

MISSISSIPPI'S DEATH PENALTY



**CATHOLIC
MOBILIZING
NETWORK**

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

- 46 people currently on death row
- 21 executions since 1976
- 351 executions before 1976
- Jury decides the sentence
- Life without parole is a sentencing option
- Method of execution is lethal injection
- 4 persons released from death row based on evidence of innocence
- 0 clemencies granted

Innocent

Michelle Byron was sentenced to die in Mississippi for a crime she did not commit. She was convicted of conspiring to kill her husband even though her son confessed to the crime, angered by his father's abuse. She spent 15 years in prison and came within hours of her scheduled execution before the Mississippi State Supreme Court ordered her a new trial.

Defending the Poor

In 2015, the Mississippi Supreme Court found Hinds County Judge Weill had improperly prevented a public defender from defending impoverished clients. Judge Weill could not identify a sufficient reason for barring the public defender from court, and some believe the ban was because of the attorney's successful representation. The poor face many obstacles in exercising their right to a lawyer and many are sentenced to die because of inadequate defense.

Join Us and Work to End the Death Penalty

Working in close collaboration with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and living the mission of the Congregation of St. Joseph, The Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN) proclaims the Church's pro-life teaching and prepares Catholics for informed involvement in the public debate to end the death penalty and promote restorative justice.

Join our email network:

bit.ly/JoinCMN

Inhumane Conditions

Inmates on Death Row in Mississippi and in several other Southern states claim to suffer in extreme temperatures. Though the heat index is supposed to be maintained at a temperature no higher than 85 degrees, there are no logs used to track temperature and fans are used to lower the index. In other states, extreme temperatures within the prison have led to sickness and even death.

Cruel and Unusual

Several methods of execution have been used in Mississippi including hanging, gas chamber, and even a portable electric chair. Today, the method used is lethal injection though all executions have been temporarily halted until 2016. Advocates say the drugs used cause pain and are "chemical torture."

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*

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