

Jean Donovan and the Call to Discipleship

In the summer of 1985, I lived and worked in a church-run camp for displaced peoples in the countryside of El Salvador. During the 1980s, nearly 80,000 people were brutally murdered in El Salvador by a repressive government that was funded, trained, and armed by the United States. Though that tiny country along the Pacific coast of Central America has only about five million people, over 700,000 people fled their homes because of the war. Over 500,000 were refugees within their own country. U.S. trained and armed death squads terrorized the people. The U.S. sent over one and half million dollars a day during the 1980s to carry out this genocide. We also bombed the countryside.

While living in the Calle Real camp, I witnessed those bombings, was interrogated twice by those death squads and heard countless testimonies from the suffering people. I saw how our government was killing them, but also how they stood up nonviolently and resisted our war making. The Salvadoran church had been led by Archbishop Oscar Romero to stand with the poor, to speak out against war, and to make peace in the name of Jesus. Archbishop Romero was assassinated while celebrating Mass, just like hundreds of other priests, religious, catechists and church workers. In their struggle for justice, the Salvadoran church gave us modern day martyrs who exemplify the Gospel commandment to lay down our lives in nonviolent love as Jesus did.

I used to go and pray at the tomb of Archbishop Romero in the capital city of San Salvador. His tomb was covered with plaques offering thanks for his life. It has become a place of pilgrimage. It is a symbol of the rising spirit of the church, crying out for justice and peace, not just in El Salvador, but everywhere.

Out in the countryside, south of the capital, along a lonely dirt road, stands a smaller memorial, another place of pilgrimage. A stone cross and plaque mark the place where four North American churchwomen were raped, murdered and buried. "Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan gave their lives on December 2, 1980," it reads. "Receive them Lord, into your kingdom."

When their bodies were discovered in a make-shift grave two days after their brutal death, North Americans were shocked and horrified, and forced to see the reality of U.S. backed violence which kills the world's poor and those who defend them.

When one thinks of these modern day martyrs, one is struck by the seriousness of their faith, their commitment to the poor, their insistence on justice and peace, and their willingness to give their lives for oppressed people.

When one ponders Jean Donovan, one marvels at her conversion, her complete response to the call to follow Jesus, her selfless dedication to the poor, and her refusal to give up in the face of death threats and family pressure.

The Gospels tell the story of a rich young man who confronted Jesus with a question: "What must I do to inherit everlasting life?" Jesus answered, "You know the commandments: 'You must not commit adultery; you must not kill; you must not steal; you must not defraud; honor your father and your mother.'" "I have kept all these from my earliest days," the rich young man replied.

Mark records that Jesus "looked steadily at him with love," then said, "There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me." His face fell at these words, we are told, and he went away sad because he was unable to give up his wealth, his career, his life in order to follow Jesus.

Jean Donovan, on the other hand, was able to do just that. When she left her executive position at the Cleveland, Ohio branch of Arthur Andersen, the national accounting firm, she turned her back on first world America to follow Jesus wherever he would lead her. She left behind her apartment, her automobile, her Harley Davidson, her friends, her family, and her bank account to become a lay missionary serving Christ among the poor. She responded wholeheartedly to Jesus' invitation and she did not stop when the violence and injustice around her turned on her. Her response to Jesus led to her martyrdom at the age of twenty-seven.

Along with Ita, Maura and Dorothy, she has become a model of Christian discipleship for North American Catholics, indeed for Christians worldwide. Hers is a remarkable story, a remarkable faith, a remarkable life and death. Jean heard the call to discipleship and said Yes. In the twenty years since her death, as the wars, weapons and suffering increases, she calls us to take up where she left off.

Jean's Journey to Conversion

Jean Donovan was born on April 10, 1953 and raised in upper-middle class Westport, Connecticut. From her earliest days, she stood out for her passion for life and her outgoing, enthusiastic spirit. She excelled at horseback riding and became a star performer at the Fiddle Horse Farm. Her family attended Mass every Sunday and supported the Republican party at every election. Her parents, Pat and Ray, created a warm, loving home for Jean and her older brother, Michael. After graduating from Staples High School, Jean enrolled in Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where she continued to ride horses. Following in Michael's footsteps, she decided to major in economics and looked forward to a successful business career.

When Jean was twenty, she decided to spend her junior year studying abroad at the University of the City of Cork in Ireland. She arrived with an English saddle slung across one shoulder and a golf bag on the other, ready for a year of fun and adventure.

But life in Cork did not turn out to be as glamorous as she expected. In the midst of getting adjusted to a new culture, meeting new friends, and buckling down to her studies, she met an extraordinary person who would change her life, Father Michael Crowley.

One evening, Jean was invited to attend a student meeting of the Legion of Mary, led by Fr. Crowley. Each week, he encouraged them to help someone in need. He had just recently returned from working as a missionary in Peru for ten years. He lived in the desert city of Trujillo, along the Pacific coast. Before that, he had worked with Puerto Rican and Cuban communities in Harlem, New York. During those weekly Legion of Mary meetings, Fr. Crowley spoke passionately about the sufferings of the poor in the third world, their connection with our first world lifestyle, and the need to help them with material goods and justice. "It is a terrible tragedy to see the

world's superpowers reading as communism what is in fact nothing more than the cry of the poor for justice," he would say.

"When I first met Jean," Michael Crowley later recalled, "she was like a cross section of American young people, I suppose: confused, searching for a meaning in her life. She was a conventional Catholic, if you will, but took it, you know, tongue-in-cheek, in the same way as so many Christians around the world." Crowley challenged her and her friends not to waste their lives, but to become real Christians by serving the poorest of the poor. "When you come out of college with a nice degree and a nice job, don't become a nice comfy capitalist," he told them. "Feel it as your Christian duty to change the wrong structures of the world. Try and improve the world."

Jean joined the Legion of Mary student group, and began visiting the elderly, the sick, and the mentally disabled. Sometimes she brought cooked meals to them. For the first time in her life, she encountered the poor and needy. "If you stand with the poor," Crowley had told her, "identify with them, feel their insecurity, their rejection and so on, then you begin to understand the world in a new way." Soon, all her talent, energy, enthusiasm, generosity, warmth and good humor were being showered on her new friends. Slowly, she began to realize that she could live without the many possessions she had, and that through loving service, she could find happiness.

"Jean was always very aware that there were people who suffered," said her friend Maura Corkery, who had initially invited her to join the student group. "Sick people, hungry people, people who were poor, the more she found out about this reality, the more uneasy she became. Even as a student, she was always committed to doing something about it." As she settled down, she really began to enjoy the work she was doing. "She laughed a lot," Maura remembers. "She loved life. She love people. She was happy."

Fr. Crowley made a deep impression on Jean. He challenged her and listened to her search for meaning. She began to feel called to a life of service, and this call both excited and terrified her.

In 1974, she left Ireland for her senior year at Mary Washington College. At graduation, she was awarded an alumni scholarship for further study. She won a second scholarship at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland, to study economics for another year. After getting her master's degree, she was offered a job at Arthur Andersen and began what everyone assumed would be a successful career in business.

At the age of twenty-three, she moved into an apartment on the shore of Lake Erie with her cousin, Colleen Kelly. The two friends talked, laughed and went out on the town. Another Cleveland friend, Debbie Miller, recalled that she enjoyed heated discussions, especially taking the opposite side in an argument. "It got to the point that I stopped arguing with her because there was no winning," Debbie said. "She maintained conservative Republican beliefs all the way down the line, but her friendships were with people who did not share her viewpoint. Jean liked extremes, in her friendships and in her political and economic beliefs."

Jean was twenty four years old by Christmas, 1977, earning \$20,000 a year. Ana Carrigan, author of "Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan" (Simon

and Schuster, 1984), wrote that Jean "seemed to have achieved the good life at a very young age, and her gregarious, fun-loving personality gave every indication that she was enjoying to the hilt the rewards that went with her success." At the Arthur Andersen Christmas party that year, the annual office lottery was drawn. First prize was an all expense paid trip for two to Spain. Jean won.

But she did something unexpected. The next morning, she made arrangements with her boss to take an immediate two week vacation, cashed in the ticket to Spain and booked an immediate flight to Ireland. Michael Crowley opened his door the next day, and there stood Jean, "unannounced, on his doorstep." "Don't laugh too loud, Mike," she said. "I've come to talk to you because I think I have to change my life."

During that trip to Ireland, Jean began to reexamine the direction of her life, her work at an accounting firm, and the call to serve the world's poor. "I think," Father Crowley later commented, "what was happening then, was a gut discontent with the so-called twentieth-century utopia. You know she had money. She had everything that money could buy. And she didn't give a damn about money. In fact, she was reckless and she had no regard for money. She'd spend it like a drunken sailor, as we say. She knew quite well what she was doing when she came to Europe that time, when she was tossing over the idea of becoming a missionary; she was basically saying--life as I live it isn't fulfilling me deep down."

She returned to Cleveland and went directly to the diocesan youth ministry office, "wearing a T-shirt and a leather jacket and carrying a motorcycle helmet." Soon she was working with inner-city kids and had won everybody over with her confidence and charm.

"I'm Jean Donovan," she said, when she went to visit Fr. Ralph Wiatowski at St. Luke's parish. "I've decided it's time I learned something about this God and I've decided that you're the one to teach me."

"She was just so honest and so open," he recalled, "that she was a delightful person to talk to and discuss things with, because she had no qualms about saying, 'Ah, that's crazy,' you know. And it wasn't like you could just provide something for her and expect her to go off happy with that. She had a questioning mind and an alert mentality."

Jean began to meet every week with Father Ralph to talk about the Gospels. One day, Fr. Ralph brought along some brochures about the social programs run by the diocese. Jean noticed a small pamphlet describing the work of Cleveland diocesan lay missionary program in El Salvador. Instantly, she knew what she wanted to do. The work in El Salvador struck a deep chord in her. She found what she had been looking for. She immediately applied to the program. She would join the Cleveland mission team and become a Maryknoll lay missionary in Central America.

Jean's Journey to El Salvador

In late 1977, Jean told her family that she was going to quit her job and move to El Salvador to work for two years as a missionary. Her parents did not understand why Jean wanted to go to Central America. They didn't even know where El Salvador was. That day, Ray Donovan went out and bought a map of Central America to find El Salvador. Her brother Michael tried to discourage her from going. "

I knew it was dangerous," Michael Donovan recalls. " I knew something just like what happened could happen and I told her so, but she wouldn't listen to me." The more he learned about war-torn El Salvador, the harder he tried to convince her not to go. "I don't think I could have tried harder. She was very stubborn and determined in most things. On any other subject she would always argue vociferously. But this was totally different. With regard to El Salvador, she'd be very still, very quiet. She'd just listen to what everybody had to say. She never really got argumentative about it at all."

To become a member of the Cleveland mission team in El Salvador, where she would use her accounting skills to balance the mission books, Jean had to spend four months studying at the Maryknoll headquarters in Ossining, New York, which ran the only existing program in the country designed to give lay people a thorough preparation for work among the Third World poor. She concluded her application to the Maryknoll Lay Missioner program by writing:

"I have been thinking about this vocation for many years. Actually I think, that for a number of years, Christ has been sending various people into my life, that through their example and actions, I heard a calling to missionary work. I have a gut feeling that my main motivation to be a missionary is a true calling from God."

At the farewell party in her honor, one of her Cleveland friends asked Jean, "What are you going to El Salvador for anyway, Jean? So you can be known as 'St. Jean the Playful?'" Jean laughed. Later, when other friends would question her, she would repeat that phrase. "Look, it's a can't lose situation for me! Either I will get three years of great experiences out of it or I will die--and then you'll have to pray to St. Jean the Playful for the rest of your life!"

Jean lived and studied at Maryknoll for four months in the fall and winter of 1978. Pat de Angelis, another lay missioner, remembered how Jean struggled for clarity about her new journey. "Do you think this call is really a call?" she would ask. "Do you think God's really calling me? Why? Why me? Doesn't God know what kind of person I am?"

Many remember her provocative questions. Gwen Vendley, a former lay missioner who taught a course for the new students, recalled, "She wasn't one to compromise her beliefs, even if she felt that being outspoken might jeopardize her being here. She would challenge some of the institutional understandings of what the church means. She would question the role of the women in the church, the laity's role, what priesthood means, and if you're in a seminary setting, that's a little awkward at times."

Her friends Mary Fran Ehlinger and Rita Mikolajczyk from the Cleveland youth ministry group talked often with her "about the choices people make and about what it means to do something that feels right." She questioned Mary Fran, "Why me? Why do I want to do this? Why don't you or Rita want to go to El Salvador? Why is this something that I have to do?"

Jean had begun to date Doug Cable, a doctor in Cleveland. He accepted her decision to go to El Salvador. "She was an accountant in Cleveland who was going down to Salvador to be an accountant down there. She was going to balance the mission's books and that seemed like a reasonable thing to do, like it was perfectly safe. She

wasn't getting out in the jungle, risking her life. There was some violence in El Salvador at the time and she had said, 'Well, when the first shot is fired, I'll be on the next plane.' And we all believed her. I thought I knew her well enough by then that she would have sense enough to get out when things got serious. Because she was above all a very practical person. At least so she seemed in Cleveland, when she was an accountant."

Jean's Journey to Solidarity with the Poor

In the Spring of 1979, Jean graduated from the Maryknoll program and flew to Huehuetenango, Guatemala for three months of intensive language training. She arrived in La Libertad, El Salvador, her new home, in August 1979. Her assignment was simple: balance the mission books.

For several years, the United Nations listed El Salvador as one of the poorest nations in the hemisphere, with the lowest caloric intake of any country in Latin America except for Haiti. Over fifty percent of the people were unemployed. Eighty percent of the rural families lived in flimsy shelters without electricity, plumbing or heating. A small handful of landowners controlled the population, and formed armed civilian vigilante groups with persecuted and tortured any agitators. Elections in 1972, 1974, and 1977 were fraudulent. Any efforts toward agrarian reform, electoral reform, democratic reform, or economic reform were immediately squashed. As small groups began to demonstrate against the appalling widespread systemic injustice, the government repression began. The police arrested or shot any protesters. Over time, tens of thousands of people were disappeared and assassinated, all thanks to U.S. military aid, guns, and training.

During the 1970s, the Catholic church in El Salvador began to speak out against injustice and oppression. Inspired by the theology of liberation, priests and church workers pressed for justice for the poor, an end to the violence, and for the basic human rights of food, shelter, and equal sharing of land. Basic Christian Communities were formed so that small groups could gather to pray, read the scriptures, and discuss how to implement them.

On March 12, 1977, a Salvadoran Jesuit, Rutilio Grande, became the first priest to be assassinated by the death squads. He was killed because he had been organizing poor people to demand justice and an end to the killings. In one of his last sermons, Grande said, "Soon, the Bible and the Gospel won't be allowed to cross our borders. We will get only the bindings, because all of the pages are subversive. And I think that if Jesus came across the border, they would not let him in. They would accuse him of being a rabble-rouser, a foreign Jew, one who confused the people with exotic and foreign ideas, ideas against the ruling class, that is, against the wealthy. Brothers and sisters, there is no doubt, they would crucify him again."

While Jean was studying Spanish in Guatemala, military forces killed scores of people in El Salvador who were protesting the military government. There was some discussion of canceling the missionary project, but Jean spoke onto a tape for a friend saying that she still wanted to go to El Salvador and begin her new work among the suffering people. "There's one thing I know, that I'm supposed to be down here, right now. Not that I'm going to be able to do anything, or contribute to anything, but it's just a feeling I have. And maybe, maybe I will be able to. I read a very interesting article in one of the Maryknoll magazines before I left. Two things

really hit me: first, that you can contribute a lot and make a big difference in the world if you realize that the world you're talking about might be very small, maybe one person, or two people. And the other thing it said was that if you can find a place to serve, you can be happy. I think, they're both really true."

As she continued her Spanish studies, reports of the daily violence in El Salvador grew more numerous and terrible. "I think, as oppose to what a lot of people have said, in some ways, with all the trouble, this is when you should be there. Because it's not when things are going really well and everybody is happy, that's not when they need support or whatever. Maybe that's all you can give them, support, when you can't contribute anything else. And now, it seems to me like it's a perfect time to be there."

The Cleveland mission team was based in the tiny Pacific coast town of La Libertad. Fr. Paul Schindler served as the pastor of the parish. Co-workers Fr. Ken Myers, Sister Dorothy Kazel, and Sister Cris Rody lived two miles down the road in the village of Zaragoza. There was an endless array of tasks and requests for help. Everyone was overwhelmed by the urgent demands. At first, it was difficult for Jean to adjust to reality of rural life in El Salvador. La Libertad had already suffered some of the worst violence of the time. But suddenly, Jean found herself living without hot water, without any plumbing, without television, without her favorites foods, and without a variety of other luxuries.

After a month in El Salvador, Jean wrote to a friend, "I keep getting very frustrated and wonder what I am doing here as opposed to being married and living at lollipop acres. Sometimes I'll think: Oh my God, I'm twenty-six years old, I should be married. I shouldn't be running around the way I am. And then I sit there, and I talk to the Lord, and I say, 'Why are you doing this to me? Why can't I just be your little suburban housewife?' And you know, God hasn't answered me yet. I don't know. Sometimes I get mad at God. Sometimes I tell God I'm going to chuck the whole thing, that I've had it."

Jean quickly became friends with her co-workers from Cleveland. Dorothy Kazel, an Ursuline sister who had already been in Salvador for eight years, became her guide, mentor and partner. "We know we are sort of band-aid instruments," Dorothy wrote her parents back in Cleveland. "We are not able to participate fully, completely, in the culture and politics and everything that is going on around here. We touch on things. But we can only touch on things in a hopeful way and in a loving way, and in this way bring Jesus Christ to the people."

Jean was asked to help serve a community of harvest workers in Santa Cruz. Over the next months, she spent her days playing with and encouraging young people. She also coordinated the local lay preachers, "the Delegates of the Word," and arranged the Bible readings for the "Celebration of the Word," which replaced the weekly Mass, since there were so few priests. During these gatherings, scripture would be read and discussed openly by everyone. Through these base community meetings, missionaries in El Salvador and Latin America encouraged other Christians to take a stand for the Gospel values of justice, peace and equality. Earlier, Dorothy had written out the goal of Jean's work: "The whole Gospel of John is about love, and the whole reason for living is love, and if we can just breathe a little bit of love, a little bit of warmth and a little bit of concern, extend the whole idea of universality, extend this to the people here, then, I think that's all we can really do."

Jean quickly fell in love with the Salvadoran people. The poor began to teach about life. They shared their lives, their suffering, their faith, their love and their hope. She was accepted and welcomed as a new member of their community. "It seems that we're here to be ministered to a lot more than to minister," she wrote one of her teachers back at Maryknoll. She had begun to discover a truth which Maura Clarke later wrote: "The poor really strip you, pull you, challenge you, evangelize you, show you God." But just as Jean fell in love with the people, they also fell in love with Jean. She poured out all her energy on them.

The Witness of Archbishop Oscar Romero

All around La Libertad, mutilated bodies began to turn up every day. The government death squads, trained and funded by the United States, practiced a reign of terror over the people, killing catechists and community organizers. With each passing month, the violence dramatically escalated. Eventually, El Salvador became synonymous with terrorism and violence.

As the tension grew, Archbishop Romero spoke out with ever greater force, demanding an end to the government violence. He became a hero and inspiration to the people, including Jean. "He is a great guy," she wrote a friend. "The leader of liberation theology in practice. It is so inspiring when you see and hear a person like Archbishop Romero. He doesn't back down for anything. He really is the voice of the people. The way they respond to him is great. It is like the Pope when he enters church. They stand on the pews and clap for him. They clap for his sermons, and at the recessional, everyone tries to shake his hand. And I think he does manage to shake most people's hands. At the same time, he is a very humble person. He has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. I hope he wins."

When Oscar Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador in January of 1977, the military, the landowners, the ruling junta, the death squads and the business establishment were delighted. Nearly all church workers were bitterly disappointed. Romero was a right-wing conservative, a friend of the military and the business elite. He practiced a private pietistic spirituality that remained above the public fray for justice.

But despite his right wing views, Romero remained a close friend of Rutilio Grande, the troublemaking Jesuit. Romero saw Grande weekly, and listened closely to his stories about the plight of the rural poor and his interpretation of the Gospel. When his friend Rutilio was assassinated, Romero was shocked. He immediately condemned the killing and began to criticize the government, which he suddenly realized had ordered Grande's death. Romero excommunicated the assassins, closed down the school in Grande's home town of Aguilares for three days of mourning, and told the students to reflect on the meaning of Grande's life. He announced that until the government brought answers to Grande's death, no member of the church hierarchy or the clergy would attend any civic ceremony. In open defiance of the government ban on all public gatherings, he ordered all churches throughout the whole country to cancel their Sunday masses, and announced there would be only one Mass that day, at the Cathedral in San Salvador, which would be broadcast nationally on the radio.

Grande's illegal funeral Mass marked a new level of solidarity between the Catholic church and the poor and oppressed peoples. Romero denounced government

violence until his dying breath. He was immediately called a traitor, unpatriotic, a communist dupe and even a terrorist. His conversion was immediate, dramatic and stunning. He would become not just one of the great voices for justice and peace during the 1970s and 1980s, but of all times.

"The world which the church ought to serve is the world of the poor," Romero said after Grande's death. "The persecution of the church is a result of defending the poor." Every Sunday morning, Romero offered a long reflection on both the weekly scripture readings and the weekly murders, with a careful analysis of the government's participation in injustice and the military death squads. Nearly every church, community and village throughout the country gathered around a radio on Sunday mornings to listen to those sermons.

Jean traveled to the capital nearly every Sunday from then on to see and hear Romero preach in the Cathedral. Shortly after she first arrived, Romero visited La Libertad. Jean had made some of her famous chocolate chip cookies. He thoroughly enjoyed them. From then on, every week, according to Ana Carrigan, Jean would bake a fresh supply of chocolate chip cookies for Archbishop Romero and drop them off in San Salvador with the nuns who ran the convent where he lived. "To many, Romero is a saint here," Jean wrote to a friend. His witness in the face of such terrible violence gave Jean the strength to pray and "to believe a bit more in prayer." She wanted to stay, just to be in his presence and learn from him.

As the threats against Romero's life increased hourly, he spoke out publicly about his inevitable assassination, and how he hoped that it would sow the seeds of justice and liberation. "As a pastor, I am obliged by divine mandate to give my life for those I love, for all Salvadorans, even for those who may be going to kill me," Romero said. "If the threats come to be fulfilled, from this moment I offer my blood to God for the redemption and the resurrection of El Salvador. Let my death, if it is accepted by God, be for the liberation of my people and as a witness of hope in the future. You may say, if they succeed in killing me, that I pardon and bless those who do it."

On October 15, 1979, a group of junior military officers staged a political coup. Jean wrote to her friend Rita back in Cleveland: "Well, kid, I got your letter today and it really brightened up my day to hear from you. First, I appreciate your prayers. We all need them. Yes, we certainly did have a coup. So far, everyone is just holding their breath and waiting to see what happens. The leftist groups are making lots of trouble and twenty-three were killed in the capital yesterday. At times I'm really scared for me as well, but mostly I know the Lord is and will protect me, so I'm certainly not looking over my shoulder."

People were being killed every day, every hour, throughout the country. Their bodies were left on the street. "When you see the police here," Jean wrote, "you certainly don't feel they're going to protect you. You feel like they're going to shoot you!"

In early January, 1980, as the violence mounted and people fled their homes, Romero opened the doors of the mammoth seminary in downtown San Salvador to any displaced person. It was the first of many church-run centers for the displaced. His decision shocked the clergy and the other bishops, and has never been replicated anywhere else. His announcement would be the equivalent of turning New York city's stately archdiocesan seminary into one large Catholic Worker house. Hundreds of destitute people camped out on the grounds and slept in the building. It totally

disrupted archdiocesan business as usual, but in a time of war, it not only offered comfort and actual relief to the suffering people, it made the Gospel of peace come to life with stunning clarity.

"My life has been threatened many times," Romero told a reporter in early March. "I have to confess that as a Christian I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people."

During his Sunday sermon on March 23rd, Romero listed the people who were murdered that week and concluded with a direct plea to the young men in the military. "Each one of you is one of us," he said. "We are the same people. The peasants you kill are your own brothers and sisters. When you hear the voice of a man commanding you to kill, remember instead the voice of God: 'Thou Shalt Not Kill!' God's law must prevail. No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. There is still time for you to obey your own conscience, even in the face of a sinful command to kill. The church, defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, and of the dignity of each human being, cannot remain silent in the presence of such abominations. The government must understand that reforms, steeped in so much blood, are worthless. In the name of God, in the name of the tormented people whose cries rise up to heaven, I beseech you, I beg you, I command you, stop the repression!"

The next day, on Monday evening March 24th, 1980, while celebrating Mass in the Convent of the Good Shepherd where he lived, Oscar Romero was shot and killed by an assassin who stood at the back door.

"He was a fantastic person," Jean wrote to a friend. "He was patient and kind, and always

showed love. He had a gift of public speaking but could talk to people one on one. He was fearlessly honest. He lived a simple life of continual forgiveness and love. He was the friend of the weak and the poor, and was always available to anyone who wanted to talk. The campesinos were always outside his door."

Jean and the sisters she worked with stood guard beside his coffin during the long hours before his funeral Mass. Over one hundred thousand people crowded the plaza outside the Cathedral for his funeral. In the middle of the Mass, as bishops from around the world stood outside on the steps of the unfinished church, gunfire and bombs exploded from the top of the National Palace. The government had opened fire on the crowd, with the full support of the United States. The crowd rushed forward into the cathedral. Thirty people were killed in the stampede. Hundreds were injured. The funeral Mass was never finished.

"I went through a complete spectrum of faith," Jean told Michael Crowley on a tape she sent afterwards, "from, I didn't believe there was a God, to, what am I doing here? I'm much too young to die!, to, There has to be a God, so it's going to be much better, because I know I'm going to die today. I was convinced they were going to throw a bomb in the cathedral. But actually, for all that, I was fairly calm about what was happening. I certainly didn't get upset. You know, I didn't know how I would react to something like that, but now, I know."

After Romero's assassination, a friend wrote to Jean saying it was time for her to come home. "I got your letter," Jean wrote back, "and I really appreciate the fact that you said you worry about me. It's nice to know that people care and they'd like to tell me to come home, as you say. There are lots of times I feel like coming home. But I really do feel strongly that God has sent me here, and wants me to be here, and I'm going to try to do my best to live up to that."

Jean's Journey to the Cross of Christ

In April 1980, in the small community of Santa Cruz where Jean was working with the displaced peoples, government death squads killed several young catechists and community leaders, and destroyed the church's altar and the house of the pastor. In May 1980, hundreds of Salvadoran refugees were brutally massacred as they crossed the Sampul River from El Salvador to Honduras on the other side. Salvadoran soldiers fired machine guns from the Salvadoran side, while Honduran soldiers fired machine guns from the Honduran side. All the weapons came from the United States.

At that time, two Maryknoll sisters, Ita Ford and Carla Piette, who were working in Chile, decided to move to El Salvador. They were trying to respond to Romero's call for international solidarity. Immediately upon arrival, they went to work serving the victims of these massacres. "The focus of our lives is to accompany these displaced, fragmented families in their terrific fear and pain," Ita wrote. "I don't know if it is in spite of, or because of the horror, terror, evil, confusion, lawlessness, but I do know that it is right to be here. That may be the only surety as, with Carla, I start a work that is going to put us in contact with some of the hurting, homeless, hungry and God knows whom else."

"Things now are so much worse, it's unbelievable," Jean wrote to Michael Crowley in late May, 1980. "People are being killed daily. We just found out that three people from one of our areas had been taken, tortured and hacked to death. Two were young men and one was an older man. The man had been in ORDEN, a government death squad, had a fight with them and quit. So that's probably why they got him. And the other two, well, they really make me sick, because I knew them both fairly well. We had done a mission out there recently and they were coming to the celebrations and stuff. Everything is really hitting so close now." The murder of people she knew brought the violence home to Jean more than ever and for the first time, she felt personally threatened.

She went to Guatemala for a week to visit a Maryknoll friend. "He thinks I should get out," she wrote after the trip. "Maybe I should. I'm not sure yet. I feel helpless to really work because everyone is afraid to do anything. Presently I spend most of my time going to celebrations in our various communities. Because of problems nobody wants to go without me. Today I started at 7 a.m. and finished about 8 p.m. In the middle, I went to a Mass celebrated by Bishop Rivera y Damas in a village where the nuns who run the parish next to ours have been threatened. They were captured and questioned for a day. Bishop Rivera came to show his support. Dorothy Kazel and I were the only outsiders there because every other parish around has been deserted. Either the priest was going to be killed or the catechists. It's really a situation of anarchy."

"Down here things are getting bad fast," she wrote to another friend. "Every day there are so many killings. I don't know if I can face another body. It may be that each day you get worn down a little. We had an Italian priest killed yesterday while he was praying in church."

Paul Schindler, the pastor at the church in La Libertad, later recalled their conversations. "We had so many of our catechists killed, so we often discussed: 'Are we actually being the cause of people dying?' And our answer was always, 'Definitely not,' because in a lot of places where there were no priests, there were a lot of people dying. Our presence was actually protecting them, because we always had that telephone call to the Embassy that we could make. Just by the fact that I was an American and they worried about losing arms support, and I had contact with the Embassy and human rights people, that would sometimes make them back off."

On several occasions, when Paul and the others were away, Jean would go to the military barracks and demand that the death squad soldiers immediately release a prisoner, saying that she would contact the U.S. Embassy if the prisoner was not released. Dorothy and Jean were worried that Paul might be killed because he received so many deaths. "It got to the point," Paul recalled, "that every time I climbed into the jeep to leave for Mass somewhere, I'd say, 'Well, here I come, Lord.' You get past that fear. You have to get past the fear or you'd never step outside the door. You'd become a prisoner inside your own house. So you just say to yourself, 'I'm going to be killed today, and I'm ready to die, but I have to be with these people.' I just did not fear anymore."

Soon, Paul, Dorothy and Jean were spending most of their time recovering and burying the mutilated bodies of people killed by the death squads. After a while, notes were pinned to the bodies, "If you bury this body, the same will happen to you."

On July 6th, 1980, two of Jean's closest friends, Armando Avelae and Carlos Hernandez, walked Jean home down main street in La Libertad, after seeing a movie together. As Jean was going into her house, gun shots exploded. She ran back into the street. Her friends had been shot and killed. Their deaths devastated her. They were also a direct message from the death squads to the missionaries--get out or you're next. "It was really the lowest point in her whole Salvador experience," Fr. Crowley later observed.

In Chalatenango, where Ita and Carla worked, the violence was just as brutal, just as terrifying, just as overwhelming. "They've got bodies lying all over," Jean told Crowley on a tape. "No one can bury them because they get shot if they try. The nuns got a message to leave in six days or they're going to be killed, and they burned their jeep to prove it. So the nuns believed it and left. People don't have liberty to do anything. They have to take a side. And it's very hard to take a particular side. It's so much harder to fight for your liberty in a nonviolent way than it is with a gun."

Ita Ford admitted that most of their efforts were aimed simply so they could "keep walking down this dark road without becoming as dark as the situation." "You say you don't want anything to happen to me," Ita wrote her sister. "I'd prefer it that way myself, but I don't see that we have control over the forces of madness, and if you could choose to enter into other people's suffering, or to love others, you at least

have to consent in some way to the possible consequences. Actually what I've learned here is that death is not the worst evil. We live with these evils, hate, manipulation, selfishness. We look death in the face every day. But the cause of the death is evil. That's what we have to wrestle and fight against."

"What I want to say, some of it isn't too jolly birthday talk, but it's real," Ita wrote to her niece on her sixteenth birthday back home in Brooklyn. "Yesterday I stood looking down at a sixteen year old who had been killed a few hours earlier. I know a lot of kids even younger who are dead. This is a terrible time in El Salvador for youth. A lot of idealism and commitment are getting snuffed out here now. The reasons why so many people are being killed are quite complicated, yet there are a few simple strands. One is that many people have found a meaning to live, sacrifice, and even die. And whether their life-span is sixteen years, sixty, or ninety, for them life has had a purpose. In many ways, they are fortunate people. Brooklyn is not passing through the drama of El Salvador but some things hold true wherever one is, and at whatever age. What I'm saying is I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for, maybe even worth dying for, something that energizes you, enthuses you, and enables you to keep moving ahead."

In August, 1980, Ita and Carla were helping transport a refugee through a mountain canyon when their jeep got trapped in an unexpected flood. Flash floods are common in the rugged terrain of Chalatenango. Before they knew what was happening, their jeep flipped over and trapped Carla. As the jeep filled with water, Carla pushed Ita out. Ita went bobbing down the rushing river. Realizing she was about to drown, she prayed, "Receive me, Lord, I'm coming." After being tossed downstream for several miles, Ita was able to grab hold of some roots along the water's edge where she clung for her life. Later, she said she heard "a voice which seemed to be other than my own," saying, "The Lord has saved you to continue serving the poor and you've got to get out of this river." Ita managed to get to shore and was eventually rescued. The next day, Jean Donovan discovered Carla's naked body washed ashore nine miles away from the overturned jeep. "This is a kind of heavy experience," Ita wrote home a few days later. "But I guess it just says that God is extremely active in our lives and is certainly the Lord of life, the one who's in charge, the one who decides."

The death of Maryknoll Sister Carla Piette devastated Ita, but coming so soon after the deaths of Armando and Carlos, it also devastated Jean. Jean had spent most of her time in the last four months with the two Maryknollers. She particularly looked up to Ita Ford, who was strong, confident and full of life. "I know that I want to stay and work in El Salvador," Jean wrote a friend after Carla's funeral, "because of the work that Carla had begun."

Maryknoll Sister Maura Clarke, a longtime missionary in Nicaragua, volunteered to go to El Salvador and carry on Carla's work with Ita in Chalatenango. When her friends expressed concern that she was going into the war zones of El Salvador, Maura wrote, "If we leave the people when they suffer the cross, how credible is our word to them? The church's role is to accompany those who suffer the most, and to witness our hope in the resurrection."

Maura wrote to her parents, "Don't worry about me. The Lord takes care of us all. If I see that it isn't the place for me, I'll return to work in Nicaragua very soon. We

must not be afraid. No matter what happens, we are one with God and with one another."

On September 1st, 1980, a meeting of the church workers was held and it was decided that Ita and Maura would stay in Chalatenango and that Dorothy and Jean would act as a backup to them. Cris Rody would work with refugees and Ken Myers would open a new refugee center for children in Zaragoza.

"All I can share with you is that God's palpable presence has never been more real ever since we came to Salvador," Ita wrote to her mother. "God's made a lot of things clear for us--what we should be doing, etc.--and I trust in that and I hope you can, too."

In early September, Jean took a well-planned, six-week vacation: to Miami to see her parents, then to London to meet Doug Cable, then to Ireland for the wedding of a friend, then to Maryknoll headquarters in New York, Cleveland, Miami and back to El Salvador. "Dear Everybody," she wrote ahead to Maryknoll. "I can't really write here. But I will have a lot to relate when I arrive. I will probably need debriefing on how to be normal in the States... but when was I ever normal? See you soon. Love."

Although the trip was a great reunion with her family and friends, everyone tried to convince her not to return to El Salvador. "I couldn't get her to stay," Doug Cable said later. "I talked to her for two weeks, and Father Crowley was just eloquent, and neither of us could convince her not to go back. He pointed out to her, that even though she was not a revolutionary, was not aiding or abetting the revolutionaries, and neither was the church, they were perceived to be on the revolutionaries' side by the army. The army saw them as sympathetic, and that's all that mattered. And because she wasn't a revolutionary, she didn't have the advantages they have. They had no defense. They couldn't arm themselves. They couldn't hide. They discussed this--'Maybe we should arms ourselves,'--and they couldn't bring themselves to do this. It was against everything that they were down there for. They were down there to heal, and to save lives, to save souls. They couldn't carry guns."

"She went back because she knew she was doing some good," Doug continued. "She was showing these poor Salvadoran people who were being massacred, whose families were being decimated, that they weren't alone. That she cared."

Michael Crowley also tried to dissuade her from going back. "In my judgment," he recalled, "her life was at risk and I told her that in very, very clear terms. I said, 'You're going to get it. You'll be picked, lifted, tortured and killed. It's going to happen.'" On the plane ride back, she wrote a long letter to Crowley explaining why she was going back. "I know this isn't going to be understood," she wrote to him. "I belong there. Those people need me."

At Maryknoll, Jean had several long conversations with Gwen Vendley, who said to her, "What difference does it make if you go down there and you get killed? You're just one person that's killed down there." They had talked about continuing the work in the United States, but that wasn't enough for her. "Something more was calling her," Gwen Vendley recalled later. "The bravery came in saying 'Yes.' She didn't know when it was going to happen, she just knew. We all did. We all knew. Because Jeannie wouldn't run from a situation. She wouldn't leave people who needed her because it was dangerous. She was a person who walked out on a limb. To stay

there was to die." While she was at Maryknoll, reports of increased violence and indiscriminate bombings of villages reached Jean, and she decided to cut short her vacation and go back immediately.

She spent a weekend with her brother, Michael, in Connecticut. "When she left," he said, "I drove her to meet my uncle who was taking her to the airport. She said goodbye, and she kissed me, and she got into my Uncle Jay's car and they drove off. And I sat there and watched them go, and I can remember, as clear as can be, thinking, 'She's not coming back.'"

In Miami, Jean stayed with her parents for a few days. Friends remarked later how upset she appeared, but to her parents, Jean seemed relaxed. A friend from Maryknoll told them that while Jean was there, she had wanted to spend a couple of hours in the chapel. "She went into the chapel," Pat Donovan, Jean's mother recalled, "and Jean was a great one for talking with God, and if she got answers, she's the only one that heard them, but when she came out two hours later, the sister said that she was an entirely different woman. She was ready to go back."

Apparently, back at Maryknoll, Jean had confronted her fears and apprehensions, and through prayer, decided to go back and serve the poor. She felt at peace with her decision. She had placed her trust in God and the call she heard. "She had somehow reconciled herself to what was happening and what she was to do, and she had made her peace with whatever frightening thoughts she had," her mother said later. "She was really the old Jeannie when we put her back on the plane, joking, laughing."

Jean explained her reason to stay in a letter to a friend: "The Peace Corps left today and my heart sank low. The danger is extreme and they were right to leave...Now I must assess my own position, because I am not up for suicide. Several times I have decided to leave El Salvador. I almost could except for the children, the poor, bruised victims of this insanity. Who would care for them? Whose heart could be so staunch as to favor the reasonable thing in a sea of their tears and loneliness? Not mine, dear friend, not mine."

On Friday, October 17, 1980, Jean arrived back in El Salvador and immediately began working with the refugees again. Her colleagues noticed a change in her. "She had achieved a degree of peace that we all struggle for," commented one of the Cleveland mission workers. "Jean had made a faith decision that shaped her life and her heart and shaped her relationships with others and her relations with the people in her mission."

On October 20th, she wrote to her friend, Fr. Ralph Wiatowski in Rome. She had hoped to visit him on her trip. "I just felt that I had to get back. The situation is bad and believe it or not, at times I'm actually helpful. I also was trying to deal with some close friends who had been killed the last week of August. We are still plugging alone. Life continues on with many interruptions. I don't know how the poor survive. People in our positions really have to die to ourselves and our wealth to gain the spirituality of the poor and oppressed. I have a long way to go on that score. They can teach you so much with their patience and their wanting eyes. We are all so inadequate in our help. I am trying now more and more to deal with the social sin of the first world."

"I am beginning to see death in a new way," Maura Clarke wrote to a friend. "We have been meditating a lot on death and the accepting of it, as in the Good Shepherd reading. There are so many deaths everywhere that it is incredible. It is an atmosphere of death. The work is really what Bishop Romero called 'accompanying the people,' as well as searching for ways to help. This seems what the Lord is asking of me, I think, at this moment. We are on the road continually, bringing women and children to refugee centers. Keep us in your heart and prayers, especially the poor forsaken people."

Maura confessed to another friend, "One cries out: 'Lord! How long?' And then, too, what creeps into my mind is the little fear or big, that when it touches me very personally, will I be faithful? And keep saying to the Lord: 'I want to trust. I want to believe. Help me.'"

On Thursday, November 27, members of the left-wing opposition party were gunned down in San Salvador. At the ecumenical service that evening, the members of the Cleveland mission team met Robert White, the U.S. ambassador. They had a good meeting, and White and his wife, Mary Anne, invited the missionaries to dinner on the following Monday, the first of December. The Whites were curious about Jean's decision to leave "her extremely interesting job in the States to come and work with the poor of El Salvador," as Mary Anne White later said. Jean "did not regret it for a moment. In fact, she seemed to enjoy to the fullest what she was doing."

"There's no more radicalizing experience in this world than living among the poor of Central America," White said later, "because you see daily testimony to oppression and injustice. There's no way out for these people, and I think Jean felt this terrible injustice very much in her own inner being, and identified very much with the need to bring some new deal to the people of El Salvador."

Sometime in November, according to her mother, Jean was riding her motorbike on an errand through the Salvadoran countryside. Suddenly, she looked up and saw a U.S. military helicopter flying over her. It did not just stop and hover; it followed her. Later, she told Ambassador White about it. He denied that U.S. helicopters were there, and asked how could she tell. Jean said she knew all about these helicopters because her father helped build them.

At the same time, a traumatized woman in Chalatenango asked Ita to go to the local police headquarters (the base of the military death squads) and demand the release of her husband who was recently arrested. So Ita boldly entered the barracks, which were surrounded by grim soldiers carrying machine guns. She demanded to speak with the general in charge. As she asked for the husband's immediate release, he refused to look her in the eye. Ita was short, and according to Pat Donovan, got angry and walked up to him, stood on his shoes, pointed to his face and demanded the husband's release. The general was furious and humiliated in front of the other soldiers. But the woman's husband was immediately released. Ita's name soon appeared on a death list.

On November 29th, as Dorothy Day died at the Catholic Worker house in New York City, Ita and Maura flew to Managua, Nicaragua, for a four-day conference of Maryknollers working in Central America. On the night before their return to El Salvador, Ita shared with the group a passage from the writings of Oscar Romero: "Christ invites us not to fear persecution because, believe me, brothers and sisters,

those who are committed to the poor must risk the same fate as the poor, and in El Salvador, we know what the fate of the poor signifies: to disappear, to be tortured, to be captive, and to be found dead by the side of the road.”

Jean and Dorothy drove out to the airport to meet Ita and Maura that evening after their flight from Managua. The four women were last seen alive driving out of the airport down the main road. Two days later, their bodies were discovered in a makeshift grave about fifteen miles away. They had been raped and shot at close range.

“The message of Jean’s life is a challenge,” Michael Crowley said years later, “I think, not only to those who loved her, but to all Americans, that there are people on the other side of the American continent who are our brothers and sisters; and if we take our Christianity seriously, they should be part of our family, of every family. I think that’s what Jean was saying with her life.”

Jean’s Message To the World

Jean Donovan was a martyr whose life and death have a message for our times. She was not a plastic saint or supernatural hero, but an ordinary human person, who struggled with the harsh realities of the world and decided to do something about them. In her struggle and search, Jean showed us how to be human in these inhuman times. God used Jean’s openness and willingness, and sent her into the vortex of the world’s violence as an instrument of God’s own nonviolence. As I reflect on her life, I see at least three important gifts, examples and lessons which God is offering to Catholics, Christians and people of good will today, through Jean.

The first important example and lesson which Jean’s life offers us is how to accept God’s call to discipleship. God invited Jean to let go of her business career and all the typical North American ambitions, desires, and selfish wants. God called her to go and be with God among the world’s poor. Once there, God called Jean to stay and to continue the work God had given her. When the violence came really close, God called Jean to plumb the depths of faith and face the possibility of death, just like Jesus. What is significant about Jean’s response is that she continued to listen to God’s call and continued to respond positively to it. She struggled to find God’s will and to hear where God was leading her. Even though it was counter-cultural and dangerous, she opened her heart and went. In the process, she discovered how to become a faithful follower of Jesus. She learned to listen continually for God’s invitation, to let go of her own plans and desires, and to go wherever God wanted her and to do the work God gave her to do.

God has revealed in the life of Jean Donovan that the call to follow Jesus does not happen just once, but continues to come us to regularly throughout our lives. It is not an easy call, nor a popular call, but it is there, as plain as day in the Gospel, if we dare open our hearts to it. Discipleship to Christ requires a conversion to the Gospel and its radical values of love, nonviolence, peacemaking, justice, and solidarity with the poor. But it is also a continuing, ongoing commitment. As Jean demonstrated, discipleship is an ongoing conversion toward doing the will of God, and discovering that God is active among the poor, opposed to the world’s violence, and steadfast through creative nonviolence.

Jesus invites his followers: "Sell all you have and give to the poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Then, come and follow me."(Luke 18: 22) His words invite a total commitment of the heart. They summon us to a journey beyond our imaginations, into the world of the suffering and oppressed, into his struggle for justice and peace. At the end of John's Gospel, the risen Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" He also asks each one of us the same question, and issues the same call. "Do you love me? Do you truly love me? I tell you solemnly, as a young person, you fastened your belt and went about as you pleased, but when you are older, you will stretch out your hands, and another will tie you fast and carry you off against your will. Follow me."(John 21: 15-19)

Christ invites us, as he invited Jean, to let go of everything, even our goals and ambitions for our lives, and enter into the world of the poor. "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his or her very self, take up his or her cross each day and follow in my steps," Jesus said. "Whoever would save his or her life will lose it, and whoever loses his or her life for my sake will save it."(Mt. 16: 24-25)

Let go of your life and follow me. This is what Jesus says to every one of us. This is precisely what Jean did. She was invited to follow Christ who carries the cross in the world today, and she said Yes. She leaves us an example of modern day discipleship in its fullest expression. If we wish to follow Jesus, we can learn from Jean's example, reverse our direction, set out into the world of the poor, take a step on the path of nonviolence, join the struggle for justice and disarmament, and learn the meaning of fidelity to God's call. Jean shows us how.

A second gift from Jean's life is the example of her complete identification and solidarity with the poor as the contemporary Christian grace. When Jean heard the call to conversion and turned her life upside down, she entered the world of the poor and the oppressed and began to see life through their eyes. The more she let go and entered this new life, the more and more suffering people she met, the greater was the freedom and grace and joy and hope that she felt. Jean's living solidarity with the poor transformed her life. She never found meaning in her work at the accounting firm, but now her life was overflowing with meaning. She actually felt that she was helping, even that the Creator of the universe wanted her, of all people, in El Salvador, at this moment in history. Her identification with the poor grew with each month in Central America, so that each day, each encounter, took her deeper into the Gospel, until she found herself in the Maryknoll chapel saying Yes to the God who wanted her to go back at the risk of her life. In the end, as she was tortured and killed, she became one with the poor and the God of the poor. Jean's solidarity with the poor was complete in her martyrdom. She was given the grace to share literally the same fate as the poor, the fate of Jesus, who was poor: an early and unjust death.

Why did Jean leave so many things behind to enter into the world of the poor? Because in the face of the poor, the broken, battered, bruised, beaten people of Central America, in the face of the refugees, the homeless, the hungry, sick, displaced, despised people, she began to see more clearly the face of God. In the face of the poor, Jean Donovan saw the face of Jesus Christ. In the midst of the poor, she discovered not only the meaning of life, but the presence of the living God of life. After such a spiritual encounter, there could be no turning back.

Jean's solidarity with the poor is especially significant for North Americans today. When Jean saw the Crucified and Risen Christ in the poor, she began to make connections between the affluence of our first world, war making culture and their third world poverty. Her journey shows us a way out of the madness of our culture, away from its classism, violence, racism, sexism and militarism, into human kindness, solidarity, compassion, faith and hope. She shows us how to incarnate not only our resistance to our culture's violence, but our faith in the God of nonviolence.

In the ultimate solidarity of Jean's life and death, we see anew the depths of the sufferings of the world's poor and how our country inflicts death upon them. In particular, Jean's solidarity with the poor and her subsequent death point out what the United States will do to any nation that challenges its interests, and how we could care less about human life when someone else starts resisting our imperialism. the poor of Central America.

Jean was a typical, first world North American, but she heard the call to discipleship and entered into Christ's perfect solidarity with the world's poor and his perfect nonviolent resistance to systemic injustice. Like thousands of other campesinos who suffered and died under U.S. violence, Jean suffered, died and was buried.

On the third, Jean's body was uncovered and the whole world began to hear her story and her message. Like Christ and the thousands of faithful who have been killed, she is rising today. She is sharing in the glory and the joy of Christ's resurrection. Because of her solidarity with the poor of the world, and her solidarity with Christ crucified in the poor, Jean is sharing in full solidarity with the poor, with Christ, right now, in the reign of God as Jesus promised in the Sermon on the Mount. Jean is risen. Like Romero, Gandhi, Dorothy Day and Ita Ford, Jesus is alive and well and hoping that we will take up where she left off.

Jean discovered that true solidarity with the poor and oppressed is the ultimate act of nonviolent resistance toward the power of death and its ruling authorities. She learned that answering the call to discipleship, living out her faith, and practicing gospel nonviolence would get her in trouble with those ruling authorities as they seek to maintain their global system of oppression and injustice. Her Christian solidarity with the Salvadoran poor was "illegal" in the eyes of the ruling authorities and in itself an act of nonviolent civil disobedience. Her death, like the deaths of all the poor of El Salvador, like Romero's death, like Jesus' death, was quite legal. Her resurrection, like the resurrection of Christ in the poor, the resurrection of Romero in the life and struggle of the poor, is illegal. The ruling authorities had hoped that the bodies of the churchwomen, like the bodies of all disappeared people, would never be discovered.

The spirit of Jean, like the spirits of Oscar Romero, Rutilio Grande, Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel and all the Central American martyrs, has risen in the life of the poor and in the lives of North Americans who now struggle to end U.S. militarism and corporate globalization and create a new, more just world without war. Jean's life demonstrates that our own steadfast practice of Gospel nonviolence and solidarity with the poor will get us into trouble too. Those who maintain the systems of oppression and domination will not tolerate such agitation and faith. We too will be harassed, ridiculed, questioned, mocked, perhaps even followed, arrested for crossing the line or, like Dr. King, killed.

Jean Donovan challenges and invites North American Christians to enter more fully into the lives of the poor, into the powerlessness and oppression which they feel and to risk the consequences of that Christian solidarity. Jean invites us to defend the poor and follow Jesus, even to the cross and beyond to resurrection. Fundamentally, Jean invites us to do whatever we can to help the poor, to side with the poor, to stand with the poor, to speak up for the poor, to defend the poor and to become, like Christ on the cross, one with the poor.

A third gift which God offers through the life of Jean Donovan is the gift of peace, the example of peace, the way to peace. As Jean pursued God's call into the life of the poor, she experienced the life of Gospel nonviolence. She refused to respond to U.S. violence by retaliating with violence, and learned like Jesus to go deep into divine, nonviolent love. Like Christ who first agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane but received the gift of peace, she passed through anguish to a deep inner peace.

The Gospel invites us into Jesus' way of active nonviolence. It calls us to be peacemakers, people who love our enemies, people who refuse to take up the sword but who are willing to take up the nonviolent cross. Jean's active nonviolent love manifested itself both as a willingness to serve others, especially the poor and the marginalized, without the desire for reciprocation, and a willingness to suffer with the poor in their struggle for justice without the desire for retaliation. She struggled to right the wrongs committed against them, but through the means of love and truth. Jean did not take up arms but stood with the poor and remained disarmed. Her willingness to enter into the life and death of the poor was an entrance into Christ's nonviolent resistance against the world's injustice and violence. Her discipleship and steadfast love resisted evil and actually overcame death in the holy tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothy Day. Jean shows us another face of the peacemaking Christ, and how to live as Christians in first world, imperial North America.

As Jean responded to God's call to enter into the life of the poor, she entered into the reality of violence and injustice which the poor suffer. As she stayed with and suffer with the poor, she felt up close the U.S. force of imperial violence. She walked into the valley of death, but trusted in the Good Shepherd. Her friends were killed. The church worker she most admired, Oscar Romero, was killed. Many people around her were killed. Every day, in the end, every hour, she was faced with death. As she picked up the dead bodies along the road, her own death drew closer.

Yet in the midst of this violence, a miracle occurred in the life of Jean Donovan. As she struggled to help others, to be of service in the chaos of El Salvador, she was given the gift of peace, the gift of the risen Christ to the poor. With this spirit of peace, she was able to let go of her fears and to carry on the life-giving work of serving the poor and defending them.

The deep inner peace which was given to Jean Donovan is at the heart of Gospel nonviolence. God does not summon us to this counter-cultural life and then leave us alone. God gives us a grace, a freedom, a purpose, a peace we had never known possible, something which the United States can never give. God's gift is the inner unity of peace, the deep serenity of emptiness, the harmony that comes with compassion, the gift of our own personal disarmament of heart. Amidst the suffering around her and her prayerful loving response, the unarmed Christ disarmed Jean and

gave her his spirit of nonviolent love and truth that empowered her to stand with the powerless unto death. She knew a peace not of this world.

In this new heartfelt peace and compassion, in this living, risky solidarity with the poor and oppressed, Jean was blessed with the reign of God, with the gift of peace that she had searched long and hard for, which she had left everything for, and which now will never be taken from her. "Seek first God's reign and God's justice and all these other things will be given to you," Jesus says. (Luke 12:31) Jean followed this law of life. She sought God's reign and God's justice for the poor. Everything was provided for her and in the end, she discovered God's reign within her, in the deep peace that was given to her. She now dwells forever in God's reign of peace.

After her death, Jean's mother Pat found a prayer which Jean wrote and left in her bible. It read simply: "I pray that I will be an example of Christ's love and peace. I pray that people will always be more important to me than the job I do." Jean's prayer came true. She loved everyone, and became an example of Christ's love and peace.

Along with the other churchwomen, Jean's life shows a way to peace through her active, nonviolent love and willingness to enter into the redemptive suffering of Christ in the poor. Her life invites North American Christians to go into the war zones of Central America and the third world, to stand with the victims of U.S. aggression and "the sin of the first world," to serve those in need and resist our violence. Her example summons us to love the poor by working for a change here in the United States, for an end to U.S. militarism, corporate greed, military aid, and imperial domination.

Jean's life is an invitation to love our neighbors and our enemies, to side with the oppressed in their nonviolent struggle against their oppressors, to reject first world greed and violence and extend our hands in international friendship and reconciliation. Through the life of Jean Donovan, God is inviting us to disarm ourselves, cancel the third world debt, feed the world's starving, end our world's, bring justice to the world's poor and finally learn to live in love and peace with one another.

The gift of inner peace which God gave to Jean in her solidarity with the poor continues to bear fruit today. Her life inspires us to stand for peace, to work for justice for the poor and to speak the truth of nonviolence and disarmament. The peacemaking witness of Jean Donovan invites us to demand that our government stop killing the world's poor, stop oppressing the world's poor, and stop dominating the world's poor. It invites us to break free from our complicity with injustice through our silence and apathy, and to speak out against all U.S. wars. The Gospel peacemaking of Jean Donovan summons us to resist U.S. military aid, U.S. weapons sales, U.S. nuclear weapons, U.S. support of oppressive regimes and U.S. efforts to overthrow other governments in Central America and throughout the world.

The invitation which Jean received from Christ in the poor is an invitation which she offers to us today. It is an invitation to discipleship, a discipleship which is costly, not cheap. The discipleship which Jean accepted cost her at every moment, and in the end, cost her her life. In giving her life over to Christ in the poor, she found life itself: she found God, joy, friendship, peace, and meaning. The costly discipleship which Jean embraced is a two-sided love: a preferential option for the poor, which

means solidarity and life with the poor; and a preferential option for peace and nonviolence. It is a preferential option to follow Jesus, to stand with Jesus, and to resist systemic violence through the active nonviolence of Jesus. In the end, Jean's example invites us to be serious about our own discipleship, to take Jesus seriously, to stop wasting our lives and to join the global struggle, the divine struggle, for justice and peace, here and now.

Since Jean's death, so much has happened. The United States supported the murder of tens of thousands of other Salvadorans, including six Jesuit priests whom I knew and loved. The United States funded and supported the genocide of over 100,000 Guatemalans, the death of 30,000 Nicaraguans, the murder of thousands of Panamanians, Libyans, and Palestinians. The United States killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis in the Gulf War, and continues to kill them through sanctions, bombing raids and threats of total annihilation. Most of all, the U.S. maintains tens of thousands of nuclear weapons and polices which literally destroy the environment by the minute. El Salvador today continues to suffer from devastating unemployment, starvation, poverty, disease, violence and systematic neglect from her neighbor to the North, which spent so much money inflicting violence on its people. Since September 11th, 2001, the United States has bombed Afghanistan and threatened anyone nation in the world to protect its global domination.

After Maura Clarke's death, Maryknoll Sister Madeline Dorsey was looking through her few possessions and found a poster which read: "Follow me, and if you follow me and you lose your life, others will follow you."

Each year, thousands of Christians and people of conscience gather at the entrance of the School of the Americas, a U.S. training school for Latin American death squads and soldiers. There, U.S. soldiers teach people to kill, torture and repress Latin Americans. But each year, thousands of North Americans speak out in the name of the dead, in the name of the poor, in the name of the God of peace, for the school's closing and a new foreign policy of nonviolence and social justice.

Like Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel and Oscar Romero, Jean Donovan died following Jesus. But she also rose with Christ in the hearts of the Salvadoran people and in many North American Catholics, Christians and people of good will. Many people have been inspired by Jean's life and death, and now take up where she left off. Many have decided not to go to the third world, but to stay here and work full time opposing U.S. policies and practices which kill the people of the third world.

The meaning of Jean's life and death, as well as all the other martyrs, is not just in their sacrifice and their witness, but in their call to follow in their footsteps, to enter into the life of the poor, to struggle for justice with the poor, to stand with the poor, to defend the poor, to speak out for the poor, and to become one with them. Just as Jesus called Jean to walk the road of peace, Jean now calls us, in Jesus' name, to become God's instruments of justice and peace.

Jean's life and death is another call to discipleship. It is a call to join God's work for justice and peace, to stand with the people of Latin America and the third world, and to advocate the abolition of war, poverty, starvation, racism, sexism, classism, the death penalty, nuclear weapons, corporate globalization and injustice.

Jean Donovan invites us to embrace discipleship to Jesus Christ in the poor, with all its costs and graces, and finally to become instruments of God's peace. She promises that if we follow Jesus and die with Jesus in the witness of nonviolence, we too will rise with him and enter God's reign of peace. And we too will help the poor live once more.

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