

# Stay of execution for coordinator of faith-based program

October 26, 2023

HUNTSVILLE—Less than five hours before he was [scheduled to be put to death](#) by lethal injection on Oct. 26, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals granted a stay of execution for William Keith Speers, an inmate coordinator of the faith-based program on Texas Death Row.

In his [application](#) before the appeals court, Speer asserted his previous legal counsel had failed to investigate and present his long history of childhood abuse and neglect to the jury.

The application also asserted prosecutorial misconduct, suppression of evidence and the presentation of false testimony.

The stay of execution was granted “pending further order of this Court,” the appeals court wrote.

“We are relieved that Will Speer will live to see another day so he can continue to spread his message of hope and healing in Texas prisons,” said Amy Fly, one of Speer’s attorneys.

“Will’s life of ministry, and his efforts to offer some measure of peace to his victims’ families, are an inspiration. We are grateful for the thousands of people, including faith leaders and his victims’ survivors, who told the State of Texas that Will’s life was worth saving.”

Two days earlier, the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles unanimously denied Speer’s [request for clemency](#) or a 180-day reprieve.

Speer received the death sentence for the 1997 strangulation killing of a fellow inmate, Gary L. Dickerson, when they were at the Telford Unit in Bowie County.

At the time of the Dickerson killing, Speer was serving a life sentence for the shooting death of Jerry Lee Collins. Speer committed the Collins murder at age 16 but was tried as an adult.

Dickerson's sister, Sammie Gail Martin, [submitted a letter](#) to the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles asking the board and Gov. Greg Abbott to commute Speer's sentence to life imprisonment.

Martin wrote based on what she had learned about Speer in the past month, she believed "he is not only remorseful for his actions but has been doing good work for others and has something left to offer the world."

Speer professed a commitment to Christ and was baptized in June 2022 after spending six months in the faith-based program at the Allan B. Polunsky Unit, a maximum-security facility near Livingston.

Later, the chaplain and fellow inmates selected him as inmate coordinator for the program, and he is in the process of mentoring 13 fellow Death Row prisoners.