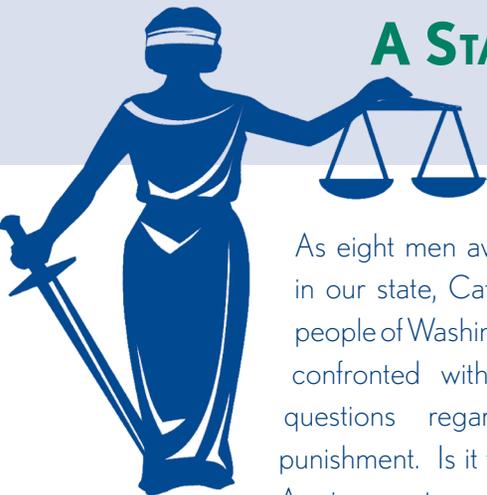


A STATEMENT ON THE DEATH PENALTY IN WASHINGTON STATE

SEPTEMBER, 2009



As eight men await execution in our state, Catholics and all people of Washington State are confronted with unanswered questions regarding capital punishment. Is it fairly applied? Are innocent people executed?

Are our motives revenge or safety? Is the punishment of death a necessary means of ensuring public safety? In the midst of grappling with these questions, we the bishops of Washington State want to share with Catholic people the understanding of this issue that emanates from our faith and teaching.

First and foremost our pastoral responsibilities call us to comfort and care for victims' families, friends and loved ones in response to the crime of murder. We reaffirm our commitment to console these secondary victims of violence by ensuring a welcoming presence within the Church to love and support them. We also join our voices with all other citizens in the demand that we are protected from those who would commit murder.

When someone is murdered, their death cries out for a response, but violence in response to violence

Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor.

If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person.
Catechism of the Catholic Church [2267]

only perpetuates the illusion that cruelty and the taking of human life can balance the scales of justice. We therefore call upon Catholics, all citizens and our state leaders to find appropriate methods and means to protect innocent life from those who would commit murder. We further acknowledge that in the most extreme cases of violent murder, the sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole can be an appropriate sentence.

In order to establish sentencing alternatives for the death penalty, however, we must reject state-sponsored killing from the outset. In the past, when life imprisonment was an impractical option to protect society, the Church permitted the execution of murderers. As the need for capital punishment to protect the public has become increasingly rare, the Church has spoken out consistently for abolition of the death penalty.

We therefore raise our voices as pastoral leaders and call for a moratorium on capital punishment in Washington State. We further urge state leaders to conduct an open and thorough review of the death penalty and search for effective sentencing alternatives for the crime of murder.

As we did almost 10 years ago, we recommit ourselves to the pastoral support of those who have lost loved ones to acts of criminal violence and to the reform of our sentencing options to ensure true justice for victims and the protection of the public. We ask that all Catholics pray, study and reflect on Church teaching about the dignity of human life, and we ask Catholic public officials to dedicate themselves to the eradication of violence in the cause of justice.

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Washington State Bishops, 2009

[T]he nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent.

From “*Evangelium Vitae*”:
Chapter III, 56

Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm—without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself—the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity “are very rare, if not practically non-existent.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church [2267]

For the longer WSCC Pastoral Statement on the Death Penalty, go to: www.thewsc.org



Washington State
Catholic Conference

The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State: Archbishop Alex J. Brunett of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Bishop William S. Skylstad of the Diocese of Spokane, Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla S.J., of the Diocese of Yakima, Bishop Eusebio Elizondo M.Sp.S., Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle and Bishop Joseph J. Tyson, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Washington State Catholic Conference

“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” Jn 10:10

**A PASTORAL STATEMENT ON
THE DEATH PENALTY IN
WASHINGTON STATE**

SEPTEMBER 2009



Washington State
Catholic Conference