

LOUISIANA'S DEATH PENALTY



**CATHOLIC
MOBILIZING
NETWORK**

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

The Facts

- 70 people currently on death row
- 28 executions since 1976
- 632 executions before 1976
- Jury decides the sentence
- Life without parole is a sentencing option
- Method of execution is lethal injection
- 11 exonerations from death row
- 2 people have been granted clemency

An Exoneree

Glenn Ford was exonerated after spending almost 30 years on Louisiana's death row in 2014. He died of lung cancer one year after his release, and hours before his case was cited in the dissenting opinion of Justice Breyer in *Glossip v. Gross*, as providing "striking" evidence "that the death penalty has been Wrongly imposed," calling into question the constitutionality of the death penalty.

After Ford's exoneration, the lead prosecutor on his case, A.M. "Marty" Stroud III, issued a public apology, admitting "I was...very full of myself. I was not as interested in justice as I was in winning. We are simply incapable of devising a system that can fairly and impartially impose a sentence of death because we are all fallible human beings."

Louisiana's Bishops Stand Against Capital Punishment

The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops lifted up the Church's Pro-Life teaching and released a statement in 2017 calling for an end to the death penalty: "The stark reality is that capital punishment fails to bring back life that has been lost. It does not provide healing, reconciliation, or even peace to those impacted. The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops asks all men and women of good faith, especially those members of the Louisiana legislature, to search their heart in an effort to seek mercy and love to support the repeal of the death penalty and aid in building a culture of life. We renew the call issued in our 1994 statement *Violence in Our Society: Death is Not the Answer*. 'We must believe in the all-powerful redemptive love of God which can change hearts, convert people, and renew all things. . . We must be a people who see the value of a human life that others might think to be worthless. We must be a people who give praise to the God of all possibilities. . . ' The time is upon us to affirm life without exception here within our great state of Louisiana."

For the full statement and more resources visit:

Louisiana Catholic Conference of Bishops: www.laccb.org

Louisiana's Hidden Evidence

John Thompson was convicted of robbery and murder and spent 18 years in prison, 14 of them on death row, before being exonerated. Right before Thompson's scheduled execution, an investigator discovered that prosecutors had hidden blood evidence which was used for Thompson's exonerations.

Louisiana's Broken Death Penalty

Louisiana's death penalty is not reserved for the worst of the worst but imposed on the broken; a study by the Jesuit Social Research Institute found that individuals with mental illness, brain damage, intellectual disability, the young, and those who suffered abuse as children were highly overrepresented on death row.

Sr. Helen Prejean

Sr. Helen Prejean began her work against the death penalty in Louisiana when she visited Patrick Sonnier on death row at Angola and accompanied him to his execution. Her account is documented in the book and movie, "Dead Man Walking."

The Church and State Speak

The Church Speaks

Catechism of the Catholic Church

"The Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that 'the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person' and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide." (CCC 2267)

Evangelium Vitae

Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical on human dignity, challenges us to be "unconditionally pro-life.": "The case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform." (*Evangelium Vitae*, 27)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

"Its [the death penalty] application is deeply flawed and can be irreversibly wrong, is prone to errors and is biased by factors such as race, the quality of legal representation and where the crime was committed." (*A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*, USCCB, 2005)

Words of the Popes

Pope Francis: "Rendering justice' does not mean seeking punishment for its own sake, but ensuring that the basic purpose of all punishment is the rehabilitation of the offender." *World Congress Against the Death Penalty*, June 22, 2016

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: "Society's leaders should make every effort to eliminate the death penalty and to reform the penal system in a way that ensures respect for the prisoners' human dignity." *Benin, Africa*, Nov. 19, 2011

The States Speak

Innocence

- Nationally, over 160 people have been exonerated from death row.
- For every nine executions carried out in the United States, one person has been found to be innocent.

Racial Bias

- 76% of death row defendants have been executed for killing white victims, even though African Americans make up about half of all homicide victims.

Criminalization of Mental Illness and Intellectual Disabilities

- A study in the *Hastings Law Journal* of recent executions found that "over half of the last one hundred executed offenders have been diagnosed with or displayed symptoms of mental illness."
- The Supreme Court banned the execution of those with intellectual disabilities but states have significantly deviated from accepted clinical methods for determining intellectual disability.

Overrepresentation of the Poor

- The majority of individuals on death row could not afford their own attorney. In many cases, the appointed attorneys are overworked, underpaid, or lacking the trial experience require for death penalty cases.

Costly Public Policy

- Multiple studies have shown the cost of trial sentencing, appeals, and imprisonment to be much higher in capital cases versus life in prison without parole.

Geographic Basis

- 2% of all U.S. counties have produced 56% of the U.S. death row population.



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