

*Jan. 10, 2021*

## **Statement by Notre Dame President Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., on scheduled executions in Indiana**

“Lisa Montgomery is scheduled to be executed Tuesday at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute. Her execution is one of three in my home state of Indiana in the coming week, which will bring to 13 the number of individuals executed by the federal government in the last six months. President Trump, whose administration has expressed a commitment to defend the sanctity of human life, has the power to stop this inhumane, unprecedented and unnecessary spree of executions pursued by his Justice Department in the waning days of his administration. I urge him to do so.

“After a quarter of a century of discernment over capital punishment, the Catholic Church, under the leadership of Pope Francis, has deemed it inadmissible under any circumstances and calls upon Catholics and all people of goodwill to work for its abolition everywhere in the world. ‘There is no stepping back from this position,’ Pope Francis has said.

“Grave questions exist about the justice and purpose of the death penalty in the United States. The execution of Lisa Montgomery is particularly troubling and illustrates some of the many systemic failures in our system of capital punishment. The victim of severe child abuse and sexual violence herself, Montgomery committed a crime so heinous and bizarre that it raises serious questions about her mental state. In a system in which the poor are far more likely to be sentenced to the death penalty, there is serious doubt about the quality of the counsel she received from a public defense attorney. Defendants charged with killing a white victim are far more likely to be executed than when the victim is Black. No compelling evidence exists that the threat of the death penalty is an effective deterrent against future crimes. Furthermore, capital punishment won’t end the suffering of the family and friends of Bobbie Jo Stinnett and the other victims of prisoners currently awaiting execution.

“The most fundamental objection to the death penalty, though, is that it undermines our commitment to the sanctity of all human life — healthy or infirm, talented or ordinary, good or bad. Death row inmates have been convicted of some of the most awful crimes imaginable, yet even their lives do not lose that dignity. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, there are ways to safeguard the common good that do not involve an ‘attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person.’ To the extent that we accept the killing done by the state in our name, we are all complicitous, and we are all brutalized.

“President Trump, you have pardoned many in your last days in power. Please take this final opportunity to act humanely in the cause of upholding the sanctity of life. And I call on all Catholics and everyone of goodwill, regardless of faith, to work to end capital punishment in Indiana, the United States and the rest of the world.”

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