



# ARIZONA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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## **Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference Statement on the Scheduled Execution of Frank Atwood**

Unfortunately, last month the State of Arizona conducted its first execution in nearly eight years and has now scheduled another one for June 8<sup>th</sup>. Sadly, it is expected that even more executions are likely to follow in the coming months.

As we stated previously, the Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference (ACC) remain steadfast in our opposition to the death penalty, especially in this modern era. In doing so, we are united with Pope Francis who has advocated for a global end to capital punishment.

In discussing capital punishment, however, it is first critical to never forget the horrible crimes committed and the terrible loss experienced by the families of victims. Our concern is for all who are victims of such heinous crimes, and we support the provision of compassionate and professional assistance to the families and loved ones of victims. We fervently pray for their healing and that their needs are never forgotten!

As bishops, our primary opposition to the death penalty is rooted in the teaching of the Catholic Church that every person is created in the image and likeness of God. For this reason, we are compelled to uphold the sacred dignity of all human life.

We are also mindful of the many problems associated with the death penalty that are in conflict with the concepts of human dignity and equal application of the law. Specifically, across the nation, including in Arizona, the use of the death penalty is troublesome because it is often influenced by factors such as geography and is disproportionately imposed on people of color and of limited economic means.

Furthermore, the risk of executing an innocent person is not illusory. More than 180 people in the United States have been wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death only to be later exonerated. In Arizona alone, ten people have been released from death row after evidence was later found to exonerate them.

The execution of prisoners can also be problematic in that it may deny them a final chance at redemption and salvation. As Catholics we believe that all of us, including even the worst sinner, has a chance at forgiveness and to reconcile themselves with God as long as they live. While some inmates on death row do seek forgiveness, the execution of others permanently closes this door.

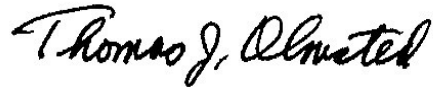
We are fortunately living in a time where modern prisons create an environment that does not require the death penalty to keep us safe. Our society is able to achieve justice and protect its population from harm.

Accordingly, the resumption of capital punishment in Arizona is an extremely expensive proposition that is fraught with many of the problems discussed. It furthers a culture of death that is all too common in our society and is something that we are called to reject.

As the Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference, we, therefore, encourage all people of goodwill to join us in praying and advocating for an end to the death penalty and for the soul of Frank Atwood as his scheduled execution date approaches.



Most Rev. Eduardo A. Nevares  
Auxiliary Bishop of Phoenix



Most Rev. Thomas J. Olmsted  
Bishop of Phoenix



Most Rev. James S. Wall  
Bishop of Gallup



Most Rev. Edward J. Weisenburger  
Bishop of Tucson