



# Arizona Catholic Conference

Diocese of Gallup • Diocese of Phoenix • Diocese of Tucson

## **ARIZONA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE BISHOPS' STATEMENT REITERATING OPPOSITION TO THE DEATH PENALTY**

In light of the increasing possibility that Arizona will soon begin conducting new executions, the Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference want to reiterate our continued opposition to the use of the death penalty.

### **Disregard for Human Life**

We oppose the death penalty primarily because its use disregards the dignity of human life and the inherent dignity of each person.

There is no doubt that the state has an obligation to promote the common good by punishing criminals and preventing the recurrence of crime. Furthermore, those who commit brutal crimes such as murder are certainly deserving of a punishment proportionate to the gravity of their offense. However, we believe that the state should not respond to the violence of brutal crimes with the violence of capital punishment.

When there are typically means available to punish criminals and protect society from the recurrence of crime (e.g., life in prison without parole), the use of capital punishment is both unnecessary and undesirable. Because these means exist, Pope John Paul II stated that the use of capital punishment should be limited only to extremely rare situations where it is necessary to defend society (*Evangelium Vitae*, #56).

### **Wrongful Convictions and the Death Penalty**

Besides disregarding human life and the inherent dignity of each person, the use of the death penalty is troubling because in recent decades more than 100 people have been wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death in our country, only to be later released after DNA or other evidence proved their innocence. Even our own State of Arizona has witnessed innocent people sitting on death row whose lives were spared because of recent breakthroughs in DNA evidence.

We are left to wonder how many other innocent people have been wrongfully convicted or even executed.

### **The Sacredness of Life**

Our opposition to the use of the death penalty in today's society is derived from the continuum of the sacredness of life that our Church teaches. All life – from conception to

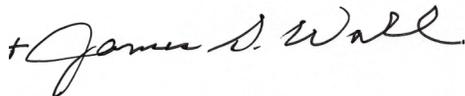
death – is sacred. State-sanctioned killing, whether by unnecessary use of the death penalty or by the intrinsically evil actions of abortion or euthanasia, violates human life and dignity.

### **Concern for Victims**

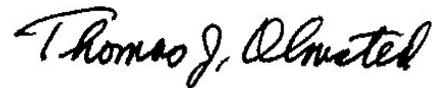
As we state our opposition to capital punishment, we also want to express our compassion for those victimized by brutal crimes as well as their families. The pain and suffering experienced by these families is enormous and must never be forgotten. We pray for their healing in a very special way.

### **Conclusion**

The use of the death penalty in today's society not only disregards human life and the inherent dignity of each person, but it is also unnecessary to protect the public and is prone to serious flaws.



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