Minister gives mourners Williams' last message

By DOUGLAS DEMMONS
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In his final message to the members of his church, Robert Wayne Williams warned of the horror of murder and the world of drugs and self-gratification that lead to it.

Williams, his minister told more than mourners at the Faith Chapel Church, had spent six weeks unable to sleep ring about the supermarket security guard he murdered during a robbery.

The Rev. J.D. Brown said Williams told him to tell his friends and family that he was repulsed by "the horror of seeing my hands bloodstained. I saw myself banished to hell and there was no forgiveness for me for the crime I committed."

"I want you to tell the people," Brown said, quoting Williams two days before Williams' death in the electric chair, "how deep and lost I was, how hopeless I felt. Tell them about what drugs had really done to me, tell them about how I lost respect for myself."

Williams became the first man executed in Louisiana in 22 years when he died Wednesday morning for the murder of Willie Kelly. Friday night Williams' body lay in an open, copper-colored casket in front of the congregation.

No effort was made to cover Williams' shaved head. At his request no cosmetic rectification was performed on his body so that those viewing him could "turn away from a life of crime."

The small, cinder-block chapel on Staring Lane was filled to capacity. Flowers surrounded the casket and on the front row some of his many relatives wept. Much of the two-hour evening service was an impassioned plea by speakers against the death penalty.

The Rev. Reginald Pitcher told the gathering that Williams went to his death with dignity and grace.

"I see in him courage and strong convictions," Pitcher said. "When he faced the death chair, he could have groveled and begged for mercy, but he didn't. He said, 'I want all of those who fight the death penalty to keep on fighting.'"

Pitcher urged the mostly black audience to fight harder against the death penalty because it is inflicted most often on blacks. Those of us who stand to gain the most from the abolition of capital punishment fail to realize that it affects us as black people more. Yet when we give a rally we see the white brothers and sisters of conscience," he said.

"If a man hasn't found something worth dying for, then he isn't fit to live," Pitcher said, quoting The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to thunderous applause. "Let Robert's death not be in vain. Let it be a message that the death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment and we should fight it with every ounce of determination."

State Rep. Joe Delput, D-Baton Rouge, also denounced the death penalty as unfair to poor and black people.

He told the crowd that he and the other members of the state Legislature's black caucus were first refused a meeting with Gov. Treen before they were finally allowed to talk to him and request a reprieve for Williams.

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Williams

He said Treen and the caucus members cried during the "very tense" meeting. Another of Williams' supporters, Ronald Montelaro, said he told an aide to the governor that the common factor among all condemned men was poverty. He said the aide replied "That's because rich people don't go around killing people."

Williams' attorney, Sam Dalton, told mourners that he had accepted no money from his court appointment to defend Williams "because I'm not going to give them the dignity of saying they paid me."

He told of how he stood before a judge and heard the order read that he be put to death in the electric chair.

"Thank God the man that read that death warrant is dead and gone. The man that would pull that switch is dead and gone and Robert Jones is here and still fighting. I'll fight, fight, fight," he said.

Death Row inmate from Kentucky, Robert Jones, who said he was "sent by God" to speak out against the death penalty. He told of how he stood before a judge and heard the order read that he be put to death in the electric chair.

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John Williams/Morning Advocate