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May 13, 2019

Governor Bill Lee
1st Floor, State Capitol
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

Greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

As leaders of United Methodists throughout the state of Tennessee, we write to share our opposition to the death penalty and to specifically ask you to spare the life of Donnie Johnson, scheduled for execution this week.

We recognize the horror that comes through the taking of another's life. Mr. Johnson acknowledges his guilt in the crime, expressing remorse for his actions. Certainly, Mr. Johnson needs to be held accountable for what he has done. However, we believe that responding to one horror with another only serves to perpetuate the belief that violence is an acceptable means of resolving conflict. We believe in the power of reconciliation and forgiveness given in Jesus Christ -- a power that has been demonstrated through Mr. Johnson's transformation and work while in prison.

Our United Methodist *Book of Discipline* (the rule of order for our church) states:

The United Methodist Church is deeply concerned about crime throughout the world and the value of any life taken by a murder or homicide. We believe all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore, we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that the possibility of reconciliation with Christ comes through repentance. This gift of reconciliation is offered to all individuals without exception and gives all life new dignity and sacredness. For this reason, we oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.

We know that the decision you face is not an easy one. We know that there are voices reaching out to you at this time on both sides of the debate on capital punishment. Please know that you are in our prayers, and we are asking God to give you clarity and wisdom. We also note that you are a person of faith, and sincerely hope you will listen closely to God's guidance in the coming days as you hold the life of another in your hands.

May God's grace and peace be with you always.

Bishop William McAlilly

Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor