dignity and sanctity of every human life -- even the life of a person convicted of a most heinous crime. The Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania have consistently called for a re-examination of the death penalty. Church teaching calls all people to grow in respect for human life and to oppose the death penalty.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* teaches that governmental authority has the right and duty to assure the safety of society, and to punish criminals by means of suitable penalties. This includes imposition of the death penalty if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor (cf. CCC, no. 2267).

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. (cf. CCC, no. 2267)

Society can appropriately punish without having to rely on execution. We can imprison and isolate offenders to promote the safety of citizens. Life imprisonment in Pennsylvania means

confinement without the possibility of parole. And, a life sentence allows victims to begin their healing while providing the inmate time to repent of his crime.

Law enforcement officials concede that the death penalty has no effect in dissuading others from committing murder. This conclusion is supported by studies comparing murder rates in states that have the death penalty with states that do not.

The death penalty creates a potentially greater harm to society by reinforcing the idea that violence is a solution to society's problems. The death penalty will not eradicate violent crime any more than abortion is a solution to unwanted pregnancy.

The Church's opposition to the use of the death penalty should not be construed as a lack of compassion for those who have been affected by violent crime. True emotional, spiritual, and even physical healing is found in the compassionate embrace of Jesus, who practiced forgiveness and teaches us to do the same.

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Abolition of the death penalty is an issue that affects the common good. We are committed to defend the gift of life that God has given all people.

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**Resources:**

*The Death Penalty: Choose Life, A Statement On Capital Punishment*, The Bishops of Pennsylvania, 2001.

*A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death, A Statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Calling for an End to the Use of the Death Penalty*, 2005.

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### **Let us pray for justice and mercy.**

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