



Wrestling respect
 Bishop Kearney's wrestling team continues to improve following its second-place finish in the Irondequoit Tournament last weekend.
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Church workers harassed in U.S. and in El Salvador

By Rob Cullivan
 Staff writer

El Salvador's current treatment of American religious workers may put a new twist on the old phrase "Yankee, go home!"

For it is not the Salvadoran people, but the Salvadoran government, backed by the United States to the tune of more than \$1 million a day, that seems intent on ridding itself of U.S. Catholic and Protestant workers who during the last decade have educated the world about El Salvador's brutal civil war.

Growing numbers of American church workers are finding themselves banned from entry into El Salvador, according to an article in the Sept. 29 edition of the *National Catholic Reporter*. Other reports indicated that some religious workers in this country have even been subjected to death threats from unknown sources.

According to the NCR report, religious workers in the U.S. have seen their names on lists at the Salvadoran embassy in Washington, or at checkpoints when traveling in El Salvador. The lists are used to deny or delay visas of people the Salvadoran government defines as "undesirable." Some of the "undesirables" include Catholic bishops in Milwaukee, San Francisco and Richmond, Va., who have been involved with human-rights causes.

"(American religious workers) estimate that the lists they have encountered include about 1,000 names and seem to be getting longer," the NCR article said.

Joseph Piersante, a parishioner from Corpus Christi in Rochester, noted that he may have been on such a list when he traveled to Honduras with his wife Lillian and two other parishioners last October. The foursome were part of an American ecumenical effort to accompany Salvadoran refugees returning to El Salvador from refugee camps in Honduras.

"(The Salvadorans) have a list," Piersante said. "You can see them reading the list when you come in." Piersante added that he, his wife and Barbara Smullen were denied entry into El Salvador after they spoke to the press and denounced human-rights abuses of the Salvadoran government and the United Nations, which administered the refugee camps. The fourth member of the Corpus group, Donna Del Santo, was allowed to spend a week in El Salvador with the refugees.

In a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Miguel Salaverria, El Salvador's ambassador to the United States, denied charges that the embassy compiles lists of American religious workers involved with El Salvador. He did acknowledge, however, that the Salvadoran government keeps a list "of people that are not welcome" in El Salvador.

As of December 2, 1989, 32 foreign lay church workers have left El Salvador:

- 16 Deported
- 14 Voluntarily
- 2 Because of death threats

Source: Christian Education Seminar, San Antonio, Texas

"We welcome all the humanitarian workers who come to El Salvador," Salaverria said. "The problem is ... some of them have been found connected with political movements." The ambassador asserted that religious workers who associate with anti-government factions — such as the Marxist-led Faribundo Marti Liberation Front — should not be surprised if they are considered enemies of the government.

Nonetheless, religious workers in the United States maintain that anyone who attempts to work with the poor in El Salvador can be considered a potential target of harassment and possible assassination. Such assertions have been tragically buttressed in recent months.

As FMLN guerillas and government troops battled last November in San Salvador, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter were brutally slain on the grounds of their residence. Rightists in El Salvador have accused the priests of "agitating" people through their work with the poor and their critiques of Salvadoran society.

News reports from Monday, Jan. 8, quoted Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani as saying that government soldiers had committed the murders. The Jesuit killings have drawn the world's attention to the violent atmosphere in which religious workers in El Salvador operate.

In addition to the Jesuit slayings, "there were reports of scattered attacks on Catholic and other churches by Salvadoran troops in the sweep against rebels



entrenched in the poor, northern suburbs of El Salvador's capital," noted a Catholic News Service report from Nov. 30.

Caught up in the military's sweep was Jennifer Casolo, a Catholic from Thomaston, Conn., who had lived in El Salvador

for eight years as an employee of the Christian Education Seminar. Based in San Antonio, Texas, CES sponsors church groups that travel to El Salvador to meet with representatives from both governmental and non-governmental spheres to inform the groups of the situation within the country.

On Nov. 26, Casolo was arrested and accused of storing a cache of ammunition for the FMLN on her property, a charge which she denied. Although the charges were subsequently dropped, Casolo was deported 17 days later after being detained by Salvadoran authorities. Her treatment at their hands included being deprived of sleep several nights and being forced to lie on a concrete floor.

CES Director John Blatz said Casolo was just one of many religious scapegoats the Salvadoran military harassed in the wake of the FMLN offensive.

"The government had just suffered an embarrassing defeat," Blatz told the *Catholic Courier*. "The FMLN came in and basically mopped up the army. They had to blame it on somebody, so they blamed it on the church." The director expressed puzzlement at Casolo's treatment, because CES is known for giving fair treatment to all parties in the Salvadoran civil war.

Blatz added that Casolo had high contacts in both the government and the ruling right-wing ARENA party. "If she was going to be using the contacts, it wouldn't have been to hide arms; it would have been to pass information, and I never heard anyone accuse her of that," he commented.

The director said he believes another motive lay behind the Salvadoran government's harassment of religious workers — the progressive elimination of all witnesses to the civil war. Referring to Casolo's arrest, he said, "I think that if anything, it was the writing on the wall that (the government) is not going to tolerate witness."

Blatz quoted a late-November report from inside El Salvador to support his contention, claiming that of a total of 79 foreign lay church workers, 16 have been deported since the November FMLN offensive, 14 have left voluntarily, and two left after receiving death threats.

Del Santo said she has heard since the offensive began that the prospects for native religious workers bode no better. "We've gotten reports that as many as 500 religious workers have been captured in the last month and a half," she said. "If they're doing any form of organizing, or working with people, they are considered enemies of the state."

The U.S. government's role in the harassment and targeting of religious workers in El Salvador and the U.S. likewise has come under scrutiny in recent

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