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Connecticut repeal thrills longtime death-penalty opponent

Zoe Ryan | May. 7, 2012

Antoinette Bosco in 2004 (CNS)

Writer, journalist and well-known death penalty opponent Antoinette Bosco, 83, has been against the death penalty her whole life. When she moved to Connecticut in 1981, she continued her campaign to abolish the death penalty in the state with the Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty. What makes her commitment even more compelling is that her son and daughter-in-law were murdered in 1993 in Montana. She and her other children wrote to the judge and said they did not want the killer executed.

On April 25, the campaign in Connecticut came to a close -- Gov. Dannel Malloy signed a law to repeal the death penalty. NCR *talked to Bosco about the decision. The interview below has been edited for length and clarity.*

***NCR:* What have you learned from working to repeal the death penalty in Connecticut?**

Bosco: The nice thing I've learned is that a lot of people who never thought they'd be interested in this have

joined. That is a good thing. We do make "converts" on this. And the other thing is that we have just had a repeal of the death penalty law in Connecticut. When I first started back in the '80s, if anybody said to me, "It'll take 25, 30 years, but it will happen," I would've said, "Yeah, sure," because I knew how adamant so many people were that we have to keep it. But it happened. It happened just now that Gov. Malloy signed the repeal of the state's death penalty. So I just feel, "Thank God for the young people." Thank God for them. Because they were the ones I have to give credit to, along with a few of us old ones. So you can understand, can't you, how happy I feel about this? Because sometimes you just felt like giving up. But we didn't.

What was the road to get to this point in Connecticut?

I want to pass everything on to young people, so I was really happy when they would be willing to do more by contacting legislators and all of that. They did wonderful work, and that's because of the wonderful work of the Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty. I believe it's because of their wonderful work that we finally now have what we have achieved in ending the death penalty in Connecticut.

Sort of the sad thing is that we have about 10 people on death row in Connecticut, and it doesn't change their sentences. But there won't be any new ones.

We feel that we've done something historic here in Connecticut. Thanks to the Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty, all those young people -- and some older ones, too, like me, but, you know, the young people -- and having a wonderful governor like Gov. Malloy. So it makes me believe in miracles.

You'd find that there would be a certain number of people who would say, "Well, I go back and forth. I can see what you're saying. Maybe human life is too precious to have the state kill it." But then there'd be some kind of a crime that you'd hear about and people would change their mind and want to go right back, "Well, let's have the death penalty."

So it was back and forth a lot. If you believed in it, you had to stick with it. And as I say, the encouraging thing for me was always the young people.

It's a horrible thing that we -- as the kind of nation that we're supposed to be -- that we still have a death penalty.

Why did it pass now?

I think the main thing was the fact that Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty and all these young people, they never gave up. They just kept going. You have to be so proud of them.

What directions are other states taking?

We still have 33 states that have the death penalty. And we have to hope that eventually some of them will see the light and that it doesn't do any good. I really do think it's you don't give up.

Depending on the people in these states, but I do feel that there are many, many people who work, as we have worked in Connecticut -- they're working in their own states, I think we're going to see more and more states that are going to eliminate it. I really do.

Do people view the death penalty differently today than years ago?

Not too much. You have to keep going with this and never give up. Because an awful lot of people -- you're not going to change their minds. And I've had some really nasty things said to me. "You couldn't have loved your kid." That's the main thing [they say to me]. My family and I have been through it, and we do believe that life is more important than killing of any kind.

Parting words?

How proud I am that we have so many young people in Connecticut who have picked up the ball. I credit them. I do credit them. I don't think we could have done it without them.

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