

## **New Jersey Catholic Conference**

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### **A Statement of the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey on the Death Penalty**

**November 26, 2007**

Consistently, over many decades, the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey have called for the abolishment of the death penalty. Most recently, we spoke out on this issue on February 4, 2005, on July 19, 2006, and on May 8, 2007. Our message always is simple – the death penalty takes a human life and should be abolished. Many others have pointed out that the death penalty is not consistent with evolving standards of decency.

On Holy Thursday of 2005, the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops launched a campaign to end capital punishment across the nation with a theme: “The death penalty diminishes all of us. Its use ought to be abandoned not only for what it does to those who are executed, but what it does to us as a society. We cannot teach respect for life by taking life.”

The Catholic Church is guided by our belief that every person has an inalienable right to life, because each human being is made in the image and likeness of God, who alone is the absolute Lord of life from its beginning until its end (cf. The Book of Genesis 1:26-28).

We acknowledge that the subject of capital punishment is controversial, emotional and not an easy matter to address. All murders are violent and shocking; some are savage. They all stir emotions of revulsion and anger.

We grieve for the victims of murder, for the brutalization and loss of life. We commiserate with the families and friends of victims who must suffer with their loss through the years.

We recognize the need to improve our criminal justice system and the need for a greater societal commitment to preventing crime and to providing assistance for victims of crime.

We do affirm that the state has the duty to punish criminals and to prevent the repetition or occurrence of crime. We believe that greater efforts must be made to bring the criminal to repentance and rehabilitation.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* acknowledges the right of public authorities to impose criminal punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense, “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.”

Because the State of New Jersey has other means to redress the injustice caused by crime and to effectively prevent crime by rendering the one who has committed the offense incapable of doing harm and because we recognize the dignity of all human life, we continue oppose the use of capital punishment vigorously. Life in prison without the possibility of parole is an alternative to the death penalty.

As pastors and teachers we urge the State of New Jersey not to impose the death penalty in our state.

We urge the Legislature to pass and Governor Corzine to sign Senate Bill 171 and Assembly Bill 3716 which would abolish the death penalty in New Jersey.

Most Rev. John J. Myers  
Archbishop of Newark

Most Reverend Andrew Pataki  
Bishop of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy  
of Passaic

Most Reverend Joseph A. Galante  
Bishop of Camden

Most Reverend Joseph Younan  
Bishop of Our Lady of Deliverance Diocese

Most Reverend Paul G. Bootkoski  
Bishop of Metuchen

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha  
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli  
Bishop of Paterson

Most Reverend Thomas A. Donato  
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Most Reverend John M. Smith  
Bishop of Trenton

Most Reverend John W. Flesey  
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark