



March 2015 #1

The ongoing trial of accused Marathon Bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev brought back memories of 1997 when the return of the death penalty to Massachusetts was feared imminent. Those of us opposed rallied, wrote letters and held signings of the Declaration of Life, a legal document which we signed and had notarized to the effect that, were we to be murdered, we did not want the murderer executed. Helen Prejean, CSJ, author of “Dead Man Walking” spoke at various locations. I, personally, made several trips to the Boston hearings, hoping to present my personal experience with murder and subsequent support for the mentally ill murderer. We all breathed a sigh of relief when reinstatement failed by one vote. Until today. Dzhokhar is being tried under Federal Law which allows for the Death Penalty.

Over the years 140 countries have abolished capital punishment including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia and Haiti. Unfortunately, the United States stands with countries such as China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. In the U.S. the Federal Courts and some 32 states retain this barbaric custom.

And yet we hear “Thou Shalt Not Kill” from the Commandments and “Blessed are the Merciful” from the Beatitudes.

The official Catechism of the Catholic Church states: 2267.....”*If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people’s safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person. In fact, as a consequence of the possibility which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm---without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself---the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are rare, if not practically non-existent.*”

The Pax Christi USA statement on the death penalty, approved by the National Council, April 2000 reads as follows: “*We base our unconditional opposition to the death penalty on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in the consistent ethic of life which teaches that all life is sacred from the moment it begins until its natural death. In the Gospels we see a nonviolent Jesus who taught and exemplified forgiveness, mercy, compassion and justice that is restorative and healing, always seeking to convert and correct rather than to condemn. We believe that those who are guilty, even of the most heinous crimes, are still sacred in the eyes of our loving God who embraces all sinners as sons and daughters.*”

Pax Christi Central Massachusetts, one of the fifteen local chapters in the Pax Christi MA Region, has formed a Pax Christi Chapter in a Massachusetts Medium Security prison. They have recently completed a study of Pax Christi using Mary Lou Kowknacki's book "Love Beyond Measure" and have been formally received into Pax Christi. Approximately, 25 men and 3 women have attended the sessions. At their recent "graduation" ceremony they asked, "What is Pax Christi doing about the Death Penalty?" Some commented, "If there had been a death penalty in Massachusetts we would have been gone a long time ago." Many of these men are "lifers." These same men walk the 20 mile perimeter of the prison grounds to raise money for hunger issues. They participate in donating money out of their meager accounts to Toys for Tots at Christmas. Most important is their mentoring of younger men coming into the system. We learn from these redeemed men.

What can you do?

Pray the Prayer to Abolish the Death Penalty by Helen Prejean, CSJ

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

Action suggestions:

1. **Attend** the Stations of the Cross to Abolish the Death Penalty and All Violence, 12:00 – 3:00 at the Massachusetts State House on Good Friday, April 3.
2. **Start** the conversation. What do we really know about brain development? About PTSD? What about environmental forces? Do we really have answers? What about the fathers, mothers, husbands, wives and children of those executed? They are punished too.
3. **Write** a note of support for victims of violent crime and their families. Execution does not usually bring closure.

Contact the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty at 202-331-4090 or www.ncadp.org to get more involved.

To **learn more** about Pax Christi contact: Sue Malone, Pax Christi MA Board member and Co-chair of Pax Christi Central MA at organurse@gmail.com or 508-366-2050.

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Our Mission

Pax Christi strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring, articulating, and witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence. This work begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. **Pax Christi USA** rejects war, preparations for war, and every form of violence and domination. It advocates primacy of conscience, economic and social justice, and respect for creation. There are 15 local **Pax Christi** groups in **Massachusetts**. We invite you to join one of these or start a local group in your area.

www.paxchristima.org