News

Ron DeSantis at press conference

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks during a news conference as he visits a temporary migrant detention center informally known as "Alligator Alcatraz" in Ochopee July 1. The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops in an Aug. 21 letter asked DeSantis to stay the Aug. 28 scheduled execution of Curtis Windom and commute his sentence to life imprisonment without parole. (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)

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The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops has asked Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, to stay the Aug. 28 scheduled execution of Curtis Windom and commute his sentence to life imprisonment without parole.

Windom was convicted of killing Johnnie Lee, Valerie Davi and Mary Lubin on Feb. 7, 1992, and was sentenced to death. The Florida Supreme Court on Aug. 21 rejected a last-minute appeal in the case, allowing the scheduled Aug. 28 execution at Florida State Prison in Raiford to proceed.

In an Aug. 21 letter to DeSantis, Michael Sheedy, FCCB executive director, wrote, "We mourn the tragic deaths of Mr. Lee, Ms. Davis, and Ms. Lubin, and we feel

sorrow for the terrible suffering their loved ones have had to live with ever since. May they find comfort in God. Indeed, the Church remains available to assist them with pastoral care."

"Nevertheless, even as we pray for the repose of the souls of the victims and for the consolation of their survivors, we urge you to spare Mr. Windom's life," Sheedy wrote. "Every human life, given by God, is sacred."

Florida's Catholic bishops have routinely appealed to the Sunshine State's governor to reverse course on capital punishment as he seeks to expand its use. DeSantis, who ran a failed campaign for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, is Catholic.

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In an action alert on its website, Catholic Mobilizing Network, a group that advocates for the abolition of capital punishment in line with Catholic teaching said, "We oppose this execution as we do every execution."

"Capital punishment is an act of state sanctioned violence that violates the sacred dignity of every human life," the message said. "In the words of Saint Pope John Paul II, 'The dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil.' "

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"Curtis experienced a childhood that was rife with trauma and abuse, particularly at the hands of his father," the group said. "His experiences of abuse, combined with physical trauma to the head resulted in his mental illness and impairment, which was not properly evaluated prior to his trial. Like many others on death row, Curtis was provided ineffective counsel who did little to defend his client and was monitored by the trial judge for intoxication daily. After representing Curtis, that attorney was eventually disbarred after multiple DUI arrests."

The group urged its supporters to contact DeSantis and Florida's Office of Executive Clemency, asking them to stop Windom's execution, "and to turn away from capital punishment in their state."