

## **INTRODUCTION**

Good Shepherd Voices for Justice Ministry presents justice issues every month and invites your response. In the process of learning about and responding to these issues we believe we can grow in our awareness and deeper understanding of local, national and international needs in light of the values of the Gospels and the principles of Catholic social teaching and then act accordingly. This communal effort offers opportunities for transformation and for furthering the reign of God on earth.

We invite you to review this month's issue and consider taking the recommended action. We estimate it will take you only a few minutes to complete this action. We encourage you also to take time to pray and reflect on the presence of God in this challenge and in your response.

## **BACKGROUND**

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, we in Wisconsin have before us a referendum regarding the death penalty. The referendum is worded:

*“Should the death penalty be enacted in the State of Wisconsin for cases involving a person who is convicted of first-degree intentional homicide, if the conviction is supported by DNA evidence?”*



Our U.S. Bishops have written in “A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death” that our nation should forgo the use of the death penalty because:

1. The sanction of death, when it is not necessary to protect society, violates respect for human life and dignity.
2. State-sanctioned killing in our names diminishes all of us.
3. 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.
4. We have other ways to punish criminals and protect society.

## **ACTION**

We invite you to consider writing a letter to the editor of our local newspaper. It is much easier to publish a letter to the editor than it is to place an op-ed. Listed below are some 'basics' for letter writing to the editor and some information to assist you in writing

### What are Letters to the Editor?

Letters to the editor (LTE's) most often discuss a recent event or issue covered by a publication, radio station, or TV program. Widely read, LTE's are your chance to "sound-off" to your community about issues in the news.

### Elements / Hints

- Letters have the best chance of being published if in reaction to a story in the paper. Respond as quickly as you can.
- Read the letters page for examples.
- Keep it short ...150-200 words. The paper will shorten to suit its format. The more it has to cut, the less control you have of what gets printed.
- Focus on one main point and make a compelling case.
- Write in short paragraphs. No more than three sentences per paragraph.
- Don't write too often.
- Avoid personal attacks.
- Put your full name at the bottom. Include a phone number for verification.
- Follow up to see if the letter was received.

### Points You Might Consider in Drafting your Letter to the Editor

- The United States stands with China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia as the countries accounting for almost all executions.
- A 2005 study in California found that those who killed whites were over 3 times more likely to be sentenced to death than those who killed blacks and over 4 times more likely than those who killed Latinos.
- A comprehensive study of the death penalty in North Carolina found that the odds of receiving a death sentence rose by 3.5 times among those defendants whose victims were white.
- It has been found that states without the death penalty also have lower murder rates. Texas, which has the second highest number of death row inmates, leads the nation with the most executions.
- People of low social status and limited resources are primary targets of the death penalty.
- In 1997, the American Bar Association voted to call for a moratorium on executions because of the serious concern with racial disparity. Often there was not adequate counsel.
- Not everyone can afford the legal assistance necessary to prove innocence.
- A 1995 Hart Research Poll of police chiefs in the US found that the majority of the chiefs do not believe that the death penalty is an effective law enforcement tool.
- In Virginia, former Governor Mark Warner requested DNA testing of those on death row. Of 36 tested so far, 2 are innocent.
- Only one out of 100 convicted murderers is sentence to death. 90% on death row cannot afford an attorney.

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Taken from Wisconsin Council of Churches Educational Packet and Sisters of St. Agnes (CSA) Justice Ministry

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You can visit the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' website for the full statement and more information on the Catholic stance on this issue and others - [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)