

Capital Punishment

At a time when the issue of resuming hangings in TT is being discussed, CCSJ urges each person to pray that the death penalty in TT and in the world will be abolished (see [CCSJ's media release on 13 July](#)). Let us demonstrate that we are witnesses to the Gospel of Life. The Catholic Church must provide strong moral leadership, affirming and protecting the sanctity of human life as a gift from God at all stages and in all circumstances.

As our AEC Caribbean Bishops have said in their [Pastoral Letter on Capital Punishment \(2000\)](#): “The prophetic voice of the Church must be heard especially in times of moral and social crisis...regardless of the potential unpopularity of our Gospel message...Capital punishment symbolises a form of despair for the effective reform of persons.”

During their Ad Limina meeting in Rome in 2008, our Caribbean Bishops said, in their [Pastoral Letter: The Gift of Life](#):

“The Church’s teaching does not provide the basis for the re-introduction or the renewed use of the death penalty which is presently under discussion in the region.” The Bishops further expressed their “firm desire that the leaders and people of Caribbean Society move toward the total abolition of the Death Penalty. Therefore, we should place emphasis on the rehabilitation of the offender rather than on his elimination. Non-lethal forms of punishment are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person.”

Read: [Archbishop Pinder of Nassau, Bahamas – Red Mass homily 2009](#)

It is important to note that while we oppose the death penalty, we embrace the victims of violent crimes; those who are hurting and grieving for their loved ones who have been killed, at times in the most heinous ways. We urge each parish to establish victim support groups and seek to meet their physical, mental, spiritual, financial and other needs.

We are all made in God’s image and likeness. Therefore, we must stand in solidarity also with offenders and their families. We agree with Sister Helen Prejean (see *Dead Man Walking*), when she says:

“The movement to abolish the death penalty needs the religious community because the heart of religion is about compassion, human rights, and the indivisible dignity of each human person made in the image and likeness of God.”

Sadly, as the US Bishops have said: “The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life.”

Please urge our leaders to address the root causes of crime and violence (see below). Say the following prayer and take action to work towards the abolition of the death penalty.

A Prayer to Abolish the Death Penalty

–Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J.

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*God of Compassion,
You let your rain fall on the just and the unjust.
Expand and deepen our hearts
so that we may love as You love,
even those among us
who have caused the greatest pain by taking life.*

*For there is in our land a great cry for vengeance
as we fill up death rows and kill the killers
in the name of justice, in the name of peace.*

*Jesus, our brother,
you suffered execution at the hands of the state
but you did not let hatred overcome you.
Help us to reach out to victims of violence
so that our enduring love may help them heal.*

*Holy Spirit of God,
You strengthen us in the struggle for justice.
Help us to work tirelessly
for the abolition of state-sanctioned death
and to renew our society in its very heart
so that violence will be no more. Amen.*

SOME SUGGESTIONS MADE TO CCSJ TO ADDRESS THE CRIME SITUATION IN TT

“It is recognized that the causes of crime are deep rooted and need to be tackled with improvements in our education systems and societal arrangements. There is a need to tackle crime on all fronts e.g.

- strengthen family life – promote good parenting;
- develop and implement programmes to regenerate the morals and values of society: at all levels (including our families and schools);
- encourage faith communities to address the issue of crime and violence in their communities. All faith communities should be praying for peace in our country and in our world;
- address poverty and social exclusion;
- revamp the education system to make it more relevant to needs of young people. Establish special projects for helping school drop outs. Funding of NGO’s in this area will give more bang for the buck and introduce an innovative creative entrepreneurial spirit particularly if funding is geared to accomplishment of such targets. It could also allow for corporate contributions for approved NGO’s with appropriate tax deductions even;
- deal with gangs;
- root out those who are bringing in drugs and guns;
- develop first class detection, followed by charges being laid and swift justice through judicial system followed by conviction where case proved and appropriate penalties and system of rehabilitation. Sentences could be based on time taken to learn trade/skill and reading writing math along with good behavior;
- achieve swift justice by abolishing preliminary inquiries – with indictable offences being heard only through High Court;

– improve detection rates with new technology such as:

- a) wire tapping to assist detection (need to introduce legislation dealing with wire tapping – should be subject to a Court Order;
- b) DNA (beef up the DNA legislation and the capabilities of the forensic lab with an ability to use foreign facilities if necessary);
- c) GPS and criminal database available to all police cars.

Evidence can then be produced without lay witnesses who are susceptible to intimidation, being killed or temporary amnesia.

– improve the prison system e.g. develop a comprehensive programme to rehabilitate prisoners (prison should not be a warehouse) and address issues such as mobile phones being used by inmates (both white collar and violent crime are sometimes arranged through mobile phones in prisons);

– Improve the criminal justice system with:

- b) abolishing preliminary inquiries
- c) streamlining of prosecution
- d) rebalancing the of burden of proof which now overly favours the defendant
- e) setting up special courts such as gun courts and appropriate sentencing for possession of guns.”

We welcome all suggestions.



Catholics & the Death Penalty pt.2 - [Catholics and the Death Penalty 2](#)

