

## From The Womb to the Tomb

### Reflection by Sr. Grace Walle, FMI

On March 25, 2022, we will celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation. In the Hail Mary we pray, “blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.” In these words of the Hail Mary, we hear words of praise for Jesus, while his human body is being knitted in his mother’s womb. In the passage of the Visitation, (Luke [1:39–56]), we hear John the Baptist, himself in the womb, leaping in praise for the unborn Jesus. The greeting in the Visitation is a snapshot of four people, John, Elizabeth, and Mary celebrating the birth of Jesus. A few weeks later, on Good Friday, April 15, 2022, we will witness the once defenseless baby that Mary held in her arms now a defenseless man on the cross as she is waiting for Him to be put back in her arms. She too hears his words of mercy and forgiveness for those who do not know what they are doing. As Mary pondered and treasured all the events of her life in her heart, so I am led to reflect with thoughtful contemplation on my involvement in the Death Penalty Abolition & Restorative Justice Issue Team.



I am writing this reflection on behalf of the Marianist Social Justice Death Penalty Abolition & Restorative Justice Issue Team. We are one earliest issue teams developed at the beginning of MSJC. Thanks to many team members over the years, we have been able to continue our limited volunteer efforts on this issue, but not in isolation from all life issues. Regrettably, the death penalty abolition work continues although more states have outlawed it since our work began. We view our efforts, as part of a “Consistent Ethic of Life.” It’s been 40 years since Cardinal Bernadine initiated the Catholic principle of the consistent ethic of life. This ethic recognizes the interrelatedness of all threats to human life—nuclear war, abortion, death penalty, and euthanasia—and teaches that all human life must be protected, however repugnant some lives may seem. The Gospel of Life ([Evangelium Vitae](#)), followed with John Paul II’s challenging call to become “people of life,” committed the Church to building a new culture based on the dignity of the human person. For Catholics being “pro-life” means protecting life from womb to tomb. We support pro-life, pro-family, pro-environment, pro-poor, pro-justice, pro-wholeness, and pro-peace, and oppose structures and behaviors that discriminate or block access to or eliminate the essentials of human life.

As an Issue Team, we have applied this lens of consistent life ethic **of the death penalty, which denies our call to respect the dignity of human life from the womb to the tomb.** The death penalty unjustly targets people of color, those with intellectual disability and mental illness; it affects those living in poverty and risks killing innocent life. We also support restorative practices that seek to repair harm through transformative encounters that model Jesus’ reconciling way. Our issue team works in collaboration with other MSJC issue teams and most recently has been in dialogue with the Racial Justice Issue Team.

We are a small but committed issue team, made of up the following members, including myself:

- Bob Stoughton
- Janet Hoben
- John Holden
- Lauren Olson
- Martha Hurley
- Mary Beaudoin
- Tom Redmond

We have benefited from dialogue and support of many death penalty abolition and restorative justice organizations, especially the Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN). CMN “is a national organization that mobilized Catholics and people of goodwill to value life over death, to end the use of the death penalty, through education, advocacy, and prayer, and based on the Gospel value that every human is created in the image and likeness of God.” [Their website](#) has prayers and educational resources, especially for Lent and the Stations of the Cross.

**In this sacred season of birth, suffering, death, and new life, we can ponder ways that we uphold the quality and dignity of life from the womb to the tomb and participate in the advocacy, direct outreach, or educational efforts in support of the Gospel of Life.**