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## Resolution Calling for Abolition of the Death Penalty

### Archdiocese of Louisville Priests' Council August, 2000

The Priests' Council of the Archdiocese of Louisville, affirming its belief in God as the author of life and in the dignity of every human person now expresses its opposition to the use of the death penalty and calls for its abolition. We take this stand for the following reasons:

1. Jesus calls us to love and forgive even our enemies, and to reform our hearts and lives, replacing anger and retaliation with reconciliation. (Mt. 5:21-45). Recent statements of Pope John Paul II, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and pastoral letters issued by the Catholic bishops of Kentucky, all teach that the use of the death penalty is inconsistent with our Catholic emphasis on the value of all human life and urge us to live a consistent ethic of respect for all life by opposing its continued use.
2. As Christian leaders we have a duty to foster unity with God and forgiveness within the human family. We cannot uphold a practice that deliberately removes some of the members from our human family by killing them. The words of Eucharistic Prayer III, "In mercy and love unite all your children wherever they may be," include all those on death row. It is impossible to unite with those you intend to kill.
3. Victims' voices are the most compelling. The Holy Father forgave his own attacker. In this country, members of Murder Victim Families for Reconciliation urge the abolition of the death penalty. They tell us that the *answer lies in supporting those who grieve for their lost loved ones, not creating more grieving families. It is time we break the cycle of violence. To those who say society must take a life for a life, MVFR members say: "not in our name."*
4. There is ample scientific evidence that the death penalty is applied in a racially biased manner. Several studies by researchers at the University of Louisville concluded that in Kentucky racial bias is a key factor in selecting defendants for capital prosecution.
5. Death sentences are overwhelmingly applied to the poor.
6. Prisoner appeals have been severely curtailed, increasing the risk of longer imprisonment and execution of innocent people.
7. Life without possibility of parole is a sentencing option in Kentucky since July 15, 1998.

8. The ever-increasing number of those who are wrongfully convicted and released from death row clearly calls for the abolition of the death penalty.

Therefore, on behalf of the priests of the Archdiocese of Louisville, we commit ourselves and ask our brother priests to commit themselves to the following:

- To work with Kentucky Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation and others to support those grieving for their lost loved ones; to pray for the victims and their families, for the offenders and their families, for the innocent and the guilty, for judges, jurors, attorneys, police officers, prison officials and all affected by violent crime.
- To oppose the imposition of a death sentence by the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the United States or any other entity.
- To encourage all archdiocesan priests and parishioners through homilies and other educational means to work toward the abolition of the death penalty by asking their elected representatives to repeal all laws allowing for death sentences.
- To call upon the Office of Lifelong Formation and Education and the Respect Life Office to collaborate to ensure that the Church's teaching on this matter is included as part of the curriculum in their various educational programs, especially those associated with the dignity of human life.
- To support each other to grow in non-violence as a way of life.

We further direct that copies of this resolution shall be forwarded to Governor Paul Patton, Lieutenant Governor Steve Henry, Attorney General Ben Chandler, state representatives and senators, and the Kentucky Congressional delegation.

Signed by President of the Priests' Council

Date: August, 2000

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Catholic Conference of Kentucky  
1042 Burlington Lane  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601  
502-875-4345 ■ 502-875-2841 Fax ■ cckstaffATccky.org  
**Last modified: October, 2010**