

Focus on Kentucky: The Death Penalty

The abolition of capital punishment represents one issue that people of faith in Kentucky could successfully address to break the cycle of violence.

Prayer & Education

The change of heart needed for seeing the death penalty as a human dignity issue begins with openness to God's grace through prayer. Additionally, meditating on the Gospel parables of mercy plus careful study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nn 2265-67, 1997 edition) and John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae* (n. 56) reveals the image of God even in the most sinful murderer.

Readings in the social sciences indicate that:

- the death penalty does not deter crime;
- innocent persons have been executed;
- executions discriminate against poor persons and minorities; and
- forgiveness, not vengeance, heals victims' families.

Public Policy

People of faith, by voicing their opposition to the death penalty and writing legislators and letters to the editor, can support legislation to:

- exempt mentally ill persons from execution;
- implement a moratorium on the death penalty; and
- abolish capital punishment completely.

For More Information:

Visit the website of the Kentucky Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty: www.kcadp.org.

For Discussion and Reflection

1. In my daily life how do I promote a respect for others?
2. When do I find it most difficult to recognize the human dignity of others? Why?
3. What standards does society use to value a person? Examples?
4. What are the greatest threats to human life today?
5. What groups in our society face discrimination or disrespect? What can remedy this?
6. List the public policies that protect human life, then list any that do not.
7. What is the social impact from discrimination? from abortion? from capital punishment? from poverty?
8. How can we reduce the number of abortions?

Scripture Meditations

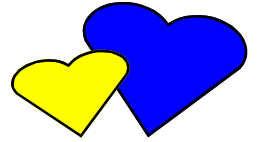
Psalms 139:13-16

Jeremiah 1:4-8

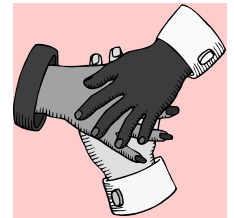
Matthew 18:12-14

Luke 15:11-32

Human Dignity



Reflects the
Image of God



Economic Justice
in 21st Century Kentucky:
Holding Ourselves Accountable
1—Life is Priceless



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Human Dignity

People We Encounter and Read About:

Every day we relate to people different from ourselves. Some are:

- aged or very young;
- healthy or physically challenged;
- a different race or creed;
- illiterate or well educated.

Whoever they are, each person deserves respect as a brother or sister. The **human dignity** of every person stands at the heart of God's Word, because every person is created in the image and likeness of God.

Image of God:

In the creation story Genesis recounts how God took clay and breathed life into the nostrils of the first human being (Gen. 2:7). We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death. Like a seamless garment, we proclaim a consistent life ethic because God's image can never be taken from any person.

Unfortunately, people do disregard the sacredness of others through abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, racism, poverty, war, violence and other crimes. From God's perspective, no person is a mistake, an embarrassment, a mere number or thing. Our faith calls us to measure every economic decision and institution by whether or not it enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

Scripture Speaks

Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (Gen. 1:26)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

(Gal. 3:28)



"I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live."

(Deut. 30:19)



People in Kentucky:

Many fellow Kentuckians lack the means to live a full and dignified life:

- 14% of working adults in Kentucky are illiterate; 26% read at only a basic level;
- 520,000 Kentucky residents live without health insurance; and
- 4,700 abortions were performed in Kentucky in 2000.

The Commonwealth also experiences other strong forces that debilitate society:

- the scourge of the drug culture;
- the violence of capital punishment; and
- the sting of racism and hate crimes.

All these forces work against the dignity of the human person and God's plan for society.

The Church Speaks

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.1700.

Today there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every person, no matter who he is, and if we meet him, to come to his aid in a positive way, whether he is an aged person abandoned by all, a foreign worker despised without reason, a refugee, an illegitimate child wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit, or a starving human being who awakens our conscience by calling to mind the words of Christ: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40).

Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 27.

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...with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.

Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 29.

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...in the name of God:
respect, protect, love and
serve life, every human
life!

John Paul II
Evangelium Vitae, n.5.

