

American nun shot in Guatemala

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

The fatal shooting of an American nun in Guatemala on May 5 was the second attack on a U.S. religious worker there in the past two weeks.

Sister Barbara Ann Ford of the Bronx-based Sisters of Charity was shot in the head during an apparent car jacking. The nun had worked in Guatemala for twenty years aiding civil war victims.

Her death followed the April 26 kidnapping of 12-year-old Amy Sherman who was taken from her father's car on her way to a Christian school. She was rescued several hours later when the police uncovered where she was being held

Ford is the sixth American killed in Guatemala in the past 18 months. Local police say they have no leads, though several suspects were captured during Amy Sherman's rescue.

A graduate of St. Barnabas High School and the College of Mount Saint Vincent, both in the Bronx, Ford first moved to Guatemala in 1978 to help after a series of massive earthquakes devastated the country.

Ford, who was also a licensed nurse, returned to the Bronx in 1986 to teach at Lincoln Hospital. But three years later she returned to Guatemala, which was then in its 26th year of a civil war that did not end until 1996.

"She was just so dedicated to the Latin American people, especially the indigenous people," said Sister Doris Smith, a nun with the Sisters of Charity.

According to the Sisters of Charity, Ford helped recover the remains of massacre victims dumped in unmarked mass graves, and she ran a mental health service to help survivors of the bloody conflict deal with their trauma. Since 1989, Ford had served as a health administrator for the Diocese of Quiche in northern Guatemala, a region that saw some of the war's worst massacres.

Meanwhile, the captors of Miss Sherman demanded \$2 million dollars from her family for her safe release. The kidnappers intercepted the car, driven by Amy Sherman's missionary father Steven Sherman as he drove his daughters to school at the Christian Academy of Guatemala. Police captured two of the alleged kidnappers after one of them was injured during the girl's release.

Officials said that six men were involved in the kidnapping. Police said that they know the identity of the four assailants who are still at large. One of the kidnappers was said to be known by the family.

The U.S. ambassador to Guatemala, Prudence Bushnell, praised the Guatemalan police for their quick action in freeing the girl.

Officials said that the kidnappers had planned to hold Miss Sherman for as long as necessary to obtain the money demanded. They said that the men had amassed a large supply of food and other items necessary.

In 1998, Gunmen kidnap four missionaries working with Nueva Vida (New Life) in Guatemala. Police located the kidnappers hours later and the four escaped unharmed.

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