

Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico

Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Four U.S. Church Women in El Salvador

We invite you to purchase a copy or copies of our Special Edition of Central America and Mexico Report, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the martyrdom of the four U.S. Church Women who died December 2, 1980 in El Salvador.

If you would like a copy of this issue, or would like to order bulk copies, please let us know by email: general@rtfcam.org as soon as possible. Single copies cost \$5.00 (includes postage). 10 copies cost \$10.00. Prices include postage and will be sent priority mail (ten copies and under).

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If you would like to make one final donation to the Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico – to help us close free from debt and give back to those who have generously helped us along the way – please send your contribution to the Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico, 3321 12th St. NE, Washington DC 20017.



A Scattering of Seeds

By Scott Wright

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In this issue - our final issue - we commemorate the lives and deaths of the four U.S. Church Women who were martyred in El Salvador on December 2, 1980. We commemorate as well, the anniversary of the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, who were martyred November 16, 1989.

It has been a long journey, and we will continue to walk with you and with the poor of Central America and Mexico on new paths yet to be forged. We think of the wisdom of the Gospel: "Unless a seed fall to earth and die, it will bear no fruit; but if it die, how great the fruit!"

May this labor of love over 25 years - yours and ours - be like a scattering of seeds, bearing fruit along the way as we continue the journey.

Throughout these years, we have kept the memory of the martyrs alive, and we have asked: What do they require of us today? We think especially of the four Church Women - Maura, Ita, Dorothy, Jean - and ask, "What would they be doing today, if they were living in our times?"

What insights do their courage give us into how we ought to respond today to a myriad of challenges: The war in Iraq; the practice of torture; the migrants dying in the Arizona desert; the growing divide between rich and poor; the structural poverty and racism in our own country revealed by the disaster of Hurricane Katrina?

We don't have to look far to know. Because they chose to live in the midst of war and cry out for an end to violence; they saw the victims of torture and cried out for an end to torture; they offered food, shelter and medicines to the families displaced by the war and; they took sides with the poor and cried out for justice.

In a word, they shared the same fate as the poor.

To What Do They Call Us Today?

Today, if they were living, we are certain that they would be found among the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast; we are certain they would be there with the migrants dying in the Arizona desert, calling for a more just and humane immigration policy and welcome to the stranger in our midst.

They would be at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, calling for an end to the practice of training armies in Latin America who torture, and disappear and kill their own people - the very same School that trained the Salvadoran military responsible for their own deaths. They would be in the streets calling for an end to the war in Iraq - a war based on lies and deception - and to the abominable practice of torture by our own government in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

Why do we say this? Can we be sure? How do we know they would be there, doing these things?

We can be certain they would be there, simply, because you are there. And you are the ones, by your lives and your witness for justice and for peace, who keep alive the memory of the martyrs.

So we offer you a word of thanks, for your faithfulness, not only to us, but much more - to them.

Today our hearts go out to the peoples of Central America as they struggle with basic issues of survival and rebuilding of their lives after so many disasters: hurricanes and earthquakes, but also wars and poverty. We pray for an outpouring of compassion and solidarity, that we may continue to address in systemic ways the underlying human failings - structural poverty, racism, violation of human rights, destruction of the environment - that these and other natural and human disasters unmask with such brutal clarity.

We think of Archbishop Romero's words about the resilience of the poor, when he spoke about the capacity of the Salvadoran people to overcome suffering - and bear witness to hope. Let us continue to encourage a spirit of solidarity with the victims of natural and human disasters - wherever they occur - and help create conditions of hope for their future.

Thank You for Your Faithfulness!

In that spirit, we want to thank you again for your faithfulness through the years.

Twenty-five years ago, in response to a call from Archbishop Romero for solidarity, the Religious Task Force on El Salvador (as it was called then) was formed, as a six-month emergency response to the critical situation of the people and church of El Salvador. The date was March 7, just two weeks before the assassination of the beloved Salvadoran pastor.

With little more than a deep commitment to solidarity and attentiveness to the signs of the Spirit moving in our times, a handful of people representing Catholic religious orders and justice and peace organizations formed the Religious Task Force. We had no staff, and we had no money, but we did have an abundance of good will to respond to the cry of the poor.

Now, twenty-five years later, we live in a very different world. The challenges we face today are different from what we faced 25 years ago when we created the Religious Task Force on El Salvador. They call for new perspectives and new structures to adequately respond to the need for justice in our hemisphere, and at home as well.

Today, we want to bring closure to the task force created twenty-five years ago. It has lasted for many more than the six months originally intended and has responded well to many, many crises in Central America and Mexico. On December 31, 2005, we will officially close "The Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico." In doing so, we will celebrate our many accomplishments, which would not have been possible without your participation, your support, your commitment.

We close the RTFCAM with a mixture of emotions - sadness as well as gratitude - and with a desire to do this in a responsible manner. This seed will fall to earth and die - as did the seed twenty-five years ago. Whether we will bear new fruit is yet to be seen. We ask your prayers and for your continued support. Let us again make the road by walking it.

In that spirit, we want to thank you for your faithfulness over the years. We honor and celebrate the solidarity of these 25 years by ending on a note of hope. So, like that seed that falls to earth and dies, we, too, shall become a scattering of seeds. May each of our humble attempts to bring a greater measure of justice and peace in this world, be like that seed - and bear fruit!

Thank you again.