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Father Fidelis Moscinski, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, is seen leading fellow pro-life advocates in prayer Sept. 19, 2020, outside a Planned Parenthood center in Hempstead on Long Island, N.Y. He was among 23 pro-life activists pardoned for violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, or FACE Act, by President Donald Trump Jan. 23, 2025. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz, CNS)

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On the eve of the national March for Life rally in Washington, President Donald Trump announced Jan. 23 he was issuing pardons for 23 protesters arrested for violating the federal Freedom of Access to Clinics (FACE) Act.

Trump signed the pardons in the Oval Office.

"They should not have been prosecuted. Many of them are elderly people," he told reporters. "This is a great honor to sign this."

The Thomas More Society, the Chicago-based public interest law firm, had earlier in January announced it had submitted formal requests to pardon 21 pro-life activists convicted under the FACE Act. They included Joan Bell, Coleman Boyd, Joel Curry, Jonathan Darnel, Eva Edl, Chester Gallagher, William Goodman, Dennis Green, Lauren Handy, Paulette Harlow, John Hinshaw, Heather Idoni, Jean Marshall, Father Fidelis Moscinski, Justin Phillips, Paul Place, Paul Vaughn, Bevelyn Beatty Williams, Calvin Zastrow, Eva Zastrow, and James Zastrow.

The two other convicted pro-life activists pardoned by Trump are Herb Geraghty of Pennsylvania and Jay Smith of New York.

Many are still incarcerated. Lauren Handy, a Catholic convicted for her participation in a 2020 abortion clinic blockade in Washington, has been serving the longest sentence: 57 months.

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According to a list maintained by Citizens for a Pro-Life Society, Handy is currently in a federal prison in Florida. Idoni is incarcerated in Florida; Marshall and Goodman in Connecticut; Darnel and Calvin Zastrow in Illinois; Hinshaw in Massachusetts;

Geraghty in Pennsylvania; and Williams, who was arrested for protesting outside an abortion clinic in New York City, in Alabama.

"Today, freedom rings in our great nation," said Steve Crampton, senior counsel for the Thomas More Society. "The heroic peaceful pro-lifers unjustly imprisoned by Biden's Justice Department will now be freed and able to return home to their families, eat a family meal, and enjoy the freedom that should have never been taken from them in the first place."

Moscinski, a member of the Franciscan Fathers of the Renewal, issued his own statement expressing gratitude to President Trump for the pardons.

"The pardons corrected the injustice of our prosecutions and incarceration but the daily and horrific injustice of abortion continues," he said. "And it must be stopped."

At the same time, the Catholic priest leveled criticism at the president over his position that the states should decide abortion policy.

"Although it might be politically expedient to say that each state should make its own laws about abortion, this position is morally incoherent," he said. "We invite President Trump to abandon this incoherence and show himself to be a president of all Americans — born and unborn."