

**Statement of Patrick R. Brannigan,
Executive Director of the New Jersey Catholic Conference,
On the Findings of the New Jersey Death Penalty Study Commission
January 3, 2007**

The Catholic Bishops of New Jersey have long advocated an end to capital punishment in this State. The Bishops' February 4, 2005 statement in opposition to the death penalty is included below

Now that the New Jersey Death Penalty Study Commission has formally called for abolition of the death penalty, the New Jersey Catholic Conference urges the State Legislature to pass legislation to implement the recommendation of the New Jersey Study Commission. Legislation to encompass life imprisonment without the possibility of parole would be a humane alternative that recognizes the dignity of all human life.

The Conference applauds Governor Jon Corzine's announced support of the Death Penalty Study Commission's recommendation.

The Conference acknowledges that the passage of such legislation alone would not be an end or a total solution to the issue of capital crimes. Our State's leaders must continue to seek improvement in our criminal justice system. As a society, we must make a greater commitment to crime prevention and victim assistance.

**STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF NEW JERSEY
ON THE DEATH PENALTY**

February 4, 2005

As death row inmates exhaust their appeals and the possibility of execution draws near, we, the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey, wish to reiterate our opposition to the death penalty. We are guided by our belief that every person has an inalienable right to life, because each human being is made in the image and likeness of God, who alone is the absolute Lord of life from its beginning until its end (cf. The Book of Genesis 1:26-28).

We acknowledge that the subject of capital punishment is controversial and emotional. All murders are violent and shocking; some are savage. They all stir emotions of revulsion and anger. We grieve for the victims of murder, for the brutalization and loss of life. We commiserate with the families and friends of victims who must suffer with their loss through the years. We affirm that the state has the duty to punish criminals and to prevent the repetition or occurrence of crime. We believe that greater efforts must be made to bring the criminal to repentance and rehabilitation. We believe that our society is sufficiently developed to protect itself and to redress the injustice caused by the criminal

without resorting to the use of the death penalty. One alternative is life without possibility of parole.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* acknowledges the right of public authorities to impose criminal punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense, “if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor. 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.” Pope John Paul II has stated that in today’s world cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity “are very rare, if not practically non-existent.” (*The Gospel of Life*, 56)

Because the State of New Jersey has other means to redress the injustice caused by crime and to effectively prevent crime by rendering the one who has committed the offense incapable of doing harm and because we recognize the dignity of all human life, we continue to consistently and vigorously oppose the use of capital punishment. We recognize the continued need for improvement of our criminal justice system and for a greater societal commitment to crime prevention and victim assistance. As pastors and teachers we urge the State of New Jersey not to impose the death penalty in our state.

Most Rev. John J. Myers
Archbishop of Newark

Most Reverend Andrew Pataki
Bishop of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy
of Passaic

Most Reverend Joseph A. Galante
Bishop of Camden

Most Reverend Joseph Younan
Bishop of Our Lady of Deliverance Diocese

Most Reverend Paul G. Bootkoski
Bishop of Metuchen

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli
Bishop of Paterson

Most Reverend Thomas A. Donato
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Most Reverend John M. Smith
Bishop of Trenton

Most Reverend John W. Flesey
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark