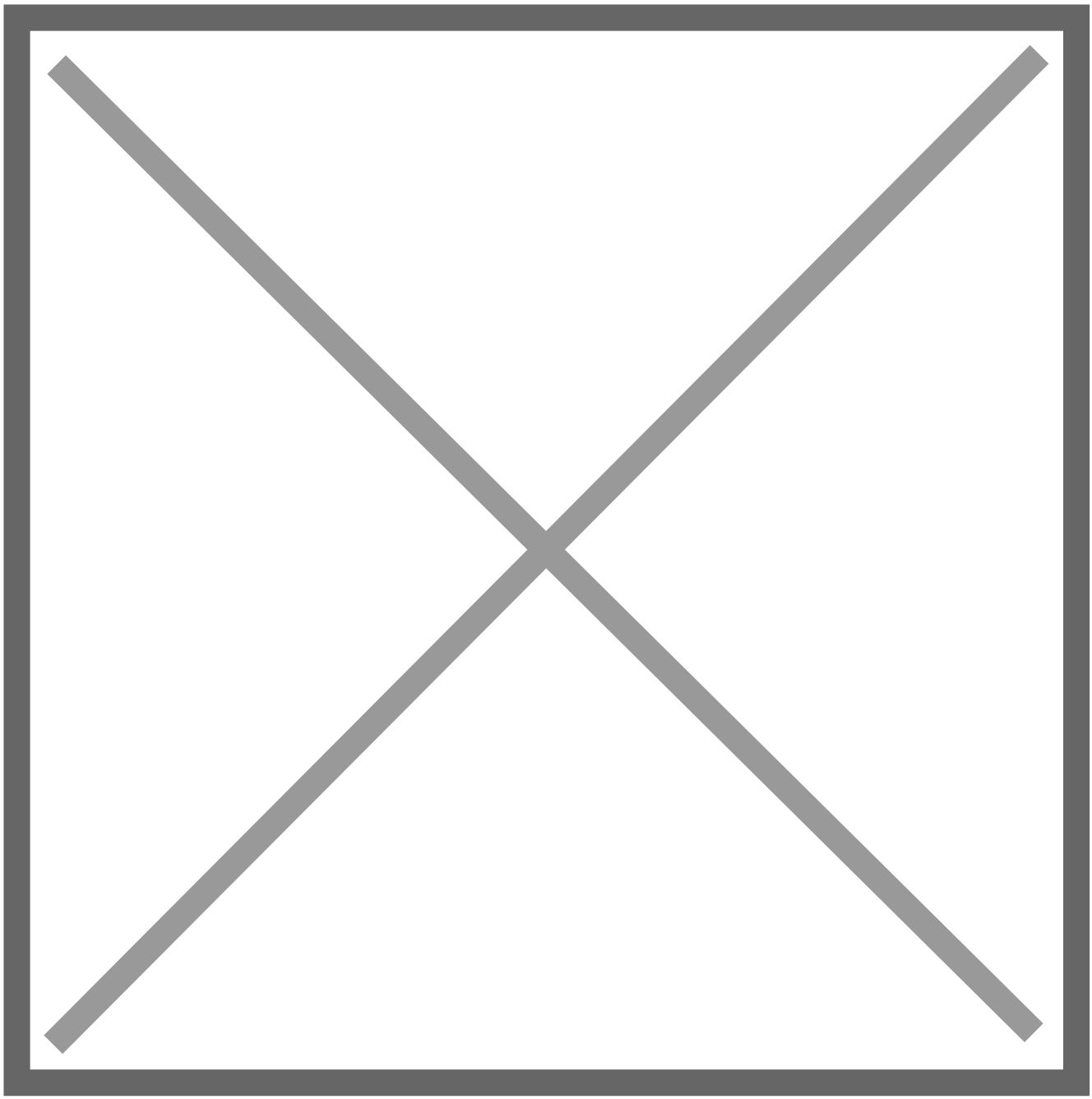
News



Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is pictured in a July 17, 2023, photo. The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops Dec. 2, 2025, asked DeSantis to stay two executions scheduled to take place on Dec. 9 and 18. (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Wurm)



by OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Tallahassee, Fla. — December 8, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint
Read this next: New coalition aims to end capital punishment as executions increase but public support wanes

Saying it is possible both to uphold justice and to exercise mercy, Florida's Catholic bishops have urged Gov. Ron DeSantis to stay executions scheduled for Dec. 9 and Dec. 18.

Mark Geralds is scheduled to be executed Dec. 9 for the 1989 murder of Tressa Lynn Pettibone. Frank Walls is scheduled for execution on Dec. 18 for the murder of Ann Peterson in 1987.

In separate letters to DeSantis on behalf of Geralds and Walls Dec. 2, Michael Sheedy, executive director of the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops, called on Desantis to halt the two executions and commute both sentences to life without parole.

Sheedy recognized the duty of the state to punish the offenders for their grave crimes yet pleaded with the governor to spare their lives.

"To punish with lifelong imprisonment is not to minimize the heinousness" of their crimes, wrote Sheedy. "It is rather to recognize with awe that God is the author of life, and to reserve to him the taking of human life except where it is otherwise impossible to maintain the common good."

Catholic faithful and members of the community will gather in multiple locations across Florida to pray for the condemned men, for the families of their victims, and for DeSantis as he considers the request to stay the executions, according to a Dec. 3 news release from the state Catholic conference, the public policy arm of the church in Florida.

Advertisement

The Catholic Church's official magisterium opposes the use of capital punishment as inconsistent with the inherent sanctity of human life, and advocates for the practice's abolition worldwide.

The late Pope Francis revised the Catechism of the Catholic Church in 2018 to clarify the church's teaching that capital punishment is morally "inadmissible" in the modern world and that the church works with determination for its abolishment worldwide.

In his 2020 encyclical Fratelli Tutti, 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."

About a decade prior to becoming Pope Leo XIV earlier this year, then-Bishop Robert Prevost also raised his voice in support of abolishing capital punishment, writing in a March 5, 2015, post on X, then known as Twitter, "It's time to end the death penalty."