STATEMENT ON A PLEA FOR BENNIE E. DEMPS

May 25, 2000

The 1976 murder of Alfred Sturgis was a terrible crime. His brutalization and loss of his life arouse our deepest regrets and our sympathy for his survivors. **Bennie Demps** is scheduled to die on Wednesday evening, May 31, for this crime. The Bishops of Florida ask Governor Bush to halt this execution.

Neither retribution nor deterrence justify taking a human life, even one guilty of a terrible crime. It is only when society cannot be protected in any other way that the death penalty is justified. We diminish ourselves as a people by taking away a human life. Every human life must be respected, even lives who fail to show that respect for others. Florida's alternative law of providing life imprisonment with no opportunity for parole allows our society to be protected, and allows for remediation of those who have committed crimes.

Only a few do not acknowledge that our system of capital punishment is imperfect. We are regularly reminded of this by government appointed task forces and commissions, new Supreme Court rules, recurring legislation and even a special session to deal with problems of the death penalty. Still we do not find the affluent on death row; sometimes it happens that co-defendants who plea bargain are even more culpable than those who end up on death row; and, our consciences are plagued by concerns for racial disparity and the possibility of executing an innocent person.

We join with others in calling for a moratorium on executions, but here and now appeal to Governor Bush for clemency and a stay of the death sentence for Bennie E. Demps.

Archbishop John C. Favalora

Archdiocese of Miami

Bishop John J. Snyder Diocese of St. Augustine

Bishop John J. Nevins Diocese of Venice

Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee

Bishop Robert N. Lynch Diocese of St. Petersburg

Bishop Norbert M. Dorsey, CP

Diocese of Orlando

Bishop Anthony J. O'Connell

Diocese of Palm Beach

Bishop Agústin A. Román

Archdiocese of Miami

Bishop Gilberto Fernandez

Archdiocese of Miami

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski

Archdiocese of Miami