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South Dakota's bishops call for end to death penalty

Joshua J. McElwee
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South Dakota's two Catholic bishops have called for a stay of all executions in their state and for the repeal of the death penalty, saying it "undermines the moral authority of our government."

"We call for a system of justice and reconciliation that is worthy of the values of the people of South Dakota," write Rapid City Bishop Robert Gruss and Sioux Falls Bishop Paul Swain, who released their statement Oct. 9, the feast day of Saint Denis, a martyr of the early church who was executed by beheading.

The bishops' statement came days before South Dakota executed Eric Robert Oct. 15, the second person to be executed in the state since the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the death penalty in 1976.

Addressing the situation in their state, where a criminal Donald Moeller is set to be executed Oct. 28, the bishops write that while "the state has an obligation to hold violent criminals accountable for their actions and to protect society from those who are a threat," "we as persons and as a state ought not to shrink to the level of the violent criminals by sanctioning state-inflicted violence."

"We are all gifted by God with life and reason and, therefore,are called to a higher standard," the bishops continue. "Violence in response to violence does not relieve personal anguish or result in societal protection."

The full text of the bishops' statement follows.

South Dakota's Catholic bishops' Joint Statement on Death Penalty [1]

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[1] http://www.scribd.com/doc/110818858/South-Dakota-s-Catholic-bishops-Joint-Statement-on-Death-Penalty