

# MAINE'S DEATH PENALTY



## The Facts

- 0 people currently on death row
- 0 executions since 1976
- 21 executions before 1976
- Life without parole is a sentencing option

## Botched Execution

The last execution took place in Maine on November 21, 1885. This execution is also notable because the hanging was not successful.

Daniel Wilkinson was an escaped convict who, along with an accomplice, attempted to break into a store. Wilkinson and John Ewitt, the accomplice, were making an escape when they were chased by police officer, William Lawrence. Wilkinson shot Lawrence in the head and was sentenced to death for the crime.

## Maine Bishops Stand Against Capital Punishment

Human life is sacred. Direct attacks on innocent human beings are never morally acceptable. Within our society, life is under direct attack from abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, and destruction of human embryos for research. These intrinsic evils must always be opposed. This teaching also compels us as Catholics to oppose genocide, torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty, as well as to pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism, and other conditions that demean human life.

-Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Nov. 2014

## Maine's Death Penalty is a Thing of the Past

Maine repealed its death penalty in 1876, reestablished it briefly from 1883-1887, and then abolished it again after a botched hanging in 1885, which was the state's last execution.

A bill was introduced in 1925 to reinstate Maine's death penalty, but no legislative action was taken on it.

Another attempt to reinstate the state's death penalty occurred in 1937, but once again no legislative action was taken.

Further attempts to reinstate the death penalty occurred in the Maine legislature in 1973, 1975, 1977 and 1979 but all of them were defeated.

# The Church and State Speak

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## The Church Speaks

### ***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)

### **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' (Francis) and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide." (CCC 2267)

### **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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MOBILIZING  
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ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.  
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

## 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