

## Recalling Sister Dorothy Kazel, OSU By Sister Beverly Anne LoGrasso, OSU

For many in my generation, recalling the impact of Dec. 2, 1980 is akin to recalling the horror of Nov. 22, 1963, with the same haunting question: "Why would someone want to kill President Kennedy? Why would someone want to kill Dorothy?"

Many faculty and staff at Beaumont had known Dorothy personally, so her murder was not just a headline. Those who had followed U. S. Central American policy had a better understanding of the risk the Churchwomen were taking and its possible consequences, but most Americans experienced the killing of the Churchwomen as the "shot heard 'round the world."

The night of parent conferences in 1980, as Assistant Principal, received a phone call from the Ursuline motherhouse that Dorothy and the women were "missing." The next day, Fr. Eldon Reichart, a Marianist priest from St. Joseph High School and friend of Dorothy's, came to say a Mass for Dorothy and the women in Room 110, (the former chapel). We used the altar cloth Dorothy had sent us from El Salvador. In the middle of the Mass, we received a call that the women were found dead. I walked down the hall to tell Eldon. I opened the door and I did not have to say anything. He looked at my face and he said: "Dorothy is dead, isn't she?" I nodded and went to the office where Sr. Martha Mooney was in her office, sitting at her desk, crying. Many faculty members were upset, so, we made the decision to dismiss early. The news went around the school like wildfire. All 400 students left the building in complete silence.

In **A Radical Faith: The Assassination of Sr. Maura**, Eileen Markey suggests that the answer to why the Churchwomen were killed lies in the fact that the women aligned themselves with the struggles of the Central American poor who began to form basic Christian communities where the liberating message of the Gospel was studied. The Gospel undergirded the message of human dignity which demands humane living conditions and a living wage.

The lives of Dorothy, Maura, Ita and Jean teach me that the heroism of martyred saints originates in ordinary Christians taking the Gospel seriously in situations of violent oppression. As St. Oscar Romero pointed out: Those who are committed to the poor risk the same fate as the poor. If the women are never officially canonized, they will always be saints to me and thousands of others.

Some personal "snapshot" memories:

- Dorothy, well loved by students, including my sister Barb, at Sacred Heart Academy in the typing room where she taught business classes
- Dorothy in the Beaumont cafeteria at her family good-bye party in the summer of 1980; her uncle begged her NOT to return to Salvador
- Dorothy's love of collecting driftwood from Lake Erie and painting Scripture quotes on it
- Dorothy's bright spirit, open, gentle, manner which seemed to hide a depth of spirit, determination, searching
- Dorothy piling us into a car to attend a charismatic prayer meeting at St. Joseph High School
- We gathered around the Beaumont convent fireplace the night we heard of the murder. Sr. Francis Patrick was stunned and just kept repeating: "Why would anyone want to kill Dorothy?"

-Dorothy's funeral in St. John Cathedral on a bitter cold night, when the entire main aisle was lined by an honor guard of priests for her coffin; Bishop Pilla preached.

-Dorothy's winter boots on the "grab table" at Beaumont convent. I stopped dead in my tracks when I saw them; I thought: "Shouldn't we be saving these as first class relics?"

One of the Sisters said: "Dorothy would rather they be given to the poor."

-I recall:

-my outrage when Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick and Alexander Haig, Secretary of State, accused the nuns of being "gunrunners."

-attending a City Club Forum with Jim Kazel, Dorothy's brother, when Jim asked the speaker, an officer of the School of the Americas which trained assassins in El Salvador: "Why did you kill my sister?" The officer did not answer.

-attending the 25th anniversary of the martyrdom of the Churchwomen at the National Cathedral in Washington DC. I met Melinda Roper, President of the Maryknoll Sisters in 1980 and the only person who defended the women, on national news, from Haig's despicable accusations

The martyrdom of the Churchwomen continues to:

-challenge me as an American citizen to educate myself on U.S. involvement in El Salvador and other countries and to be an active citizen advocate.

-challenge my "comfortable" faith in relationship to the poor in our city, on the Tex-Mex border, in our world.

-If the Church never officially canonizes the women, they will always be saints to me, saints who inspire and challenge.