

To:

Mr. Raoul Schonemann
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From:

Cantor Michael Zoosman,
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Founder:

“L’chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty”
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/996205437512710/?ref=share>

Advisory Board Member:

Death Penalty Action
<http://deathpenaltyaction.org/jewish-action>

RE: Spiritual Support for Execution Reprieve for Mr. Ramiro Gonzales

Shalom Mr. Schonemann,

My name is Cantor Michael Zoosman, and I write this message of wholehearted support for the petition for reprieve of my longtime pen pal Mr. Ramiro Gonzales.

A few words about me. I am ordained Jewish clergy (The Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, '08), a former Prison Chaplain, and a current multifaith federal hospital chaplain. I am a member in good standing of Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains. I also am a third-generation Holocaust survivor and the founder of “L’chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty,” a group that opposes state killing by any means, including via lethal injection, as first implemented by the Nazis as part of the Aktion T4 protocol.

I write letters and emails to anyone in our nation faced with imminent execution. Some respond - many do not. Ramiro responded eagerly to my first email to him on January 24, 2021 after I learned of his execution date in April of that year, which was set to take place on Hitler’s birthday.

Ramiro was the first person in Texas with whom I corresponded, and has since been a faithful correspondent. He has sent me dozens of letters since January of last year, and I have responded to each via JPay. It has been very clear to me from his first letter that

Ramiro is a person of profound faith in his Messianic Christian tradition. He has expressed sincere repentance for the life he took and has spoken with me with great interest of Jewish ideas about repentance and forgiveness. Upon his request, I have sent him religious materials and books on spiritual matters.

Early in our correspondence, it happened that a member of my home congregation - Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Synagogue in Bethesda, MD - informed us of her need for a kidney donor. I put the word out far and wide on email and social media, but there was no one who responded. When I mentioned this to Ramiro, he immediately and unequivocally indicated his hope of being able to do this. In his letters to me, he expressed his desire to be able to give life before his life is taken. It is my impression that his wish to do this has been out of his hope of saving a life after he has taken another. He knew that his altruistic action would not stop his execution. He only wanted the chance to help another human being in need. When this specific opportunity to donate to a member of our congregation was no longer available, Ramiro eagerly explored how he might be able to donate a kidney to another in need before his execution.

I have known many convicted criminals in my time, both the innocent and - like Ramiro - the guilty. Some to be sure would attempt a maneuver like this to try to beat the executioner's sword. Nothing in this would convince me that this is the case with Ramiro. There has been no doubt in my mind that Ramiro's desire to be an altruistic kidney donor is not motivated by a last-minute attempt to stop or delay his execution. I will go to my grave believing in my heart that this is something that Ramiro wants to do to help make his soul right with his G-d.

For this reason, I respectfully and sincerely submit this letter of support for a reprieve of Ramiro's execution for however much time is necessary to allow him to be an altruistic kidney donor - before Texas takes his life.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please feel free to contact me at this email or by phone at 860-830-0114 with any questions or concerns.

L'shalom uL'chaim - For Peace and For Life,

Cantor/Chaplain Michael Zoosman

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"With every cell of my being and with every fiber of my memory I oppose the death penalty in all forms. I do not believe any civilized society should be at the service of death. I don't think it's human to become an agent of the angel of death."

- Holocaust Survivor and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel (1928-2016)

"Whoever destroys a life, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world." - The Talmud (Jewish Oral Law) Sanhendrin 4:5)