

# DEATH PENALTY RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN) seeks to support Catholic educators in search of ways to incorporate the issue of capital punishment into their curricula. **Here is what you need to know about this resource:**

**WHAT:** A collection of resources and activities that serves as a general introduction to the death penalty as it aligns with Catholic Social Tradition.

**WHO:** Intended for educator use in Catholic grade schools, colleges, and universities. Best suited for classes on theology or social justice.

**WHERE:** May be applicable anywhere in the United States, with additional information included about your state or jurisdiction for context.

**WHEN:** Recommended for a single class or unit on the topic of the death penalty.

**HOW:** Intended to be streamlined and simple; All resources are hyperlinked to their original source and CMN handouts can be downloaded from our website ([www.catholicismobilizing.org](http://www.catholicismobilizing.org)).

**NOTE:** The content includes stories of violent and non-violent harm and victimization. Consider ways to preface and adapt presentation of material to account for potential trauma responses of students.



For questions about this resource, please contact Emma Tacke, CMN's Associate Director of Community Engagement, at [emmat@catholicismobilizing.org](mailto:emmat@catholicismobilizing.org).



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## INSTRUCTION SUPPORT

[Death Penalty FAQ](#)

[Updated List of Upcoming Scheduled Executions](#)

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[History of the Death Penalty Timeline](#)

[Interactive Map of Past Executions in the United States](#)

[Execution by Race and Race of Victim](#)

## POTENTIAL SPEAKERS

[Witness to Innocence \(Death Row Exonerees\)](#)

[Journey of Hope \(Murder Victims' Family Members\)](#)

Look up local state death penalty abolition coalition and invite members to speak

## HANDOUTS

[Catholic Social Teaching and the Death Penalty](#)

[How Poverty Affects the Death Penalty](#)

[Defending a Culture of Life: Pro-Death Penalty Claims and Pro-Life Responses](#)

## ARTICLES/BLOG POSTS

[Man executed as Catholics continue to denounce executions](#)

Mark Pattison // Arkansas Catholic (via Catholic News Service)

[At its core, the death penalty is indefensible](#)

The Editors // America Magazine

CMN [In the Media](#)

Catholic Mobilizing Network



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## SHORT BOOKS

### **Death Penalty and Discipleship: A Faith Formation Guide**

David Matzko McCarthy

## LONG BOOKS

### **Dead Man Walking**

Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ

### **Just Mercy**

Bryan Stevenson

### **Where Justice and Mercy Meet**

Edited by Vicki Schieber, Trudy D. Conway, and David Matzko McCarthy



## VIDEOS/FILMS

### **Catholics and the Death Penalty**

Catholic Mobilizing Network

### **"Inadmissible": The Church's Call for an End to the Death Penalty**

Catholic Mobilizing Network

### **Just Mercy**

Warner Bros. Pictures

### **Restorative Justice: Why Do We Need it?**

Brave New Films



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## REFLECTION/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Consider your own views on the death penalty. Do you agree or disagree with the Catholic Church's teaching that the death penalty is "inadmissible"?
- How does the death penalty violate the Church's teaching about upholding the inherent dignity of the human person?
- What does the word "justice" mean to you?
- Consider what kind of services a state could provide if it did not spend money on the death penalty.

## ACTIVITIES/ASSIGNMENTS

- Write a letter to the editor about the death penalty.
- Watch the film 'Just Mercy' and use CMN's Just Mercy Catholic Study Guide ([catholicismobilizing.org/just-mercy-guide](http://catholicismobilizing.org/just-mercy-guide)) for a guided discussion.
- Research whether your elected state officials have spoken about the death penalty and write them a letter explaining your own stance.
- Research and summarize — in either a paper or a presentation — your state's history and use of the death penalty.
- Look up whether any bishops in your state have made statements about the death penalty. If yes, write them a letter thanking them for their leadership on this issue. If no, write them a letter inviting them to be more public in their support for ending the death penalty and share with them what you have learned.
- Short essay: Does/How does your faith inform your opinion on the death penalty?

\*Large group, small group, pair share, journaling, or follow-up assignment



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## SUGGESTED SEQUENCE - HIGH SCHOOL

1. **Pre-Reading:** "Catholic Social Teaching and the Death Penalty" handout and History of the Death Penalty Timeline
2. **Video:** Catholics and the Death Penalty
  - a. Church teaching on justice: Right Relationship
3. **Invite a speaker or watch a film** (Alternatively, have students watch film on their own before class)
  - a. **Activity (if watching a film):** Discuss film as a class—What feelings came up during the film for you? What was something you learned? Something that surprised you?
4. **Reflection (either in pair share, journal, or small group):**  
Consider your own views on the death penalty. Do you agree or disagree with the Church's teaching that the death penalty is "inadmissible"?
5. **Assignment:**
  - a. Research and summarize — in either a paper or a presentation — your own state's history and use of the death penalty.
  - b. Look up whether any bishops in your state have made statements about the death penalty. If yes, write them a letter thanking them for their leadership on the issue. If no, write them a letter inviting them to be more public in their support for ending the death penalty and share with them what you have learned about the death penalty.



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## SUGGESTED SEQUENCE - COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY

1. **Pre-Reading or Pre-Viewing:** 'Just Mercy'
2. **Supplemental Readings:** "Catholic Social Teaching and the Death Penalty" handout, History of the Death Penalty Timeline, Interactive Map of Past Executions in the United States, Executions by Race and Race of Victim
3. **Activity:** Use CMN's 'Just Mercy' Catholic Study Guide ([catholicismobilizing.org/just-mercy-guide](http://catholicismobilizing.org/just-mercy-guide)) for a guided class discussion
4. **Assignment:** Research and summarize — in either a paper or a presentation — your own state's history and use of the death penalty.

