



Arizona Catholic Conference

Diocese of Gallup • Diocese of Phoenix • Diocese of Tucson

Ronald M. Johnson, Jr.
Executive Director

ARIZONA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE BISHOPS STATEMENT OPPOSING THE DEATH PENALTY

Approaching Arizona's first execution since 2000, the Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference express our 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 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 over the past two 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. We pray for their healing.

Conclusion

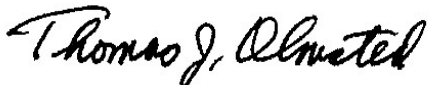
The use of the death penalty in today's society not only disregards human life and the inherent dignity of each person, but it is also unnecessary to protect the public and is prone to serious flaws.

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name "Donald E. Pelotte" and the initials "S.S.S." below it.

Most Rev. Donald E. Pelotte, S.S.S.
Bishop of Gallup

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name "Gerald F. Kicanas" in a cursive style.

Most Rev. Gerald F. Kicanas
Bishop of Tucson

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name "Thomas J. Olmsted" in a cursive style.

Most Rev. Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix