News



The South Carolina Department of Corrections headquarters is seen behind barbed wire fence. Death row inmate Brad Sigmon is scheduled to be executed March 7, 2025, by firing squad method at the Broad River Correctional Institution in Columbia, South Carolina. (OSV News/Reuters/Shannon Stapleton)

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As South Carolina prepared to carry out the first execution by firing squad in the U.S. since 2010, Catholic activists against the death penalty had sought clemency from that state's governor.

But Brad Keith Sigmon, who was convicted of the 2001 murders of Gladys and David Larke, his ex-girlfriend's parents, was executed March 7 and was pronounced dead at 6:08 p.m. Previously, officials indicated he would be strapped to a chair specially designed for the purpose and have a hood placed over his head while three corrections staffers, who volunteered for the role, aimed loaded rifles at his heart and fired a shot.

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Sigmon, who chose the firing squad over other means of execution, admitted to killing the Larkes.

But faith groups, including Catholic Mobilizing Network, filed petitions asking Gov. Henry McMaster, a Republican, for clemency. McMaster declined to do so.

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, CMN's executive director, said in a March 3 statement that Sigmon "chose this method because compared to its alternatives — lethal injection and the electric chair — it seemed to him the most humane."

"It's hard not to look at these methods and think, 'How did we get here? And how does our society think this inhumanity is somehow acceptable?' The reality is, those are the questions we should ask ourselves each time there is an execution, because the death penalty is contrary to human dignity and an affront to the sanctity of life," she said.

"The outrage we feel toward these execution methods is a reminder that, over time, the system of capital punishment has become all the more deceptive to make

executions appear more palatable, sterile and 'humane,'" she added. "But executions are never any of these things."

"Whether someone is shot, electrocuted, injected or gassed, each and every execution extinguishes a God-given life with inherent dignity and worth. Each and every execution is a blatant act of state sanctioned violence," she said.

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Asked for comment on the execution, as well as if the governor had any response to the petitions from faith groups, a spokesperson for McMaster directed OSV News to comments he made to local media prior to the execution that state officials were "prepared, ready, to execute the law."

McMaster previously signed a 2021 bill into law that permitted execution by firing squad in the state but named the electric chair the state's primary means of execution. Those changes were made as states seeking to carry out executions faced a shortage of the drugs used to administer lethal injections as fewer pharmaceutical companies chose to produce them. Sigmon's execution is the first execution by firing squad in the state's modern history.

The Catholic Church's magisterium opposes the use of the death penalty as inconsistent with the inherent sanctity of human life. In his 2020 encyclical Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis addressed the moral problem of capital punishment by citing St. John Paul II, writing that his predecessor "stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice."

"There can be no stepping back from this position," Francis wrote. Echoing the teaching he clarified in his 2018 revision of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the pontiff said, "Today we state clearly that 'the death penalty is inadmissible' and the church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide."