

## Pope makes plea to spare life of Troy Davis

By Vicky Eckenrode

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ATLANTA - The state clemency board reviewing the death sentence of Troy Anthony Davis is continuing to receive an unprecedented amount of letters about the case, ranging from Savannah neighbors to international religious leaders.

The Vatican added its support this week for commuting Davis' sentence to life in prison without parole.

A U.S. envoy for Pope Benedict XVI, the leader of 1.1 billion Roman Catholics worldwide, sent a letter urging state officials to consider the special circumstances in the case, specifically that Davis' "conviction was not based on any physical evidence, and the murder weapon was never found."

"The pope continually exhorts all people, and especially those men and women who serve in government, to recognize the sacredness of all human life," wrote Monsignor Martin Krebs. "I reiterate the commitment of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, to uphold the sacredness and dignity of all human life, and I hope that you will give heed to his petition."

Krebs' letter was mailed early this week to Gov. Sonny Perdue's office. Staff members there forwarded it to the state Board of Pardons and Paroles to add to its sizable stack of petitions.

### Lost authority

The governor's office lost its clemency authority in 1943 during a push to reduce its powers after Gov. Eugene Talmadge's term, according to the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

Now, Georgia is one of only three states in which the governor has no authority to grant clemency.

However, as with any state board, the governor can apply political pressure. The governor appoints board members, and the board is part of the executive branch. Fourteen states place clemency responsibility solely with the governor, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

In Savannah, family and friends were hopeful that a plea from the pope would result in clemency.

"If you are truly doing the right thing, God will open doors for you that no man can," said Nadra Enzi, who has worked with the Davis family, organizing community events. "How often does the pope make statements like this? Hopefully the pope's pleas for mercy will transcend political and racial lines."

A call to Davis' mother, Virginia, was not returned Friday afternoon.

Jason Ewart, an appeal attorney for Davis, said he was upbeat about the pope's involvement.

"I think most people could discern that the pope is against all loss of life. He's an abolitionist when it comes to the death penalty," Ewart said. "But you don't hear his name associated with every death penalty case. I think he came out on this case because it's an example of a needless loss of life."

### Review time

Georgia's five-member clemency board on Monday granted Davis a 90-day stay so members can spend more time reviewing his clemency request. Davis had been scheduled to die Tuesday night by lethal injection.

The letter on behalf of the pope is one of thousands that have been filed with the board in recent weeks, including petitions from other well-known people such as South African cleric Desmond Tutu and Sister Helen Prejean, who

wrote the book "Dead Man Walking."

Scheree Lipscomb, spokeswoman for the pardons and paroles board, said the agency has received thousands of letters and e-mails, including form letters supplied by Amnesty International through its Web site.

She said she has received 700 messages since the board issued its delay. Lipscomb said letters, whether from the pope or an interested individual, are all treated the same and are put into the case's file. She said she could not comment on the content of letters, including whether some have opposed commuting the death sentence for Davis.

Krebs stated in his letter, which was provided by Perdue's office, that he was conscious of the suffering felt by crime victims' family members and loved ones.

Davis attorney Jason Ewart said he was surprised when he heard the pope had taken an interest in the case as well as the overall response.

"I think it's an overwhelming volume that shows people are concerned about this case," he said. "I think that this thing has a lot of resonance because of the way the court has mistreated the case, in my opinion."

Savannah Morning News reporter Adam Crisp contributed to this report.

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