

# Statement of the Missouri Catholic Conference Concerning Continued Use of the Death Penalty

This summer, the state of Missouri issued an execution warrant for Russell Bucklew for October 1, 2019. This will be the first execution in our state in nearly three years. The United States Department of Justice has also recently announced that the federal government will once again begin utilizing the death penalty as punishment for certain crimes. We write to express our concern and dismay at these developments.

We recognize that the death penalty is rarely used and is typically reserved only for those horrific crimes that seem to call for vengeance. However, Pope Francis reminded us in his address to Congress during his 2015 Apostolic visit to the United States, that, “[A] just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation.” Echoing the views of his predecessors, he called for the “global abolition of the death penalty.” This call is now reflected in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which provides, “The death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person.”

Catholic teaching affirms that the dignity of the human person applies to both victims of crimes 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 experiencing the loss of a loved one through an act of violence, a death sentence for the perpetrator offers the elusive hope of closure and vindication; but no act, not even an execution, can bring back a loved one or heal the lingering wounds. The pain and loss caused by the death of a loved one cannot be wiped away by the state-sanctioned death of the perpetrator.

As Catholic bishops, we have consistently opposed the use of the death penalty. Evidence shows that the death penalty is often unfair and biased in its application. By ending the use of the death penalty, we can hopefully begin to break the cycle of violence. We can demonstrate that we need not take a life for another life, that we can envisage more humane and more hopeful and effective responses to the growth of violent crime.

We respectfully ask Governor Parson to grant clemency to Russell Bucklew by reducing his sentence to life in prison, noting that his particular medical situation warrants special consideration. We call on the state and federal governments to abandon their pursuit of the death penalty. We also ask our brothers and sisters in Christ, and all people of good will, to contemplate the crucified Christ, who though innocent, was himself executed by capital punishment. We ask that we all take a stand for life, justice, healing and mercy by opposing the continued use of the death penalty.

## 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 James V. Johnston, Jr. in black ink.

Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Jr.  
Vice Chairman  
Bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph



Handwritten signature of Shawn McKnight in black ink.

Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight  
General Chairman  
Bishop of Jefferson City



Handwritten signature of Edward M. Rice in black ink.

Most Reverend Edward M. Rice  
Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

Approved September 13, 2019