

CALIFORNIA'S DEATH PENALTY

State Death Penalty Facts

- 746 people currently on death row
- 13 executions since 1976
- 709 executions before 1976
- Jury decides the sentence
- Life without parole is a sentencing option
- Method of execution: gas or lethal injection
- 3 innocent persons released from California's death row (151 nationally)

Support Prop 62, The Justice That Works Act of 2016

In November of 2016, Californians will vote on the future of capital punishment in their state. The ballot initiative would:

- Save California taxpayers \$150 million per year
- Repeal the death penalty and replace it with life imprisonment without possibility of parole.
- Provide restitution payments to victims' family members.
- Eliminate possible execution of innocent persons.

California Bishops Stand Against Capital Punishment

"As teachers of the Catholic faith, we consistently proclaim the intrinsic worth and the God-given dignity of all human life, whether innocent or guilty. We are all created in God's image... We appeal to Californians to end a failed system of justice and choose life. Violence does not end violence. Killing in the name of the state will not end killing. The death penalty will not give us justice worthy of a good society." *September 27, 2012*

The **California Catholic Conference** actively works on death penalty legislation as part of their mission to uphold the dignity of life.



Visit their website to learn more: <http://www.cacatholic.org>

Oppose Prop 66, The Death Penalty Reform and Savings Act of 2016:

The act would require an unrealistic timeline for the completion of the appeals process. This would leave defendants without the proper representation. Vote "No" on the Nov ballot.

Racial Bias

White jurors in California are more likely to recommend a death sentence for Latino defendants than for white defendants. White jurors recommended a death sentence about half the time for Latino defendants who were poor, but only one-third of the time for poor white defendants. In California prisons, black and Latino inmates make up 60% of the death row population, revealing the state's sentencing procedures to be discriminatory in nature.

Largest Death Row

California has the country's largest death row population. There are over 700 people awaiting execution at San Quentin State Prison and Central California Women's Facility.

Cost of the Death Penalty

Taxpayers have spent more than **\$5 billion** on capital punishment in California since it was reinstated in 1978.

OUR FAITH AND THE DEATH PENALTY

Respect for Life

Catholic teaching on human life is rooted in the belief that all life is a gift from God that must be respected and defended from conception to natural death.

Evangelium Vitae, Pope John Paul II's encyclical on human dignity, challenges us to be "unconditionally pro-life."

"The dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in 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" (*Gospel of Life*, 27).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

"If...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 to the dignity of the human person."(Article 2267)

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 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.

Pope John Paul II: Catholics and others believe that each human being is made in the image of God and therefore, "No matter how heinous the crime, the offender retains their God-given worth and must be treated with dignity." *St. Louis, Mo.*, Jan. 27, 1999.

Social Justice

The Church is also concerned with social injustices integrated in the death penalty system: "Its 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).

Innocence

- Over 150 people have been exonerated from death row
- Approximately 10% of inmates sentenced to death since 1976 were exonerated.

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.
- African-Americans are overrepresented on death row. They make up 13% of the US population but constitute 42% of death row.

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.

Representing the Poor

- The vast 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

- The death penalty costs 18 times more than life in prison without the possibility of parole. Multiple studies have shown the cost of trial, sentencing, appeals, and imprisonment to be much higher in capital cases v. life in prison without parole.

Geographic Bias

- 2% of all US counties have produced 56% of the US death row population.
- Just three states, accounted for 80% of the executions in 2014.