



October 18, 2004

The Honorable Ernie Fletcher
Governor
Commonwealth of Kentucky
700 Capital Avenue, Suite 100
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

Re: Promoting a Culture of Life in our Commonwealth

Dear Governor Fletcher,

We appreciate your meeting today with the Catholic Bishops of the Commonwealth of Kentucky about the death penalty and your pending decision on the request by the Attorney General to sign an execution warrant for Thomas Bowling.

On behalf of the 400,000 Catholics in Kentucky, we urge you to commute Thomas Bowling's sentence of death to life without parole.

We support and find important many issues that promote a Culture of Life which you support and find important, including those on abortion, cloning, embryonic stem cell, and fetal homicide.

October is Respect Life month in our Church. Life is sacred. A fundamental teaching of our Church is the dignity of every person. Every person is made in the image and likeness of God. Thomas Bowling is a child of God.

As we stated in our pastoral letter, *Choose Life: Reflections on the Death Penalty*, "under the circumstances prevailing in society today, the death penalty as punishment for reasons of deterrence, retribution, or the protection of society cannot be justified. But beyond that, whether capital punishment is logically defensible on these grounds or not, a deeper question remains about its compatibility with gospel values as they are understood today.... We insist that the Church has a prophetic mission to constantly remind the world that God is the Lord of Life and all human life is sacred and belongs to him alone. We see our rejection of capital punishment as part of the Church's opposition to every attack upon human life. It is in line with the struggle against abortion, against euthanasia, against the destruction of a nuclear war. We proclaim the sacredness not only of innocent life, but even of the life of the guilty!"

We appeal to you Governor as our brother in Christ. "We urge our brothers and sisters in Christ to remember the teachings of Jesus who called us to be reconciled with those who have injured

us (Mt. 5:43-45) and to pray for forgiveness for our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. (Mt. 6:12) We call on you to contemplate the crucified Christ who set the supreme example of forgiveness and of the triumph of compassionate love." *Choose Life: Reflections on the Death Penalty*.

In this request to you, we add our voices to the prophetic witness of Pope John Paul II who, when he last came to our nation, appealed for an end to capital punishment: "The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 27). I renew the appeal I made most recently at Christmas for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary."

Kentuckians increasingly oppose the death penalty. A significant shift of opinion has occurred in Kentucky over the last 15 years as demonstrated by the 2001 *Attitudes Toward the Death Penalty in Kentucky: A Comparison of Survey Results-1989, 1997, 1999* published in Kentucky Justice and Safety Research Bulletin. The majority of Kentuckians prefer a sentence of life without parole to a sentence of death.

We very much appreciate the meeting with you today. God's justice is not blind. It is imbued with mercy. We ask that you, as a man of faith and as a moral leader in Kentucky, provide mercy to Thomas Bowling. May God bless you as Governor of our Commonwealth as you promote the common good.

Sincerely in Christ,

S/Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly, O.P.

S/Bishop John McRaith

S/Bishop Roger Foys

S/Bishop Ronald Gainer