

# WYOMING'S DEATH PENALTY



**CATHOLIC  
MOBILIZING  
NETWORK**

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.  
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

## United States Bishops Stand Against Capital Punishment

In 2015, Cardinal O'Malley and Archbishop Wenski issued a statement reemphasizing the Church's imperative to partake in the death penalty abolition movement. They said: "Ten years ago, the Catholic bishops of the United States initiated the *Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty*. Speaking as pastors and teachers, we issued a statement at that time, *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*, in which we considered the reality of capital punishment in the United States. We urged a prudential examination of the use of the death penalty, with the aim of helping to build a "culture of life in which our nation will no longer try to teach that killing is wrong by killing those who kill. This cycle of violence diminishes all of us... The Church's opposition to the death penalty should not be seen as indifference to the sinfulness of crime and attacks on human life, but as an affirmation of the sacredness of all life even for those who have committed the most heinous of crimes."

As Archbishop Joseph Naumann of the Archdiocese of Kansas City, whose own father was murdered, recently said: "Our refusal to resort to the death penalty is not because we fail to appreciate the horror of the crime committed, but because we refuse to imitate violent criminals... The Scriptures remind us: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Lk 5:7). As Christians, we are called to oppose the culture of death by witnessing to something greater and more perfect: a gospel of life, hope, and mercy. To help build a culture of life, capital punishment should be abolished."

## THE FACTS

- 1 person currently on death row
- 1 execution since 1976
- 22 executions before 1976
- Jury decides the sentence
- Life without parole is a sentencing option
- Method of execution is lethal injection or gas
- 0 people released from death row based on evidence of innocence
- 0 people have been granted clemency

## MILESTONES IN ABOLITION & REINSTATEMENT

Wyoming was one of the last states to ban the execution of juvenile offenders before the Supreme Court banned the practice in *Roper v. Simmons*. The state legislature passed a bill banning the death penalty for juveniles in 2004.

## OTHER FACTS

The last execution in Wyoming was that of Mark Hopkinson in 1992.

# The Church and State Speak

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## 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



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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.
- Louisiana has not executed a white person for killing an African-American in over 300 years.

### 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