

Faith leaders bring personal testimony to Texas dialogue on death penalty

HOUSTON - Religious leaders, including Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, brought personal testimony and the beliefs common to their faiths to a recent dialogue on the death penalty.

Cardinal DiNardo said the care and support brought to families and communities victimized by murders is “an essential element and dimension of our religious convictions.”

“The humanizing attitude we can bring to the manner of punishing crime and criminals requires now more thinking and action in our culture, particularly in this faith, toward the elimination of punishment by execution,” he said.

The cardinal recalled leading a pro-life march in 2008, where 500 participants prayed at various sites through Huntsville. The mile-long walk ended with a vigil at the state penitentiary in Huntsville, which houses the state’s execution chamber, and a meeting with prison authorities.

“It was a most sobering occasion,” Cardinal DiNardo said. “The authorities were kind and clear in the explanation of what happens in the final days and hours of the prisoner who is to be executed. But in going into the death chamber and the surrounding rooms, there was an unmistakable aura and feeling of coldness, stark efficiency of everything that is opposed to the dignity of the human person, even a guilty one. I found the occasion instructive and alarming.”

Citing “*Evangelium Vitae*” (“The Gospel of Life”), Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical indicating a preference for a “nonlethal means of punishment as more in keeping with the common good and dignity of the human person,” the cardinal emphasized the need for catechesis on the death penalty with parishioners and seminarians.

Cardinal DiNardo, who is chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life

Death Penalty; Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston; the Dominican Sisters of Houston; the archdiocesan Office of Justice and Peace; and the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.