

ISSUES AND ACTIONS

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The mission of the Earth Charter Initiative is to promote the transition to sustainable ways of living and a global society founded on a shared ethical framework that includes respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, universal human rights, respect for diversity, economic justice, democracy, and a culture of



"LIFE OR DEATH?" THAT IS THE QUESTION

"Ending the death penalty would be one important step away from a culture of death and toward a culture of life."

"When the state, in our names and with our taxes, ends a human life despite having non-lethal alternatives, it suggests that society can overcome violence with violence."

A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005

According to many polls and studies, **75%** of the United States citizens favor and support the death penalty. Most of these are not extremist, but people who are educated and reasonable. The death penalty issue arouses deep passions and strong convictions especially in the presence of heinous crimes and unspeakable violence. At a dialogue around this issue, a defense attorney described his own anguish as he represented a man who was convicted of kidnapping an eight year old girl, beating, raping, strangling and throwing her still living body off a bridge. The coroner reported that her death was by drowning. This attorney was not pleading his client's innocence, but that imposing the death penalty was not the state's only option in order to protect society and penalize the offender. He stated his opposition to the death penalty, in light of this case, was an agonizing torment, "You see, I have a young daughter ."



“In Catholic teaching the state has the recourse to impose the death penalty upon criminals if this ultimate sanction is the only available means to protect society from a grave threat to human life. However this right should not be exercised when other ways are available to punish criminals and to protect society...”

A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death
USCCB, 2005

The opinion expressed above would not spring forth from scores of Californians where a statewide Field Poll in July found that **70%** of the population support the death penalty, up from **67%** in 2006. California has debated the issue of the death penalty since at least 1851, when hanging was the preferred method of execution. Even then there was a debate around this penalty’s morality. On September 29, 2010, the California State Supreme Court issued a stay of executions until 2011. The scheduled execution by lethal injection of Albert Greenwood Brown was barred with this decision in order to provide Judge Jeremy Fogel a review of the state’s lethal injection system. Governor Schwarzenegger said that the viciousness of the crime justified a death sentence and his statement, issued after the Court ruling stated, “It is absurd that our legal system continues to prevent the state from carrying out the will of the people.” This stay of execution at San Quentin State Prison applies to others on Death Row who were scheduled for execution in the near future.



VICTIMS’ RELATIVES SPLIT ON PENALTY ALSO

The relatives of victims are in clear agreement about this: murder is the ultimate crime. Contemplating the ultimate punishment is not so straightforward however. There is little or no agreement on what is the right thing to do.

JUDY KERR

Judy Kerr’s brother, 33-year-old Bob was strangled in 2003. But Judy is unable to consider the death of his killer as a viable solution. “I didn’t have a lot of sympathy for killers, and still don’t. But I don’t think killing somebody will bring my brother back. It’s not going to help me, and it’s not going to make me safer.” Judy Kerr is an outreach coordinator for *California Crime Victims for Alternatives for the Death Penalty*, an advocacy and support group for opponents of the death penalty.

LA WANDA HAWKINS

Reginald Hawkins, 19 years old, was fatally shot in 1995, and his mother La Wanda, who founded *Justice for Murdered Children*, supports the death penalty. “Why should we give these murderers health care, feed them, clothe them, give them dental care and education? So many of us can’t afford it out here, but they’re giving it to someone who took another’s life. Isn’t that outrageous.”

The challenges of this moral issue are many. Even the Court requires time to consider and review all factors. Governors, who have the power to commute the death penalty to life without parole are drawn in, and we are all being challenged to re-examine our own stance and scrutinize all aspects, pro and con, that are involved with the death penalty.

“We also share in the hurt, and horror, the loss and heartache that are the result of unspeakable acts of violence. We have heard the anger and despair of the victim’s families who feel ignored by the criminal justice system, society as a whole, and at times the Church. Our family of faith must care for {those} who have been wounded by violence and support them in their loss and search for justice. However, standing with families of victims does not compel us to support the use of the death penalty. We seek to help build a culture of life in which our nation will no longer try to teach that killing is wrong by killing those who kill.”

A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death
USCCB, 2005

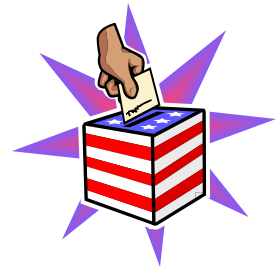
www.usccb.org/deathpenalty

www.usccbpublishng.org

www.sfgate.com/2010-09-22

2010 Elections

The 2010 election cycle is shaping up to be one of the most consequential state elections in decades. Many of the nations largest states will decide on governors for 2011. There are at least 21 races for the governor, the most in years and the control of state legislatures is expected to be fiercely competitive. The economic meltdown and overall nervousness have raised citizen’s anxiety. Huge state deficits, runaway medical costs, diminished education funding and under-maintained infrastructure are problems of gigantic proportions , but the elephant in the room is the loss of trust in elected leaders. Regaining this trust will demand nonpartisan collaboration, a quality that is rarely seen in action these days, yet it is indispensable to address today’s recession-induced problems. The next duly elected representatives will need to move away from the sandbox. Someone replied to this with keen insight “Oh yeah! The new ones would have ‘Googled’ sandbox tactics long ago, so its probably here for a long, long stay.”



www.sfgate.com/propositions

www.cavotes.org/vote/election/2010

[www.balloted.org/California ballot propositions](http://www.balloted.org/California_ballot_propositions)

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