



Conference of Major Superiors of Men

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Media Release

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Caring for Sinners is Caring for Humanity: Criminal Justice Reform

(Silver Spring, MD). Although life is a splendid adventure, we all struggle, failing to love at times, and even grievously harming others. Jesus was clear about transcending an “eye for an eye,” punishment-based form of justice towards a healing, restorative justice that challenges us to even discover how we might “love our enemies.” [The Conference of Major Superiors of Men](#), which serves the leadership of the Catholic men’s religious orders in the United States, urges Congress and our society to support the present bi-partisan criminal justice reform efforts. With the upcoming [Year of Mercy](#) proclaimed by Pope Francis, this is an apt time to respond.

Pope Francis has been very clear on this issue saying: “I also offer encouragement to all those who are convinced that a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation.” For example, he has called for the end of life without parole as a “hidden death penalty” and for the abolition of the death penalty itself.

CMSM President Very Rev. Jim Greenfield OSFS says,

“Perhaps stronger than Pope Francis’ words are his actions. His frequent visits to prisoners in Italy including his recent visit to a Philadelphia prison during his trip to the United States dignifies incarcerated women and men with the power of human love and esteems them greatly. The choice of the pope to spend time with prisoners alongside his visits with our president, Congress, and international leaders at the United Nations re-humanizes imprisoned people whenever our society may forget or—worse—hate them. Certainly, the Gospel impels us to do more for anyone behind bars.”

Archbishop Thomas Wenski and Sister Donna Markham of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities USA stated:

“One-size-fits-all sentencing policies, such as mandatory minimums, are inadequate in addressing the complexities of crime and community safety. Instead of directing a vast amount of public resources to imprison more people and build more prisons and jails, government should support effective programs aimed at crime prevention, rehabilitation, education efforts, substance abuse treatment, as well as programs of probation, parole and reintegration.”

We are concerned about the human person, whether they are persons who commit crimes or those who have experienced crime. We are concerned about the families and children that struggle either with members being incarcerated or with members who have suffered crime. Thus, we lift up the following core elements:

1. Prevention, Restoration, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration should all be part of any criminal justice reform that hopes to succeed.
2. Restorative Justice should be the paradigm that orients our approach. Such an approach not only prevents initial crime and heals the harm of crime better, but also leads to much lower recidivism rates.
3. Solitary confinement, life without parole, and the death penalty should all end as clear violations of human dignity.
4. Address the embedded racism in our present criminal justice system in terms of sentencing, enforcement, profiling, drug laws, legal and jury representation.

We particularly support the inclusion of the Youth Promise Act (H.R. 2197, S.1770), which helps to fund effective, local-based, prevention programs in U.S. communities.

Let us pray as well as change our habits and policies in the way of love and mercy.

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The **Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM)** supports and offers resources for U.S. leaders of Catholic men's religious institutes. CMSM promotes dialogue and collaboration on issues of religious life as well as peace and justice issues with major groups in church and society. There are more than 17,000 religious priests and brothers in the United States.
