

## Penalty

continued from page 1

Irondequoit; and St. Bridget's, St. Mary's and Corpus Christi parishes, Rochester.

"Moratorium" has become more of a household word, Kendall said, because of the movement and media reports.

Even so, she noted, while an increasing number of Catholic leaders and most major denominations oppose the death penalty, "When we go into actual congregations and churches, that position in the Catholic community or any other is not evident. People have varying support for the death penalty."

The Illinois Bar Association called for a moratorium on the death penalty in 1997, which death-penalty opponents say gave significant momentum to the movement. Since then, major investigations by newspapers as well as by college journalism students turned up a number of wrongful homicide convictions.

Some prisoners have spent more than a decade on death row, have actually been fitted for burial suits and come within two days of a wrongful execution.

According to a widely cited statistic, nearly 90 people since 1973 have been released from death row because of evidence that emerged showing they were innocent of the crimes for which they were sentenced to die. An average 4.6 have been released each year since 1993.

Kendall noted another reason why the campaign for a moratorium seems to be working. Whereas abolishing the death penalty is a moral, heated issue, she said, "This campaign enables people to discuss it on a different level. Not to think about whether the death penalty is right or wrong, but to look at how it is applied —

who receives the death penalty, who are the victims, those kind of things — ... We can go further that way."

### Leadership involvement

The fact that the movement seems to be catching on at a leadership level encourages Suzanne Schnittman, life issues coordinator for diocesan Catholic Charities.

"I think it's one of the most exciting things I've seen in the five years I've been involved," she said. "I definitely see a difference. We sort of used to have to look under the bushes to find something new. Now something breaks every day."

Among recent actions was a plea March 9 by representatives of more than 30 church-based groups asking President Clinton to impose a moratorium on the federal government's use of the death penalty.

They stated that "our nation is slowly realizing the truth of capital punishment: the death penalty, as applied in America today, threatens to shed innocent blood."

"There are too many death penalty cases where questions remain — or even arise — after the execution has occurred," the letter said. "And there are too many death penalty cases where the understandable desire for punishment overshadows the impartial pursuit of justice."

It was signed by leaders of Baptist, Quaker, Episcopal, Lutheran, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ and Methodist organizations, among others. Columban Father Michael Dodd, director of the Justice and Peace Office of the Columban Fathers, also was among the signers.

The president of the U.S. bishops' conference had issued his own letter to President Clinton in February urging a moratorium. Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza also noted that the U.S. bishops have long called for an

**Although the majority of Americans are in favor of the death penalty, the percentage has been gradually decreasing. It now is at 66 percent, the lowest since 1981, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.**

**The center quoted a Gallup poll that found that when surveys also include the alternative of life without the possibility of parole, the percentage in favor of the death penalty drops to 52 percent.**

end to the death penalty.

"There are many practical reasons to stand against the death penalty, including its arbitrary application, its cost, inadequate counsel, the possibility of executing wrongly convicted people, and racial disparities," Bishop Fiorenza's letter stated. "But we also condemn the death penalty because of what it does to us as a society."

Also this year, at the request of Catholic bishops, Philippine President Joseph Estrada suspended the death penalty for the rest of 2000 "in deference to the celebration of the Catholic Church's jubilee year."

In Illinois, the Joliet Diocese made the death penalty its social-justice issue for 2000, encouraging education from the pulpit about the church's position. Bishop Joseph L. Imesch joined other leading clergy in the state in signing a decree opposing the death penalty, and mounted support for a proposed moratorium last year.

"I think if we could get Catholic people to accept the fact that the death penalty is not a legitimate form of punishment, that would be a major step for me," he said.

His colleagues in Washington had similar sentiments.

"We must touch the hearts of the large number of Catholics who accept execution as an appropriate response to the violent crimes that confront our society," read a statement signed early this year by Seattle Archbishop Alexander J. Brunett, Spokane Bishop William S. Skylstad and Yakima Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla.

They noted some Catholics may be unaware of how church teaching about capital punishment has changed. Their statement addressed the argument that execution is a proportionate punishment for killers; the possibility that innocent people might be wrongly convicted; and the connections between capital punishment and a violent society.

In the Rochester Diocese, educational opportunities on the death penalty have included appearances by Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, author of *Dead Man Walking*.

St. Bernard's Institute sponsored a May 2 lecture, "The Death Penalty & You," by Bud Welch, who also spoke at the May 1-3 diocesan priests' convocation on "Preaching Difficult Issues: The Death Penalty."

Welch lost his 23-year-old daughter in the 1995 bombing of Oklahoma City's Murrah Federal Building, yet he continues to speak out against the death penalty.

His appearances are accompanied by the distribution of Moratorium 2000 petitions as part of an international effort led in the United States by Sister Prejean. She hopes to deliver 1 million U.S. signatures for a death-penalty moratorium to the United Nations in honor of Human Rights Day, Dec. 10.

Welch also was a key speaker at an April 29-30 statewide conference in Binghamton,

which was organized in part by Rochester-area death-penalty opponents and featured such workshop leaders as Kendall and Peter Ladley, the chaplain at Elmira Correctional and Reception Center.

"We came away with the vow we will never let anyone be executed in New York state," Schnittman said, adding that the conference drew some 200 activists.

### In other action

President Clinton has asked the attorney general's office to review how the death penalty is applied under federal law. Amid growing pressure for a halt to federal executions while such a review is conducted, Catholic bishops or their representatives in New Jersey, Florida and New Mexico have sought changes in their state death penalty laws.

Meanwhile, the New Hampshire House voted to abolish the death penalty, and Illinois Gov. George Ryan established a commission to review his state's use of capital punishment, which he suspended in January.

The call for a federal death-penalty moratorium has gained strength, particularly since Ryan announced in January that he was suspending all Illinois executions pending a review of how the state applies the law. On March 10 Ryan announced the formation of a 14-member panel to study the system.

The panel will be headed by former federal judge Frank McGarr, director of the Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University, and former U.S. Attorney Thomas Sullivan. Also on the panel will be retired U.S. Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., and lawyer-novelist Scott Turow.

Since 1977, 13 men on Illinois' death row have been released after they were found to have been wrongly convicted. In that same period, Illinois executed 12 other inmates.

Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., has said he hopes President Clinton can be persuaded to call for a moratorium. The senator introduced a bill to the Senate April 26 calling for a death penalty moratorium at both the federal and state level until a national commission studies the use of the death penalty and until policies ensuring justice fairness and due process are implemented.

The first federal execution since 1963 could be scheduled at any time. Convicted murderer Juan Raul Garza — convicted under a federal drug-kingpin statute — has exhausted his appeals and is awaiting an execution date.

An Innocence Protection Act introduced by Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., would require that inmates be allowed to have DNA testing if such evidence might be relevant to their convictions or death sentences. The House also introduced a version of the bill in late March that also would improve the system of representation for people who face the death penalty.

"This is the first time in at least 15 years the anti-death penalty movement at the city level, state level and national level has been on the offensive," remarked Brian Henninger, program coordinator of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, based in Washington, D.C. "Commentators around the country, from George Will to George Stephanopoulos, and Pat Robertson all are saying there's been a significant shift in politics."

The coalition has existed since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, according to Henninger, a Rochester native who grew up in St. Mary's Parish, Canandaigua, and graduated from Geneva's Hobart College. But finally it appears headway is being gained, he said.

"It really is a very significant time for the abolition movement and the country as a whole," Henninger said.

"The Catch-22 is if you don't do the work after you get the moratorium," he added. "We've got to make sure our job then is to get facts, figures and truth about the death penalty to the powers that be. The worst of all nightmares is politicians coming back and saying the death penalty is absolutely fine, let's keep it another 20 years."

## COURIER CLASSIFIEDS

### GENERAL

#### Announcements

**ADOPTIONS** The Catholic Courier does not publish adoption advertising. To obtain a list of agencies that serve birth mothers and adoptive parents, call 716-328-4340. Agencies wishing to be included on this list may send information to the Catholic Courier.

#### Merchandise

We buy all antiques & household goods for highest cash prices. One item or entire estate. Complete estate services. Appraisals, sales conducted.

**Marilyn's Antiques**  
716-647-2480

**HAMMOND ORGAN** Model B-3 in good condition with Hammond and/or Leslie speaker cabinet. Will remove. Please contact Tony tel: 416/252-4463 or e-mail cwam@interlog.com

### EMPLOYMENT

#### Help Wanted

**MATURE PERSON WANTED** for clerking duties 25 hours/week. Must like animals. Selling fine wines. Hourly plus commission. Dependability a must. Retirees welcome. Immediate pay. 716/442-2050. Call after 3 p.m.

Moms & Dads  
**WORK FROM HOME**  
Raise your own kids, earn great money. We'll teach you how.  
1(800) 431-7130

### PROPERTY

#### Vacation Rental

**ADIRONDACKS, SARANAC LAKE, NY.** Lakeside cottages, sandy beach. Memorial Day, May thru October. Weekly, weekends. 716/266-0024.

### PROPERTY

#### Senior Housing

Charlotte Lake River Homes: 1 MONTH FREE. 1 Bdrm apts High Rise only. Rents start @ \$290 inc. For Seniors 50+ or disabled. 716/621-4890. Mon-Fri, 10:30-5. Supervised by DHCR, EHO. Offer expires June 30.

### SERVICES

#### Carpeting & Floor Care

**JAI CARPET CLEANERS:** commercial/residential. Free estimates, referral program. Church discounts. "Have a cleanwright experience today." 716-243-5514; pager 716-528-0337.

#### Ceiling Repair

**TEXTURED/SWIRLED CEILINGS:** 9' x 12' ceiling only \$59! Water damage, drywall, plaster repairs. Any size patches or repairs. Quality work; reasonable prices. 716/392-5076.

#### Cleanup & Handyman

**SITE CLEAN-UP:** We clean attics, basements, garages, foreclosures, move in/out, haul away brush, construction debris and offer a full handyman service. Free estimates. Call Joe 716/281-1993 or 315/524-7985.

#### Driveways

Driveways  
Parking Lots  
**Koppers Paving**  
Since 1965  
35 Years Monroe County Area  
FREE ESTIMATES  
716-377-9000

#### Masonry

**MASONRY REPAIRS:** All types, brick steps, sidewalks, basement wall repairs. Reasonable. 35 years experience. 716-323-1007. Al Meyvis, Sr.

### SERVICES

#### Moving & Hauling

**K-D Moving & Storage, Inc.**  
Experience in office, household moving and deliveries.  
Big or Small, We do them All!  
473-6610/473-4357  
23 Arlington St., Rochester NY 14607  
NYDOT#9657

#### Painting & Wallcovering

**AL MEYVIS, JR:** Ext./int. painting. Basement walls repaired/painted. "Wet basement problems." Carpentry. All types small jobs welcome. Sr. discount. Certified. 392-4435 or 323-2876.

**BURG-MASTER PAINTING/PAPERHANGING:** textured ceilings, walls, ceilings repaired, rugs shampooed. Insured, powerwashing. Dan Burgmaster, 716/663-0827.

**Plaster Restoration  
Wallpapering Painting**

Free Estimates  
716-482-3243 • 716-703-8245  
Terry & Nina McCullough  
A Couple That Care

#### Travel

**BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA, PILGRIMAGE:** includes live taping of Mother Angelica show, Sept. 3-8 or Nov. 5-10, \$535/person. Evergreen Tours 716/544-4694.

Call  
716-328-4340  
to advertise  
in the  
Courier  
classifieds