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Land of Promise

University of Dayton

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Land of Promise

The Brazilian organization for which Dayton native Sr. Dorothy Stang worked before her murder in 2005 will be the recipient of an international human rights award from the University of Dayton.
The National Conference of Brazilian Bishops' Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) — Pastoral Land Commission — will receive the Blessed Óscar Romero Human Rights Award, presented to an individual or organization that has earned distinction for promoting the dignity of all human beings and alleviating human suffering.

Bishop Enemésio Lazzaris, CPT president, and Bro. Xavier Plassat, coordinator of CPT's national antislavery campaign, will accept the award from University of Dayton President Eric Spina during a ceremony starting at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 28, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom on the University of Dayton campus.

Created in 2000, the award honors the ministry and martyrdom of Romero, a Salvadoran archbishop slain while officiating at a 1980 Mass because of his vocal defense of the human rights of the poor and disenfranchised. Pope Francis put Romero on the path to sainthood in 2015 by designating Romero a martyr and beatifying him.

"We are bestowing the Blessed Romero Award on the CPT for its courageous defense of the poor, victims of slave labor and the environment," said Mark Ensalaco, director of research in the University of Dayton Human Rights Center and creator of the award. "Like Romero, the CPT does its work with tremendous personal risk. In 2015, 15 human rights and environmental activists were murdered in Brazil. But the CPT has not allowed fear to hinder its advocacy work. All of us in human rights take inspiration from CPT's example."

Past recipients of the University's Archbishop Romero Award include:

* Juan Méndez, United Nations special rapporteur on torture.

* Casa Alianza, which operates programs to help homeless and abandoned children in Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua.

* Radhika Coomaraswamy, former United Nations special rapporteur on Violence Against Women.

* Juan Guzman, the Chilean judge who prosecuted former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.

* Bernard Kouchner, co-founder of Doctors Without Borders.

* U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services.

* Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, former president of Caritas International, a Vatican-based umbrella organization for 160 charity organizations working on six continents.

In addition to the award presentation, the honorees will participate in a free public symposium from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. in the Kennedy Union ballroom on CPT's work, the political situations in Mexico and Central and South America, U.S.-Mexico border policy, immigration and goods made with slave labor that end up in American homes.

Panelists include former and current representatives of REPAM, a Vatican-backed network addressing human rights issues in the Amazon; the University of Dayton Human Rights Center; Catholic Relief Services, one of the world's largest
humanitarian relief agencies; the Archdiocese of Cincinnati; Welcome Dayton; and USAID, the lead U.S. government agency that works to end extreme global poverty and support democracy.

For more information or interviews, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of news and information, at 937-229-3391 or srobinson1@udayton.edu.

Photo credit: National Conference of Brazilian Bishops’ Comissão Pastoral da Terra

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