

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The state of Missouri has executed five individuals in the last five months. This represents a dramatic escalation of executions taking place in our state.

As Catholic Bishops we have consistently opposed the use of the death penalty. This ultimate penalty promotes a culture of death and undermines respect for human life, the dignity of the human person, the conditions for the common good, and definitively removes from the offender the possibility of redeeming himself (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2267*).

At the same time we reiterate and affirm our support for, and solidarity with, the families and loved ones of murder victims. As we bear witness to the Gospel message of Christ, we call for a new response to violence that upholds the sacredness of all human life.

The canonization of John Paul II on April 27<sup>th</sup>, Divine Mercy Sunday, provides an opportunity for reflection on the death penalty and the need to take action to oppose it. Saint John Paul II, himself a victim of a serious shooting, was an outspoken opponent of the death penalty. In his historic visit to St. Louis in 1999, he called for “a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.”

We urge you to let your lawmakers know of your opposition to the death penalty and to ask them to find other ways to impose punishment on offenders that does not resort to taking another’s life and add to the use of violence as a solution to society’s problems.

We invite you to be a visible witness against executions by participating in local vigils and prayer services. Follow the lead of Saint John Paul II by asking the governor to show mercy and spare the lives of those on death row. Contact the Missouri Catholic Conference, the public policy agency of the bishops of Missouri, for assistance in getting involved in these actions.

In this holy season of the year, let us acknowledge the sacredness of all human life and work to end the executions in our state.

## CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF MISSOURI



Handwritten signature of Robert J. Carlson in black ink.

Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson  
Executive Chairman  
Archbishop of St. Louis



Handwritten signature of Robert W. Finn in black ink.

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



Handwritten signature of John R. Gaydos in black ink.

Most Reverend John R. Gaydos  
General Chairman  
Bishop of Jefferson City



Handwritten signature of James V. Johnston, Jr. in black ink.

Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Jr.  
Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau