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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF KNOXVILLE

May 5, 2010

Governor Phil Bredesen
Governor's Office
Tennessee State Capital
Nashville, TN 37243-0001

Dear Governor Bredesen,

Recalling our meeting during Catholic Day on the Hill this past March and with gratefulness for the generosity of your time, I write regarding one of the very solemn and sacred responsibilities of your Office – the authority to grant clemency. I write regarding Gaile Owens who, twenty-five years after being sentenced to death for the contract murder of her husband, is now scheduled to be executed on September 28th.

I share your deep concern for the proper functioning of our criminal justice system and the protection of society. However, I also believe that mercy must always be the very heart of our justice system. I do not have detailed information before me of Gaile Owens' case which might somehow prove her deserving of this special consideration. I have but the image before me of Our Savior writing upon the ground with his finger as a woman condemned to death stood before him, much the way that Gaile Owens now stands before you.

I share with you a very memorable moment during the visit of Pope John Paul II to St. Louis in 1999 that I helped coordinate. At one point during his visit, the Pope leaned over to Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan and in his thick Polish accent said to him, "Show mercy for Mr. Mease." The Governor knew exactly what the Pope was asking because Darrell Mease had been scheduled to be executed on the day of the Pope's arrival for a triple murder he had committed in 1988. But so that the execution would not coincide with the Pope's visit, it was rescheduled for after his departure. However, at the Pope's request, Governor Carnahan commuted the death sentence to life in prison without parole. I remember clearly the Governor exclaiming, "How could I say no to the Pope?"

And so and I repeat those same two words that Governor Carnahan heard, "Show mercy..." show mercy to Gaile Owens.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Richard F. Stika
Bishop of Knoxville