March 12, 2009

The Honorable Christine Gregoire  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA  98504-0002

Dear Governor Gregoire,

Cal Brown is scheduled to be executed this Friday, March 13, 2009. We the Catholic bishops of Washington State ask you to commute his death sentence to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

Our request acknowledges the heinous nature of the crimes Mr. Brown committed. Crimes involving murder, robbery, rape and torture – of which Mr. Brown has been found guilty – demand the highest level of judicial scrutiny and cry out for severe sanction. We agree that justice demands Mr. Brown be held accountable for his crimes, but justice also recognizes that violence begets violence.

Catholic social teaching upholds the inherent dignity of every human life. This applies equally to all, regardless of one’s criminal history, mental capacity, station in life or perceived value to society. While our sympathies clearly and rightfully rest with the victim and her loved ones, we must not let the desire of some for retribution bind us to further violence.

Another factor to be considered before allowing so permanent a penalty is Mr. Brown’s mental health. It has been reported that prison physicians have prescribed medication to control his bipolar disorder since 1994. While this alone did not reverse the outcome of his trial, deliberations over his fate should certainly weigh the fact of the state of his mental health.

We ask you to reflect on the appropriateness of the death penalty, as we continue to pray for the healing of all victims of violence. Again, we hope you will choose to affirm the dignity of life by commuting Mr. Brown’s death sentence in favor of a sentence that reflects God’s law of justice and mercy.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Alex J. Brunett  
Archbishop of Seattle

Most Rev. William S. Skylstad  
Bishop of Spokane

Most Rev. Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J.  
Bishop of Yakima