



Reuters/CNS

Death penalty opponents sing "We Shall Overcome" outside the federal prison in Terre Haute, Ind., the morning of June 11. Timothy McVeigh died by lethal injection at 7:14 a.m. local time.

## Bishop regrets McVeigh execution

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The execution of Timothy McVeigh and the resumption of federally sanctioned executions marks a sad day for the country, the president of the U.S. bishops' conferences said.

Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic Conference, said that he deeply regretted the execution of McVeigh.

McVeigh was executed by lethal injection June 11 at the federal prison at Terre Haute, Ind. He had been convicted of murder in the 1995 bombing of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, in which 168 people were killed.

"In an age where respect for life is threatened in so many ways, we believe it is im-

portant to emphasize that human life is a gift from God, and no one or any government should presume to kill God's gift," Bishop Fiorenza said in a statement released just after the execution was carried out. "Rather, all of us have the responsibility to protect human life from conception to natural death."

He noted that the U.S. criminal justice system has alternative ways to punish criminals and protect society and called on Catholics and all people of good will — particularly legislators — to reconsider the use of capital punishment.

He said the bishops offer their sympathy and prayers for all those touched by the bombing.

"We pray that the God of all mercies will

grant them every consoling grace during their grief and suffering," Bishop Fiorenza said.

"On this difficult day, we pledge our best efforts to reverse this culture of violence and replace it with a profound respect for the inherent value God confers on human life."

Susan Borcherts, spokeswoman for the Indianapolis Archdiocese, in which Terre Haute is located, said Indianapolis Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein was saddened the execution was going forward.

"He is praying for the victims and their families. He is praying for Timothy McVeigh and his family. He urges Catholics to join him in prayer," said Borcherts in a June 8 statement.

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12 PAGES

### Inside This Week



**Bishop ordains six to diaconate**  
Cathedral packed for celebration  
— Page 3



**Teen makes time to help others**  
First part in Hands of Christ series  
— Page 12

**Parents warn advertisers**  
Vow that children are not a 'market'  
— Page 8

## The NUN Study



By Maureen Daly  
Catholic News Service

Page 3: Local Alzheimer's studies

### Alzheimer's is not inevitable

"There is great promise in old age, as much as in adolescence or in any other stage of human development."

That is just one piece of news from David A. Snowdon, who since 1986 has led the Nun Study, an ongoing research project on aging involving 678 members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in seven convents across the United States.

The sisters in the study have ranged in age from 75 to 106. They gave Snowdon access to their personal and medical histories; they undergo annual physical and mental tests. Each sister also has agreed to donate her brain for Snowdon's research after she dies, yielding one of the largest brain donor pools in the world.

"When I started 15 years ago, the thinking was that if you lived to be old enough you would get Alzheimer's and dementia," said Snowdon, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Kentucky's Sanders-Brown Center on Aging.

"Now we know that Alzheimer's is not inevitable. Some of the healthiest, most beautiful brains we have seen are from people over 100," he told Catholic News Service in a telephone interview.

Snowdon's hopeful results and his lively, symptom-free study subjects have drawn the attention of the "Today" program, *Time* magazine and *The New York Times*.

One of the study's sisters with Rochester roots, Sister Mary Ann Tantalo, was interviewed on television this spring, and featured with other sisters on Tom Brokaw's evening news report.

"They spent the whole day here," she said from the Wilton, Conn., motherhouse. "I was disappointed they didn't put more pictures on of the motherhouse." (A story on Page 10 features several of the sisters in the study.)

To date, 334 of the 678 nuns over age 75 who pledged their brains to the study in 1991 have died and more than 300 brains have been autopsied. Of the 344 living sisters, now ages 84 to 106, about 100 show no signs of Alzheimer's.

Snowdon's study has produced information about the causes, treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's disease. He discusses several in his book *Aging With Grace: What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Leading Longer, Healthier and More Meaningful Lives*, published by Bantam in May.

Some of Snowdon's findings follow:

- Preventing strokes may be the key to avoiding Alzheimer's symptoms. Some sisters showed no memory loss when they were alive even though their brain autopsies revealed signs of Alzheimer's. These symptom-free sisters had never experienced strokes.

- Depression appears to worsen Alzheimer's and Alzheimer's appears to intensify depression. In both conditions there appears to be some shrinking of the hippocampus, one of the brain's memory centers.

- Linguistic ability in early life seems to protect against

Continued on page 10