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CATHOLIC BISHOPS ASK GOV. GREGOIRE TO COMMUTE DEATH PENALTY

The bishops of Washington's three Catholic dioceses have requested that Gov. Christine Gregoire commute the death sentence of Darold Ray Stenson to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

Stenson, 55, was found guilty of aggravated murder in the shooting deaths of his wife and business partner in 1993. His execution at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla is scheduled for December 3.

"The citizens of Washington have reason to punish Mr. Stenson," said Seattle Archbishop Alex J. Brunett, chairman of the Washington State Catholic Conference. "As pastors, we are sympathetic to the pain of victims and their families and we recognize the responsibility of the state to maintain public safety, but state-sanctioned killing only erodes respect for the dignity of life."


The three bishops made their request to Gov. Gregoire in a letter dated Nov. 21 (See bishops’ letter attached). In the letter, the bishops stated the death penalty robs the state of moral consistency and perpetuates the violence state law seeks to prevent.

"As the bishops of Washington state, we are unified in our belief that the death penalty should be abolished," Archbishop Brunett said. "The state justly administers severe punishment for violent crimes like that of Mr. Stenson. That is why we recommend a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

"However, our efforts to protect innocent life and deter violent crime cannot become a justification for actions that undermine our belief in the value of human life," he said. "With the methods of incarceration available to us today, there remains no moral justification for imposing a sentence of death."

Stenson would be the first inmate put to death in Washington since James Elledge was executed in August 2001. Because he declined to choose between lethal injection and hanging, Stenson would be killed by lethal injection if the execution goes forward as planned.

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