



AP/Wide World Photos
 Photographs of the five sisters killed in Liberia rest at the altar at St. Peter's Cathedral in Belleville, Ill., during a memorial service Nov. 5. The photographs are of (left to right) Sister Joel Kolmer, Sister Shirley Kolmer, Sister Kathleen McGuire, Sister Barbara Ann Muttra and Sister Agnes Mueller, all of whom were members of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Red Bud, Ill.

Officials recover remains of three sisters in Liberia

By Carol Zimmermann
 Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The bodies of three American sisters were found in their convent Nov. 29, more than a month after they were killed in Liberia's civil war, said a State Department spokesman.

The remains are believed to be those of Sisters Shirley Kolmer, Agnes Mueller and Kathleen McGuire, members of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ order, which is based in Red Bud, Ill.

A search continued for the bodies of two other American sisters of the same order, Sisters Joel Kolmer and Barbara Ann Muttra.

Charles Gurney, spokesman for the State Department's Office of West African Affairs, told Catholic News Service that diplomats and Catholic priests joined the West African Peacekeeping Force, which found the bodies at the sisters' convent outside Liberia's war-torn capital of Monrovia. At the time of the killing in October, the area was controlled by members of Charles Taylor's rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

"Two of the bodies were found in the convent; one was outside the wall," Gurney said the reports indicated.

He said the evidence at the convent scene supported an earlier report that said the women religious were shot by a National Patriotic Front soldier who had stolen the convent's vehicle.

He said the final verification of the sisters' identities would only take place after their bodies were returned to the United States.

"It's been over a month and their bodies have started to decompose because they were exposed to the weather," he said.

Sister Frances Schumer, spokeswoman for the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, told CNS that the fighting had been so fierce in Liberia that no one had been able to investigate the convent where the three were killed.

She said the order had not made plans for burial because members did not know when the bodies would be returned.

"We are just hoping the efforts to find the other sisters are successful," she said.

While arrangements were being made to transport the bodies, the order's provincial administration in Red Bud was preparing medical and dental records to be used in confirming the

identification of the bodies.

The congregation received word of the recovered bodies from the State Department Nov. 29.

Sister Schumer said the members of the order have "a real feeling of gratitude that the bodies have been found, especially because of the nature of their deaths."

"At least we have certainty about the three of them, and they can be laid to rest here," she said.

The five sisters had returned to Liberia in the summer of 1991 to continue to teach and provide health care and ministries that had been interrupted by civil war in 1990.

Eyewitness accounts given to the order's provincial house indicated two of the five sisters had been shot while taking someone to visit a sick relative in the nearby town of Banersville.

"We hope that the efforts to reach the area of Banersville, where Sisters Barbara Ann Muttra and Mary Joel Kolmer were reported killed, result in the successful reclaiming of their bodies as well," said Sister Mildred Gross, the order's provincial.

The order has also received news of the four Liberian women studying to join the community. Two are now reported safe, and the whereabouts of the others were unknown, contrary to previous reports that the four women had also been killed.

Mass obligation is lifted for three holy days on Saturdays, Mondays

By Jerry Fliteau
 Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — When any of three holy days of obligation — Jan. 1, Aug. 15 or Nov. 1 — falls on a Saturday or Monday in the future, U.S. Catholics of the Latin rite will not be obliged to attend Mass that day.

Jan. 1 is the feast of Mary, Mother of God. Aug. 15 is the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Nov. 1 is the feast of All Saints.

The change comes as a result of a decision made by the U.S. bishops last year.

The bishops' decision was confirmed by the Vatican this summer and formally decreed as law Nov. 17 during the fall meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops by Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk, then NCCB president.

High court's turndown of Guam case expected

By Patricia Zapor
 Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court's decision not to review Guam's abortion ban was no surprise to organizations that supported the law and hoped the court would uphold it.

The court Nov. 30 decided 6-3 not to review lower court rulings overturning Guam's law, which prohibited almost all abortions.

Paul Linton, associate general counsel for litigation for Americans United for Life, said he was disappointed the court didn't take the case because it would have provided an opportunity to decide whether abortions should be allowed after the point of fetal viability.

"I can't say it came as a great surprise," said Linton, whose organization joined in the petition by Guam Gov. Joseph Ada for the Supreme Court to overturn a 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling declaring the law unconstitutional.

"This was the first case since *Roe vs. Wade* where the court was asked to consider an abortion prohibition as opposed to a regulation," Linton noted.

Helen Alvaré, spokeswoman for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, also was not surprised the Supreme Court turned down the case, given the ruling this summer in Pennsylvania's *Casey vs. Planned Parenthood*. In that case the court affirmed the "central holding" of *Roe vs. Wade*, the 1973 ruling legalizing abortion as a part of a constitutional right to privacy, but upheld several state regulations including requirements for parental notification for minors and a 24-hour waiting period before an abortion may be performed.

Alvaré said a written dissent by Justice Antonin Scalia of the decision to let the lower court ruling stand in Guam's appeal "expressed most of our hopes that some of the statute could be upheld."

"There are apparently some applications of the statute that are perfectly constitutional," Scalia said in a dissent joined by Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Associate Justice Byron R. White.

Scalia argued that the appeals court ruling should have been set aside and returned to the lower court to determine whether the law had any constitutional applications.

"Under this court's current case law ..., I see no reason why the Guam law would not be constitutional at least in its applications to abortions conducted after the point at which the child may live outside the womb," he said.

The appeals court, in its unanimous ruling, said it would be "wrong and presumptuous" to declare the *Roe* decision dead.

Guam's law would have allowed abortions only to save a woman's life or prevent grave danger to her health, as certified by two independent physicians, or to end a pregnancy that develops outside the uterus, such as an ectopic pregnancy.

Any abortions would have had to be performed in hospitals operated by the government, the law said.

It also provided for misdemeanor convictions of anyone who had an abortion or advised another person to have one.

No other U.S. law makes an abortion a crime, both for the doctor performing the procedure and the woman or anyone else seeking it. The Guam law made no exceptions when the pregnancy results from rape or incest.

Enforcement of Guam's law was blocked by a federal judge four days after it went into effect in March 1990.

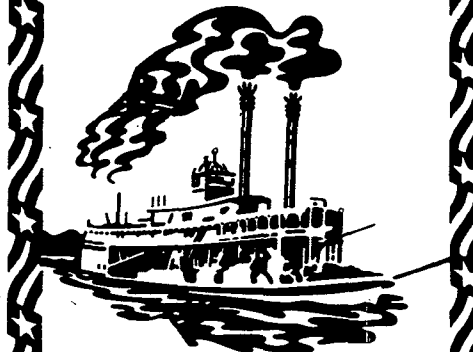
Alvaré said the decision not to take the case leaves unanswered questions about whether the court would uphold an outright ban on abortions once a fetus has reached viability.

Linton said neither *Roe* nor any ruling since then has clarified the question about abortion after viability. Medical advances have made it possible for fetuses to survive outside the womb as young as about 20 to 23 weeks into the pregnancy.

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