

Statement on the 25th Anniversary of the Four Missionary Women
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Twenty-five years ago, many throughout the world were shocked by the news of the abduction, rape and murder on December 2nd 1980 of four American missionary women in El Salvador. That same year saw the intensification of the civil war in that country that was dramatically marked first by the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero on March 24th and, nearly a decade later, by the slaughter of six Jesuit priests and their two aides at the Central American University on December 16th 1989.

There can be little doubt that the sacrificial deaths—the martyrdoms—of these exemplary Christians, representing the episcopate, the life of vowed religious men and women, and the Catholic laity. Nor is there doubt that the findings of those guilty for these crimes served to hasten the end of that fratricidal war that was finally concluded with the January 1992 Peace Accords.

Sister Maura Clarke, MM, Sister Ita Ford, MM, both of the Maryknoll Sisters, Sister Dorothy Kazel, OSU of the Sisters of St. Ursula, and lay missionary Jean Donovan of the Cleveland Diocesan Mission team were all young, dynamic, deeply committed missionaries. They saw the face of Christ in the poorest and most vulnerable of the people of El Salvador and sought to offer what aid and consolation they could provide. In the poisonous political atmosphere of the time, their concern for “the least of these” was seen by some as a challenge to an unjust status quo.

May we today rededicate ourselves, together with the bishops and faithful of El Salvador and all of Central America, to the task of peace, justice and reconciliation throughout the Americas for which these exemplary women gave their lives.