

Students pray for abolishment of death penalty



Photo by Robin Johnson

After praying for the end of the death penalty, sophomore theology major Luis Jose Barajas makes the sign of the cross.

By Sarah Mills
Features Editor

Expressing their opposition to the death penalty, members of University Ministry and several students came together on Nov. 7 to pray for the end of capital punishment.

Texas leads the nation in the number of death row executions since 1976.

"I think it's important for people to know the issues and be aware of what's going on, because the death penalty is something we really need to work towards abolishing," said senior interdisciplinary major Annie Alejos. "It's not only hurting lives, but families. It's a cycle of death."

Alejos helped lead the prayer under the Barrett Memorial Bell Tower along with Brother Brian Halderman, S.M., the minister for social justice of University Ministry.

"We started having prayer this month to bring social justice and awareness in respect to church's belief," said Halderman. "It's important in Texas with high-rate death penalties. In this month alone there have been six executions."

According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice website, as of Dec. 31, 2005, there were 3,254 offenders facing the death penalty in 38 different states.

Those opposed to the death penalty argue that it does not deter crime and can be considered cruel and unusual punishment.

"I think our system should be a system of rehabilitation. I don't think that killing them is teaching them a lesson," said Alejos. "Cruel and unusual punishment shouldn't be an option."

Alejos added that she understood why some families of victims often feel as if the death penalty does them justice.

"I know that if I ever lost a family member because someone murdered them, I'm sure I would have those feelings," she said. "But I don't think it's my decision to say if they should live or die."

Students attending the ceremony observed the prayer written by Sister Grace Walle, F.M.I., D. Min., campus minister for the School of Law, and reflected on the Marianist emphasis on the death penalty as inhumane.

"It sounds cliché that no one is perfect, but no one is perfect

and no one has the right to take anyone else's life no matter what anyone's done," said theology sophomore Luis Barajas. "God is merciful and he loves everyone."

Halderman said that the prayer was held as a religious expression against the death penalty. It is also an initiative to bring more exposure to a monthly effort emphasizing Marianist beliefs and hopes.

To increase awareness about the death penalty, Halderman and Walle are working to get students involved on this issue and have plans to eventually take students to Huntsville where executions take place.

"Our next program is called 'Prevention, Not Execution,' a seminar about people with mental disease and how we could help and prevent those who commit the crimes," said Walle.

Although the prayer is just one of the ways in which Halderman and Walle are trying to increase awareness, Walle sees it as an important event to teach and honor.

"We held the prayer in order to remember both those being executed and people who have committed crimes."