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Consistent ethic of life says end death penalty

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The author, who lives in Omaha, is chairwoman of Nebraskans United for Life.

As Holy Week is upon us, and I reflect on the passion of Jesus — the most famous victim of a state execution — I can't help but think about the important debate that is happening in our own state about the death penalty.

My strong beliefs about the sacred value of human life compel me to speak out to protect life whenever possible. For me, this means defending innocent life, as well as the lives of the guilty when capital punishment comes into play.

Though there are many important factors to consider when reflecting on capital punishment, the one that is most fundamental is the sacredness of human life.

The state has a right to take life only in circumstances where nonlethal means are insufficient to protect society. As the United States Conference of Catholic

Bishops has stated, "No matter how heinous the crime, if society can protect itself without ending a human life, it should do so."

In Nebraska, we have life imprisonment with no possibility of parole, which enables society to be kept safe without resorting to the taking of human life. This is important not just for the condemned man or woman whose life is on the line, but for the message we send about how we value life. It reflects upon how we treat life at every stage.

In some instances, the death penalty affects innocent life. Every year the evidence mounts that there are many innocent people on death row. Since 1973, over 155 people have been released from death rows across the country with evidence of their innocence, and an untold number of innocents have already been executed.

Troubling mistakes in Nebraska's criminal justice system have come to light. The Beatrice Six were Nebraskans convicted of a rape and murder, who collectively spent over 75 years in prison before DNA evidence emerged demonstrating their innocence.

When the innocent Beatrice Six were threatened with the death penalty, this fear led some to confess to a crime they had nothing to do with. As our witness against abortion proclaims, nothing could be more cruel and inhumane than the needless death of an innocent.

In debates over life, questions inevitably come up asking whether those working tirelessly to defend life are motivated by a concern for all life. A growing movement of pro-life lawmakers and citizens in Nebraska has left no doubt

where we stand: We are committed to ending all policies that unnecessarily threaten life, from abortion to the death penalty to euthanasia. Ultimately, no message is more powerful than this straightforward consistency.

In November, all Nebraskans are going to have a chance to vote on whether or not to bring back our state's death penalty.

This week, as Christians reflect upon the execution and resurrection of our Lord, I encourage you to think of that vote as an opportunity to vocally proclaim a consistent ethic of life in all we do. I implore Nebraskans to help promote a culture of life and reject bringing back our broken death penalty.