

October 1, 2026

**The Honorable Bill Lee
Governor of Tennessee
Nashville, Tennessee**

Dear Governor Lee:

Grace and peace to you.

We write as bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Episcopal Church, and the Roman Catholic Church, serving Christians and communities throughout Tennessee and the Southeast, to respectfully and urgently ask you to commute the death sentence of Christa Gail Pike and ensure that the State of Tennessee does not attempt to execute her again.

We make this appeal mindful of the horrific murder of Colleen Slemmer and the immeasurable grief endured by her family and those who loved her. Nothing in our request diminishes the gravity of that crime, the preciousness of Colleen's life, or the legitimate responsibility of the state to hold those who commit violence accountable.

Yet accountability need not require another death.

Our churches have long and consistently opposed capital punishment. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has called for the abolition of the death penalty, affirming that society can be protected through alternative punishment while refusing to perpetuate violence through execution. The Episcopal Church likewise has opposed the death penalty for decades and has called for existing death sentences to be commuted. For decades, the Roman Catholic Church has called the death penalty unnecessary to protect society and still punish those who have committed grave crimes.

These convictions arise from the heart of our Christian faith. We believe every human being bears the image of God and therefore possesses a dignity that even the most grievous sin cannot erase. We believe in accountability, but we also believe in repentance, redemption, mercy, and the possibility of transformation. As Scripture reminds us, God "desires mercy, not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13).

The events surrounding Tennessee's attempted execution of Ms. Pike make this appeal even more urgent. After the state administered its prescribed lethal drugs and she nevertheless survived, another attempt to take her life would compound an already grave situation. We are grateful that you have ordered an independent review of what occurred. We believe this moment also calls for an act of mercy.

Governor Lee, we therefore respectfully ask you to exercise the authority entrusted to your office and commute Christa Pike's death sentence to a sentence that protects the public while preserving her life.

Such an act does not deny justice. It declares that justice need not become vengeance and that the State of Tennessee can choose restraint, human dignity, and mercy.

As Christian bishops, we believe the Gospel continually calls us beyond cycles of violence and death toward the difficult work of justice, reconciliation, repentance, and life. In that hope, we respectfully ask you to grant clemency.

May God grant you wisdom, courage, and compassion as you exercise the solemn responsibilities of your office.



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