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The bishops leading Tennessee's three Catholic dioceses said the planned Dec. 6 execution of a man convicted of brutally killing of a young mentally handicapped woman fails to serve the "common good of advancing toward a more just society."

Bishop Richard Stika of Knoxville, Bishop Mark Spalding of Nashville and Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, of Louisville, Kentucky, who is apostolic administrator of Memphis, said in a Dec. 5 statement that David Miller, should be "punished severely," but that his life should not be taken.

Miller's attorneys continued seeking to delay the execution hours before it was set to occur at 7:10 p.m. local time. Miller, 61, has been on death row since 1982.

Miller was convicted of the 1980 death of Lee Standifer, 23. Investigators found her body May 21, 1981 in the backyard of a Knoxville home where Miller was living. Authorities determined that Standifer was killed by two blows to the head and that she was stabbed eight times after she died.

The bishops acknowledged that the Miller's crime was unjustified and that he deprived Standifer of "her God-given gift of a joyful and fulfilling life."

They also said the "horrendous conditions and abuse" Miller experienced as a child and young adult that were revealed in recent news reports do not mean he should absolved of responsibility for Standifer's death, "but they do shed light on the impact of sin and the destruction of a soul."

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The statement expressed concern for the rising pace of executions in Tennessee and noted that six other people are scheduled to be put to death by April 2020.

"The church teaches that the death penalty is simply not necessary when society has other means to protect itself and provide a just punishment for those who break civil laws," the trio of bishop said. "Rather than service as a path to justice, the death penalty contributes to the growing disrespect for human life."

All death-row inmates "still retain their human dignity and deserve a chance to live," the statement said.

"The lives of victims and sinners alike should be respected," it added saying, "the taking of another life will serve no purpose but vengeance."