

Pastoral Statement Opposing Resumption of Executions in New Mexico

A Public Statement to the People of New Mexico and Its Leaders

This is a key moment in the history of our state. After 41 years, this state, in our name, is planning the execution of one of our own. At a time when the country, and the people and leaders of this state are reviewing the practice of capital punishment, we are planning to go forward with the killing of a man on New Mexico's death row.

We wish to address this issue with one voice to speak to all people of faith across denominational and sectarian boundaries. We are united in our opposition to the death penalty: the criminal violence which we all abhor should not be responded to by the further violence of an execution.

At the same time, we are deeply disturbed by the deadly actions that affect our communities. We share the sense of fear, frustration and rage people feel everywhere and acknowledge that such actions should have consequences. We grieve for the suffering of victims and their loved ones and offer our hearts and our hands to them, affirming that restitution to victims and families, as well as rehabilitation of the offender should be our goals.

Vengeance is not justice, and violence is not the answer to violence. The death penalty is incompatible with the teachings of our faith. Our Scriptures hold central beliefs of forgiveness and reconciliation – even when the object of forgiveness commits the most outrageous wrongs. Whatever our emotional reaction to a crime, we must reach for the higher standards of our faith.

We recognize that many people of faith support the death penalty and we intend to address this gap with teaching and programs to help people of faith reflect on their personal conviction with an informed conscience. We will remind our followers of the statements of our national bodies and of our religious communities throughout the state.

We will inform our sisters and brothers about the disproportionate numbers of poor people and people of color caught in the judicial system, and of its imperfections. We will share information about alternatives to the death penalty and encourage spending of resources that will help prevent violent crime.

We invite you, and commit ourselves to minister to victims and their families, and to offenders and their loved ones. We must respect the human dignity of each and every member of our society. As we are taught, what we do unto the least of these, we do unto our Creator.

We pledge to continue to maintain a strong voice against executions in this state and to work actively towards the repeal of the death penalty in New Mexico. We ask Governor Johnson to immediately declare a moratorium on all executions and entreat our elected officials to prayerfully acknowledge the role they can play in ridding this state of capital punishment . We invite all people of good will to explore the depth of their minds and hearts, to learn what their faith teaches and to join us as advocates for ending the death penalty in this state.

New Mexico is a state for which we all have deep affection – its landscapes and rich cultural diversity place it in a leadership role for fostering compassion and tolerance. The execution of one of our citizens would deter this, and our way forward should not involve returning to the cruel and unusual practices of the past.

Signed,

The Rev. James Large
President of the Board
New Mexico Conference of Churches

The Rev. Barbara Dua
Executive Director, NMCC
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