

**Dear Marianist Family,**

As we approach Easter and our celebration of the Resurrection, the members of the MSJC Death Penalty Issue Team write to share signs of hope of a continuing resurrection with efforts to abolish the death penalty and to invite you to consider how you and others in your community could be involved.

As a first step, we encourage you to use an excellent Good Friday reflection that comes from the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty. It's available at this link: <http://catholicismobilizing.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Good-Friday-brochure-outside-revised.-v3pdf.pdf>

We would welcome your involvement in the work of our issue team. Membership on the team is a three-year commitment, so we are always seeking new members with fresh ideas. Familiarize yourself with our work through *Justice Jottings* and [www.msjc.net/deathpenalty](http://www.msjc.net/deathpenalty). Contact our chair, [Lauren Olson](#), or staff, [Jim Vogt](#), if you want to explore further involvement.

The MSJC Death Penalty Issue Team has been very active over the last several months. On March 2 - 4 we met in Dayton, Ohio, in conjunction with the Archdiocesan Social Action Conference that included about 100 parish social justice leaders. Through the efforts and energy of Karen Clifton, director of the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Use of the Death Penalty, who joined us, we presented two workshops on the death penalty during the conference. A highlight of the weekend was a gathering for local members of the Marianist Family hosted by the team and held at the Marianist Sisters' residence. About 30 people heard a thoughtful – and thought provoking – presentation by Mary Hallinan, a local advocate on the topic of [Restorative Justice](#).

At the end of the weekend we elected **Lauren Olson**, a law student at Southern Methodist University, as chair of the team. She replaces **Sr. Grace Walle, FMI**, who served admirably as chair for six years.

In a [recent article](#) on the website of the Catholic Mobilizing Network, Jeremy Schroeder of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty reviewed the status of the death penalty in several key states:

- Connecticut and Maryland have repeal bills pending in their legislatures.
- California will have a ballot initiative for repeal in the 2012 election.

- Colorado, Kansas and Montana look to have legislation introduced in the next session.
- Two states that merit our attention are Missouri, where legislation for repeal has been introduced, and Ohio, where there are bills to abolish the death penalty in both chambers, and a study commission is looking at the death penalty.
- In Florida there are currently bills to require unanimous juries in sentencing as well as bills to abolish the death penalty. Litigators and communities of color are particularly active in county organizing at the moment.
- In Texas energy is focused on the county level, stressing the expense of the death penalty compared to the cost of a life sentence without parole. The Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty is a growing grassroots organization worthy of our support. It is with pride that we note that **Bro. Brian Halderman**, a member of the team, was honored recently by TCADP for his outstanding efforts to end the death penalty in Texas.

Bob Gilligan, director of the Catholic Conference of Illinois, the last state to abolish the death penalty, said something we can all take to heart and support:

*I don't fight to abolish the death penalty because it will save money (it will), or because of problems with a broken system (there are many). I fight the death penalty because the death penalty is morally wrong. Because of this simple truth, I believe that it is important that we work in our own communities to create a society that addresses violence through a system that is as morally just as possible, takes care of victims, and makes us all safer. There is a lot of work to be done on that front, but I am starting by fighting to abolish the death penalty.*

Bob was successful in his fight in Illinois. We, too, can be successful in the states where we are present if we get behind this initiative. Every state has an organized coalition to abolish the death penalty. You can find the one in your state at [www.ncadp.org/affiliateDirectory.cfm](http://www.ncadp.org/affiliateDirectory.cfm). As individuals and communities we can lend our support to the effort by making contact with the organizers in our state and volunteering to write letters to legislators and newspaper editors advocating the abolition of capital punishment.

Unlike some of the critical socio-political issues of our time, abolishing the death penalty in our country is within reach if we persevere patiently and prayerfully.

**MSJC Death Penalty Issue Team**

Lauren Olson, Chair

Bro. Brian Halderman, SM

Fr. John Manahan, SM

Bob Stoughton

Bro. Jerry Sullivan, SM

Sr. Grace Walle, FMI