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**NEWS RELEASE**

**Archdiocese Calls Attorney General Barr to Halt Federal Executions,  
Calls for Withdrawal of Award to Attorney General Barr**

ALBUQUERQUE – Friday, September 18, 2020 – It has come to our attention that a non-profit group called the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast, which is not an official Catholic organization, will honor Attorney General William Barr with their *Christifideles Laici* award on September 23, 2020 “In Honor and Gratitude for Fidelity to the Church, Exemplary Selfless and Steadfast Service in the Lord’s Vineyard.” We are appalled this group will honor Attorney General Barr in light of the fact he just recently began executions of federal prisoners; something that has not been done since 2003. Catholic teaching on capital punishment (the death penalty) is clear. The Church teaches that “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2267).

We here in New Mexico worked tirelessly with many faith-based and community groups to eliminate the death penalty for New Mexico. In 2009, New Mexico became the 15<sup>th</sup> state to abolish the death penalty and to replace it with life in prison without the possibility of parole. As of today, there are 30 states that have abolished the death penalty, while 20 states and the federal government still allow executions. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, “the federal death penalty applies in all 50 states and U.S. territories but is used relatively rarely. About 60 prisoners are on the federal death row, most of whom are imprisoned in Terre Haute, Indiana. Three federal executions have been carried out in the modern era, all by lethal injection, with the last occurring in 2003” (DPIC, 2020).

That is until this year. In July 2020, after a 17-year moratorium, Attorney General Barr changed that when he resumed federal executions on July 14. Under his authority, in just six weeks, five men have been executed including a Native American man, despite calls for clemency from his tribal leaders. There are two more scheduled for execution in September, one the day before and another the day after Barr is to receive recognition for “serving the Church well.”

Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Francis and the U.S. Bishops have consistently opposed the death penalty and provide guidance to abolish the death penalty at both state and federal levels.

Catholic teaching offers a unique perspective on crime and punishment. It begins with the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victims and offenders. It affirms our commitment to seek justice, comfort and support victims and their families, while acknowledging the God-given dignity of every human life, even for those who do great harm. Catholic teaching on human life is rooted in the belief that all life has inherent dignity and is a gift from God that must be respected and defended from conception until natural death. In his encyclical *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II challenged followers of Christ to be “unconditionally pro-life.” He reminded us 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” (*Gospel of Life*, 27) (USCCB, 2/2011).

There are numerous serious reasons to oppose the death penalty: the dignity of both victim and perpetrator, the routine inconsistent application of capital punishment, the fact that mistakes are irreversible, the exorbitant cost of the appeals process, and a lack of correlation between the death penalty and crime deterrence. As Catholics, we acknowledge the inherent dignity and sacredness of all. We work to protect all life, whether it be a child in the womb, a person without a home, a refugee family, an elderly person at the end of life, a victim of a crime, or a person on death row. There is no justifiable reason to support government-sponsored execution as punishment for even the most heinous crimes. We possess means in today’s society to render the perpetrators harmless through life in prison without parole. With this in mind, we call for the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast to withdraw their honor of Attorney General Barr; and we call on Attorney General Barr to stop all federal executions. Let us not become the evil we despise.

Submitted by: Archdiocese of Santa Fe Office of Social Justice & Respect Life—END.