



The Diocese of Knoxville

Living our Roman Catholic faith in East Tennessee

MEDIA ADVISORY
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Catholic bishops issue statement on pending execution Bishops of Knoxville and Nashville voice strong opposition

We, the Catholic bishops of the Dioceses of Knoxville and Nashville, charged with shepherding the people of our state from the Tennessee River in the west to the mountains in the east, join to voice our strong objection to the execution of Billy Ray Irick, even though his brutal rape and murder of seven-year-old Paula Dyer is among the most heinous of crimes.

The state has the obligation to protect all people and to impose just punishment for crimes, but in the modern world the death penalty is not required for either of these ends. We echo the words of Pope Francis, who recently declared as definitive teaching that “in light of the Gospel,” the death penalty is unacceptable in all cases “because it attacks the dignity of the person, a dignity that is not lost even after having committed the most serious crimes.”

We pray that God’s healing mercy will provide consolation and everlasting peace to Paula Dyer and her family. We pray for the same mercy, consolation, and peace for Billy Ray Irick and his family. We pray for a conversion of hearts to put an end to the practice of the death penalty in all cases and for an increase of the respect for life in all stages from conception until natural death.

Most Reverend Richard F. Stika
Diocese of Knoxville

Most Reverend J. Mark Spalding
Diocese of Nashville

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