

PSALM FOR THE ASC MARTYRS OF CHARITY

Blood of martyrs Mary Joel, Shirley, Kathleen, Agnes, and Barbara Ann, remember us.

May your blood call us to see there can be no peace without justice.

May your blood call us to hear again the cries and sighs of the poor.

May your blood call us to touch the wounds of those oppressed.

May your blood call us to taste the bitter sorrow of those who grieve.

May your blood call us to smell the scents of resurrection we believe will blossom from blood-stained soil because of your witness.

Mary Joel, Shirley, Kathleen, Agnes, and Barbara Ann, May your lives of commitment convict us to be compassionate.

May your deaths disturb us so we will see how far we have to go to make the reign of justice and peace a reality in our world.

May your lives inspire courage in us.

May your names live on in our memory.

And when we are tempted to give in or give up, may we remember your names, Mary Joel, Shirley, Kathleen, Agnes, and Barbara Ann, martyrs of memory and charity, whose names, whose courage, whose witness challenge us to keep seeing, keep pushing, keep proclaiming the peace found in the Blood of the Cross.

Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.



ASC MARTYRS OF CHARITY

“Martyrs of Charity” is a collective title popularly given to five Adorers of the Blood of Christ, United States Region, who were slain in October 1992 as they ministered with the people of Liberia during the civil war in that West African country. Under the direction of Charles Taylor, soldiers of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) were responsible for their deaths. In October 2001, Pope John Paul II called them Martyrs of Charity.

On October 20, 1991, Sisters Barbara Ann Muttra and Mary Joel Kolmer were ambushed and killed while on a sick call. Sisters Shirley Kolmer, Agnes Mueller, and Kathleen McGuire were shot to death three days later outside their convent at Gardnerville, where they long had offered hospitality and kindness to people in all walks of life.

These Sisters chose to walk with, to work with, to dream with the people of Liberia in the most difficult times and circumstances. Although they easily could have joined the refugees streaming out of Liberia, these women religious chose to stay with the people. The day before they died, the five stood on the roadside and gave water to passing refugees.

The long-term veteran of this mission team was Sister Barbara Anna Muttra, who served in Liberia for 21 years. Born in Springfield, IL, she was trained as a nurse. Arriving in Liberia in 1971, she had a tremendous impact on health care in the bush. Sister Muttra challenged traditional practices and significantly improved infant survival rates. Under her influence, local infant mortality rates dropped from two deaths per week to two deaths per year. This sister’s healing skills also were affirmed by those she cared for—people suffering from cholera and malaria as well as from life-threatening injuries. Her devotion earned her the affectionate nickname of “Old Ma” from the people.

A college professor and mathematician, Sister Shirley Kolmer began her Liberian service in 1977 as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Liberia. The native of Waterloo, IL, interrupted her educational ministry in Africa to serve as provincial superior of the Adorers at Ruma, IL. She returned to Liberia after completing her leadership responsibilities.

Having been trained in education and nursing, Sister Agnes Mueller brought a special versatility to the Adorers’ Liberian missions when she arrived in 1987 and is remembered for her artistic talents and flair, as well as her abiding joy and zest for life. Her arrival in Africa fulfilled a life-long dream to be a missionary. Sister Mueller was involved in pastoral care, vocation work, and literacy programs.

Sister Mary Joel Kolmer is remembered for her artistic talents and flair, as well as her abiding joy and zest for life. All these traits served her well as she ministered with the Liberian people in religious education after 25 years in elementary education in Iowa and Illinois. She planned liturgies, worked with youth, and visited the sick and elderly in their homes.

The newcomer to the Adorers’ Liberian mission, Sister Kathleen McGuire, arrived 14 months at Gardnerville. During this time, she worked for the rehabilitation of those psychologically scarred by the civil war. Most important, she stood with the suffering people of Liberia.