



#Catholic TRANSCRIPT

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Drive to end death penalty is under way

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HARTFORD – As the date approaches for the first execution of a convicted criminal in Connecticut in more than 44 years, the Connecticut Catholic Conference (CCC), the public policy arm of the Catholic bishops in Connecticut, is joining forces with the Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty (CNADP) in a statewide petition drive to end the death penalty.

The petition has been distributed to every parish in the Archdiocese, along with a letter from Archbishop Henry J. Mansell reminding parishioners, "The Gospel mandates us to respect human life from conception to natural death." The letter quotes Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium vitae* ("The Gospel of Life"), which states, "The nature and extent of the punishment ought not to go to the extreme of executing the offender, except in cases of absolute necessity"

Such cases include those in which the safety of the public is endangered, the encyclical states, adding that modern improvements to the

penal system result in "such cases [being] very rare if not practically nonexistent" (*Evangelium vitae*, #56).

Marie Hilliard, CCC executive director, said in an e-mail message, "The 'Gospel of Life' addresses society's right to engage in self defense. However, the Holy Father was clear that all other options must be considered, and utilized first. If we were in a system wherein consistent escape was the norm and persons continued to be murderers, perhaps that would be ... a situation [warranting capital punishment]. However, it has been said that in the Western world it is hard to imagine such a situation."

Dr. Hilliard said, "The seven active bishops in Connecticut met Dec. 10 and reaffirmed their position on the death penalty."

That position was first stated in 1999, after Pope John Paul II focused his visit in St. Louis, Mo., on a call to end capital punishment. In a "Statement of the Catholic Bishops of Connecticut Regarding Capital Punishment, April 2, 1999," they wrote: "We wish to make clear that,

in accord with the teaching of Pope John Paul II, respect for human life must be 'profoundly consistent.' ... Consequently those who serve as advocates for the elimination of the death penalty should also oppose all other threats to human life and dignity such as abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide"

Deacon David Reynolds, legislative liaison at CCC, told *The Catholic Transcript* in mid-December, "Some of the priests have seen the petition already, and it's moving along." Asked what effect convicted killer and rapist Michael Ross had on the timing of the petition drive, he said, "I think the fact that Michael Ross is going to be executed may have influenced the timing of the petition, but it was not specifically done [because of] him."

Gov. M. Jodi Rell has announced that she would not stand in the way of the scheduled execution. Ross himself has said repeatedly that he will not pursue the appeals process any further.

Deacon Reynolds said, "I think
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SIGNS OF PROTEST – Maryam Elahi, head of Trinity College's Human Rights Program, holds a sign during the rally against the death penalty at the state Capitol on Dec. 10 that was organized by the Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty. (Photo by Jack Sheedy)