



CATHOLIC MOBILIZING NETWORK

THE FEDERAL DEATH PENALTY

What All Catholics Need to Know

“Every person is created in the image and likeness of God, and we encourage everyone to work to rid the death penalty from our... federal laws and to develop greater appreciation for the sacred dignity of every human life.”

-Joint statement from Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City in Kansas, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities

OVERVIEW

Catholics have a vital role to play in the national movement to abolish the federal death penalty.

In the wake of an unprecedented spree of federal executions in 2020-2021 and presented with the first anti-death penalty presidential administration in U.S. history, now is the moment for Catholics to amplify the church's call for an end to this immoral practice. **You can take part in this life-affirming mission.**

A FEDERAL KILLING SPREE

In July 2020, after a 17-year hiatus from federal executions, the Trump administration restarted the practice of capital punishment and took the lives of 13 people in the span of six months.

The resumption of executions was notably out of step with recent progress made in the U.S. toward abolishing the death penalty. (Consider: Since the government's last execution in 2003, eleven states have abolished capital punishment, and public support for the practice is at a historic low.)

OPPORTUNITIES

President Biden, a Catholic, is the first U.S. president to publicly oppose capital punishment and to have campaigned on an anti-death penalty platform.

On Jul. 1, 2021, Biden's Department of Justice ordered an official moratorium on federal executions. Though an encouraging first step, the new moratorium is not strong enough on its own to prevent a future execution spree.

There are additional actions within President Biden's power that could help dismantle the federal death penalty and cultivate responses to harm that honor the dignity of human life.

The most immediate action President Biden could make with the stroke of a pen is **commuting federal death sentences**. The president could also **work with Congress and the states to remove death penalty from law**. This process is of course lengthier, requiring negotiations with federal legislators.

President Biden can and should pursue these additional abolition actions and uphold the church's anti-death penalty teachings.

Learn more about the history of the federal death penalty >> catholicsmobilizing.org/federal-death-penalty-information

BROKEN BEYOND REPAIR

The federal death penalty is a deeply flawed system that targets the most vulnerable among us. Consider the following:

Racially Biased

The federal death penalty reflects the same racial bias found in state death penalty systems. (E.g., The federal government sentences a disproportionate number of Black people to death. *See figure.*)

Vulnerable Populations

Every person executed by the federal government in 2020 had one or more significant mental or emotional impairments (e.g., mental illness, intellectual disability, brain damage, or chronic trauma) or was under age 21 at the time of the crime for which they were executed.

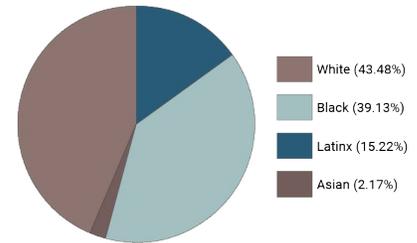
Geographically Arbitrary

The federal death penalty is not a “national” punishment applied equally throughout the country. (E.g., Just three states – Virginia, Texas, and Missouri – are responsible for nearly half of all current federal death sentences.)

Out of Step

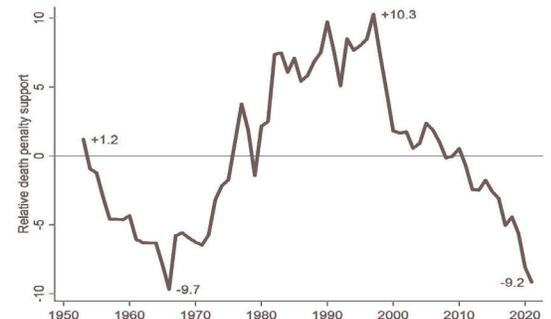
Federal executions do not reflect declining national trends in public opinion (*see figure*) and execution rates.

Racial Breakdown of the Current Federal Death Row Population (46)



Source: Death Penalty Information Center (bit.ly/3D2X1Ph)

Declining Public Support for the U.S. Death Penalty



Source: Death Penalty Information Center (bit.ly/3iQoco8)

CATHOLIC OPPOSITION

Many Catholic bishops and church leaders have denounced the federal death penalty and the executions ordered by the Trump administration. Their advocacy is supported by the church's unequivocal teachings against capital punishment:

“The Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,’ and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.” (Catholic Catechism, 2267)

TAKE ACTION!

Sign CMN's Petition

Urge President Biden to dismantle the federal death penalty >> catholicismobilizing.org/biden

Contact Your Members of Congress

Encourage your federal lawmakers to support legislation to end the federal death penalty >> catholicismobilizing.org/contact-congress

Mobilize Your Catholic Community

Find resources to educate, advocate, and pray with your parish or faith community >> catholicismobilizing.org/dp-resources

Write a Letter to the Editor (LTE)

Find federal death penalty LTE tips and examples >> catholicismobilizing.org/write-lte

