As people of Faith, we urge this commission to urge our elected officials to abolish the death penalty. We acknowledge that this commission has limitations in terms of its present mandate. This is a broken system that can never be fixed. We need to commute all death penalty sentences to life without the possibility of parole.

This commission has heard hours of expert testimony outlining the disparities and inconsistencies. Throughout CA, people of color are disproportionately sentenced to death. No matter how many safeguards are put in place, we will never be able to reach the hearts and minds of jurors where hate and prejudice still dwells.

We must protect the innocent from being wrongfully convicted. As you are well aware, the Innocence Project has exonerated over two hundred people. We don’t want the State to kill an innocent person in our name. It is chilling sober to reflect on the errors we may have already made. These are mistakes we can never reverse.

As clergy, we have walked with many victims families. In Rampart Division alone, we had 15 gang homicides in 14 weeks. I have heard the cries of too many grieving mothers. I had hoped more of these mothers could be with us today. In our conversations, they do not look to the death penalty as a way bringing closure. Rather they seek to find hope and meaning out of this tragedy. They want to see resources brought into our communities and local schools so another mother will not have to endure what they are going through.

We are losing our youth to poverty and violence. Fifty percent of our Latino and African American students do not graduate high school. We have ninety thousand youth age
16-25) who are neither in school or gainfully employed. Los Angeles is sadly the gang and homeless capital of our nation, forty thousand gang members. Los Angeles county has seventy eight thousand homeless residents.

Instead of spending millions of dollars in prolonged litigations and appeals, let us focus our precious resources on keeping our young and disadvantaged citizens on the path of peace and prosperity. Every murder in our society is a collective failure because we were unable to socialize our citizens. We must not scapegoat the convicted with our tough on crime rhetoric and disregard how we as a society have not afforded our citizens with some of the basic tools and resources they need to succeed.

People of faith are united in this call to establish restorative justice. We share this common pursuit of love, justice and compassion. The time has come for us to set aside this human rights debacle. It is embarrassing and shameful that we are still committing these draconian and barbaric acts.

If we are to truly be the shining City on the Hill, we must dispel these dark days.

Jesus of Nazareth has compassion for our brothers on death row. Jesus was one of wrongfully convicted. Jesus extended love and forgiveness to his enemies. He is calling us to do the same. We must soften our hearts, and hold out for grace and redemption. Life is sacred. No citizen nor state has the authority to take away what God has given and sustains.