



THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN FRANCISCO

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Archbishop of San Francisco

STATEMENT ON PROPOSITIONS 62 & 66 ON THE NOVEMBER 2016 CALIFORNIA BALLOT

Three years ago at this time I was part of a delegation of California bishops who paid a pastoral visit to San Quentin State Prison. While there, we had the opportunity to meet with a number of the inmates on death row, hearing their stories, learning of the misfortunes in their lives, and becoming sensitized to their deep spiritual yearnings and innate desire for God. The experience put a human face on a tragic human condition that we very comfortably can – and usually do – completely ignore.

This experience also highlights the challenge we as a society face in determining how we can foster peace in this increasingly violent and complicated world. The answer is certainly not by inflicting more violence. As we, the Catholic bishops of California, said in our statement reaffirming our opposition to the death penalty: “Our support to end the use of the death penalty is also rooted in our unshakable resolve to accompany and support all victims of crime.... As we pray with them and mourn with them we must also stress that the current use of the death penalty does not promote healing. It only brings more violence to a world that has too much violence already.”

We teach on this sensitive matter aware of the complexities of this issue, but also in communion with the bishops throughout the United States, with conferences of bishops throughout the world, and with the consistent teachings of the Popes of our time. As Pope Francis has recently stated: “The death penalty is an offense to the inviolability of life and to the dignity of the human person; it ... does not render justice to victims, but instead fosters vengeance... the basic purpose of all punishment is the rehabilitation of the offender” (message to the 6th World Congress against the Death Penalty, June 2016).

As California citizens we have an opportunity to make our voices heard on behalf of the inviolability of human life and for rehabilitation over retribution. I ask you to join me in voting to end the death penalty in our state by voting Yes on Proposition 62, and voting No on 66. Doing so will put to end the myths of capital punishment – such as the assertion that it serves as a deterrent to violent crimes – and also to the flaws it perpetrates, such as its disproportionate use on the poor and minorities. Most tragic of all, though, is the finality of the sentence: no restitution is possible for a wrongful execution. Since 1973, 151 people have been released from

death rows in the United States due to evidence of their wrongful convictions. How many were not so fortunate?

Voting Yes on Proposition 62 will be a vote affirming the human dignity of those on death row, affording them the opportunity to rehabilitate themselves. I also ask you to join me and my fellow California bishops by opposing Proposition 66. This Proposition would expedite executions in California. A rush to streamline that process will inevitably result in the execution of more innocent people.

In a decisive historical moment for the ancient people of Israel, when they were about to cross the Jordan River to occupy the Promised Land after wandering forty years in the Sinai Desert, Moses told them: “I set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you ... may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

We are likewise at a decisive moment in our country and state, and we, too, are given the same choice, a choice we will make when casting our vote this November. Let us choose life, then, that we may live.

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