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**STATEMENT ON PENDING EXECUTION
OF CHRISTOPHER SEPULVADO**

We are called by the foundational theme of Catholic Social Teaching – The Life and Dignity of the Human Person – to affirm that human dignity does not discriminate between those who are innocent and those who are guilty. Instead, it is a gift that is freely and undeservedly bestowed on us by our Creator, and not to be taken away by humanity.

The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops, therefore, strongly opposes the scheduled execution of Christopher Sepulvado on February 13, which is also observed as Ash Wednesday for Christians.

Blessed Pope John Paul II illuminated this tenet of human dignity in *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). He rightly proclaims “that not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, as God himself pledges to guarantee this. For this reason whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself.” (*Evangelium Vitae*, #9) In this regard, the Church and society are challenged to consistently speak against any assault on human life, including the practice of state-sanctioned killing.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls us to acknowledge both the rights that states possess in protecting its citizenry, as well as the appropriateness of the punishment it uses to do so. “If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people’s safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means...Today, ... the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not practically non-existent.” (CCC 2267)

We in no way condone the actions of Christopher Sepulvado. His actions were evil and tragic, and we lament the resulting death of Wesley Mercer. At the same time, we acknowledge the Christian power of reconciliation and redemption which Christopher has embraced. He has expressed remorse for his actions while at the same time embracing his faith and ministering to his fellow inmates. Executing Christopher will not bring Wesley back to life, nor will it provide healing, reconciliation, or peace to those involved. We offer prayer for and solidarity with those family members impacted by this crime, as we do for all family members of victims of violent crime and murder.

The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops asks that Gov. Bobby Jindal, along with the Louisiana Parole/Pardon Board, halt the execution of Christopher Sepulvado. To execute a faithful Catholic on Ash Wednesday would be inconsistent with the Lenten call for reconciliation and redemption and an unnecessary tragic irony.

February 1, 2013