

# Killings in Liberia hit close to home for orders

## Sisters schedule service as tribute for missionaries

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Rochester diocese's two largest congregations of women religious are feeling the effects of last month's murders of five sisters and four novices in war-torn Liberia.

Both the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester have members serving missions in strife-torn countries.

"It hits close to home in the sense that you know it's a possibility for anyone who is in mission in a country that's in turmoil," noted Sister Ann Curtis, RSM, the congregation's justice coordinator and a former member to the order's mission team in Chile. "(Death) is always something that's in the distance."

"There is that great concern," observed Sister Christine Wagner, SSJ, justice and peace coordinator. "We've got several sisters not only working in Brazil, but also involved in the land issue, which is a volatile issue."

"But the sisters there are committed to continuing that ministry," Sister Wagner added.

The Sisters of St. Joseph will host a memorial service to honor the five Adorers of the Blood of Christ at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 24, at the mother-house chapel, 4095 East Ave., Pittsford.

The service will also honor four women missionaries executed in December, 1981, and six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and the housekeeper's daughter killed in November, 1989. Both massacres took place in El Salvador.

Meanwhile, the Vatican, the U.S. government, and human-rights organizations have condemned the killings.

But even as these condemnations are being made, officials still don't know who is responsible for the killings, said



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Jonathan Reffell (left), who served as a press official at Liberia's London embassy from 1982-87, gave up his post and a career with the Liberian government when he saw what the government was doing to his homeland. He and his wife Charlotte stand in front of a favorite image — which depicts a traditional Liberian scene — in their Greece home.

Rochester resident Jonathan Reffell, a former Liberian government official, in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

"To just say it is Charles Taylor is simplifying the problem. It's much deeper than that," observed Reffell, who served as a press official at Liberia's London embassy from 1982-87. He quit his post and gave up a career with the Liberian government when he saw what was happening in his homeland at the hands of his own government.

"There are so many factions," Reffell added, citing not only Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia, but also several other rebel groups, the current government's forces, and the seven-member West African peacekeeping force defending the nation's capital of Monrovia.

A representative of Taylor denied his group had killed the nuns and said there is still no proof the sisters are dead.

Momolu V. Sackor Sirleaf, identify-

ing himself as the foreign minister of Taylor's organization, said at a Washington press conference Nov. 5 that Taylor is being framed.

"Charles Taylor is being blamed by a carefully calculated disinformation and misinformation campaign," Sirleaf said. "We know we are not involved."

He also made the denial in a letter to Sister Mildred Gross, provincial of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ.

Sirleaf has asked the United Nations to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Liberia to investigate the murder report.

The nuns are identified as Sisters Shirley Kolmer, 61; Kathleen McGuire, 54; Agnes Mueller, 62; Mary Joel Kolmer, 58, and Barbara Ann Muttra, 69.

Sirleaf's denial counters statements by Archbishop Michael Francis of Monrovia. Archbishop Francis has laid the blame squarely on Taylor and his forces, many of whom are untrained youngsters armed with assault rifles.

As for the motivation for the kill-

ings, Reffell speculated, "It's religion, it's West African politics," but cautioned, "I don't have any proof to say that."

"It's so senseless that anyone can gain anything from it," Reffell continued, "other than to gain attention from the international media. If that was an objective, then it was successful."

But fellow Liberian Ezekiel Pajibo placed the blame for the killings on Taylor's forces, noting in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, "That doesn't mean that Taylor authorized the killings, but I believe it is people from that group that did it."

A staff member of a Washington, D.C. education and advocacy group, the Africa Faith and Justice Network, Pajibo noted that the killings took place in an area that Taylor had recently said his people controlled.

"They claim over and over again they control 99 percent of the country, but then they don't want to take responsibility for things that occur," he said.

Pajibo also discounted suggestions that the women had been specifically targeted, or that the killings were religiously motivated.

"I think it's just part of the random violence of the war," Pajibo said.

That violence has claimed more than 20,000 lives, Reffell said. Most of those dead are civilians, he added.

Reffell noted that the peacekeeping force is ineffective because the nations supplying troops are themselves unstable or are inexperienced in maintaining democracy.

"It's like asking a sick person to become a nurse to take care of another sick person," Reffell said. "They don't understand what peace keeping is."

He suggested that the United States should send peacekeeping troops, or that a United Nations force be deployed. "I think that that's the only thing that will have an effect," Reffell said.

But Pajibo observed that rather than sending troops, which could become mired in a guerrilla war and make the situation worse, the United States and the United Nations should put diplomatic pressure on the nations supplying Taylor's forces. This pressure should include an arms embargo, he said.

"I think there's a lot of opportunities for international intervention that have not been done," Pajibo concluded.

Contains information from *Catholic News Service* reports.

## Dansville church gets \$50,000 donation

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

DANSVILLE — An anonymous woman has donated \$50,000 toward the renovation of St. Mary's Church, 40 Elizabeth St., according to Father Andrew W. Teuschel, pastor.

The donation, which the priest said came as a "surprise," will enable the parish to bypass a fundraising drive to renovate the church.

"It was promised for some time," Father Teuschel said. "The actual gift will be given as we progress along with the renovation process."

Thanks to the anonymous donor's generous contribution and a volunteer force of 20 parishioners, St. Mary's will embark on an extensive renovation project this week, commented Robert J. Goins, chairman of the renovation committee.

Although the parish was founded in 1845, the current church building was erected in 1915.

"(The church) has not really had this kind of work done on it within anyone's memory," Goins observed of the 77-year-old structure. "There's a lot of work to do."

The anonymous donor actually worked with the committee to define

where her money would be used, Goins said, adding that "she took a real interest" in the project.

The committee, however, did not take cost into account when outlining its plans, he said, but simply examined how much of the church really needed renovation.

The board then divided the renovation process into two phases. Phase I will include all the work that could be done with the \$50,000 donation. According to Goins, that phase will include the following work:

- The church's restroom will be remodeled and made handicapped accessible.
- For the first time ever, both the restroom and the sacristy will have hot water.
- All the church's pews will receive a partial refinishing.
- One of the church's two confessionals will be converted to a modern-style "reconciliation room."
- A platform between eight and 10 inches high will raise the altar table so that the congregation has a better view of the celebrant and the table.
- All the lighting in the sanctuary will be replaced.

- The church's aisles and sanctuary and the area between the pews and the altar will be recarpeted.
- The church's front steps will be rebuilt.

In addition to these tasks, the upper sections of the church's walls will be repainted, Goins said. The ornate border between the upper and lower sections of the walls will be carefully cleaned as well, he added.

"The general theme we have is to brighten the church," he said.

A number of the tasks will be contracted out, Goins continued, adding that the church has sent its renovation plans to the Diocesan Building Commission. Once the commission has approved these plans — a decision is expected sometime later this month — the committee will begin accepting bids, he said.

Phase II of the renovation will include several tasks that the anonymous donation doesn't fund, Goins said. He pointed out that the church will have to host a future fundraising drive to raise money for such tasks as repairing the church's stained-glass windows and installing a new public-address system.

The committee would also like to recarpet the entire church, he said.

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