



## *South Dakota Catholic Conference*

### **Statement Regarding the Execution of Charles Rhines**

**November 4, 2019**

*Monday of the Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time*

Pursuant to a Warrant of Execution, today the state of South Dakota intends to execute inmate Charles Rhines. On this occasion, as the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Sioux Falls and the Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Rapid City, we repeat once more the Church's perennial call for a culture of life, founded upon a firm insistence that the life of every human person is of inestimable value, whether young or old, ill or well, rich or poor, prisoner or free. Consequently, in light of the legion attacks on human life in the modern era, the Church's awareness of the urgent need to proclaim the full truth of human dignity as given by God, and considering the advances and professionalism found in contemporary systems of criminal justice, follows the conviction that capital punishment unduly affirms a false view of the disposability of life and therefore should not be used.

It is impossible for us, and for most people, to know the suffering Mr. Rhines inflicted upon Donnivan Schaeffer, then a young man some twenty-seven years ago, or the deep horror and profound wounds brought upon family and friends who lost their loved one at Mr. Rhines' hands. Our hearts are moved at the thought of such pain; we cannot but help recall the piercing sorrow of the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, who surely heard her son cry out as He suffered crucifixion and death. To all those who have suffered, and who continue to suffer from unspeakable crime, we humbly extend our support. We pray for you and your families, that you might know the healing peace of God's loving gaze.

We pray also for Mr. Rhines, all on death row, and all repaying debts owed as a result of crime, that they would know that they too are seen and loved by the Lord, that they might amend their lives and open their hearts to His infinite mercy. God is always near, awaiting each person's response to His offer of redemption and love.

Safeguarding society and restoring the disorder introduced by crime is a weighty responsibility, and we thank those persons in public service who nobly bear this civic duty. The magnanimous work of law enforcement officers, court officials and legal professionals, executive and legislative lawmakers, and emergency services personnel does not go unnoticed.

The diligence, professionalism, and deep concern for the common good with which they perform their respective roles are truly necessary to the life of a free people. Yet, as the bishops of South Dakota have expressed in the past, the clear obligation of civil authorities to redress wrongs and restore order does not give rise to boundless state power, unconstrained by moral limits. Such authority must always be exercised “in line with human dignity and thus, in the end, with God's plan for man and society.”<sup>1</sup> To seek final justice or ultimate healing through the means of lawful capital punishment, especially given the conditions of our time, further obscures the reality that God, as the author of life, is the source of eternal justice and lasting mercy. All healing is ultimately found within the grace of His designs.

Consequently, in light of the pervasive attacks on human life in our day, the Church's responsibility to proclaim the truth of God given dignity due all persons from conception to natural death, and recognizing the professionalism and safeguards in our current criminal justice system, as Pope Francis has affirmed, capital punishment is unnecessary and ought not be applied in this instance or in any instance, for the long-term common good of our state and nation.

The Very Reverend Michel Mulloy  
Diocesan Administrator of Rapid City

The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain  
Bishop of Sioux Falls

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<sup>1</sup> *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 56.