

COURT COMMUTES DEATH SENTENCE

ST. LOUIS (CNS) — The Missouri Supreme Court Aug. 26 commuted Christopher Simmons' death sentence to life in prison without parole.

Catholic groups, including teens from parishes in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, had opposed his execution, noting that Simmons was 17 at the time of his crime.

Simmons was sentenced in 1994 to death for the abduction and murder of Shirley Ann Crook in 1993.

GUNMAN GETS LIFE FOR CHURCH SHOOTINGS

ROCKVILLE CENTRE, N.Y. (CNS) — Peter Troy, convicted of killing the pastor and a parishioner last March at Our Lady of Peace Church in Lynbrook, received three consecutive life sentences, two of them without the possibility of parole.

Troy was convicted of fatally shooting Father Lawrence M. Penzes, 50, pastor of Our Lady of Peace Church, and 73-year-old Eileen Tosner, a lifelong parishioner.

Father Penzes and Tosner were shot March 12, 2002, just after the priest finished the homily during the 9 a.m. Mass. Police said Troy, who is Catholic, entered the church through the main doors at the back of the sanctuary, pulled a rifle from under his trench coat and opened fire.

IRISH NUN REBUTS

CLAIMS AGAINST ORDER

DUBLIN, Ireland (CNS) — Claims that the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity secretly buried the bodies of women who died in their care are "preposterous and untrue," said a spokeswoman for the order.

Sister Ann Marie Ryan, provincial superior of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in Dublin, said in a statement that all deaths at the order's laundry and convent were handled appropriately and within the law.

"We believe that this practice always pertained — although we do (not) have the records available at this time to indicate this."

Sister Ryan said many of the records were destroyed by a fire in Dublin.



File photo

Justice turns down request to annul Sacred Heart vote

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — State Supreme Court Justice Robert J. Lunn has dismissed a lawsuit brought by a group opposed to renovation of Sacred Heart Cathedral. The Sacred Heart Preservation Committee had petitioned Lunn to again annul the city planning commission's decision to deny landmark status for the cathedral.

On Aug. 28, Lunn denied the preservation committee's petition, saying he was satisfied that the planning commission had followed his instructions in deliberations prior to its two June 24 votes to deny landmark status for the cathedral's interior and exterior. Lunn said he had reviewed a videotape of the June planning commission meeting, and said the commission had properly balanced a variety of pertinent concerns surrounding landmark designation in its discussions.

Mary Giorgi, one of the five people who brought the petition, said she plans to appeal the ruling.

In May, Lunn ruled that the commission had to re-examine its October 2002 vote denying landmark status for the cathedral, noting that the commission had primarily considered the landmark designation's overall impact on the city's planning program and whether the designation would have an adverse impact on the city's growth and develop-

ment. He found that the commission did not tie these criteria to the overall purposes of landmark designation as set forth in the city code, nor did it make an effort to evaluate other factors in designating landmarks, including cultural and civic concerns.

In its second petition, the Sacred Heart Preservation Committee argued that the planning commission did not comply with the city's landmark ordinance or Lunn's May ruling. The petitioners said the commission failed to deliberate designating the cathedral's interior a landmark and gave undue weight to "mere neighborhood opposition" to landmark designation.

In a memo submitted to Lunn prior to Aug. 28, Alan Knauf, the attorney representing the Sacred Heart Preservation Committee, stated that in June the commission had "put the cart before the horse" by basing its decision mainly on the supposed impact landmark designation would have on the diocese's plans for renovation. He called the neighborhood groups' opposition to landmark status "'fruit of the forbidden tree' since it is based upon their support for the proposed renovations, which are irrelevant to the question of designation." In court, he added that the commission improperly considered the diocese's statement that it would relocate the cathedral if landmark

status was granted to Sacred Heart.

"The commission ... did not consider whether (landmark designation) would be harmful to the diocese," Johanna Brennan, the city's attorney, told Lunn Aug. 28. "They considered whether it would be harmful to the city. I think we literally and in spirit complied with all the requirements of your prior order."

Edward Hourihan, attorney for the diocese, said that in his May ruling Lunn had given the planning commission a "blueprint" for its decision-making process and "they followed it entirely." He added that he thought the likelihood of success with an appeal is very small.

Doug Mandelaro, diocesan spokesman, said the diocese was "delighted" with Lunn's ruling. Now, he said, the diocese will be able to proceed with renovations designed to update the cathedral to fulfill the universal church's liturgical norms, as well as improve its accessibility to people with handicaps, expand parking and install adequate restrooms. He noted that some renovation work has already taken place, including work on the cathedral roof.

"This is good for this city," Mandelaro said. "This is good for area Catholics ... I think (Bishop Matthew H. Clark) truly in his heart loves the cathedral and truly believes when it is done people will look at it and beam with pride."