

Religious Leaders Statement for Christopher Sepulvado

As citizens and religious leaders of faith communities throughout our beloved Louisiana, we have always strongly opposed state-sanctioned killing. We write now to specifically express our opposition to the pending execution of Christopher Sepulvado, scheduled for February 13, 2013, Ash Wednesday. We urge Governor Piyush “Bobby” Jindal, the Louisiana Board of Pardons, Desoto Parish District Attorney, Richard Z. Johnson, and the Honorable Robert E. Burgess, 42nd Judicial District, to halt Mr. Sepulvado’s execution.

We are aware that a DeSoto Parish jury imposed the death penalty on Mr. Sepulvado in 1993 for the March 8, 1992 death of his stepson, Wesley Allen Mercer, age six. We abhor the physical abuse that led to Wesley Mercer’s death and recognize the need for both punishment and rehabilitation for Christopher Sepulvado and for his wife Yvonne Mercer Sepulvado, who was convicted of manslaughter in the death of her son.

Human beings are instilled with a God-given dignity that is not contingent upon their actions. By enacting revenge through the death penalty, we as a state and society violate our most cherished value: the dignity of every human life. In planning Christopher Sepulvado’s execution we practice the behavior we most despise: the premeditated taking of life. However sanitized the state-sanctioned machinery of death has become—including the purported diminishment of cruel and unusual punishment through lethal injection—it remains a meticulously planned event that takes a human life and demonstrates total disregard for human dignity.

The planned execution of Christopher Sepulvado does not restore life to Wesley Mercer. The planned execution does nothing to prevent physical abuse of children in general or to help parents develop healthy parenting skills. In no way would this execution make our state safer. An execution does nothing for victims of violence; it provides no healing, no reconciliation, no peace. It is merely an additional act of violence.

Rejecting capital punishment in no way diminishes our support for families of murder victims. Just as we acknowledge the dignity of Christopher Sepulvado’s life, we continue to acknowledge the dignity of all victims and reaffirm our support for murder victims’ families. Victims carry a lifetime burden of grief and rightly seek justice. Yet as Murder Victims Families for Human Rights (MVFHR, online at <http://www.mvfhr.org/>) teaches us, execution serves only to re-traumatizes a victim’s family members and friends and fails to bring healing or closure.

Men who have experienced childhood trauma, suffer from brain damage and mental illness, and those who have intellectual disabilities, are grossly overrepresented on Louisiana’s death row. Like many others death row, Christopher Sepulvado is brain damaged, likely as a result of a series of head injuries he has incurred, the first when he was eight-months-old. Mr. Sepulvado has also experienced a series of psychotic episodes during his adult life. He was reared in poverty by a family with a long history of alcohol abuse. Christopher Sepulvado is currently 69

years old and in poor health. He is deeply remorseful and has turned to God as he struggles to atone for his crimes. During the twenty years that he has been incarcerated, he has compiled an exemplary record and has consistently spent his time on death row tutoring and ministering to other inmates. He realizes the severity of his crime warrants a life sentence. He wishes for nothing other than this.

We urge you to affirm life and the common good of Louisiana by stopping this execution and requesting a grant of clemency that would allow Mr. Sepulvado to serve a sentence of life without opportunity of parole.