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The University of Dayton will present its Oscar Romero Human Rights Award to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services.

Since 1975, Migration and Refugee Services has coordinated the resettlement of more than 800,000 refugees through dioceses nationwide. During the last decade, the department has advocated for laws to stiffen penalties for human traffickers and provide protection and relief to victims, and to increase Congressional appropriations for refugee protection and assistance.

The award ceremony, which will mark the 30th anniversary of the martyrdom of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, is free and open to the public. It's set for 7 p.m. Monday, March 29, in the Immaculate Conception Chapel. Ambassador Johnny Young, executive director of the conference's Migration and Refugee Services will accept the award. The Most Reverend John Wester, bishop of the Salt Lake City diocese and chair of the conference's migration and refugees committee, will deliver the acceptance address.

The next day, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Kennedy Union room 222, the University will host the quarterly meeting of the Coalition of Catholic Organizations against Human Trafficking to formulate plans to combat trafficking and serve trafficking victims in the Miami Valley. Ohio State Sen. Teresa Fedor, who recently introduced anti-trafficking legislation, will be among the participants in the meeting. This event is by invitation only.

Later that evening, at 7 p.m. in Kennedy Union Boll Theatre, University faculty members Mark Ensalaco, director of the human rights program; David O'Brien, University professor of faith and culture; Vince Miller, Gudorf chair in Catholic theology and culture; Una Cadegan, director of the American studies program; and Bro. Ray Fitz, S.M., Ferree professor of social justice will participate in the Archbishop Romero Symposium. The theme of the symposium, "Social Inquiry for Social Justice," will discuss the relevance of Catholic social teaching in the context of the University of Dayton's service to community. The symposium is free and open to the public.

"This symposium will celebrate the University of Dayton's identity and mission in the promotion of social justice," Ensalaco said.

The Oscar Romero Human Rights Award was created in 2000 to honor the ministry and martyrdom of the Salvadoran archbishop slain while officiating Mass 30 years ago because of his vocal defense of the rights of the poor and disenfranchised. The award is presented to an individual or organization that has earned distinction for the promotion of the dignity of all human beings and alleviation of the suffering of the human community in the spirit of Christian humanism that animates the University of Dayton.

"We are trying to honor Romero's ministry and martyrdom by addressing the very serious human rights issues we confront here and now," Ensalaco said. "We are focusing on the rights of migrants and refugees and the awful scourge of human trafficking which we know is taking place all around us. The selection of Migration and Refugee Services as this year's award recipient is really an expression of the University of Dayton's recognition of the importance of its work."

Past recipients of the University's Archbishop Romero Award include: Juan Méndez, former director of America's Watch and president of the International Center for Transitional Justice and United Nations special representative on the prevention of genocide; Casa Alianza, which operates programs to help homeless and abandoned children in Central America, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua; Radhika Coomaraswamy, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women; Juan Guzman, the Chilean judge who prosecuted the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet; and Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of Doctors Without Borders.

The University of Dayton is one of the country's top 10 Catholic universities and home to the nation's first undergraduate program in human rights.

For more information, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of media relations, at 937-229-3391 or

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