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Contact: Teri Rizvi
rizvi@udayton.edu
(937) 229-3241

NEWS RELEASE

(Editor's Note: For assistance in scheduling interviews with Sister Dorothy Stang's family, call Teri Rizvi at (937) 229-3241 or e-mail rizvi@udayton.edu.)

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS: UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON TO PAY TRIBUTE TO SLAIN NUN ON FEB. 2

DAYTON, Ohio – The night before Sister Dorothy Stang was murdered by two hired gunmen, she gave up her hammock to a Brazilian peasant farmer and slept on the ground.

"To me, that's her story," said her brother, David Stang, in a phone interview from Palmer Lake, Colo. "She loved the earth. She was always close to the earth. When they murdered her, she fell to the earth. She gave up her life so that the world would understand that the rights of the homeless and the earth are being disregarded and the rights of the lawless are being protected."

In death, she's being called the "Angel of the Amazon" for devoting decades to serving the poor and protecting the rainforest. As the first anniversary of her murder approaches, the University of Dayton will honor the Dayton native with a posthumous honorary degree of humane letters at a Mass and honorary degree ceremony at **4 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 2, in the Immaculate Conception Chapel** on campus. It's believed to be the first time UD has ever conferred an honorary degree after someone's death. The event is open to the public.

A contingent of 30 family members, including seven of Stang's brothers and sisters from Dayton and around the country, will be on hand when University of Dayton President Daniel J. Curran presents the diploma to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the religious order Stang joined in 1948 after leaving Julianne High School in Dayton following her junior year. The Rev. Paul Marshall, S.M., rector at the University of Dayton, will preside over the Mass, and Cincinnati Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk will give the benediction. Sister Joan Krimm, SNDdeN, and Marguerite Stang Hohm will offer reflections on Stang's life after the degree is conferred.

A University of Dayton degree is not an unusual achievement for the Stang family.

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OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
300 College Park Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679
(937) 229-3241 (937) 229-3063 Fax
www.udayton.edu

"My father was in the first graduating class, and around 40 members of our family are UD graduates," said Barbara Richardson, Stang's sister. "She would hate this brouhaha over her, but would be thrilled that people know the plight of her people."

Curran calls Sister Dorothy "an extraordinary role model" and praises her work on behalf of the "poor and powerless" in Brazil. He recommended her selection to UD's honorary degree committee.

"Her martyrdom is a witness to the call of discipleship to work for justice and peace in our times," reads Stang's honorary degree citation. "What she was not able to realize during her lifetime is being realized today during her martyrdom. People from many corners of the world have been captivated by her life, mission and story. ... Sister Dorothy's life continues to have meaning for all those willing to embrace the moral imperative of the social Gospel to speak out against all forms of injustice."

Stang was shot in the chest and head on a rural road near the town of Anapu, Brazil, on Feb. 12, 2005, as part of a land dispute over the displacement of peasants. Witnesses say the 73-year-old nun, who had previously received death threats, pulled out her Bible and began reading from the Beatitudes before she was shot. The two ranchhands were found guilty in December and sentenced to 27 years and 17 years in prison, respectively.

"The prosecutor at the trial respectfully said, 'She treated you with respect. She shook your hands, and yet you still murdered her.' I was there, and they started crying," remembered David Stang, who attended the trial with his sister, Marguerite. "They knew they had done wrong, but the land grabbers (who hired them) don't care. The gunmen were just poor people. I don't feel sorry for them, but even Christ forgave Judas, and I'm sure Dorothy forgave them. However, those who ordered hundreds of murders of farmers in the Amazon in the past 10 years are never sentenced."

Stang, a naturalized Brazilian, spent nearly four decades as a missionary in that country. For more than two decades, she lived in primitive conditions in the rainforest, where she taught peasants sustainable farming techniques and fought illegal logging and ranching. She worked with the Association of Ecological Solidarity in the Amazon and was a founder of the Catholic church's Pastoral Land Commission in the state of Para, a human rights organization that fights for the rights of rural workers and peasants.

"There's a division within our world today and even within our church. There's a division between absolute love for the poor and personal faith," David Stang observed. "Too many Christians think they've arrived because they've read the Bible or they believe in Jesus. But by your works, you will be known. Jesus chose not to live with the elite, but with the poor. ... The people of Brazil love her and already consider her a martyr."