

## CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

**2265.** Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for someone responsible for another's life. Preserving the common good requires rendering the unjust aggressor unable to inflict harm. To this end, those holding legitimate authority have the right to repel by armed force aggressors against the civil community entrusted to their charge.

**2266.** The State's effort to contain the spread of behaviors injurious to human rights and the fundamental rules of civil coexistence corresponds to the requirement of watching over the common good. Legitimate public authority has the right and duty to inflict penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime; the primary scope of the penalty is to redress the disorder caused by the offense. When his punishment is voluntarily accepted by the offender, it takes on the value of expiation. Moreover, punishment, in addition to preserving public order and the safety of persons, has a medicinal scope: as far as possible it should contribute to the correction of the offender.

**2267.** Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good.

Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.

Consequently, 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.**

# Resources

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## The Public Policy Voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana



"The death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person."

-Catechism of the Catholic Church 2267

# INDIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

# The Death Penalty



# Resisting the Culture of Death

As Catholics, we profess and are called to uphold a consistent ethic of life, to stand against violence in every form—abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, unjust war, and all conditions which undermine the dignity of life, including but not limited to poverty, hunger, racism, and endemic diseases.

The Church has consistently taught of the inviolable dignity of the human person, including those who have committed terrible crimes. We invite you to reflect upon this teaching and the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, Himself a victim of the death penalty, did not condemn His executioners, but forgave them.

## PAPAL TEACHING

In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), Pope Saint John Paul II stated the teaching of the Catholic Church: "Punishment ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity." The Pope went on to teach that such cases of absolute necessity in which society cannot be defended in any other way are "very rare, if not practically non-existent."<sup>1</sup>

Pope Saint John Paul II also spoke about about the death penalty while visiting St. Louis in 1999. "The new evangelization calls us to be unconditionally pro-life: we will proclaim, celebrate, and serve the Gospel of Life in every situation...modern society has the means of protecting itself without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal I made most recently for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary."<sup>2</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI carried this teaching into his papacy recalling "the attention of society's leaders to the need to make every effort to eliminate the death penalty." He later wished a group of the faithful that 'your deliberations will encourage the political and legislative initiatives being promoted in a growing number of countries to eliminate the death penalty and to continue the substantive progress made in conforming penal law both to the human dignity of prisoners and the effective maintenance of public order.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, #57

<sup>2</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops regarding the new revision of number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the death penalty, 02.08.2018

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

# ...promoting a Culture of Life.

Pope Francis, in light of the teachings of his predecessors, requested a revision of number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which "situates itself in continuity with the preceding Magisterium while bringing forth a coherent development of Catholic doctrine."<sup>3</sup> This revision "gives energy to a movement toward a mentality that recognizes the dignity of every human life and, in respectful dialogue with civil authorities, to encourage the creation of conditions that allow

for the elimination of the death penalty where it is still in effect."<sup>4</sup> The Church's complex teaching on the death penalty, further developed by the Magisterium, aims to promote a worldwide culture of life. The revised text of the Catechism is printed in its entirety on the back of this brochure.



Indiana should forego the use of the death penalty because:

- There are other means of protecting society and punishing criminals.
- The death penalty demonstrably does NOT deter crime.
- Its application is flawed and can be irreversibly wrong.
- The sanction of death undermines respect of human life and dignity.

## DEATH PENALTY IN INDIANA

After Indiana reinstituted the death penalty in 1976, its use of the death penalty was uncommon until 1994. Only two individuals were executed from 1976 through 1993. However, from 1994 through 2009, the State of Indiana carried out 18 executions. No executions have been carried out by the State of Indiana since 2009.

In 2020, the federal government resumed the execution of death row inmates, ending a 17 year moratorium on executions at the federal level. These executions take place in Terra Haute, Indiana, at the United States Federal Penitentiary, which consequently affects many Hoosiers.

Indiana is 1 of 29 states that continue to execute individuals. 21 states have banned the use of the death penalty. Those 21 states recognize the arbitrariness and flaws in the death penalty. In Indiana, 2 persons have been exonerated after serving time on death row. In response, Indiana law has changed in recent years to limit the application of the death penalty in some cases:

- Juveniles and the mentally retarded are no longer eligible for the death penalty.
- A Jury must impose the death sentence in a capital case, rather than the judge.

In 1993, Indiana adopted an alternative—life without parole. Unfortunately, despite this available alternative, 19 individuals have been condemned to death in Indiana.



<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, #57

<sup>2</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops regarding the new revision of number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the death penalty, 02.08.2018

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