

## Novenario

Novenario is a Latin American custom of praying for nine days for the dead. It is a "keeping vigil" as the deceased journey to God. We are invited to join in days of prayer and remembrance in the spirit of this tradition as we join in solidarity with the 19<sup>th</sup> annual SOA Vigil at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Jewish people keep before us the memory of the holocaust and in doing so teach us a sacred truth: **Hope lies in the remembering.** Remembering disrupts the tyranny of the present status quo and summons up a future worth struggling for. It sets our feet on the path of some unfinished business. Closing the SOA is the unfinished business of the unprecedented violence in the Americas that continues right up to this day. As we come face to face with this reality, we lean on God, who is our hope. (adapted from Don Goergen, *Globalization of Hope.*)

***Though we are unable to attend the Vigil at the SOA/WHINSEC, we can unite in prayer. We stand in solidarity with the people of Central and South America.***

### Day 1

**Let us hold up in prayer the people of Colombia.**

**Hope lies in the remembering.**

Colombia has sent more troops to the SOA than any other Latin American country, with chilling results. Political and sociopolitical violence claims the lives of more than 4,300 Colombians each year; 200 people are forcibly disappeared each year; well over 3 million have been displaced since 1985.

Two groups of people targeted unmercifully have been union organizers and religious leaders. A few examples of the latter are:

- More than 30 priests assassinated in the last ten years
- Archbishop Isaias Duarte Cancino of Cali, assassinated March 12, 2002
- Sister Martha Ines Velez, a poor Sister of St. Peter Claver, assassinated July 14, 2002
- Courageous priests who work for justice there include two Jesuits, Francisco DeRoux and Javier Giraldo, both of whom have visited Madison.
- Fr. Rafael Gallego, parish priest of Tiquisio, known for courageous efforts in community building and community radio, has been on the hit list of Colombian paramilitary forces and has been denied a visa in 10/08 to come to the U.S. for a speaking tour. Alleged "secret security reasons" are cited for the denial.

Washington has given Colombia over \$2 billion in mostly military aid since 2000, making Colombia the third largest recipient of military aid. There is a cycle of funding under the guise of the war on terrorism that help fund lucrative mining and energy zones targeted by large foreign corporations, which use military and paramilitary forces to secure their investments.

The **Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado** has been a sister community to Dane County, Madison, Wisconsin, for many years. They continually come under attack because they have steadfastly refused to arm themselves or align themselves with any of the armed factions.

Over 3000 Dominican Sisters are working among the poor and marginalized in Colombia. They are a light of hope and peace in the midst of so much death and violence. Maria Leonor Charria, O.P., was instrumental in founding a Dominican NGO for the promotion of peace called "Option for Life." Maritze Trigos, O.P., has given her life to the accompaniment of the displaced and the documentation of human rights abuses. She is constantly under death threat.

For more information, go to [www.colombiasupport.net](http://www.colombiasupport.net)

**We pray for the people of Colombia and for the closing of the School of the Americas/WHINSEC. We call upon you, O God of love, for you are the only solid ground for hope that we have.**

**Day 2**

**Let us hold up in prayer church leaders in Central and Latin America, as we remember Archbishop Oscar Romero from El Salvador.**

**His 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of death was on March 24 of this year.**

**Hope lies in the remembering.**

Archbishop Romero was a studious man and a gentle shepherd of his people. More and more, Romero allowed himself to be converted to the side of the poor and the oppressed, becoming the catalyst for radical moral prophecy in the church and outside it. He opened a human rights office, which documented abuses, and received many death threats as a result. He was a powerful preacher whose sermons were broadcast live on radio throughout the country every Sunday. His preaching was so remarkable that people were eager to hear him, especially his beloved poor. He spoke openly about the reality that they were experiencing and brought the light of Christ's Gospel to bear on their lives. The last Sunday of his life he preached these words:

***"Brothers, you came from our own people. You are killing your own brothers (and sisters). Any human order to kill must be subordinate to the law of God, which says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you obeyed your consciences rather than sinful orders. The church cannot remain silent before such an abomination. ... In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people, whose cry rises to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you: stop the repression."***

Within the week, Archbishop Romero was assassinated, while at the altar offering Mass at Divine Providence Hospital in the heart of San Salvador. According to the U.N. Truth Commission, Roberto D'Aubuisson planned and ordered the assassination. He was an SOA graduate and the one who organized El Salvador's infamous death squads. Two of the three Salvadoran soldiers who carried out the assassination were also trained at the SOA.

To date, more than 150 U.S. Catholic bishops have signed a resolution to close the SOA. Additionally, over 110 bishops from Latin America have written letters supporting its closure.

**We pray for the people of El Salvador and church leaders everywhere, that their call for the closing of the SOA/WHINSEC may be acted upon. We call upon you, O God of love, for you are the only solid ground for hope that we have.**

**Day 3**

**Let us hold up in prayer the people of Guatemala, who cry to God that the memories of their loved ones not be lost.**

**They pray, "Nunca mas!" (Never Again)**

**Hope lies in the remembering.**

Bishop Juan Gerardi initiated a peace process called "Restoration of Historic Memories." Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, Pam Mitchell and Julie Schwab, participated in this process wherein the Indian people were allowed to tell the truth of what happened when 440 Indian villages were destroyed, 150,000 of their people killed, and a million people made refugees. The report, *Guatemala: Never Again*, provided a chilling catalog of the violence. It names one particular arm of the government as responsible, the infamous D-2 Military Intelligence, headed by Lima Estrada. He took his training at the SOA at the height of the genocide

campaign in Guatemala's civil war. The report condemned the D-2 for playing a "central role in the conduct of military operations, in massacres, extra-judicial executions, forced disappearances and torture."

Bishop Gerardi was bludgeoned to death in his home two days after he released this report on April 26, 1998. Two years ago (Nov., 2006) Lutheran pastors, Francisco and Jesus de Carillo were murdered as they were locking up their church. The year 2006 was declared the year of Father Stanley Rother by the Catholic Archdiocese of Oklahoma City; he was martyred in 1981 in Santiago, Atitlan, after thirteen years of service with the indigenous people there.

**We pray for the people of Guatemala, especially for the indigenous people, that their memories may be healed and they may rise up strong, despite their severe losses. We call upon you, O God of love, for you are the only solid ground for hope that we have.**

#### Day 4

**Let us hold up in prayer all veterans of all wars.  
We pray for their physical and spiritual healing  
and in gratitude for their sacrifices.**

**We pray that war may eventually be seen as no way to resolve conflict.**

Many have heard war veterans and those who are trained for war say that they feel alone, lost, in pain, burdened by guilt, hopeless, less than human. Perhaps those trained at the SOA/WHINSEC feel the same at times. This reflection points out areas that are wounded and beg for healing.

***"To the blindness in me you say: 'Shed the darkness. Look! See!'***

***To whatever is withered, bent, crippled within me, you proclaim:***

***'Be freed! Go and walk your best in the world.'***

***To the hunger in me for truth, beauty, peace, consolation,  
you promise: 'I will feed you.'***

***To my distressed, disconnected, confused dimensions you say:***

***'I will bring you to your senses.'***

***To the deaf and the unlistening parts of my heart you speak:***

***'Be opened!'***

***To all that has died in me and needs to rise up, you call out:***

***'Come forth!'***

*(Praying our Goodbyes by Joyce Rupp)*

#### Day 5

**Let us unite in prayer with the people of Bolivia  
as they struggle for justice and a resolution to the overwhelming poverty there.  
Hope lies in the remembering.**

General Hugo Banzer Suarez has been proudly pictured in the SOA "Hall of Fame." He was the military dictator from 1971-78 and achieved his power by means of a violent coup. He developed the "Banzer Plan" to silence outspoken members of the church. This plan became a blueprint for repression throughout Latin America.

Banzer returned as constitutionally-elected President from 1997-2001. The U.S. and Bolivian military have been carrying on a long, systemic war ostensibly against drugs but also

aimed at guaranteeing a U.S. military presence in the heart of South America. Many lives have been lost, both among the campesinos and young army recruits.

Many other SOA graduates from Bolivia have been linked to drug and arms trafficking. In a series of cases in the late '80's and early '90's, six SOA graduates were brought to trial for their links to drug rings within the military.

Dominican Sisters have been ministering in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, and Tarija since 1960. Jo Anne Leo and Peggy Ryan continue there, doing leadership training and working with an indigenous group, the Guarani, to continue the struggle for justice.

**We pray for the people of Bolivia. We call upon you, O God of love, for you are the only solid ground for hope that we have.**

#### **Day 6**

**Let us unite in prayer for the people of Argentina. The silenced voices of the disappeared and their loved ones cry out to be heard.**

**Hope lies in the remembering.**

*Desaparecidos* is the Spanish word for "The Disappeared." For thousands of Argentine families, this word has become a symbol of a long, harrowing nightmare. In a coup on March 24, 1976, a military junta seized power in Argentina and went on a campaign to wipe out left-wing terrorism. It was called the "dirty war." Between 1976 and 1983, under military rule, 12,000 people, most of them dissidents and innocent civilians unconnected with terrorism, were arrested and then vanished without a trace. In 1983, after democracy was restored, a national commission was appointed to investigate the fate of the disappeared. Its report revealed the systematic abductions of men, women, and children, the existence of about 340 well-organized secret detention centers, and the methodical use of torture and murder. The disappeared have not been heard of to this day.

Many of the officers responsible for this travesty were graduates of the SOA. The campaign to close the SOA is an attempt to bring the voices of the disappeared back to the world.

**We pray for the people of Argentina, especially those long disappeared... gone but not forgotten. We call upon you, O God of love, for you are the only solid ground for hope that we have.**

#### **Day 7**

**Let us unite in prayer with the people of Chile, who have struggled so long for their basic human rights.**

**Hope lies in the remembering.**

General Augusto Pinochet governed Chile from 1973-1990 and sanctioned the worst human rights abuses in the history of this country. Graduates of the SOA have comprised 1 out of every 7 members of the command staff of DINA, the notorious Chilean intelligence agency. The types of repression used in Chile by the military regime included: arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, torture, forced disappearances, summary executions, collective executions, the negation of the right to appeal War Council sentences, homicide, exile, abduction, intimidation, death threats, raids, dismissal from jobs, and surveillance. Such treatment violated the right to life, to personal integrity, to personal liberty, to personal security, and to live in one's own country. While Pinochet was not a graduate of the SOA, it would appear that he is held in high esteem there. A note from him and a ceremonial sword donated by him have been on display in the office of the Commandant at the SOA. Pinochet

died Dec. 10, 2006, leaving incomplete numerous court cases that had sought to bring him to justice.

**We pray for the people of Chile, whose rights have been grievously denied for decades. May justice be done. We call upon you, O God of love, for you are the only solid ground for hope that we have.**

**Day 8**

**Let us unite in prayer with the people of Mexico,  
who cry to God for justice and equality for all their people.  
Hope lies in the remembering.**

In recent years, Mexico has been among the top clients of the SOA. The sudden rise in Mexican graduates corresponds to the growing movement for economic justice in Mexico. Voices of and for the poor – represented by leaders like the retired Bishop Samuel Ruiz from Chiapas – threaten the powerful and wealthy. There is a “low intensity conflict” in the Mexican states of Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. The large Mexican Army located in these states often leaves the civilian population unprotected. Many of the top military officers are SOA graduates, like Juan Lopez Ortiz, who commanded troops that committed a 1994 massacre in Ocosingo. This year we commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1998 massacre at Acteal by paramilitaries. Eduardo Diaz, Mexican labor leader, says, “The School of the Americas is part of a larger project to protect and defend U.S. corporate interests in Mexico at the expense of workers and indigenous peoples. The movement to close the SOA is an important expression of solidarity with the Mexican people.”

**We pray for the people of Mexico, our close neighbors, sharing hundreds of miles of border with the U.S. We call upon you, O God of love, for you are the only solid ground for hope that we have.**

**Day 9**

***November 16 marks the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of six Jesuit priests and two women martyrs, Elba and Celina Ramos, killed at the University of Central America in San Salvador (11/16/89). They represent 70,000 Salvadorans who died during the civil war, most of them innocent civilians. December 2 will mark the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Four U.S. Churchwomen by Salvadoran military. Of the more than 30 cited by the U.N. Truth Commission as responsible for these deaths, more than 20 were trained at the SOA.***

**Let us unite in prayer with missionaries around the world  
who give their lives for the poor; let us unite with all who dare to teach and  
speak out on human rights.**

**We also hold in prayer the people of Arcatao, close to the Salvadoran/Honduran border, which has been sister city to Madison for over 25 years.**

In 1980, Salvadoran national guardsmen raped and murdered Catholic Sisters Maura Clarke, Ita Ford and Dorothy Kazel, and a churchworker, Jean Donovan. The crime occurred in an atmosphere of U.S. financing and political support of rightist forces in El Salvador. The women were falsely accused of running a road block. The facts are that their only offense was their commitment to the Gospel and their love of the poor. The killing of these women was a

“wake up call” for many in the U.S. that our government was involved in the military repression of the people of Central America. Two of the officers involved in this assassination retired in Florida. Though the U.N. Truth Commission report in 1993 concluded that these two men had organized an official cover-up of the slaying of the Churchwomen, later the case was brought before a civil court in Palm Beach, Florida, and lost.

The Jesuit priests of the UCA were outspoken about the oppressive socioeconomic structure of Salvadoran society. They were unwavering in their defense of the poor and were labeled subversives by the Salvadoran government. The military falsely accused them of being the “brains” behind the guerrilla movement. Rather, they were educators who spoke openly in defense of human rights. Almost a decade after the murder of the Churchwomen, in the middle of that November night, at the height of the offensive, military officers entered the gated university campus and dragged Ignacio Ellacuria, Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martin-Baro, Joaquin Lopez y Lopez, Juan Ramon Moreno, and Amado Lopez to the outside garden. Using their high-powered rifles against these defenseless men, they intentionally fired at their heads, blowing their brains out. Their housekeeper, Elba Ramos, and her teenage daughter, Celina Marisela, were later found and murdered as well. Nineteen of the 26 officers who planned, executed, and covered up this massacre were graduates of the SOA.

**We pray for the people of El Salvador and Honduras and all who love them and have made their home in those countries. We ask for God’s mercy for the part the U.S. government has played in the repression of these people. We call upon you, O God of love, for you are the only solid ground for hope that we have.**

***Sources: The Adelante Committee of the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, who first composed this Novenario in 2002; and Pax Christi, USA.***

**Updated 11/08**