

Statement of the Missouri Catholic Conference on the Execution of Ernest Johnson

As the Catholic bishops of Missouri, we express our disappointment with the decision to allow the execution of Ernest Lee Johnson to move forward yesterday.

Ernest Lee Johnson's crimes were heinous and deserve to be punished, yet as Missouri has shown itself to be a pro-life state, we should stop using the death penalty as a means of dealing with violent crimes.

Our sincerest condolences and prayers are with the families of the victims of the terrible crime committed so many years ago. The lives of Mary Bratcher, Mabel Scruggs and Fred Jones deserve honor and remembrance. We pray for the comfort of their loved ones as they are forced to relive the trauma and pain of these crimes through this execution.

When horrendous crimes are committed, it is easy to call for vengeance and retribution. It may seem the only fair thing to do is take a life for a life, but the death penalty does not make Missouri a safer or more civil state. As we communicated in our clemency request last month, the death penalty degrades us as a society and teaches our children that violence is the proper response to violence. When someone is executed, the opportunity for them to undergo a conversion and repent prior to their final judgement may be lost. That important time for grace to work in a person's heart is taken away.

It is our prayer that we, the people of Missouri, look for ways to address these crimes without resorting to the death penalty. Life without parole is a severe punishment which isolates offending individuals from society. We ask Catholics and people of good will to join us in seeking alternatives to the death penalty for Missouri's most violent criminals. Even those who commit the most offensive acts do not lose their human dignity before God.

May God grant us His peace in these troubled times.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF MISSOURI



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Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski
General Chairman
Archbishop of St. Louis



+ James V. Johnston, Jr.

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+ Shawn McKnight

Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight
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+ Edward M. Rice

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