

Death Penalty Prayer Vigil Toolkit

As Catholics, one of the strongest tools we have against the use of the death penalty is prayer. Mercy, forgiveness, and repentance are rooted in scripture and our faith. Holding a prayer vigil on the evening of a scheduled execution can be a powerful way for a ministry or entire parish to unite around this issue based on our belief in the Dignity of the Human Person. In Missouri, executions usually begin around 5:45. Some groups have found it impactful to schedule their vigil around this time. It is our hope that you will find these choices of resources useful to pick from in creating a vigil that best fits your group.

READY TO USE PRAYER VIGIL

<https://catholicsmobilizing.org/resource/prayer-vigil-on-the-day-of-an-execution/>

<https://deathpenaltyaction.org/files/federal-prayer.pdf>

BUILD YOUR OWN PRAYER VIGIL

Below are some options for scriptures, songs, prayers and Universal Prayers that you can “mix and match” to compile your own prayer vigil service.

Scriptures

Readings:

Wisdom 1:13-15, God did not make death
Isaiah 42:1-7, Bring out from the dungeon, those who live in darkness
Isaiah 61:1-2, Proclaim liberty to captives
Micah 6:7-9, Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with the Lord
Romans 12:14-21, Do not take revenge

Psalms:

Psalms 23, “The Lord is my shepherd.”
Psalm 31: 2-9, “Into your hands I commend my spirit”
Psalm 42, “My soul thirst for God, the living God”
Psalm 51:2-19, “Create a pure heart in me, O God”
Psalm 103:1-18, “Merciful and gracious is the Lord”

Gospels:

John 8:1-11, Woman caught in adultery
Matthew 27:22-26 Pilate washes his hands
Matthew 27: 45-50 “Why have you abandoned me?”
Luke 15: 11-32 The Prodigal Son
Luke 23:32-43 The Good Thief
Luke 10: 25-37 The Good Samaritan



Songs

1. Cry of the Poor – John Foley
2. Whatsoever You Do – Willard Jabusch
3. God of Justice, Love and Mercy - Eric Lige
4. Jesus Remember Me Jacques Berthier (Taize)
5. Tree of Life – Marty Haugen
6. Song of Farewell – Old Hundredth
7. May the Choirs of Angels (Song of Farewell)

Prayers

<https://resources.catholicaoc.org/offices/respect-life-ministries/issues/capital-punishment>

<https://www.sisterhelen.org/a-prayer-for-justice/>

<https://www.usccb.org/prayers/prayer-end-use-death-penalty>

<https://catholicismobilizing.org/resource/prayers-for-executions>

Universal Prayers:

<https://catholicismobilizing.org/resource/prayer-vigil-on-the-day-of-an-execution/>

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/pro-life-activities/intercessory-prayers-death-penalty>

<https://www.usccb.org/prayers/prayer-end-use-death-penalty>



Additional Resources for Further Information

Teachings on the Death Penalty

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/death-penalty-capital-punishment/upload/5-723DEATHBI.pdf>

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/pro-life-activities/life-matters-catholic-response-death-penalty>
<https://www.usccb.org/committees/pro-life-activities/gospel-life-and-sentence-death-catholic-teaching-capital-punishment>

<https://www.usccb.org/news/2024/death-penalty-fuels-poison-revenge-society-pope-says>

Online resources

Catholics Mobilizing Network <https://catholicismobilizing.org/our-work/death-penalty/>

Missourians to Abolish the Death Penalty <https://www.madpmo.org/>

Death Penalty Information Center <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/>

USCCB <https://www.usccb.org/search?key=death%20penalty>

Suggested Reading

Dead Man Walking, Sr Helen PreJean

Just Mercy, Bryan Stevenson

Lesson Before Dying, Ernest Gaines

Tattoos on the Heart, by Fr. Gregory Boyle, SJ

Suggested Movies

“Dead Man Walking” (Rated R)

“The Green Mile” (Rated R)

“A Lesson Before Dying” (Rated PG-13)

Presentation Slides – 32 PowerPoint slides titled “Death Penalty – a Pro-Life Issue” presents information, frequently asked questions, and myths about the death penalty and Catholic teaching on the issue. This PowerPoint slide deck is available by contacting Deacon David Billing at davidbilling@archstl.org

