

September 25, 2012

Governor Rick Scott  
The Capitol  
400 S. Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Scott:

We, Evangelical Christian leaders in Florida and around the U.S., write to urge you to stay the execution of John Ferguson on that ground that he is mentally incompetent to be executed.

We firmly believe that Mr. Ferguson should be separated from society and held accountable for his actions. We simply pray that in doing so, we do not lose sight of the humanity and compassion that Christ calls us to.

As pastors, we are frequently in contact with crime victims and survivors, convicted criminals and their family members, lawyers, judges, police, correctional officers, and others who give us a unique view into the complexities of the criminal justice system. We feel deeply the pain and grief of our church members when violence or loss of life is visited upon them. We are guided by the biblical teachings that call for a community “to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

The State’s psychiatrists have consistently found, over 40 years, that Mr. Ferguson suffers from severe schizophrenia and mental impairment. Now a senior citizen, he still suffers from delusions and hallucinations. For example, he believes that he is incarcerated because his strength as a “Prince of God” is being tested. He believes he converses with his deceased father, a half-century after his death. Florida will not be a better or safer place if he is executed, but rather, a diminished one.

The jurors at Mr. Ferguson’s sentencing hearings did not hear evidence of his extreme and long-term mental illness, the horrific abuse he experienced as a child, or the traumatic brain injury he suffered as a result of a gunshot wound to his head as a young man, which further contributed to his mental illness. Any one of these factors might have persuaded his juries to spare his life and sentence him to life in prison, but his attorneys failed to present any mitigating evidence to the jurors.

As followers of Christ, we believe that our justice system should be used to improve life, not destroy it. Our system must be humane and hold life sacred, while taking every step possible to support and facilitate the healing of victims.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joel C. Hunter, Senior Pastor  
Northland, A Church Distributed

Longwood, FL

Reverend Dr. David P. Gushee, Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the Center for Theology and Public Life, Mercer University  
Atlanta, GA

Dr. Ron Sider, President  
Evangelicals for Social Action

Paul Alexander, Co-founder  
Pentecostals & Charismatics for Peace & Justice

Dr. Fisher Humphreys, Professor of Divinity, Emeritus, Samford University  
Birmingham, AL

Reverend Matt Randles, Pastor  
Evangelical Covenant Church  
Seattle, WA

Dr. John Phelan, former President and Dean of North Park Theological Seminary  
Chicago, IL