

2023 LIC Resolution Again Reaffirming LIC's Opposition to the Death Penalty

As religious leaders of the state of Louisiana, we feel compelled to call attention to the moral dimensions of public policy and recommend laws that uphold the God-given dignity and rights of every person, each of whom is made in the image and likeness of God. Because our faith calls us to value human life and dignity, justice, compassion, mercy, and the common good, we are compelled to speak out and reaffirm our opposition to the death penalty and proclaim our support in the coming [current] legislative session for legislation forever ending the practice of state-sanctioned killing in Louisiana.

At the center our Christian faith is the belief in the sanctity and inherent dignity of the human person. This dignity is inviolable and cannot be lost even after the commission of a serious crime. The death penalty offers permission for the view that some people do not deserve the respect of human dignity given by God, that their Creator gives up on them, that they have to be removed from the earth on which God gave them life. The death penalty is a rejection of the power of the Gospel to transform people's lives and is a rejection of God's love, gift of life, and grace.

Social science and historic analyses expose how our state's death penalty system is deeply flawed and unjust. Widespread racial bias in the prosecution of death penalty cases, sentencing, jury selection, and appeal and post-conviction processes render Louisiana's death penalty system prone to error. There has been one exoneration for every 2.5 executions in Louisiana over the last 50 years.

The death penalty has not decreased crime in our state and does not protect our citizens. Over the last 25 years the murder rate in states without the death penalty has been consistently lower than in states with the death penalty. The U.S. Justice Department's National Institute of Justice makes clear that there is no evidence that the death penalty deters crime and that the certainty of being caught is the most powerful deterrent. Many of our law enforcement leaders believe that the resources spent on the death penalty would be better spent preventing crime, supporting victims' families, and funding police efforts to apprehend perpetrators.

The death penalty is a glaring example of misplaced financial priorities. Maintaining Louisiana's capital punishment system—prosecution, defense, court, and corrections—has cost our state over two hundred million dollars in the past 15 years.

Christians are an Easter people—our faith is rooted in the hope of mercy and resurrection. Jesus' death on the cross transformed all suffering and pain by refusing to pass it on. The Resurrection secured the promise of eternal life. It is this paschal mystery, this Easter faith, that we are called to live each day, drawing upon the limitless love of God to fortify us against the temptation of fear. Let us no longer succumb to the fear and hopelessness that the death penalty represents.

We pray that in this Legislative Session our leaders will have the courage and wisdom to end the death penalty in Louisiana and thereby proclaim our state's unequivocal commitment to protecting the dignity and sanctity of every human life.

Approved by the 2023 LIC Annual Assembly participants on March 13, 2023.