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Barring commutation from Gov. Ron DeSantis, William Silvia will be executed by lethal injection

Barring commutation from Gov. Ron DeSantis, William Silvia will be executed by lethal injection at Florida State Prison in Raiford Aug. 18. Silvia was convicted in 2008 of first-degree murder for killing his estranged wife, Patricia Silvia. (OSV News/Courtesy St. Augustine Catholic/Fran Ruchalski)



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"Every human life, given by God, is sacred," Florida's Catholic bishops told Gov. Ron DeSantis Aug. 13 in urging him to stay the execution of William Silvia and commute his death sentence to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Silvia, now 61, was convicted June 6, 2008, of first-degree murder for killing his estranged wife, Patricia Silvia, in 2006. He was sentenced to death on Jan. 28, 2009. His execution by lethal injection is scheduled for Aug. 18.

If executed, he will become the 13th inmate put to death by Florida this year. He is currently housed on death row at Florida State Prison.

In a letter to DeSantis, who is Catholic, Michael Sheedy, executive director of the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops in Tallahassee, acknowledged the gravity of Silvia's crimes but appealed to the governor for mercy. "Mr. Silvia's crimes were heinous and merit severe punishment by the state," Sheedy wrote. "Nevertheless, we ask that you spare Mr. Silvia's life."

"We mourn the tragic death of Patricia, and we feel sorrow for the terrible suffering her family has had to live with ever since," Sheedy said. "May they find comfort in God. Indeed, the Church remains available to assist them with pastoral care."

Citing St. John Paul II's 1995 encyclical [*Evangelium Vitae*](#) ("The Gospel of Life"), Sheedy reaffirmed the church's consistent teaching on the sanctity of human life and the dignity of every person, emphasizing that "not even a murderer loses his personal dignity."

The Catholic Church opposes the use of capital punishment as a violation of 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.

"To punish with lifelong imprisonment is not to minimize the heinousness of Mr. Silvia's crimes," Sheedy said. "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."

"We appeal to you that it is possible both to uphold justice and to exercise mercy," he added.

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The state Catholic conference, the public policy arm of Florida's Catholic bishops, said that in the days leading up to the execution, "Catholic faithful will gather with community members at various locations across Florida to pray for the soul of Patricia Silvia, for Mr. Silvia as he faces execution, and for Gov. DeSantis as he considers the request to spare his life."

Silvia's scheduled execution "comes at an alarming moment for the death penalty in Florida," said an alert posted on the website of [Catholic Mobilizing Network](#), a group that advocates for the abolition of capital punishment in line with Catholic teaching.

"If carried out, his execution would be the 13th this year — more than in all other states combined," it said. "Additionally, this execution comes on the heels of July 28, where the state executed two individuals on the same day for the first time in its

modern death penalty history."

"We oppose this execution as we do every execution," the organization said, asking people to contact DeSantis and the Florida Board of Executive Clemency and urge them to grant Silvia clemency.

Catholic Mobilizing Network noted that Silvia was convicted of murder by a nonunanimous jury (11-1) and sentenced to death.

The organization said that he had waived his postconviction appeals, but after [*Hurst v. Florida*](#) raised issues with Florida's sentencing program, William sought to reopen his appeals which the trial court allowed. This decision was overturned by the Florida Supreme Court.

In *Hurst v. Florida* Jan. 12, 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 8-1 that Florida's death penalty system is unconstitutional because it allows judges, rather than juries, to determine whether a convicted criminal should get a death sentence.