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Opposition to the Death Penalty in Utah

by Tom Gallagher

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In Utah, activists are getting serious about opposing the death penalty and are taking both a short and long term view. And it's refreshing to see a Catholic bishop among the founding members.

Ronnie Lee Gardner's date with the firing squad has spurred a group of people opposed to the death penalty to no longer remain silent.

Utahns for Alternatives to the Death Penalty organized as a judge signed Gardner's death warrant in April. It includes nine religious denominations, a couple of organizations and more than 160 individuals who've registered at the coalition's website.

The group opposes the death penalty, contending it is expensive, ineffective, arbitrary and discriminatory. Furthermore, it fails to meet the needs of victims' families, risks being imposed on innocent people and conflicts with religious beliefs.

"We oppose capital punishment not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes, but for how it affects society," says Bishop John C. Wester, of the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City, a founding member of the group.

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