



MISSOURI CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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March 30, 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As we approach Palm Sunday and the sacred events of Holy Week, we are reminded that Jesus Christ so loved us that he gave his life for our sins. His condemnation and execution were brutal. He was unjustly sentenced to death and executed on a cross, the cruelest form of capital punishment at the time. Recalling Christ's death on Good Friday provides us with an opportunity to reflect on Catholic teaching and the death penalty.

Catholic teaching begins with the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victims and offenders. It affirms our commitment to comfort and support victims and their families, while acknowledging the God-given dignity of every human life, even of those who do great harm. For some left behind, a death sentence offers the illusion of closure and vindication; but no act, even an execution, can bring back a loved one or heal terrible wounds. The pain and loss of one death cannot be wiped away by another death.

Twenty-five years ago, the Catholic Bishops of our nation first called for an end to the death penalty. They have recently renewed this call, establishing the Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty, and in December of 2005, issuing a document entitled *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*. This document is shaped by the Catholic commitment to the life and dignity of every person and to the common good, as clearly expressed in Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter, *The Gospel of Life*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. The Church has acknowledged the right of the state to use the death penalty in order to protect society. However, the Church insists that the state should forego the exercise of this right if other non-lethal options are available to protect society.

Within the next few weeks, Catholics will have a unique opportunity to give witness to the truth regarding the death penalty in our state. On April 18, 2006, the Eighth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals will hear a death row case challenging the constitutionality of execution by lethal injection in Missouri. The general claim is that the drugs used in executions cause extreme and unnecessary pain, in violation of the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

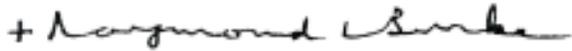
We urge all Catholics to pray that the court will rule in favor of life and condemn the practice of lethal injection. We would ask that, as witnesses to life, you take one step further and address our elected representatives on the state and federal level to voice

our opposition to capital punishment and support a halt in executions. Let them know that more violence is not a solution to society's problems.

In his Encyclical Letter, *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II told us that we have the "inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life." Our efforts to end the use of the death penalty in our state help us to reject the culture of death and to build a culture of life. May we always remember the imperative which our Lord Himself gives us in Deuteronomy 30:19: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live."

During this holy season, may you experience the blessings of Jesus the Christ who suffered and died for us, and the unfailing intercession of His mother Mary who stood beneath the cross.

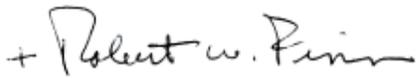
Sincerely yours in Christ,



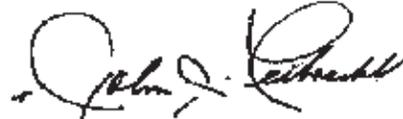
†Most Reverend Raymond L. Burke
Archbishop of St. Louis



†Most Reverend John R. Gaydos
Bishop of Jefferson City



†Most Reverend Robert W. Finn
Bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph



†Most Reverend John J. Leibrecht
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†Most Reverend Robert J. Hermann
Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis



†Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland
Bishop Emeritus of Diocese of
Kansas City-St. Joseph