

## Prayer Service

**Leader:** From the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops . . .

**Reader 1:** “We oppose capital punishment not only for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes, but for what it does to all of us as a society. Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes all of us and is a growing sign of disrespect for human life. We cannot overcome crime simply by executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life.”

(Pause for a moment of silence.)

**Reader:** For those experiencing pain and anguish as a result of being victims of violent crime.

**All:** Lord, heal their pain.

**Reader:** For those struggling with hatred and rage, both perpetrators and victims.

**All:** Lord, heal their pain.

**Reader:** For our broken world and society, entangled in the the pain of revenge and the illusion that one must take life in order to defend it.

**All:** Lord, heal our pain.

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**Leader:** From George Ryan, the former governor of Illinois . . .

**Reader 2:** “To say it plainly one more time - the Illinois capital punishment system is broken. It has taken innocent men to a hair’s breadth escape from their unjust execution. Legislatures past have refused to fix it. Our new legislature and our new Governor to act to rid our state of the shame of threatening the innocent with execution and the guilty with unfairness. In the days ahead, I will pray that we can open our hearts and provide something for victims’ families rather than the hope of revenge.”

(Pause for a moment of silence.)

**Reader:** For a system that is broken and where, since 1973, over 100 people on death row have been found wrongfully convicted and released.

# DEATH PENALTY

**All:** Lord, have mercy on us.

**Reader:** For a system that is broken, where 160 children have been sentenced to death since 1973.

**All:** Lord, have mercy on us.

**Reader:** For a system that is broken, where 300 people currently on death row are mentally retarded.

**All:** Lord, have mercy on us.

**Reader:** For a system that is broken, where 90 percent of the people the U.S. government seeks to execute are Latino or black.

**All:** Lord, have mercy on us.

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**Leader:** From U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan . . .

**Reader 3:** “The calculated killing of a human being by the state involves, by its very nature, an absolute denial of the executed person’s humanity. The most vile murder does not, in my view, release the states from constitutional restraint on the destruction of human dignity.”

(Pause for a moment of silence.)

**Reader:** For forgiveness.

**All:** Lord, help us to reconcile.

**Reader:** For recognition and upholding of the dignity of *all* people.

**All:** Lord, help us to reconcile.

**Reader:** For the ability to see root causes of crime such as poverty and lack of educational and employment opportunities.

**All:** Lord, help us to reconcile.

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# DEATH PENALTY

**Leader:** From Corretta Scott King, widow of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. . . .

**Reader 4:** “As one whose husband and mother-in-law have both died the victims of assassination/murder, I stand firmly and unequivocally opposed to the death penalty for those convicted of capital offenses. An evil deed is not redeemed by an evil deed in retaliation. Justice is never advanced in the taking of human life. Morality is never upheld by legalized murder.”

(Pause for a moment of silence.)

**Reader:** For our country, plagued by its acceptance of violent revenge.

**All:** Lord, let us work for change.

**Reader:** For guidance and compassion in addressing the pain of both victims and perpetrators, and creating solutions that uphold the dignity of all and bring true reconciliation.

**All:** Lord, let us work for change.

**Reader:** For the inspiration to create a renewed society, based on love and restoration.

**All:** Lord, let us work for change.

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**Leader:** From Pope John Paul II . . .

**Reader 5:** “A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that 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 a chance to reform. I renew the appeal I made recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.”

**All:** Make us signs of hope in our world, Lord, working for reconciliation and respect for all of humanity. Help us to be beacons of light in leading society towards love, reconciliation, and restoration. Amen.