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**Concerning the Scheduled Execution of
Reginald Clemons, by the State of Missouri, on June 17, 2009**

June 1, 2009

On June 17, 2009, the State of Missouri is scheduled to execute Reginald Clemons for the April, 1991, murders of Robin and Julie Kerry.

These two sisters died tragically when, after being raped, they were pushed from the closed Chain of Rocks Bridge outside of St. Louis. Their family and loved ones deserve our prayers and support in the face of this horrific assault and murder.

I have recently joined the Catholic Bishops of Missouri and representatives of the Missouri Catholic Conference in a petition addressed to Governor Jay Nixon asking clemency for Reginald Clemons. We have asked the Governor to commute the sentence to life in prison without parole.

That petition draws attention to issues of significant doubt concerning Mr. Clemons' involvement in the death of the Kerry sisters. Nonetheless, our prayers for clemency for Mr. Clemons, and others awaiting execution, are founded on a more basic principle of the fundamental dignity and value of every human life, even those guilty of the most heinous crimes.

The Catholic Church's position – in steadfast opposition to the death penalty – upholds the right and responsibility of legitimate authority to protect and defend its members.

However, when the State is able to secure people's safety by non-lethal means, then the use of the death penalty cannot be morally justified. (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition, no. 2267)

Violence begets violence. We have the means of protecting society without becoming killers

ourselves. For the sake of our own integrity and dignity as stewards of society we ought to reject this method of ultimate retaliation.

It is my hope that our Missouri legislators will also renew initiatives for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty and establish a study commission to resolve inequities in our system, which work against the application of justice.