

## THE STRUGGLE OF A PEOPLE IN NEED

by Patricia Frisk, SSJ



photo: Anne Michelle McGill, SSJ

This mural, painted by the Spanish Claretian Cerezo Barredo, is on the wall of a shrine dedicated to the martyrs of Latin America. Located in Ribeirao Bonito in the state of Matto Grosso, Brazil where Sisters Jean Bellini and Marlena Roeger are stationed, the shrine commemorates the tenth anniversary of the death of Padre Joao Bosco Burnier, SJ who was killed in Ribeirao Bonito in 1975.

Msgr. Oscar Romero can be recognized at left, and to his right is Padre Joao Bosco who was murdered on account of his action in the cause of justice. Others represented in the painting have also given their lives within the past ten years in the struggle for liberation.

It was shortly after the celebration for the dedication of this shrine that a co-worker and friend of our sisters in Brazil, Vilmar Jose de Castro, was killed in Cacu in the state of Golas, Brazil. Sisters Patricia Frisk, Maureen Finn, and Elaine Hollis live near Cacu and knew Vilmar well.

On Thursday morning, October 23, 1986, a tragedy shook the small community of Cacu in the interior of Brazil, where the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, NY have been working for sixteen years. Vilmar Jose Castro, 27, coordinator of the parish religious education program, left home about 5:15 a.m. for his daily ten kilometer walk to the rural one-room school where he was teacher for 25 children. By 6:30 a.m. he was found dead by the side of the highway. The police, with minimal investigation and incompetent action, concluded that Vilmar was the victim of a hit and run accident.

However, circumstances at the site where his body was found—the position of his body as well as the location of the injuries which he received—in no way substantiated the police claim. And, in the

light of the repeated threats on his life over the past months, the family and friends of Vilmar, and other pastoral agents and co-workers are convinced that Vilmar was murdered.

Vilmar has joined the growing number of Latin American martyrs who are giving their lives in the struggle to create a more just society. In the past year alone, in Brazil, more than 233 persons have lost their lives in the cause of land reform. There is little doubt that Vilmar paid the ultimate price for his involvement in this cause, an involvement which grew out of his commitment to the gospel imperative to build the Kingdom and which led him to become a voice demanding justice for those who are voiceless.

Who was Vilmar Jose de Castro? He was a native son of Cacu in the state of

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"A hard, polished acorn falls to the ground and cracks open, but it sends one shoot down and another up, and later there is a tree. Life springs and grows where the bearers of life do not clutch it to themselves, but hear the call to let it go in the interests of fuller life and action."

(from *Prayer: Our Journey Home*  
by Maria Boulding)



photo: Beatrice Ganley, SSJ

Sr. St. Luke Hardy (l.) is a frequent and welcome visitor to the programs now housed in the St. Augustine's School Building. Savay Svay (l.) wants to share her cookie with Sr. St. Luke. In center photo is Savay's mother Hor Hum.

## IN THE INTERESTS OF LIFE: SCHOOL CLOSING AT ST. AUGUSTINE'S

by Beatrice Ganley, SSJ

"We had great programs, dedicated staff, enthusiastic students . . . the only thing missing was money." Sr. St. Luke Hardy, principal of St. Augustine's School from 1982-86 speaks with a mixture of acceptance and regret. We are in her office at St. Augustine's rectory, an urban parish in Rochester, NY, where she now works as a pastoral assistant. Last year at this time she was involved in the closing of the parish school.

"It was an excruciating experience," recalls Sr. St. Luke, "something you can never explain. I was conscious of its true similarity to death."

She recalls a meeting on December 3, 1985 when she first read the proposed plan of the diocese's Urban School Study Steering Committee: "While no schools will be mandated to close at this time, based on the Urban School Study, the diocese supports the closing of St. Augustine at the end of the 1985-86 school year."

"As far as we were concerned, the death might as well have happened then," she says. "And once that was acknowledged, there was a sense of looking around and saying—OK, what needs to be done?"

"After the meeting, I sat in the car in the parking lot of the church where the meeting had been held and started thinking. I didn't leave until I knew what I would say to the teachers and until I had some sense of what we might be able to do to see that all persons involved would be cared for."

Prior to this time, the parish staff and a collaborative grouping of representatives from parish council, school board, finance committee, and parents association had been meeting for at least a year. Through common prayer and honest dialogue they had built up a solid bond of cooperation and trust.

So on short notice, on the evening of December 3, representatives from each of these groups came to the convent for a meet-

ing with Sr. St. Luke and the pastor, Fr. Bill Trott. They were there until after midnight, but by the time they left they were in charge of the process.

Fr. Bill recalls that the immediate concern was, "How do we go about this in the right way? Who needs to be told, in what order, and from whom should they hear it?" Letters went out immediately so that parishoners and parents would hear the news first from the parish staff rather than through the news media.

As pastor, it was hard for him to accept the fact that the school was a serious financial drain on the parish. "But," says Fr. Trott, "if the school had been kept open, we would have had no money for anything."

Difficult as it was, Fr. Bill speaks of having a sense of the presence of God throughout the entire process. "We approached the problem in a spirit of faith and prayer. And the prayer was not *keep our school open*, but *that the right thing would happen for our school*."

Sr. St. Luke agrees. "We knew we had to let go, so the focus was—what does the Lord really want for our school and our parish, what is the Lord calling us to?"

Both Sr. St. Luke and Fr. Trott emphasize the importance of the meetings of the preceeding year. All concerned had come together with a commitment to grappling together with their reality. Especially important, was the mix—of old and young, black and white, newcomers and oldtimers, parishoners and non-parishoners—all respecting one another's unique perspective and growing together in the process.

Summing it up, Sr. St. Luke says, "All pieces were right—as far as the important things." Then she seems to be done with the sadness and, changing her position in the chair, says, "Now it is resurrection and blessing—as it says in the Bible, heaped up, pressed down and running over."



Part of the sense of blessing is the fact that she has been able to stay on this year as pastoral assistant. Knowing that she would be there in the fall to tend to records and paper work, she felt free to spend more time and energy tending to the needs of the persons involved. She tried to create a closing procedure that would minimize the difficulties and even create some good memories that could be taken away from the experience.

"The spirit was phenomenal," she says. "Everyone worked 200%. There could have been anger, bitterness, but there was not. Christmas that year was a school celebration with all 110 students and faculty participating together. At the end of the year we had a school picnic at Egypt Park. It was a gorgeous day. It concluded with a balloon launch."

Savoring the experience, she says with pride, "What we did, was, we built wonderful, wonderful memories all throughout the year."

Part of the blessing and the sense of immediate resurrection mentioned above comes from the presence of three educational programs in the school building. Early in the summer of '85 the City School District approached the parish about leasing the building. The 80-year-old main building and its two additions have been well maintained and a consultant had recommended it to the city.

On the day that I visited at St. Augustine's, June Rousseau, building administrator, welcomed Sr. St. Luke and me to the facility now known as the Westside Adult Learning Center. "We love it here," said June. "Sister has made it so comfortable here for us. There is such a good working relationship between us, such reciprocal good feelings because we have each been sensitive to the other's needs."

On the first floor we visited in classrooms where the Refugee Assistance Program is located. Here persons recently arrived to our country (mainly from Southeast Asia) come for instruction in English, vocational training, and counselling in life skills. A child

care program is provided for participants in this program, which is June's main responsibility.

On the second floor is a General Education Program especially for employees from Rochester Products. The program emerged from negotiations between Rochester Products and the UAW, but the personnel are employed by the Rochester City School District.

In a newer wing of the building is a special placement program for about 35 students in the city schools. In this 10-week program they receive intensive counselling and academic tutoring so that they can return to the mainstream and complete their schooling.

Good spirits and enthusiasm pervade the building. All seem to speak so warmly of Sr. St. Luke and her role in facilitating their move into the building, in making them feel welcome on the site. Conversely, Sr. St. Luke expressed appreciation for their sensitivity to her position.

Typical of the approach to what was certainly a painful and sad experience was the graduation in June '85. It was planned, not as just an 8th grade event, but as a total school involvement, a missioning for both teachers and students who would all be leaving for new beginnings.

Sr. St. Luke called each teacher by name to come to the front of the church. Each teacher in turn called the names of each one of his or her students who then came up to join their teachers. Each person received a large button in the blue and gold school colors which read, "Filled with the spirit, sent to serve." And the entire school march out from the church.

One of the parents commented, "Sure it was hard to have the doors of St. Augustine's close. But the spirit that our families have had, we will never lose. We will take it wherever we go."

The sense of loss is still present. Fr. Bill speaks about the loss of mutual enrichment coming from the daily contact between the church and the neighborhood black community through the school. But he says that they hope to work to remedy that in some kind of reach out program—part of the "coming to a different way of being church" that he feels is being called for these days.

Sr. St. Luke reflects upon a family whose mother has died recently. They are now awaiting a birth of a child. "When that child is born, there will be joy," she says. "It will not take away the sadness of the parent's death. But the joy will take over."

That is something of how it is at St. Augustine's these days. Joy is taking over.



photos: Beatrice Ganley, SSJ

*The Westside Adult Learning Center which now occupies the St. Augustine's School Building offers many services. Students in classes offered through the Refugee Assistance Program are able to bring their children to a daycare center located in what was formerly the school's faculty lounge. In the back row (l. to r.) are Tracy Cretelle (aide), Chanthy Saphouvong, Tuan Nguyen, and Tanh Souvannavong (aide). In front row (l. to r.) are Youn Som, Somphone Khamvilay, and Peter Nguyen.*





"When the school closed, the parish didn't die," says Fr. William Trott (l.), pastor of St. Augustine's. "Now we can prioritize and continue what has been being done all along, but on a more secure financial basis."

Sr. St. Luke Hardy (l.) pastoral assistant and former principal of St. Augustine's School comments, "St. Augustine's has always had a welcoming, hospitable parish, and it still has that special quality. We are probably one of the few parishes with a full time social worker on the staff."



June Rousseau (c.), director of the Refugee Assistance Program, is also Building Administrator for two other programs located in the St. Augustine's building. James Allen (r.), principal of the Special Placement Program of the Rochester City Schools and his program assistant Arline Merriweather (l.) enjoy some time out during one of June's visits to their part of the building.



Huong Ho (l.) and Thanh Ho are making good progress in their English class which is a part of the Refugee Assistance Program.



photo: Beatrice Ganley: SSJ

Chanh Thack is pleased with her success in the Refugee Assistance Program. Soon she hopes to begin nursing studies at Monroe Community College.

"Sure it was hard to have the doors of St. Augustine's close. But the spirit that our families have had, we will never lose. We will take it wherever we go."

—parent of student at St. Augustine's School



# CONNECTIONS



Sr. Remegia McHenry served in Selma from 1949-57. After receiving her MS in nursing from Catholic University in 1961, she became instructor in Medical-Surgical Nursing at St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing in Elmira, NY and was subsequently appointed Director of the School in 1965. She has served in that position since then.

A 1945 graduate of the school, she was chosen this year as "the wholehearted choice of the Board" to receive the Alumna of the Year award.

Due to changes in nursing education, the school is phasing out its programs and will graduate its last class in 1988. As her letter informs us, Sr. Remegia is no stranger to the need to let go, but her visit to Selma, as she says, "has made it less difficult to say Amen." What ever the future holds for her, it is her hope to work with the sick poor.

## Editor's Note:

**The letter from Sr. Remegia is responding to an article in the summer '86 issue of re:union which described the work of the Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph in Alabama.**

**In July '86 Superior General, Sr. Elizabeth Anne LeValley wrote to the parishoners at St. Augustine's, "while we are saddened by the end of an era, we note the new thrusts that continue to be born from your parish family. Giving in the Spirit...letting go in pain...it is all a part of the Christian mystery of hope, of compassion and care for one another."**

**Is there a recipe for gracefully letting go? Perhaps it can be found in these separate yet closely related stories.**

Dear Beatrice:

Sr. Margaret Adelaide and I drove to Selma on the sixteenth of August and returned to Elmira on the sixteenth of September.

We were visiting the mission at Pine Apple when Sister got out of the car and could not walk. She had injured her knee. The pain was so severe, she could not put her weight on her right foot. The next morning, we returned to the Selma Medical Center where Sister was treated and discharged.

That was a somber introduction, but we both had enjoyed every minute of our trip to that point. Our drive was leisurely, sunny... beautiful scenery, good tapes, music, and most of all, good company.

Driving over the Edmund Pettus Bridge into Selma was like waking up to a beautiful dream. The town itself had grown, become modernized and was alive with activity. There were many changes, yet some things remained the same. Only a small portion of St. Elizabeth's Church remained, and this portion was connected with the rectory.

The building where Sr. Francis David taught the primary grades was gone. The side door entrance to the convent was also changed.

Sr. Adelaide answered the door and brought us into the new chapel. The original chapel had been expanded to include the next two bedrooms which had been occupied at different times by Sr. Vincentine, Sr. Elaine Ryan, and Sr. Louis Bertrand. It was beautiful in design and comfort. I looked at the tabernacle and said, "Here I am Lord, back after twenty-nine years." I felt at home again. It was as if I had never been away.

There is so much to tell, I don't know where to start. First of all, our sisters and the sisters at Queen of Peace did everything possible to make our visit beautiful. I have often wondered what an inter-congregational community would be like. To me, the best word to describe it would be, ecumenical. Each sister retained identity with her own community, but there was a common bonding of love and charity. It was evident that each was loving God through all kinds of services to his people. Although their works were separate in many ways, they shared community, prayer, life, and whatever they had together. You can be proud of our sisters in Selma for what they are, and for what they are doing. I want to thank all the sisters, especially Anne Urquhart, Mary Weaver, Mary Maloy, and Nancy Clark who showed us around and took me to meet many old friends.

I must confess that I had been angry because the Good Samaritan Hospital School of Practical Nursing, Old Folks Home and St. Elizabeth's School were all closed. After all the work and sacrifice that went into the establishment of those structures, it seemed such a waste to close them. I was wrong, I was like Thomas, I had to see for myself before I would believe.

This is what helped convert my thinking. There were now in Selma two beautiful modern hospitals that admitted everyone without distinction. Whoever wanted to become a nurse could go to the community college. The elementary schools were integrated, and a new home (Light House) for the aged was established. To continue the utilization of the original buildings would have perpetuated segregation. After I saw this, I realized how wrong I was and I asked the dear Lord to forgive my mistrust.

I realized more than ever that buildings have their place in time, and when they no longer serve their purpose, it is time to let go. Let go, let Jesus take over, is a meaningful conviction of mine. After visiting many people, I realized it is not the buildings, but the people who are important.

One little girl said, "You taught my grandmother," and I had. You can see the advancement of families. Their educational status seems to increase with each generation, as does their social life. Their faith is alive and strong. Love of God lives on in them and their children.

One of the first class of nurses, Etta Peckin's, had it announced on two radio stations that Sister Margaret Adelaide and I were in town, and that the sisters would have a reception from seven until—? on Friday night for those wishing to attend.

We all laughed and even cried a little as we visited and reminisced. I believe I heard the names mentioned of every sister who has ever been missioned there.

The people in Selma are grateful, and love you for what you have done. They want you to keep them in your prayers. It was a wonderful visit and I have much to share with you.

Gratefully,  
Remegia



# RESPONSES FROM OUR READERS

## From former members:

I was impressed and very moved by the collection of reflections ("Pragmatic Dreamers," summer '86 issue) and the thoughts expressed by the congregation members.

Ten years ago I was received into the Novitiate. Now I live alone and my life is very full and challenging, as is my professional work. I am happy and blessed in life.

Part of that blessing is the 2½ years I spent as a member of the SSJ's. The experience of living in a community of faith-filled and nurturing women was rich beyond material conceptions. It is a part of me and who I am.

Please extend my appreciation and thanks to all those who work so hard to publish **re:union**. I look forward to the next issue.

Doris Gruber

Thank you for a beautiful issue. I was thrilled to read about what has been happening in Selma and at Nazareth Academy. Happy to see the photos and pick out people I know...moved by Beth's prophetic words.

Barbara Steinwachs

It was such a nice surprise to receive **re:union**. I think of you often—very special memories. My years in your community enriched my life.

I am the Director of the Montessori Teacher Education Program at Xavier University and my husband teaches 4th, 5th and 6th grade Montessori. I have two sons, Timothy, 13 and Matthew, 10. Parenting them has been a joy and a challenge.

One of the most exciting parts of my job is to help the public school system expand their Montessori Program. They are now talking about a Montessori Junior High School.

Please stay in contact.

Beth Bronsil (Sr. Lelia)

## From our former financial consultant:

Have read with pleasure the Winter 1986 issue of **re:union**. It recalled to me one of the subjects that revives memories of animated but friendly discussion and favorable results.

Your letter to John Hammond was very balanced and preserved the equilibrium traditionally the mark of the Sisters of St. Joseph. I always thank you for teaching me a basic rule: Optimism based on Faith, Realism grounded in Experience.

We hope to attend the December 7th celebration. My best to all my friends.

Arnold B. Jerome

Vice President

St. Joseph's Hospital

Elmira, NY

(Mr. Jerome was the first chairperson to serve on our finance committee which was established in the early '70's when Sr. Agnes Cecilia was Superior General.)

## From a professional colleague:

Kudos and congratulations on the summer 1986 issue of **re:union**! I read every word in it and found myself awed and amazed at the courage and true faith of all the sisters involved in the various endeavors therein described.

You are to be especially commended for doing such a fine and loving job with the publication. God smile on you all!

Francesca Guli

Nazareth College of Rochester

## From the director of the Tri-Conference Retirement Project:

Your article on "Making God's Work Our Own" was excellently written. I think it has great potential for an article in a national magazine. I am looking for people

who can tell a more positive side of the story. I do think that while people are aware of this situation it is time to tell the story of how religious are contributing to the work of the church. Another focus that an article could take would be the alignment of religious women with other American women who have keenly felt the feminization of poverty. Your reference to the Older Women's League 1986 report and the current reference to how poverty has hit American women from the bishops' pastoral makes me think that that is also a potential focus for an article.

I am encouraging you to think about it because I do believe that the most effective writing in the public forum is when opinions are heard from grassroots people.

Mary Oliver Hudon, SSND

(Sr. Mary Oliver is director of the national project working to remedy the financial problems of religious congregations.)

## From Selma, Alabama:

Anne and I are sending the enclosed gift as a tribute to two Sisters from Rochester whom we have long known and loved here in Selma: Sister Catherine Martin and Sister Albertine Devereaux.

Sister Catherine mothered and helped me when I first went to work for the Fathers, and was very dear to all of us—even babysitting for our "kiddies" on various occasions. We still miss her at the Mission Office here; nobody else has ever had her sharp eye for proofreading and revision.

Sister Albertine mothered the whole parish, and we miss her at all our parish functions—especially the Annual Bazaar.

Best wishes to you all...

Alston Fitts III

Director of Information

Fathers of St. Edmund

Selma, Alabama

All the responses from our readers are collected in a book that has been on display outside the communications office at the motherhouse. The book will also be available for perusal at our congregational days such as St. Joseph's Day and other meetings. Hearing from our readers has been very affirming and encouraging.

We welcome responses—letters, submissions in the form of articles, ideas or pictures.

There has been another response too for which we are sincerely grateful. This is the more than \$2,500 in donations that has been sent in from our readers since the first issue was published in fall of 1984. Thank you.



## PERSPECTIVE



Ruth Gudinas, a member of the *Agrégée* of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, is a curriculum specialist in Human Relations for the Madison, Wisconsin Metropolitan School District. She also coordinates the Teaching Toward Peace Group and is an active member of the Madison-Voronezh Sister Cities Project. She holds a doctorate in political science from the University of Chicago and received her BA and MA in history from Nazareth College of Rochester. She is a graduate of Nazareth Academy High School in Rochester.

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**The *Agrégée* is open to men and women who wish to affiliate with the Sisters of St. Joseph through their individual life of prayer and ministry. For more information about the *Agrégée* program contact Sr. Mary Anne Laurer/180 Raines Park/Rochester, NY 14613/721-254-1925.**

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## An Opportunity for Our Readers—Save the Date

The Sisters of St. Joseph and the Diocesan Sisters Council are co-sponsoring a weekend of seminar sessions related to discipleship and church membership today. The featured speaker is Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM who has come to national attention through the 1986 publication of her book, *New Wineskins: Re-imagining Religious Life Today*.

On Saturday, May 16 at 1:30 p.m. Sr. Sandra will give a presentation followed by discussion on the meaning of Christian discipleship in the church today. We invite our readers to join us at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, 4095 East Avenue, Rochester, NY.

Sr. Sandra Schneiders is an associate professor of New Testament and Christian spirituality and a member of the doctoral faculty in scripture and spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.

We are looking forward to her presentations and hope that many of our readers will come to share this opportunity with us.

## "Study War No More?"

(from THE TEACHERS' WORKSHOP NEWSLETTER, December, 1983, Madison, Wisconsin)

Recently, I heard that *at this moment* some thirty wars are being fought around the world. Two "super powers" are engaged in an arms race consuming hundreds of billions of taxpayers' dollars and rubles. The threat of the end of the world by nuclear destruction contaminates the thoughts and dreams of all of us—young and old.

As a human being and as a citizen of one of the super powers, I wonder why war is so *acceptable* as a solution to international problems. As an educator, I wonder what we can do to educate our children in the ways of peace, not war. As a former American History teacher, I suspect that I know at least part of the answer.

In my view, there is a *war bias* in the curriculum of our schools. Think back to the texts you used in history—World, American, whatever. How many times did you have to learn the names and deeds of generals, the locations, dates and outcomes of battles? I remember spending weeks on wars, only a day or so on peace, and that was usually in the form of learning the terms of treaties which followed the end of hostilities. Overall, war in textbooks is glamorous, exciting, righteous. Peace is dull at best, unpatriotic at worst.

I was teaching American History to teenagers in the 1950's. I dutifully taught all the wars, their causes and results, their heroes, their battles. I do not remember teaching any peace heroes; they were not in the text. It never occurred to me to have students research them as they researched the war makers. To this day I do not know their stories.

In 1982, the Council on Interracial Books for Children, in a special issue of its *BULLETIN* entitled "Militarism and Education" (Vol. 13, Nos. 6 and 7), documented the military bias in history books. Its careful analysis describes what I already knew about my own learning and teaching, and it moved me again to believe that we, as educators, have much to do.

We need to study peace. We have to find the peace heroes and get to know them. We must find a way to let children see that peace is not simply the absence of war, but a vital, dynamic thing. Perhaps they will then come to understand that the love of and determination for peace can mobilize a people just as effectively as a war, can draw from them just as many resources of pride, patriotism and courage, can create just as many heroes.

We need to de-glorify and de-mythologize war, teaching it with regret rather than with satisfaction. We can do this, not by disparaging the intentions, work, and even heroic deaths, of military people, but by emphasizing the root causes of war, its terrible cost in human terms and above all, its failure as a viable solution to human problems. Students must see that war is both the least creative and the most expensive way for nations to settle differences.

Today, in the nuclear age, alternatives to war must be found; the stakes are simply too high. The "new ways of thinking" called for recently by scientists, psychologists and former military leaders must begin in the classroom. The war bias must be balanced.

With some thought and care we can wage peace in education.

—Ruth Gudinas

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*"Perspective" is a regular feature of this publication. We invite contributions to this page.*



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Goias. (Goias has one of the highest indexes of assassinations of people involved with land reform.) Vilmar was very active in and committed to the growth of the basic ecclesial community in the region of his parent's farm. As a youth and young adult, he also served the parish community as teacher and catechist.

When he was 22, he became the parish's first lay pastoral agent and director of the religious education program. He was a motivating force in founding and maintaining a youth group in the community. He organized study days, retreats, and various activities in order to promote a "conscientized" faith. Vilmar's creativity and boundless energy, his humor and his gospel sense of life pervaded all that he did.

Vilmar was responsible for the formation of the parish catechists and the organization of religion classes in Cacu and the surrounding rural communities. He encouraged the catechists to become aware of the issues of justice in relation to Brazil and Latin America. He also worked with the members of the local CEB's (basic ecclesial communities) and was an active and vital force in every aspect of parish life.

The son of a small landowner, Vilmar was a strong advocate of agrarian reform. He did much consciousness-raising among the people of the rural area and with the farmworkers. Recently, Vilmar had participated in the Pastoral Commission on the Land (CPT), a church sponsored group to promote justice, and had served as member of the group's regional coordinating team. In this capacity, he

supported the rural workers in their efforts to maintain an authentic union, having been particularly active in a recent struggle which challenged a union leadership that was "bought off" by wealthy land owners. It was after this that the threats to Vilmar's life began.

The Brazilian land reform movement has met with resistance from an organization through which wealthy land owners are attempting to protect and promote their class interests. The group, known as UDR (Democratic Rural Union) militantly opposes agrarian reform and is highly critical of the Church's support of it. They have accused various church members of promoting violence among the people. The UDR is growing steadily. They are mobilizing wealth and power, amassing money not only for arms to elect political candidates but also for the control of the media in order to promote their interests. This organization has its regional headquarters and some very active members in Cacu. Vilmar recognized the danger in this group and, he, in turn, was perceived as a threat to its interests.

With his close friends, Vilmar shared the fact that he had been threatened. Because of his struggle for land reform, because of his visible leadership in the local church community, he felt himself to be a marked person. In the midst of such threats, Vilmar never wavered in his commitment to gospel justice and to speaking the truth.

Shortly before his assassination, he told a friend who was expressing concern for him, "I cannot remain silent, I cannot stop now. If I die, I will die for a just cause, for the struggle of a people in need."



Vilmar Jose de Castro (r.) with Sr. Patricia Frisk (center). In the aftermath of Vilmar's assassination which Sr. Patricia has described as "the most difficult experience of her life," she and Sisters Maureen Finn and Elaine Hollis are "struggling along—shaken, but not defeated, and feeling strongly the prayers and support of all at home."

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