

April 14, 2019

Death Penalty Moratorium in California

On March 13, 2019, California Governor Gavin Newsom made a historic step forward in the death penalty abolition movement by declaring a moratorium on all California executions. California had the dubious honor of having the largest death row in the Western Hemisphere. While this action does not end the death penalty in California (that can only be done by voter referendum), the moratorium grants a reprieve for the 737 men and women currently sitting on California's death row. The moratorium also closed the execution chamber in San Quentin and withdraw California's lethal injection protocol.

Fr. George Williams, S.J., Catholic chaplain at San Quentin State Prison, reminds us, "Catholics do not generally hear it preached, but we have to remember that Jesus spent his last night on death row. So did Peter and Paul and John the Baptist, James, Steven and many of the early followers. It is also important to remember the most well known victim of the death penalty is our savior. Through his own words and deeds, Pope Francis has been leading us back to remembering men and women in prison. Like many popes before him, every time he visits inmates he embodies Christ's words in the Matthew's Gospel, 'I was in prison and you visited me.'"

Governor Newsom's bold action reflects the growing national trend that the death penalty is on its way out. California joins Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Oregon as the fourth state to have a governor-imposed moratorium.

This decision from the governor to spare the lives of the individuals on death row lifts up and affirms Catholic Church teaching that all human life is sacred and must be protected.