

Respect Life and the Death Penalty

1. OBJECTIVE

- a) To identify personal feelings about people who have committed crimes.
- b) To view inmates as human.
- c) To learn Jesus' teachings on crime and offenders.
- d) To learn the Church's teaching on the Death Penalty.

2. ANTICIPATORY SET

Invite the group to quietly walk around and to take time to stop and view the various images posted around the room. Allow a few minutes for this. When all are finished, ask the group to be seated.

Next, lead a large group discussion using the following questions:

- 1) What impressions did you get as you viewed the various pictures?
- 2) Do you know anyone who has been a victim of (a) crime?
What happened?
How did they feel?
What happened to the person who committed the crime?

3. LESSON

A) *Large Group Discussion*

Lead the class in a discussion using the following questions. Brainstorm ideas and write the answers on the chalkboard.

- What does "Respect Life" mean to you?
- When does life start?
- When does life end?
- Are some lives more "worthy/valuable" than others?
- Who in our society today is not given full respect?
- Who in Jesus' day was not given full respect?

B) *Read and Discuss*

Form groups of two or three persons. Give each person a Bible, a pen or pencil and a copy of the handout ***In Jesus' Own Words***. Ask each person to look up and read the Bible passage and answer the question related to the Bible passage. Allow sufficient time for this. When all are finished, invite group members to share their insights/answers with each other.

C) *The Church and the Death Penalty.*

Give each person copies of the handouts ***Catholic Teaching on the Death Penalty*** and ***Renewing Our Call to End the Death Penalty***. Also give each person a pen or pencil and a sheet of writing paper. Invite the students to silently read the handouts and write a short paragraph reflecting on the following:

- What does the Church teach about the Death Penalty?
- About "Respect Life," today I learned ...
- About the Death Penalty, today I learned ...

D) Read and Discuss

Give each person a copy of the handout **The Popes Speak**. Ask the group to silently read the statements listed. Allow for a few moments of silence and reflection. Next, ask for volunteers to read out loudly and clearly each statement. Invite students to share with the large group their reaction to the statements using the following as a basis for their sharing:

What spoke to you the most? Why?

4. LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR

- a) Give each student the **Letter to the Governor**. Have someone read the letter loudly and clearly to the class. Explain the purpose of the letter and invite students to sign the letter. Assure students that this is purely a personal choice and that they do not have to sign the letter if they do not want to.
- b) If a student chooses to write his/her own letter, allow him/her to do so.
- c) Collect all the letters. Mail letters to:

Diocese of San Bernardino
Office of Restorative Justice
Att: Marciano Avilla
1201 E. Highland Ave.
San Bernardino, CA 92404

5. CLOSING PRAYER

Give each person a copy of the **Closing Prayer** and lead the group in prayer.

6. FOLLOW UP

- a) Write a prayer for victims and offenders.
- b) Watch a movie and discuss.
- c) Interview family and friends on their feelings and attitudes toward the death penalty.