



Diocese of Salt Lake City

27 C STREET
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84103-2397
TELEPHONE (801) 328-8641
FAX (801) 328-9680

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Statement of Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City:

I am very disappointed to see Governor Herbert sign HB11 Death Penalty Procedure Amendments approving firing squads as a method of execution in Utah when no lethal injection drugs are available. It seems as if our government leaders have substituted state legislation for the law of God. They argue that, because executions are lawful, they are then moral. This is not so. No human law can trump God's law. Taking a human life is wrong; a slap in the face of hope and a blasphemous attempt to assume divine attributes that we humble human beings do not have.

The real issue here is the death penalty itself. Only God can give and take life. By taking a life, in whatever form the death penalty is carried out, the state is usurping the role of God. Execution does violence to God's time, eliminating the opportunity for God's redemptive and forgiving grace to work in the life of a prisoner.

Our legislators and governor might still repair the damage caused by the death penalty. The next execution will not occur for several years. During that time, I urge Governor Herbert and the Utah Legislature to place a moratorium on further death sentences and pass legislation to abolish state-sanctioned destruction of human life.

Contact:

Susan Dennin

Director of Communications

susan.dennin@dioslc.org

801.328.8541 x 362