

# DEATH PENALTY

Continued from page 1

es all of us," it said. "We also pray for all of the families who have endured so much loss and pain."

A statement released by the Diocese of Peoria, Ill., said Bishop Daniel R. Jenky also lauded Ryan's action and noted that "better means are available to protect citizens and punish the guilty" in advanced societies such as the United States.

New Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich called the commutations a "big mistake" before his Jan. 13 inauguration. However, he said he would for the time being keep the moratorium on executions in effect for any new death sentences handed down.

Cook County State's Attorney Richard Devine blasted Ryan's decision, vowing to try to overturn it — although legal scholars say the chances of that are slim.

Devine called the blanket commutations a "cruel hoax" on victims' families. "They will be remembered as the most irresponsible decisions ever taken by a state's chief executive," he told reporters.

In Washington, a few days before Ryan's actions, the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty announced that it would seek to introduce bills outlawing the use of capital punishment on juvenile offenders in each of the 22 states that still maintain the practice.

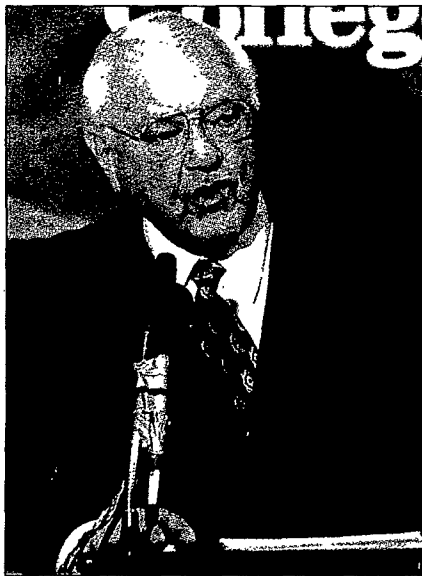
In College Park, Md., state officials recently released the results of a two-year study which showed that the death penalty was sought more for blacks, especially when crime victims were white. Outgoing Gov. Parris Glendening imposed a moratorium on executions last May pending the study's completion. His successor, Gov. Robert Ehrlich, said he would lift the moratorium despite the study's conclusions.

In Missouri, Deacon Larry Weber, executive director of the Missouri Catholic Conference, said some of the same situations that troubled Illinois officials also exist in Missouri.



Reuters/CNS

**Former Illinois death-row inmate Leroy Orange hugs his daughter Latonya as he talks with the media outside the gates of the Cook County Jail in Chicago Jan. 10. Orange and three others sitting on the state's death row were granted pardons by outgoing Gov. George Ryan following his unprecedented review of capital punishment.**



Reuters/CNS

**Illinois Gov. George Ryan discusses the death penalty at DePaul School of Law in Chicago Jan. 10. During the talk he pardoned four Illinois death-row inmates and commuted the death sentences of more than 150 prisoners.**

"You can't fix those mistakes after someone's been executed," he said. "It's part of the problems inherent in having a punishment of

the taking of one's life."

State Sen. Mary Bland has introduced a bill to create a nine-member commission to study all aspects of the death penalty. The commission would recommend modifications to state laws to ensure the adequacy of trial and appellate legal counsel, the accuracy of findings of guilt, the elimination of race disparity, fair court procedures and consistent charges, and sentence recommendations by local prosecutors.

All executions would be suspended during the term of the study. Research recently released by Michael Lenza of the University of Missouri-Columbia showed that the race of the victim plus the socioeconomic status of the defendant were far greater indicators of who ultimately received a death sentence than the brutality of the murder.

In Ohio, Franciscan Brother Daniel Montgomery, accused in the fatal shooting of Franciscan Father William Gulas, is facing the death penalty, but the Cleveland-area prosecutor said it is not a foregone conclusion that he will die by lethal injection if he is eventually con-

victed.

Cuyahoga County Prosecutor William Mason said he and a team of prosecutors will review the circumstances of the case before making a final determination on whether to seek the death penalty once the case comes to trial.

"I'll certainly consider what the victim's family wants, the church viewpoint on the death penalty and then I'll consider the evidence in the case," Mason said. "There's all kinds of options when you're indicted under the death penalty."

Ultimately, the decision to invoke the death penalty, if sought, rests with the jury.

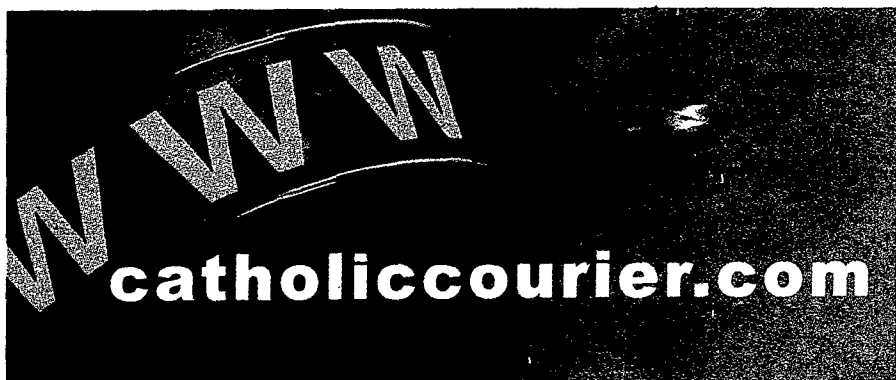
Brother Montgomery was indicted Jan. 13 by the Cuyahoga County grand jury on charges of aggravated murder and aggravated arson in the Dec. 7 death of Father Gulas, pastor of St. Stanislaus Church in the city's Slavic Village neighborhood.

Back in Washington, Sister Helen Prejean, author of "Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States," met with the members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Policy to outline some suggestions for how the bishops could address the death penalty more effectively.

Sister Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille, is asking that the church strongly support the campaign for a nationwide moratorium on capital punishment. She also is seeking financial help with abolition efforts and "a partnership with the Catholic Church," such as having a "point person" on opposition to the death penalty in every parish.

She said she would like the bishops to encourage parishes nationwide to start educating about capital punishment through such programs as a six-part adult catechesis, "Reflections on 'Dead Man Walking,'" available from the publishers of the Renew program for parish spiritual renewal.

Contributing to this story were Joseph Kenny in St. Louis, and Mark Pattison and Patricia Zapor in Washington.



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