

**STATEMENT ON
U.S. SUPREME COURT'S JUVENILE LWOP SENTENCING DECISION
BY CCC RESTORATIVE JUSTICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS,
BISHOPS RICHARD GARCIA AND GABINO ZAVALA
MAY 18, 2010**

In a 5-4 decision on Monday, May 17, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Graham v. Florida*, that the sentence of "Life without Parole" (LWOP) for non-homicide crimes committed by juveniles was unconstitutional. Writing for the majority, Justice Anthony Kennedy said, "Life in prison without the possibility of parole gives no chance for fulfillment outside prison walls, no chance for reconciliation with society, no hope."

Clearly this Supreme Court decision is a good first step towards more just sentencing—sentencing which will offer the offender, the victims and the community a chance for restorative justice. Quoting from our 2000 document, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation*," promulgated by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:

"[O]ur response to crime...is a moral test for our nation and a challenge for our Church...Our tasks are to restore a sense of civility and responsibility to everyday life, and promote crime prevention and genuine rehabilitation...A Catholic approach begins with the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victim and offender...We are convinced that our tradition and our faith offer better alternatives that can hold offenders accountable and challenge them to change their lives; reach out to victims *and* reject vengeance; restore a sense of community and resist the violence that has engulfed so much of our culture."

The U.S. Supreme Court ruling will impact just a few prisoners in our state because most California prisoners serving LWOP, who were juveniles at the time they committed the crime, have been charged with felony murder.

The California Legislature is currently considering SB 399, the *Fair Sentencing for Youth Act*, which would provide the possibility in certain cases for parole for juvenile offenders serving the LWOP sentence. Passing SB 399, which the California Catholic Conference highlighted during our Lobby Day, would be an excellent first step in responding to this Court decision.

For more information on the decision or restorative justice, go to www.restorejustice.com.

The Most Reverend Richard Garcia is Bishop for Monterey and the Most Reverend Gabino Zavala is Auxiliary Bishop for the San Gabriel Region of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Together they chair the Restorative Justice Committee of the California Catholic Conference of Bishops.