

DIOCESAN NEWS

Religious to hold vigil outside U.S. Army fort

By Rob Cullinan
Staff writer

Three Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester and one Sister of Mercy of the Americas from Rochester plan to travel to Fort Benning, Ga., to join 300 women religious from around the country in a prayer vigil Friday, Aug. 16. The women religious are calling for the closing of the School of the Americas.

On the same day, the Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard will hold a 10 a.m. public prayer service in solidarity with the vigil outside the gates at Fort Benning.

The three Sisters of St. Joseph are Sisters Janice Morgan, Sharon Bailey and Sheila Walsh. They will be joined by Sister Sheila Stevenson, RSM.

Sister Morgan is vice president of her congregation, and Sisters Bailey and Walsh are counselors on the congregation's leadership team. Sister Stevenson is a counselor on the Sisters of Mercy's leadership team.

Funded by the U.S. government and staffed by U.S. army personnel, School of the Americas trains visiting Latin American and Caribbean military personnel.

However, SOA has been criticized by religious and human rights activists for graduating military personnel later implicated in atrocities committed against unarmed civilians considered opponents of their native governments.

Alleged victims have included Catholic clergy, religious and lay leaders in such

countries as El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama and Bolivia, critics have said.

In particular, critics have maintained that graduates of SOA have been identified as assassins of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, U.S. missionaries in El Salvador, and Jesuit priests in San Salvador, that country's capital.

The Aug. 16 vigil is being organized by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, a national organization based in Silver Spring, Md. In a statement issued by the conference, Sister Mary O'Brien, SSJ, of Latham, N.Y., called for the closing of SOA.

"We believe our action is critical in breaking through the wall of ignorance concerning the true nature of SOA," she said in the statement. "The veil of silence about U.S. financing and training of Latin American militaries that abuse and violate human rights must be lifted."

Sister Walsh expressed similar sentiments.

"It seemed to me that this was a very important thing to do," she said of participating in the vigil. "I thought that I should stand up with the rest of my sisters and brothers and ask that this school be closed."

However, in a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, U.S. Army Major Gordon Martel, public affairs officer for SOA, argued that the school's critics unfairly malign SOA's graduates, more than 99 percent of whom have never been implicated in any human rights violations, he said.

101 ... and counting

Sister Rose Irene Reisdorf, SSJ, celebrated her 101st birthday Aug. 1, 1996, at the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Infirmary. Sister Rose Irene entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1930. She taught at Corpus Christi School, Rochester, for 19 years, then became the founding principal of St. Pius X School, Rochester. She then went to St. Mary's School, Waterloo, and finally to St. Stephen's School, Geneva, remaining as a classroom assistant at the Geneva school until the age of 90. She has resided at the Convent Infirmary since 1986.



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

"The fact that some thugs go back to their countries and commit human rights violations doesn't mean that the vast majority of SOA graduates do so," he said.

Martel also claimed that human rights violations in El Salvador decreased from 2,000 per month in 1980 to virtually none by 1991, a decrease he attributed to the U.S.-sponsored training of the nation's army. He added that the war in El Salvador has ended and that the former government's opponents have organized themselves into a legal political party.

LCWR members have gathered more than 25,000 signatures in support of Massachusetts Democratic Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy's bill (HR 2652) to close the School of the Americas and establish an Academy for Democracy and Civil-Military Relations. The petitions will be presented to Kennedy following the Aug. 16 vigil.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For information on the vigil at the Abbey of the Genesee, call 716/586-1000, ext. 172, or 243-0660.

Obituaries

Father Noonan, longtime McQuaid official

Father Richard P. Noonan, SJ, 71, McQuaid Jesuit High School's alumni director for 25 years, died July 29, 1996.

Born in Saratoga Springs, he served in World War II as a naval officer in the South Pacific. Upon his return to the United States in 1946, he continued his education at Holy Cross College, and the University of Notre Dame, where he received his master's degree in history. In 1950 he entered the Jesuit order and in 1961 was ordained a priest.

Father Noonan became principal of McQuaid in 1966, but had a heart attack the first month of school. Later, following medical advice, he resigned, but he returned to McQuaid in 1969 as alumni director.

"Many Rochesterians — rightly — believe that Dick Noonan is McQuaid," wrote Father William J. O'Malley in *Phoenix*, a history of the school's early years. "There is no Jesuit more faithful in visiting McQuaid people and their friends when they are ill or bereaved. His concern is tireless"

Rosemary Bayer of Rochester, who



Fr. Richard P. Noonan

worked as secretary to Father Noonan for 10 years, recalled that whether an alumnus contributed \$1 or \$10,000, the priest wrote a personal note of thanks.

"He'd write, 'Thank you John.' 'Thank you Joe.' 'How are the kids?' 'How's Mary?'" she said.

She also recalled his taste for jelly beans and chocolate chip cookies. Many falls when he drove to Notre Dame for a football game, he'd take cookies to Bayer's sons there — if she had baked him a batch as well.

Father Francis J. McNamara, SJ, a longtime friend, recalled Father Noonan's "phenomenal memory."

"At the end of the day he would review in his mind everybody he had met that day," the priest said. "He had everybody in the right family, in the right order."

His memory was especially remarkable given his social activities and "legions of friends," he said. "He was constantly vis-

iting hospitals, going to wakes and funerals, and performing weddings, especially McQuaid weddings. Everybody loved him. He was a sweet guy."

For years, every Sunday during racing season Father Noonan also said Mass in the stables at the Finger Lakes Race Track for jockeys and trainers.

Father Noonan had been at the Jesuit infirmary at Fordham University since mid-May, and died at Our Lady of Mercy Medical Center in the Bronx.

He is survived by a brother, Donald; a sister-in-law, Anne Noonan; and several cousins and nieces. He was predeceased by two brothers.

He lay in state at the McQuaid chapel Aug. 1 and 2. Bishop Matthew H. Clark presided at his funeral Mass Aug. 2 at Our Lady of Lourdes Church. Interment was in the Jesuit Cemetery at the National Shrine of the North American Martyrs in Auriesville.

Contributions are being accepted for the Noonan Scholarship Fund, c/o McQuaid Jesuit High School, 1800 S. Clinton Ave., Rochester, NY 14618.

—Kathleen Schwar

Sr. O'Connor, former teacher at Holy Ghost

Sister Mary Monica O'Connor, SSND, a teacher and administrator in the Diocese of Brooklyn, died on July 2, 1996. She was 79.

A native of Boston, Sister Monica professed as a School Sister of Notre Dame in 1937. She taught at Holy Ghost School in Rochester (1937-39); and at St. Patrick's School in Glen Cove, N.Y., (1939-53). From 1953, she served as a teacher, principal and administrator in the Diocese of Brooklyn.

A funeral Mass was celebrated July 6 at St. Saviour Church in Brooklyn. Interment took place at St. Mary Cemetery, Bethel, Conn.

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—Kathleen Schwar

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