



## **Catholic Bishops of Florida Urge Governor Crist to Halt Executions**

**Tallahassee** – The bishops of Florida delivered a letter to Governor Charlie Crist urging him to stop executions in Florida, beginning with the July 1, 2008 scheduled execution of Mark Dean Schwab. Full text of letter follows.

While praying for the victim, Junny Rios-Martinez, and recognizing the inability to fully grasp the pain experienced by the victim's family, the bishops lament that taking the life of another who has killed perpetuates violence as a solution.

"The Lord commands us to forgive, just as our heavenly Father has forgiven us. It is only through the process of forgiveness that we are healed and our suffering can be alleviated," said Bishop Victor Galeone, Episcopal Moderator for the State Pro-Life Coordinating Committee of the Florida Catholic Conference and bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine.

The bishops call on Governor Crist to set a new standard of respect for the sanctity of all life in our state. Sheila Hopkins, Associate Director for Social Concerns/Respect Life, said "More and more states in our nation are taking a second look at the use of the death penalty as a form of punishment. Over the years, studies within our own state have reported an inequality and inconsistency in who receives a death sentence".

June 25, 2008

The Honorable Charlie Crist  
The Capitol – Plaza Level 05  
400 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

### ***RE: Death Penalty - Mark Dean Schwab***

Dear Governor Crist:

We appeal to you as Governor of our state to stop executions in Florida beginning with Mark Dean Schwab, scheduled for execution July 1, 2008. Life in prison without possibility of parole is severe punishment and assures that the public will be protected.

We can never fully comprehend the pain the victim's family feels after losing their loved one and we extend our sincere sympathy to the family of Junny Rios-Martinez, the victim in this crime. But killing someone because they killed only perpetuates violence and coarsens the public's attitude about the sanctity of life, including the lives of those who have committed grave offenses.

While we recognize the right of the State to impose the death penalty, we urge your leadership allowing Florida to join the growing number of states who are re-examining the death penalty as a means of punishing those convicted of capital offenses. In 1991, a Florida Supreme Court study commission found "the application of the death penalty in Florida is not colorblind". Almost ten years later, the Governor's Task Force on Capital Cases recommended reforms, many of which have not been implemented. As recently as 2006, the Florida Death Penalty Assessment Team, working with the American Bar Association, released their report citing serious problems in Florida's death penalty

system. The recurring question of innocence, the exorbitant cost, the inconsistency in sentencing, and the capriciousness of who is executed, each calls for re-examination.

Governor Crist, you can set a new standard of respect for life in Florida, turning away from execution and imposing a life sentence without possibility of parole for Mark Dean Schwab. Incarceration allows the wrongdoer the possibility of conversion and the ability to make public restitution for crimes through life imprisonment.

As we pray for Junny Rios-Martinez and his family, we pray also for you, as well as for those on death row, that we all will acknowledge God as the Lord of Life, and that we all may learn, not only to obey the commandment not to kill human life, but also to revere it.

Sincerely in the Lord,

**Archbishop John C. Favalora**  
Archdiocese of Miami

**Bishop Victor Galeone**  
Diocese of St. Augustine

**Bishop Robert N. Lynch**  
Diocese of St. Petersburg

**Bishop Thomas G. Wenski**  
Diocese of Orlando

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

**Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito**  
Diocese of Palm Beach

**Bishop Frank J. Dewane**  
Diocese of Venice

**Auxiliary Bishop Felipe J. Estevez**  
Archdiocese of Miami

**Auxiliary Bishop John G. Noonan**  
Archdiocese of Miami