

Background on Death Penalty – 1989 to 1999:

A decade ago our SCL Community studied, discussed, and prayerfully reflected on the death penalty. As a response to that study and prayer we as a body declared our opposition to the death penalty and pledged ourselves to support efforts to abolish this penalty.

“We Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, as a community, oppose the use of capital punishment and pledge ourselves to support efforts to abolish the death penalty.”

In recognition of the dignity of all human beings and that God is indeed, the Lord of Life, we stand with those who declare that capital punishment only deepens the cycle of violence and should be abolished. Christ’s healing love should guide us to peaceful solutions to acts of violence.

Since our public release of the SCL Community’s stance against the death penalty on the World Day of Peace on January 1, 1989 there have been significant events.

Kansas, the state of our birth as a community, reinstated the death penalty in 1994. Currently Kansas has two people on death row. The death chamber is being prepared in Lansing – just two miles from our Mother House.

SCLAs: As a community, we instituted a program of associates. Currently members of that program are our companions in ministry.

Declaration of Life: At the Converging Paths gathering in ’96 SCLs and SCLAs were invited to sign a document asking that in the event that they should be murdered, they wanted it known to the authorities that they did not wish the murderer to be given the death penalty.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church was published stating “Today in practice, because of the possibilities open to the state in punishing crimes effectively and rendering harmless those who commit them... the cases of absolute necessity for the death of the guilty party are now very rare, if not in practice non-existent.” Also, increasing numbers of American Bishops have raised their voices in opposition as the death penalty is carried out within their dioceses.

Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Congregation of Major Superiors of Men: At the 1998 Joint Assembly of LCWR and CMSM that group committed themselves to “work for human rights in the United States in particular by advocating for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.” In addition they affirmed the moratorium on execution called for by the International Union of Superiors General.

American Bar Association: In February of '97 the ABA which has 370,000 members urged a nationwide moratorium on the death penalty. They denounced the current use of the death penalty as “a haphazard maze of unfair practices”.

In conjunction with the prayer for Dec. 10th, the Social Justice Executive Committee is calling upon all SCLs to prayerfully reconsider our corporate stance against the death penalty and renew personal commitments, indicating this by the return of the enclosed sheet. The committee also asks the SCLAs to prayerfully consider this stance and indicate their solidarity with this corporate stance through the action of returning the enclosed paper.

As a community on the weekend of the celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, a man who lived and preached nonviolence, we will make a public statement regarding the 10th anniversary of our stance against the death penalty. This action around the 50th Anniversary of the declaration of Human Rights is preparation for the January event.

With the U.S. Catholic Bishops in their statement we believe that “Abolition of the death penalty is most consonant with the example of Jesus who both taught and practiced the forgiveness of injustice...”

Suggested references:

U.S. Bishops 1980 Statement on Capital Punishment

Dead Man Walking by Sister Helen Prejean

Catholic Catechism

www.ncadp.org – website of National Coalition against the Death Penalty

www.essential.org/dpic - website of Death Penalty Information Center