Death

(Continued from 1A)

Rose Williams, the mother of Robert Wayne Williams who died in the electric chair in December, and other representatives of anti-death penalty groups.

Ott told Edwards that the death penalty is a "very simple solution to a very complex problem." He said forgiveness is a Judeo-Christian principle that should prevail, reminding how Pope John Paul II recently shook hands with his would-be assailant.

"We can break the cycle of violence" by eliminating the death penalty, Ott said.

Fran Bussie told Edwards that the group was particularly concerned about the Sonnier case because "he has exhausted all appeals." Sister Helen Prejean, Sonnier's spiritual adviser, made an impassioned plea to Edwards for Sonnier's life.

"Here is a man that should not be killed. Granted he did a terrible crime but ... It will do no good to kill him. Here is a man who has been rehabilitated. Here is a man that could do some good in prison."

"If he had good (legal) advice and could pay for it, there is no way he would be on death row today," Sister Prejean told Edwards.

Sonnier's new attorney Millard Farmer said evidence of how justice is unequally applied is found in the murder case itself. He said Sonnier's brother got a life sentence where he got death.

At a news conference earlier in the day, Edwards had said "Unless and until I am satisfied that there is new evidence ... that might mitigate the death penalty, it is not my intent to interfere with the process."

Edwards declined to state his personal views on the death penalty; saying he feared he might evoke another controversy like the one brewing over his religious beliefs.

Three executions are scheduled for next week at Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.

Robert Lee Willie has a April 3 date with death in the electric chair for the 1980 rape-murder of 18-year-old Faith Coleen Hathaway of Mandeville.

On April 5, convicted murderers Earnest Knighton Jr. of Bossier Parish and Elmo Sonnier of St. Mary Parish are both scheduled to die.

Knighton was convicted in the 1981 death of a service station employee killed during the course of a robbery. Sonnier was convicted in the 1977 death of two teen-agers — Loretta Ann Bourgue and David Leblanc.

The governor said both the Legislature and the courts have spoken on the death penalty and his personal views would not interfere with those stands.

Death penalty opponents advised to seek changes

By MARSHA SHULER
Capitol news bureau

Gov. Edwards advised anti-death penalty forces Tuesday to seek a change in public attitude and state law in order to stop future executions, saying he must abide by the law although he may not necessarily agree with it.

"It's not a question of my giving consent ... All I can tell you is that I am representing the state and following the will of the Legislature and my own personal views have to be submerged to what I consider to be the expressed will of the people ... It's a horrible burden for me," Edwards said.

Edwards met for about 45 minutes with about a dozen persons who expressed opposition to the death penalty and sought help, in particular, to block the impending execution of double-murderer Elmo Patrick Sonnier — the one of three scheduled next week that officials believe is the most likely.

(See DEATH, 6A)