



Denver bishops' statement on the death penalty

July 9, 2002

Like all good citizens, Catholics want justice for both the innocent and the guilty. But we do not believe the death penalty accomplishes that for either.

The death penalty doesn't work as a deterrent. It doesn't give anyone "closure" because only forgiveness can do that. And finally it diminishes all of us - the executioners - by reducing us to the same violence as the murderer.

Catholics can respect proposals to make the death penalty contingent on a unanimous jury decision. This approach clearly does a better job of protecting the rights of the accused and the interests of society than our current system. But — more importantly — we need to root all of our thinking about the death penalty in the sanctity of the human person. All life is sacred. Every person, even the murderer, is a child of God with God-given dignity. As a result, except in the most extreme circumstances, capital punishment cannot be justified. In developed countries like our own, it should have no place in our public life.

We believe the time is right for Coloradans to put all executions on hold. We believe the time is right to think deeply and carefully about the kind of justice we want to witness to our young people. We don't need to kill people to protect society. We don't need to kill people to punish the guilty. And we should never be in a hurry to take anyone's life.

As the assembly meets on this vital issue this week, the governor and legislators can do our state a great service. We encourage them to commit themselves to re-examining the death penalty - its justification and its application — in a serious way in next year's regular session.

Colorado has nothing to lose and much to gain from the debate. The times call for it. So does common sense.

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