

# ALASKA'S DEATH PENALTY



**CATHOLIC  
MOBILIZING  
NETWORK**

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.  
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

## The Facts

- 0 executions since 1976
- 12 Executions before 1976
- Life without parole is not a sentencing option

## Famous Case

The first person to be executed in Juneau was an Alaskan Native, Nelson Charles. Charles was executed by hanging in 1939 for the murder of his mother-in-law, Cecilia Johnson. Charles spent 6 months in prison without a lawyer before he was indicted by a grand jury. Charles was appointed a lawyer, Adolph H. Ziegler, a week before his trial started. Ziegler did not even give the closing argument for the trial, leaving it instead to another lawyer with no association with the case.

**For more information on this case:**

<http://bit.ly/2mQ6NhI>

## MILESTONES IN ABOLITION/ REINSTATEMENT

The abolition measure passed by the Alaska Territorial Legislature in 1957 stated simply: "The death penalty is and shall hereafter be abolished as punishment in Alaska for the commission of any crime."

Alaska as a state has never had the death penalty. The Territorial Legislature abolished capital punishment years before Alaska gained statehood.

# 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*

### <sup>27</sup> 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



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## 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 required 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