

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Media Release

Interchurch Center, Suite B ■ 0245 SW Bancroft Street ■ Portland, Oregon 97239
phone (503) 221-1054 ■ *fax* (503) 223-7007 ■ *Web site* www.emoregon.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: Dec. 1, 2016

CONTACT: Jan Musgrove Elfers, executive director
(503) 221-1054, jelfers@emoregon.org

Oregon faith leaders' statement on death penalty commutation

As faith leaders, we call on Governor Kate Brown to commute all death sentences in Oregon to life without the possibility of parole. We base this request on shared values, rooted in our religious traditions: compassion, the affirmation of human dignity and respect for all life.

Currently, 35 individuals sit on Oregon's death row, where the state holds the legal authority to take the life of its prisoners. DNA testing has already exonerated 156 people from death rows across the country, and a motion for DNA testing was filed this month in the case of one death row inmate in our own state.

There is also the matter of fiscal responsibility. In our state, keeping a person on death row costs as much as a million dollars more than life imprisonment without parole, according to an academic study released by Lewis & Clark Law School and Seattle University. These limited funds could be shifted towards more noble purposes rooted in our religious traditions such as providing shelter to the houseless or hot meals for hungry children.

We believe that those who break the law must be held accountable for their actions. At the same time, as faith leaders we believe in the sanctity of human life and the potential for redemption in our state's justice system. A penalty which cannot be shown to be applied fairly and denies the sanctity of human life while removing the possibility of redemption is fundamentally at odds with our religious teachings. We petition Governor Brown to commute all death sentences as an act of grace, clemency and leadership on this morally critical issue.

The Rev. Paul Belz-Templeman
Stated Clerk, Presbytery of the Cascades

The Rev. Steve Bils
Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of the Central Pacific Coast

The Rev. Dr. Walter John Boris
Conference Minister, Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ

MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

African Methodist Episcopal Church ■ American Baptist Churches of Oregon ■ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ■ Christian Methodist Episcopal Church ■ Church of the Brethren ■ Community of Christ
Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon ■ Episcopal Diocese of Oregon ■ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ■ Greek Orthodox Church ■ Presbyterian Church (USA)—Presbytery of the Cascades
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) ■ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland ■ United Church of Christ ■ United Methodist Church ■ Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

The Rev. Dave Brauer-Rieke
Bishop, Oregon Synod – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rabbi Michael Cahana

Jan Musgrove Elfers
Executive Director, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

The Rev. Dr. Lowell Greathouse
Mission and Ministry Coordinator, Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

The Rt. Rev. Michael Hanley
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Oregon

Rabbi Rachel L. Joseph

Rabbi David Kosak

Imam Muhammad Najieb
Muslim Community Center of Portland

Imam Abdulah Polovina
Bosniaks Educational Center of Oregon

Wajdi Said
President and Cofounder, Muslim Educational Trust

The Most Rev. Alexander K. Sample
Archbishop, Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon

Dr. Joe Snyder
Representative, Willamette Quarterly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

Rabbi Ariel Stone
President, Oregon Board of Rabbis; Rabbi, Congregation Shir Tikvah