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Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, #1.

God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!

Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Gospel”), Pope Francis, 2013, #3.

As Catholic bishops, our response to crime in the United States is a moral test for our nation and a challenge for our Church. Although the FBI reports that the crime rate is falling, crime and fear of crime still touch many lives and polarize many communities. Putting more people in prison and, sadly, more people to death has not given Americans the security we seek. It is time for a new national dialogue on crime and corrections, justice and mercy, responsibility and treatment. As Catholics, we need to ask the following: How can we restore our respect for law and life? How can we protect and rebuild communities, confront crime without vengeance, and defend life without taking life? These questions challenge us as pastors and as teachers of the gospel.

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, #1.

A Catholic approach begins with the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victim and offender. As bishops, we believe that the current trend of more prisons and more executions, with too little education and drug treatment, does not truly reflect Christian values and will not really leave our communities safer. We are convinced that our tradition and our faith offer better alternatives that can hold offenders accountable and challenge them to change their lives; reach out to victims and reject vengeance; restore a sense of community and resist the violence that has engulfed so much of our culture.

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, #4.

The United States spends more than \$35 billion annually on corrections. In many states, education, health and human services, and public transportation budgets remain stagnant or decline while more and more prisons are built.¹¹ Also suffering from a diversion of public dollars for prison construction are the very critical programs of probation and parole, halfway houses, community treatment options, and other post-

release programs. For some small towns facing losses in agriculture, mining, or manufacturing, the economic benefits from building a prison and offering related services are seen as economic development creating vital new jobs.¹² Rural communities may not have the social or physical infrastructure to handle either the facility itself, the needs of the inmate's family, or the needs of the staff. But public debate rarely encourages serious dialogue about the costs of incarceration versus less costly alternatives, such as prevention, education, community efforts, and drug treatment.

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, #20.

At the same time, a Catholic approach does not give up on those who violate these laws. We believe that both victims and offenders are children of God. Despite their very different claims on society, their lives and dignity should be protected and respected. We seek justice, not vengeance. We believe punishment must have clear purposes: protecting society and rehabilitating those who violate the law.

We believe a Catholic vision of crime and criminal justice can offer some alternatives. It recognizes that root causes and personal choices can both be factors in crime by understanding the need for responsibility on the part of the offender and an opportunity for their rehabilitation. A Catholic approach leads us to encourage models of restorative justice that seek to address crime in terms of the harm done to victims and communities, not simply as a violation of law.

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, #37-38.

Human dignity is not something we earn by our good behavior; it is something we have as children of God. We believe that because we are all created by God, "none of us is the sum total of the worst act we have ever committed....As a people of faith, we believe that grace can transform even the most hardened and cruel human beings."

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, #51.

The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: This principle of Catholic social teaching recognizes that every public policy must be assessed by how it will affect the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society. Sometimes people who lack adequate resources from early in life (i.e. children—especially those who have been physically, sexually, or emotionally abused—the mentally ill, and people who have suffered discrimination) turn to lives of crime in desperation or out of anger or confusion. Unaddressed needs—including proper nutrition, shelter, health care, and protection from abuse and neglect—can be steppingstones on a path towards crime. Our role as Church is to continually work to address these needs through pastoral care, charity, and advocacy.

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, #60.

We are guided by the paradoxical Catholic teaching on crime and punishment: We will not tolerate the crime and violence that threatens the lives and dignity of our sisters and brothers, and we will not give up on those who have lost their way. We seek both justice and mercy. Working together, we believe our faith calls us to protect public safety, promote the common good, and restore community. We believe a Catholic ethic of responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration can become the foundation for the necessary reform of our broken criminal justice system.

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000, #111.

We have seen that God's eros for man is also totally agape. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but also because it is love which forgives. Hosea above all shows us that this agape dimension of God's love for man goes far beyond the aspect of gratuity. Israel has committed "adultery" and has broken the covenant; God should judge and repudiate her. It is precisely at this point that God is revealed to be God and not man: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! ... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst" (Hos 11:8-9). God's passionate love for his people—for humanity—is at the same time a forgiving love. It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice. Here Christians can see a dim prefiguration of the mystery of the Cross: so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love. #10

Deus Caritas Est ("God is Love"), Pope Benedict XVI, 2005, #10.

The Church's spiritual tradition, basing itself on Christ's own words (cf. Mt 25:36), has designated the visiting of prisoners as one of the corporal works of mercy. Prisoners have a particular need to be visited personally by the Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Experiencing the closeness of the ecclesial community, sharing in the Eucharist and receiving holy communion at this difficult and painful time can surely contribute to the quality of a prisoner's faith journey and to full social rehabilitation. Taking up the recommendation of the Synod, I ask Dioceses to do whatever is possible to ensure that sufficient pastoral resources are invested in the spiritual care of prisoners. #59

Sacramentum Caritatis ("Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist"), Pope Benedict XVI, 2007, #59.

In the memorial of his sacrifice, the Lord strengthens our fraternal communion and, in a particular way, urges those in conflict to hasten their reconciliation by opening themselves to dialogue and a commitment to justice. Certainly, the restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness are the conditions for building true peace.(243) The recognition of this fact leads to a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness.

Sacramentum Caritatis ("Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist"), Pope Benedict XVI, 2007, #89.

Alongside economic aid, there needs to be aid directed towards reinforcing the guarantees proper to the State of law: a system of public order and effective imprisonment that respects human rights, truly democratic institutions.

Caritas in Veritate (“In Charity and Truth”), Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #41.

On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion. Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.

Caritas in Veritate (“In Charity and Truth”), Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #6.

The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.

Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Gospel”), Pope Francis, 2013, #114.

We incarnate the duty of hearing the cry of the poor when we are deeply moved by the suffering of others. Let us listen to what God’s word teaches us about mercy, and allow that word to resound in the life of the Church. The Gospel tells us: “Blessed are the merciful, because they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7). The apostle James teaches that our mercy to others will vindicate us on the day of God’s judgment: “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy, yet mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jas 2:12-13). Here James is faithful to the finest tradition of post-exilic Jewish spirituality, which attributed a particular salutary value to mercy: “Break off your sins by practising righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your tranquillity” (Dan 4:27).

Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Gospel”), Pope Francis, 2013, #193.