

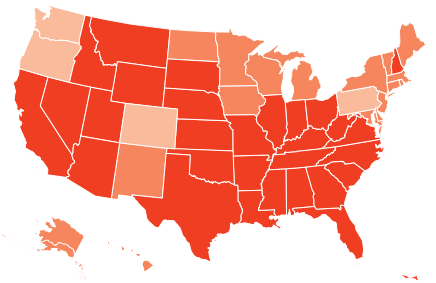
# DEATH PENALTY

BY  
DOUG CULP

## THE TOPIC OF THE DEATH PENALTY CAN EVOKE STRONG EMOTIONS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE.

Proponents of the death penalty argue, among other things, that it gives closure to the victim's families, creates a deterrent to crime, serves justice and prevents criminals from getting the opportunity to kill again after being paroled or escaping.

Meanwhile, opponents of the death penalty point to the high financial cost to taxpayers of capital punishment and counter that it violates the Eighth Amendment's ban on "cruel and unusual punishment," clogs our court system due to the endless appeals and required procedures, promotes a revenge mentality and provides less deterrence than life in prison. In addition, one argument has been particularly compelling as of late: the possibility of those wrongly convicted being sentenced to death.

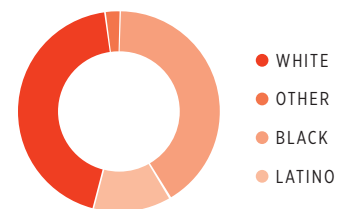


### THE STATE OF THE UNION

Today, there are **31 STATES WITH THE DEATH PENALTY** in the United States according to the Death Penalty Information Center. Of these, **FOUR STATES CURRENTLY HAVE A MORATORIUM ON EXECUTIONS** (Colorado, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington). Additionally, several states still have prisoners on death row even though the death penalty has been removed from the books.

- STATES WITH THE DEATH PENALTY
- STATES WITHOUT THE DEATH PENALTY
- STATES WITH A GOVERNOR-IMPOSED MORATORIUM

**AS OF FEB. 2, 2017,  
THERE HAVE BEEN  
1,446 EXECUTIONS  
IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1976.**



**OF THAT TOTAL, 55.6% HAVE BEEN WHITE,  
34.5% BLACK AND 8.3% LATINO.**

*(All statistics and graphs/charts are from the Death Penalty Information Center, [www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org).)*

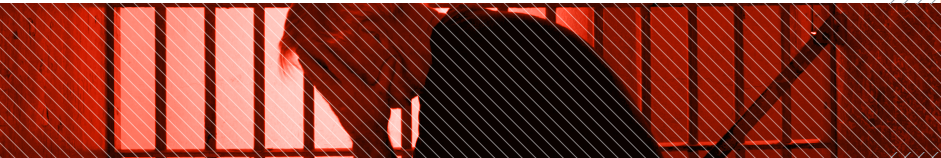
## TWO CATHOLIC VOICES ON THE DEATH PENALTY

“ Indeed, nowadays the death penalty is unacceptable, however grave the crime of the convicted person. It is an offense to the inviolability of life and to the dignity of the human person; it likewise contradicts God’s plan for individuals and society, and his merciful justice. Nor is it consonant with any just purpose of punishment. It does not render justice to victims, but instead fosters vengeance. The commandment “Thou shalt not kill” has absolute value and applies both to the innocent and to the guilty.

- POPE FRANCIS, VIDEO MESSAGE TO THE 6TH WORLD CONGRESS AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY, OSLO, NORWAY, JUNE 21-23, 2016.

“ I stand morally opposed to killing: war, executions, killing of the old and demented, the killing of children, unborn and born ... I believe that all of life is sacred and must be protected, especially in the vulnerable stages at the beginning of life and its end.

- SISTER HELEN PREJEAN, AUTHOR OF THE BOOK *DEAD MAN WALKING* AND ANTI-DEATH PENALTY ADVOCATE.



## WRONGLY CONVICTED, THEN EXONERATED

The National Registry of Exonerations is a project of the University of California Irvine Newkirk Center for Science and Society, the University of Michigan Law School and the Michigan State University College of Law. As of Dec. 10, 2016, the registry reports that there have been **1,940 EXONERATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1989.**

OF THESE EXONERATIONS, **MISTAKEN WITNESS IDENTIFICATION WAS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN 30% OF THE CONVICTIONS;**

**PERJURY OR FALSE ACCUSATION WAS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN 56% OF THE CASES;**

**FALSE CONFESSION FACTORED INTO 12%;**

**FALSE OR MISLEADING FORENSIC EVIDENCE FACTORED INTO 24%;**

and **OFFICIAL MISCONDUCT WAS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN 51%.**

## THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (USCCB) AND THE DEATH PENALTY

In July 2015, the USCCB issued a call for recommitment to the Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty, which had been initiated in 2005. While noting that death sentences were at “their lowest level since reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976,” they acknowledged that a great deal of work remained to be done.

Echoing the *catechism*, the Bishops stated that our faith tradition grounds our perspective on crime and punishment in mercy and healing, not just punishment for its own sake. “No matter how heinous the crime, if society can protect itself without ending a human life, it should do so. Today, we have this capability.”

However, they went on to say that the Church’s opposition to the death penalty “should not be seen as indifference to the sinfulness of crime and attacks on human life, but as an affirmation of the sacredness of all life even for those who have committed the most heinous of crimes.” They also renewed their call for all people of good will to:

**+** **PRAY** for victims of crime, those facing execution and those working in the criminal justice system;

**👤** **REACH OUT** to the families of those affected by violent crime;

**📖** **LEARN** about the Church’s teaching on capital punishment and educate others about it; and

**🗨️** **ADVOCATE** for better public policies to protect society and end the use of the death penalty.

(For additional information about the position of the USCCB on the death penalty, see *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death* at <http://www.usccb.org>.) **+**