

# IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **MDOC requests assistance from other agencies on inmate deaths**

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JACKSON – Mississippi Department of Corrections Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall is requesting the assistance of two outside agencies in investigating inmate deaths this month.

“I have been communicating with the FBI and the Mississippi Department of Public Safety regarding our deaths,” Commissioner Hall said today. “While we believe that most of the reported deaths during the month of August are from illnesses or natural causes, such as cancer and heart disease, based on available information, we are seeking assistance from others outside the department in the interest of transparency. My administration is committed to ensuring that all individuals in the department’s care receive appropriate medical care.”



WE SAY BISHOP JOHN MCCARTHY: 1930-2018

# McCarthy leaves legacy of justice, equality, inclusion

Former Bishop John McCarthy embodied the verse he often quoted from the Book of James: "By our works you will know us."



Bishop John McCarthy

Austin, Central Texas and beyond surely knew - and benefited from - McCarthy's many good and lasting works encompassed in decades of service to the poor, immigrants, disenfranchised people and the Roman Catholic Church.

McCarthy died at his Austin home last Saturday. He was 88. Funeral services will be Friday at 2 p.m. at St. William Catholic Church in Round Rock.

We offer condolences to his sister-in-law, Charlene McCarthy of Houston, and extended family. His loss is deeply felt across Texas, where the egalitarian bishop was known for influence that reached from people in church pews to policymakers at the state Capitol.

As a young priest, McCarthy took part in protests to advance civil rights for African-Americans and other disenfranchised people. During a two-year stint in Washington, D.C., in the late 1960s, McCarthy helped found the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which has become the U.S. bishops' primary anti-poverty initiative.

McCarthy, as head of the Bishops' committee for Spanish-speaking Catholics, took up the plight of underpaid, oppressed farmworkers in the 1960s movement led by civil rights activist Cesar Chavez.

"He dedicated his life to social justice," said Austin lawyer Jim Harrington, who formerly headed the Texas Civil Rights Project and came to know McCarthy during the farmworker movement.

"Even after retirement, he did what he could to make the church more inclusive for women and more open to the world."

During his tenure as bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Austin from 1986 to 2001, McCarthy stepped on toes with positions that raised eyebrows - and concerns - among conservative Catholics locally and bigwigs at the Vatican.

McCarthy permitted city-

owned Brackenridge Hospital, run by Catholic-affiliated Seton hospital, to perform tubal ligations, which conflicts with church law on birth control and was eventually discontinued at the behest of the Vatican.

He also took heat on the issue of priestly celibacy, writing letters to the Vatican and to his fellow U.S. and Texas bishops, urging them to confront what he saw as a looming crisis and to consider a possible solution: optional celibacy.

In a 2013 interview with the American-Statesman about his book, "Off the Cuff and Over the Collar: Common Sense Catholicism," McCarthy said:

"In the Catholic Church, the priesthood is the organizing tool. He makes possible the sacraments and they make Jesus Christ present in the material world. Since we are dependent on the sacraments, we are dependent on the priesthood. So, to build new, smaller communities, you need more priests. And that might mean married priests. It might mean woman priests."

McCarthy spearheaded another big push in Austin and elsewhere: making the Catholic faith more inclusive for African-Americans. He encouraged African-American Catholics, who long were designated to the margins of dioceses across Texas, to incorporate their culture in the church, be that in music performed in the black gospel tradition or homilies preached in the call-and-response style of Baptist preachers.

In 1987, McCarthy established the Office of Black Catholics after traveling to the first National Black Catholic Congress.

"That was our (movement) toward inclusion in the diocese and with other African-American Catholics across the country," said Johnnie Dorsey, who headed the office until he retired last year. "We had been somewhat isolated. Bishop McCarthy said we needed someone to minister and speak for black Catholics, locally, statewide and nationally."

Long before DNA became a primary tool in determining innocence, McCarthy pressed the Legislature, as well as individual Catholic lawmakers, to make reforms in criminal jus-

tice, including abolishing the death penalty.

At the time, Texas had no life without parole sentence on the books for capital murder, which prosecutors used as justification for juries to sentence convicted criminals to lethal injection. Life with parole, as Texas law stipulated, left open the possibility that convicted killers could be paroled to the streets.

McCarthy's position wasn't popular, even among Catholic Texans whose "pro-life" legislative agenda was focused almost entirely on eliminating abortion. But his fierce opposition to the death penalty helped build political momentum for passage of legislation for life without parole, which is credited with reducing death penalty sentences in Texas, because criminals are locked away for life.

McCarthy's record on social justice looms large. His accomplishments on the religious front also are significant.

The Houston native was ordained in 1956 and appointed the third bishop of Austin when it was still considered a sleepy college town. By the time McCarthy retired, membership, enrollment in Catholic education, annual baptisms and converts more than doubled, the diocese said. He also oversaw the construction of 20 new parishes and 32 church buildings.

Gregarious and well-read, McCarthy had a wicked sense of humor, experienced by many visitors to his West Austin home, where a handmade, wooden bookcase was prominently displayed in his living area. He would tell guests who admired it to look more closely: The bookcase was really a coffin he was saving for the right time. That time came this week.

Like a good shepherd watching over his flock, McCarthy used his pastoral staff to protect the poor, marginalized and oppressed. And he used it to build a stronger and more vibrant Catholic church positioned for challenges now facing communities in the way of immigration, voting rights, human dignity and the welfare of children.

We know - and celebrate - Bishop John McCarthy by his works.



Subject: Prison strike

From: aclu@aclu.org

To: 

Date: Thursday, August 30, 2018 04:47:26 PM EDT



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ACLU

Hi Charles –

Incarcerated people have had enough. Brutal treatment, deteriorating prison conditions, and incredibly long sentences have led to widespread hopelessness among the incarcerated population. **That's why – right now – there's a Nationwide Prison Strike going on coast to coast.**

[Get the full rundown of what this strike is all about and learn how we can all show our solidarity – it means so much to the incarcerated people leading the charge.](#)

The injustice of our criminal justice system is nothing new – you can trace it all the way back to 1865, when **the 13th Amendment abolished slavery but carved out an exception for people convicted of criminal offenses.** Over 250 years later, strikers are calling for fair compensation for their hard labor each day – it's one of 10 demands that include improving prison conditions, properly funding rehabilitation, and addressing the racism that fuels mass incarceration.

Among all the strikers' demands, they're emphasizing the #Right2Vote. Currently, only Maine and Vermont give all incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people their voting rights. **People in jail, prison, or on parole should have a voice in our democratic society.** In fact, their voices are key to resolving the countless failures of our criminal justice system.

[Learn more about the remarkable act of civil disobedience sweeping through our nation. It's about time we listen to the people who are directly impacted by our unjust policies.](#)

Our country is stronger when we can *all* raise our voices to demand a better future. And in the historic Nationwide Prison Strike, we're seeing just that.

Thanks for listening,

Udi Ofer

**Udi Ofer**

**Director of the ACLU Campaign for Smart Justice**

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