

U.S. nun tortured in Guatemala

MAPLE MOUNT, Ky. (CNS) — A New Mexico nun working in Guatemala was beaten, tortured and sexually abused by unknown assailants before escaping and returning to the United States.

Sister Diana Ortiz, 31, a member of the Ursuline Sisters of Mount St. Joseph, received approximately 75 cigarette burns on her back during an interrogation by her three captors, according to a statement issued Nov. 5 by her motherhouse, located in Maple Mount.

She was also struck in the face, the statement said.

No motive has been established in the case. Some members of the order said the incident might have been motivated by revenge for church activities. The nun was kidnapped Nov. 2 and held 24 hours before escaping.

The statement said that during Sister Ortiz's abduction, her captors "pulled her up to a sitting position on the floor and began to abuse her sexually, in several ways, but not in actual rape." She was released when a fourth man appeared clearly alarmed at discovering she was an American.

"Someone said, 'Alejandro, come have some fun.' But he answered them with an obscene word common in English among North Americans," the statement said. "He said, 'Idiots, she is a North American. Let her alone. It's already on the news on television.'"

The statement said the fourth man helped the nun put her T-shirt and sweatshirt back on, removed her blindfold and drove her back to Guatemala City, where she escaped from the car when it stopped in heavy traffic.

Sister Ortiz, who worked with another Ursuline nun and a Franciscan nun in San Miguel Acatan, Guatemala, had received several anonymous written threats before the abduction, the statement said. It added that once she had been accosted by a man she did not know in the center of Guatemala City. The man told her to leave the country.

Sister Ortiz was participating in a course at the Belen Sisters' retreat house in Antigua, Guatemala, on Nov. 2, the day she was kidnapped.

The statement said she was in the retreat house garden reading the Bible "when a man put his hand on her shoulder and said: 'Hola mi amor,'" a derogatory greeting when given by a man to a woman he doesn't know.

Sister Ortiz identified the man as the same one who had accosted her in nearby Guatemala City.

Another man appeared and forced Sister Ortiz to go with them by brandishing a pistol and threatening to harm her friends if she refused.

After walking along a dry river bed, the men boarded a bus at the edge of Antigua.

About 30 minutes from Guatemala City they got off the bus and walked along a rural dirt road to a white police car with a man in a police uniform inside.

"They put her in the car and blindfolded her," the statement said. "The policeman said to the men, 'I see that your trip was successful.'"

After driving for about 30 minutes, Sister Ortiz said they arrived at a place that "seemed like a warehouse because there was a lot of echo."

"They went downstairs, where she heard screams of a woman in a great deal of pain and moans of men," the statement said. "They put her in a dark and very cold room that had a chair and a desk. They left her there for many hours."

Later, the statement continued, three men returned and said they would play a game: They would ask questions, and if she answered them correctly, she could smoke a cigarette. If they did not like the answer, she would be burned on the back with the cigarette. The statement said when Sister Ortiz objected, she received her first burn.

Then the sexual abuse began, but one of the men said, "Let's take care of business first and then we'll have fun," the statement said.

After removing her blindfold, they showed her some pictures, the location of which she recognized.



AP Wide World Photo
Diana Ortiz, 31, a Roman Catholic nun who was abducted in Guatemala last week, says she was tortured and sexually abused by her captors.

The men insisted that one picture showed her and a man carrying guns, the statement said, although the woman bore no resemblance to Sister Ortiz. The men reportedly blindfolded her again and resumed the sexual abuse until the fourth man arrived.

After her escape, Sister Ortiz was helped by a woman who gave her shelter and money for phone calls and bus fare. The nun eventually was moved to the papal nunciature in Guatemala City for safe haven.

Escorted by two other nuns, she returned to the United States Nov. 5.

Bishop calls pedophilia charge 'archconservative' ploy

BALTIMORE (CNS) — Allegations that a U.S. bishop committed pedophilia with a youth in his diocese "lack substance," said a Nov. 5 statement by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Administrative Committee.

"These allegations have been made by the same individuals before," the statement said. "They have been examined by church authorities and ... they have been determined to lack substance."

The accusations were made at a Baltimore press conference just prior to the U.S. bishops' meeting. The accuser was a young man using the pseudonym "Damian," who was hidden by a screen and spoke through a device that electronically altered his voice.

"Damian," who said he was in his early

20s, claimed to have been in a sexual relationship with the bishop in question from the time he was in high school until 1986.

The bishop in question said Nov. 5 that he had first heard the allegations in November 1985, and that a year-long investigation had followed. He said he was told informally the case had been closed.

The bishop said he knew the young man's family and had met the youth in an effort to help him with some problems.

He added that the allegations are being advanced by "archconservatives" in his diocese in an effort to discredit him.

"Damian's" press conference was sponsored by a group called Catholics for an Open Church. Its chairman, Michael Schwartz, said the event was called to pressure the U.S. bishops into enforcing

their 1988 policy guidelines on pedophilia.

The guidelines, written by U.S. Catholic Conference general counsel Mark E. Choppo, noted "successfully conducted" policies in local dioceses, including personnel guidelines, suspension and rehabilitation of offenders, and counseling and reconciliation for victims, their families and offenders.

"Dioceses undertake these efforts as tangible signs of their commitment to the care and well-being of the individuals involved, especially children," the 1988 statement said.

Schwartz is director of the Catholic Center at the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, a politically conservative organization. He is former director of public affairs for the Milwaukee-based Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

The press conference also featured two other speakers who said that Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland and Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago did not take appropriate action against priest pedophiles in their respective dioceses.

Although "Damian" named the bishop, daily newspapers and wire services took different approaches to using the name. One wire service did not run it at all and

another ran the name only on the state network in Maryland. In Washington, *The Washington Post* did not print the name, citing its inability to interview the accuser, but *The Washington Times* did publish the bishop's name.

The bishop accused of pedophilia told Catholic News Service that there was no truth to the allegations.

He said he knows the family of the young man and has given him financial assistance at times. He said the mother was a housekeeper at the rectory where he was assigned before becoming a bishop.

He said the mother has been involved for a number of years in promoting the Tridentine Mass and other conservative causes in his diocese.

The bishop said that Archbishop Pio Laghi, papal nuncio to the United States, had sent an investigator to the diocese in 1985, and found no basis for action against him.

At that point he considered the matter closed, although a local conservative Catholic publication had subsequently printed the letters exchanged between the man and Archbishop Laghi, with names deleted.

Schwartz said "Damian" had received no communication indicating that the Vatican had closed the investigation.

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