

LEARN: Week 2 Handout

A Catholic Perspective on Abolishing the Death Penalty & Supporting Restorative Justice

As Catholics, we believe every person is created in the image and likeness of God. This dignity is never lost, even after grave harm has been done. For this reason, the death penalty is inadmissible—it violates the Gospel call to respect, protect, love, and serve every human life.

Core Themes:

1. **Human Dignity Never Lost** – “Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, and God himself pledges to guarantee this” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 269).
2. **The Death Penalty is Inadmissible** – The Church teaches that today the death penalty is an “attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person” (CCC 2267).
3. **Consistent Ethic of Life** – The Church opposes abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment alike, because all human life is sacred “from conception to natural death.”

“Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity.”

— Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no.269

4. **Risk of Innocence & Injustice** – For every 9 people executed in the U.S., 1 has been exonerated after being proven innocent. The poor, people of color, and the mentally ill are disproportionately sentenced to death.
5. **Justice That Heals, Not Vengeance** – The Gospel calls us to restorative justice, which seeks to repair harm, meet victims’ needs, and hold offenders accountable in ways that respect dignity and promote healing.
6. **Building a Culture of Mercy** – A society that rejects vengeance and embraces reconciliation better reflects Christ, who commands us to beat “swords into plowshares” (Is 2:4).

Other Important Teachings:

- The death penalty is unnecessary for protecting society; modern means exist to ensure safety without taking life.
- Executions do not bring true healing to victims' families and often prolong their pain.
- Capital punishment fosters a culture of retribution rather than the Gospel call to mercy.
- Restorative justice offers a faith-filled alternative: inviting accountability and fostering reconciliation.

What Can I Do?

- **Pray** for victims of violence, those on death row, and their families.
- **Learn** about Catholic teaching on the death penalty and restorative justice.
- **Support** prison ministry, re-entry programs, and victim support services.
- **Advocate** for laws and policies that end capital punishment & expand restorative justice.
- **Serve** practice reconciliation in your own life and build communities rooted in mercy and peace.

Take-Home Message:

Every Catholic is called to witness to the Gospel of Life. In our homes, parishes, workplaces, and public life, may we always be people who resist vengeance, protect dignity, and serve as instruments of Christ's mercy.

Reflection Question:

Where in your life do you see the temptation toward vengeance or retribution? How might you respond instead with the Gospel's call to mercy and reconciliation?

Church Teachings to Consult (*if you want to learn more*):

- [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) (no. 2267)
- [*Fratelli Tutti*](#) (Pope Francis, 2020; nos. 263-270)
- [*Evangelium Vitae*](#) (St. John Paul II, 1995, no.56)
- [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*](#) (2004, no.405)
- [*USCCB, A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*](#) (2005)
- Catholic Mobilizing Network: catholicismobilizing.org