



Statement of Texas Bishops Against the Execution of Johnny Frank Garrett

January, 1992

We the undersigned Catholic bishops of Texas, gathered in prayer at Christ the King Retreat Center in San Angelo, urge that a stay of execution be granted to Johnny Frank Garrett, who is scheduled to die by lethal injection this coming Tuesday, Jan. 7. for the murder of Sister Tadea Benz, a Franciscan nun in Amarillo on Oct. 31. 1981.

While we abhor the brutal murder of Sister Tadea, we continue to be opposed to the death penalty. Our opposition to capital punishment is based on our strong belief in the inherent sacredness of human life and on our obligation to be faithful to the reaching of Jesus Christ, which calls us to reconciliation and to forgiveness of those who wrong us.

In the case of Johnny Frank Garrett, we believe that the courts should take into consideration not only the fact that he was a juvenile at the time of the crime, but also that there is evidence, not admitted in the previous court proceedings, that he had suffered brain damage, was abused as a child and was addicted to drugs. He is now diagnosed as chronically psychotic.

We raise our voices in union With those of Pope John Paul II, of Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, papal pro-nuncio to the United States, as well as with the Voices of Amnesty International, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Amarillo and with the voices of other religious communities, as well as with other groups and individuals.

Our concern is raised to a new level in this case because, if executed, Garrett will be the third individual suffering the death penalty in Texas for a crime committed while a juvenile.

We, as religious leaders, are gravely concerned about the increase of violence in our state. Violence seems to be begetting more violence. At the same time, there is no compelling evidence that the death penalty is deterring murder in Texas or elsewhere.

We address this appeal first to Federal Judge Mary Lou Robinson of Amarillo, asking her to grant a new trial for Garrett so important evidence can be admitted to the court process. Second, we appeal to the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to commute Garrett's death penalty to life imprisonment without parole. We further seek the support of Gov. Ann Richards for this request.

This appeal is raised through Archbishop Patrick Flores, archbishop of the Archdiocese of San Antonio representing the undersigned bishops of the state of Texas gathered in prayer in San Angelo.