



Prayer to End the Use of the Death Penalty

Merciful Father, we ask your blessing on all we do to build a culture of life. Hear our prayers for those impacted by the death penalty.

We pray for all people, that their lives and dignity as children of a loving God may be respected and protected in all stages and circumstances.

We pray for victims of violence and their families, that they may experience our love and support and find comfort in your compassion and in the promise of eternal life.

We pray for those on death row, that their lives may be spared, that the innocent may be freed and that the guilty may come to acknowledge their faults and seek reconciliation with you.

We pray for the families of those who are facing execution, that they may be comforted by your love and compassion.

We pray for civic leaders, that they may commit themselves to respecting every human life and ending the use of the death penalty in our land.

Compassionate Father, give us wisdom and hearts filled with your love. Guide us as we work to end the use of the death penalty and to build a society that truly chooses life in all situations.

We ask this Father through your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen

Source: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

What Can I Do?

Join FLCAN, the Florida Catholic Advocacy Network, at www.flaccb.org and receive updates and alerts.

Find out who your legislators are and make your voice heard.

Attend Catholic Days at the Capitol for a briefing on current legislative issues and meet with legislative officials.

Contact your local respect life office to join in their efforts.

Join or help start a prison ministry at your parish or diocese.

Join or coordinate prayer vigils.

Above all else, pray for the victims of violent crimes and their families, for persons on death row awaiting execution, and for the end to the use of the death penalty.



Culture of Life Series

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“Walk as children of light...”
Ephesians 5:8

**A Catholic Response
to Florida’s Death Penalty**

Florida's Death Penalty: A Brief History

1924—Frank Johnson is the first inmate executed in Florida's electric chair.

1972—In *Furman vs. Georgia*, the Supreme Court holds that capital punishment is unconstitutional, striking down state death penalty laws nationwide and creating new guidelines for a new death penalty.

1976—The Supreme Court begins to approve new state laws for capital punishment.

1979—Executions resume in Florida; John Spenkelink becomes the first death row inmate to be executed under the new statutes.

1989—Ted Bundy is electrocuted as the 20th person to be executed in Florida (since 1976).

1998—Judias "Judy" Buenoano becomes the first woman to die in Florida's electric chair.

2000—Florida passes legislation allowing lethal injection as an alternative execution method; Edward Castro, through lethal injection, is the 50th executed inmate in Florida.

2002—Aileen Wournos is the second female to be executed in Florida.

2013—Florida announces it will use a new drug, midazolam, as part of a 3-drug process having never been used before in executions.

Florida's Death Penalty: Today

As of September 2014, 393 individuals are on Florida's death row; five of them are women.¹

As of September 2014, 88 inmates have been executed since Florida reinstated the death penalty in 1976.²

In 2013, Florida carried out seven executions, the second highest of US states that year.³

Florida houses the second largest death row in the US and leads the country in the number of new death sentences.⁴

Florida's Death Penalty: The Problem

Racial disparities: Research has consistently come to the conclusion that defendants are much more likely to be sentenced to death if the victims are white. Florida has never executed a white person for killing an African American.⁵

Florida is an outlier: 18 states have repealed the death penalty, six of those in the last six years. Of the states that continue to use the death penalty, Florida is one of three that does not require a unanimous jury to recommend the death penalty.

Cost: It is estimated that one execution costs taxpayers \$20 million. Taxpayers pay approximately \$51 million per year to enforce the death penalty in Florida, above and beyond what it would cost to punish all first-degree murderers with life in prison without parole.⁶

Alternatives exist: The appeals and retrials processes frequently end in a sentence of life imprisonment, a result that readily could have been obtained with far less expense.

Botched executions: At least five Florida executions have had complications leading to extraordinary suffering, most recently in the 2006 case of Angel Diaz.⁷

Have we executed the innocent? As of May 2014, Florida has exonerated and freed 24 inmates from death row, more than any other state in the country.

According to a 2009 statement by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, the Supreme Court "has never held that the Constitution forbids the execution of a convicted defendant who has had a full and fair trial but is later able to convince a habeas court that he is 'actually' innocent."⁸

¹ Florida Department of Corrections, "Death Row Roster."

² Death Penalty Information Center, "Execution Database."

³ Death Penalty Information Center, "The Death Penalty in 2013: Year End Report."

⁴ Death Penalty Information Center, "The 2% Death Penalty: How a Minority of Counties Produce Most Death Cases at Enormous Costs to All"

⁵ Radelet, Michael. *Recent Developments in the Death Penalty in Florida*, 2001.

⁶ "The High Price of Killing Killers," Palm Beach Post, January 4, 2000.

⁷ Death Penalty Information Center, "Examples of Post-Furman Botched Executions."

⁸ "Death row doubts? Not in the mind of Justice Scalia," Fort Wayne Journal Gazette Editorial, September 9, 2014.

Florida's Death Penalty: What the Catholic Church Teaches

"You shall not kill." (Exodus 20: 13)

"Do not court death by your erring way of life, nor draw to yourselves destruction by the works of your hands. Because God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living." (Wisdom 1: 12-13)

"If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority must limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2267)

"...we do not wish to have the sufferings of the servants of God avenged by the infliction of precisely similar injuries in the way of retaliation. Not, of course, that we object to the removal from these wicked men of the liberty to perpetrate further crimes; but our desire is rather justice be satisfied without taking of their lives..." (St. Augustine, Letter 133)

"...the nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not to 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." (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*)

"Even when people deny the dignity of others, we must still recognize that their dignity is a gift from God and is not something that is earned or lost through their behavior." (USCCB, *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*)

"When the state, in our names and with our taxes, ends a human life despite having non-lethal alternatives, it suggests that society can overcome violence with violence. The use of the death penalty ought to be abandoned not only for what it does to those who are executed, but for what it does to all of society." (USCCB, *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*)