

THE DEATH PENALTY - DECLINING WORLDWIDE

Amnesty International keeps a record of executions carried out around the world and has noticed a dramatic reduction in numbers of executions in recent decades. They also noted that although 57 countries retain the death penalty, more than half of the world's nations have now abolished capital punishment.

According to Amnesty International's report, there were 993 executions worldwide in 2017, down from 1,634 executions in 2015. The downward trend includes the United States. During 2017, there were 23 executions carried out in our nation as compared to 98 in 1999.

United States is the only Western Country still using capital punishment! The death penalty is legal in 31 states and illegal in 19, including Wisconsin. However nine states with the penalty currently have moratoriums on executions and four states have had no executions for more than 10 years. The military has had no executions since 1961, although four soldiers are on death row.

Many factors contribute to the decline of public support for capital punishment including concerns about human rights, discrimination, potential wrongful convictions, botched executions and doubt about its effectiveness as a deterrent. However one thing appears to underlie it all: a huge shift in attitudes about capital punishment. The opinion that the death penalty is a violation of human rights is growing internationally.

For many years, the Catholic Church has been encouraging its members to work for abolition of the death penalty. Last year, Pope Francis voiced his opinion that the penalty "heavily wounds human dignity" and is "an inhumane measure". On August 2nd of this year Pope Francis announced that the Church doctrine has been changed and now the death penalty is considered inadmissible in all cases. The Pope also declared that the Roman Catholic Church will work with determination for the abolition of capital punishment worldwide. Another encouraging sign for human rights advocates!

Note: Information for this flier was taken from Amnesty International reports; an article by Husna Haq for the May 21, 2018 *Christian Science Monitor*; and the Death Penalty Information Center <information@deathpenalty.org>.

FIVE MYTHS ABOUT THE DEATH PENALTY

Myth 1: A Death Penalty Costs Less Than a Life Sentence

There are many unavoidable costs that make a death sentence far more expensive than a sentence of life without parole. Most of these costs result from stipulations in the Constitution which require a long and complex judicial process for capital cases. Studies have revealed that a death sentence costs at least 18 times as much as a sentence of life without parole would cost.

Myth 2: The Death Penalty Makes Us Safer

It's a fact that regions with most executions also have the highest murder rates. Also, in states where the death penalty was repealed, there has been no subsequent spike in murder rates. In fact, murder rates have fallen in four states in the years after they repealed the death penalty. Furthermore, many criminologists believe that the death penalty makes us less safe because it needlessly takes limited resources away from policies that have been proven to reduce crime.

Myth 3: The Death Penalty is the Only Way to Provide Closure

Many family members of murder victims feel that the death penalty only prolongs their pain and does not provide the resolution they seek. In contrast, a sentence of life in prison without parole is swift and simple.

Myth 4: The Death Penalty is the Only Way to Make Sure a Convicted Murderer is Never Released from Prison

It is a fact that no adult sentenced to life without parole anywhere in the United States has ever been released on parole.

Myth 5: An Innocent Person Has Never Been Executed

Unfortunately we have no way of knowing how many innocent people have been executed in the United States. However we do know that since the 1970's, 161 persons on death row have been exonerated (pronounced not guilty). In many of those cases, exoneration came only after a long legal battle that was successful due to extraordinary efforts of dedicated people working outside of the system.