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**BISHOP GREGORY DENOUNCES INSTALLATION OF NEW DEATH CHAMBER AT TAMMS PRISON FACILITY, OPENED IN MARCH, IS IN BELLEVILLE DIOCESE; [ILLINOIS FIVE STAR Edition]**

*Robert Goodrich Of The Post-Dispatch. St. Louis Post - Dispatch. St. Louis, Mo.: Apr 29, 1998. pg. A.1*

**Abstract (Summary)**

Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville lamented on Tuesday the installation of an execution chamber in the state's new super-secure prison in Tamms, Ill.

The prison, about 40 miles south of Carbondale, is in the Belleville Diocese, which covers most of Southern Illinois. The prison opened March 9, but no executions have been carried out there yet.

Gregory issued a statement Tuesday on the execution chamber and elaborated on his views in an interview. Executions, he said, are an element of a growing "culture of death" in society.

**Full Text** (518 words)

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A shorter version of this article appeared in the FIVE STAR LIFT edition.

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Gregory issued a statement Tuesday on the execution chamber and elaborated on his views in an interview. Executions, he said, are an element of a growing "culture of death" in society.

"Violence is becoming passe," he said. "We are growing comfortable with more and more violent expressions as a society."

Bob Haida, state's attorney for St. Clair County, said he didn't want to comment, except to say: "I respect the bishop immensely. I'm sworn to uphold the laws of Illinois."

The bishop said he did not expect everyone, even Catholics, to support his stand. His intent, he said, is to "raise it as a point for serious reflection" for people of every faith.

"The death penalty is obviously in opposition to our contemporary Catholic religious commitment," he said.

Catholic leaders in the United States began raising moral objections to the death penalty when it was reinstated in 1976, but their opposition was solidified by John Paul II's 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, Gregory said.

The pope declared that such an extreme form of punishment should be practically nonexistent in today's world, the bishop said, used only if no other way could be found to protect society.

Gregory added that the issue of justice and fairness related to the death penalty in Illinois has been a cause of concern for people of differing religious traditions and political viewpoints.

"The gross errors placing many innocent people on death row in our state have prompted cries for a moratorium on capital punishment throughout Illinois," he said.

Department of Corrections spokesman Nic Howell said his agency had been upfront from the start about plans to establish an execution chamber at Tamms.

Illinois law requires the department to serve as its executioner, Howell added. "As for the propriety of the law, as it pertains to executions, that is not in the purview of the Department of Corrections," he said.

The Tamms Correctional Center was built at a cost of about \$60 million. It has about 120 inmates, but only one under death sentence.

Menard Correctional Center in Chester, Ill., also houses prisoners awaiting the death penalty.

Prisoners must "earn" their way to Tamms through serious infractions at other prisons and can "earn" their way out with proper behavior. They are confined to individual cells 23 hours a day.

Until now, executions have been carried out - 11 since 1990 - at Stateville Correctional Center in Joliet, Ill. The Stateville death chamber remains open. Howell said Tamms had the first chamber designed specifically for lethal injection.

#### **[Illustration]**

PHOTO; Caption: Color Photo by ODELL MITCHELL JR. / POST-DISPATCH - "The death penalty is obviously in opposition to our contemporary Catholic religious commitment," said Bishop Wilton D. Gregory.

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