

April 2015

Dear Pastors, Religious, and Parish and School Leaders:

Recently, Pope Francis exclaimed, “For the rule of law, the death penalty represents a failure, as it obliges the state to kill in the name of justice... Justice can never be wrought by killing a human being.” (*Letter to International Commission against the Death Penalty*, March 20, 2015). His statement echoes our Church’s long-held assessment that there is no justification for modern societies, as ours, to willfully take anyone’s life in defense of the common good.

Here in Ohio, we have approached a crossroads for our use of the death penalty. A Joint Task Force of the Ohio Supreme Court has released a list of recommendations for curbing the application of capital punishment, based on mental health, racial disparities, and other factors. In addition, challenges to the state’s ability even to handle executions properly has led to a postponement of all executions until at least next year. While our position continues to be, as Saint John Paul II stated, to render death penalty “very rare, if not practically non-existent,” we see these developments as steps in the right direction. It is now up to Ohioans, and especially Catholics and other people of faith, to urge for policy changes which move us closer to protecting the sanctity of all life.

To that end, the Catholic bishops of Ohio have created the enclosed brochure, “Death Penalty Education.” It includes a message from the bishops, brief excerpts from Church teaching, a prayer, list of trusted resources, and a call to action.

To carry out this campaign locally, the Archdiocese is partnering with the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center in concert with the Catholic Conference of Ohio and Ohioans to Stop Executions to organize activities on this issue in parishes, schools, and other Catholic institutions. Your role in this campaign could entail having a speaker in between Sunday liturgies, or it could involve hosting a panel of vetted experts from across the state. By way of example, I have enclosed a flyer, which you are free to distribute, for our first such panel at St. Maximilian Kolbe Church on May 26th. However big or small, all activities are welcome!

If you wish to learn more or begin preparations for some type of educational event on the death penalty, please contact the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center at allison@ijpccincinnati.org. For further information or enquiries, please contact the Archdiocesan Catholic Social Action Office at (513) 421-3131, ext. 2660, or csa@catholiccincinnati.org.

Thank you for all you do to promote authentic justice and protect life. May God bless our efforts this year to come closer to ending the use of the death penalty in Ohio.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati