

Fruits of Our Labor

Reflection by Death Penalty Abolition & Restorative Justice Team Member Lauren Olson

It was December 23rd and amidst the last-minute Christmas rush, a notification on my phone caught my attention: "*President Biden commutes sentences of 37 federal death row prisoners.*" Hope and excitement instantly rushed over me – two emotions I don't often feel when reading the news these days. "The mobilization efforts of our Death Penalty and Restorative Justice Team worked!" I thought.

At the end of 2024 the Death Penalty and Restorative Justice Team, along with other advocacy organizations, issued a Call to Action urging President Biden in his final days in office to commute the sentences of the 40 men on federal death row to life in prison without the possibility of parole. The Call asked fellow Marianists and others to sign a Catholic Mobilizing Network petition, call the White House, write a letter to President Biden, or send an email to the White House. The push reminded readers that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2267 provides that "the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person." It also recounted that in the last six months of the previous Trump administration 13 people on federal death row were executed, and that prior to the Trump administration there had not previously been any federal executions for more than 17 years.

While I wish President Biden commuted the sentences of all 40 federal death row inmates, rather than limiting the commutations to 37 inmates, I still experienced and have reflected on the announcement as a cause for hope. In justice work it is often rare to see the fruit of your labor, but when your efforts are realized in real time, it is a welcome change. While this may be a small example of progress, it served as motivation and a glimmer of hope for me and the continued advocacy efforts of our Justice Team.

As we begin the Jubilee Year of 2025 with the chosen theme of "Pilgrims of Hope," I am reminded of our call and commitment to have hope amid the many challenges we face each day. While we don't always get to experience the fruits of our labor, we can always have hope for healing and reconciliation in our world.