

Sister Maura Clarke



Sister Maura John Clarke was born Mary Elizabeth Clarke on January 13, 1931, the eldest of three children. Her parents, both born in Ireland, settled in Belle Harbour, Rockaway Beach, Queens, New York in the late 1920's. It was in Manhattan that Maura, as we affectionately called her, was born. She entered Maryknoll in 1950, and made her first vows in 1953. Initially, as she stated in a letter of January 25, 1950, she had been attracted to Maryknoll by a deep desire "to become closer to God and to serve Him."

After graduation from Maryknoll Teachers College in 1954, Maura was assigned to teach at St. Anthony's Parish School in the Bronx. In 1959 her growing desire "to serve Him" was further strengthened with her assignment to Siuna, Nicaragua, as a teacher and then superior of the little community. Then, from 1970 to 1976, she was in Managua where she ministered to the people, sharing with them in the cataclysmic earthquake of 1972. With them she worked tirelessly, helping them to rebuild their homes and to establish basic Christian communities.

In 1977 Maura returned to the Center to serve on a Maryknoll Sisters World Awareness Team, working primarily along the East Coast of the United States. Everywhere she served, Maura was the same – friendly, loving, generous, gentle, used her gifts and abilities tirelessly, and trusted that with God's help she could do what was needed.

During her three years in the States, Maura was especially grateful for the opportunities she had to be close to her wonderful parents and family with whom she spent time whenever possible. When her term with the World Awareness Team ended early in 1980, Maura made a period of spiritual renewal and mission updating. It was not easy for her to make up her mind to return to Central America, but Nicaragua needed her, so she went freely, gladly. **She wrote, "My dream is that, with each of you, in Jesus our source of hope and joy, we may continue to give ourselves to bring about the new Kingdom of love, justice, and peace."**

In August of this year emergency needs in El Salvador called Maura once again to go beyond what she felt adequate to do, and she spent her first weeks there in Santa Ana. However, after Sister Carol Piette's death, Maura volunteered immediately to accompany Sister Ita Ford in Chalatenango to minister to the poor and oppressed, the imprisoned. Willing, but still uncertain, she struggled to adjust to the further isolation from family, friends, and her beloved Nicaragua.

When she came to the Regional Assembly the day before Thanksgiving, November 26, 1980, Maura felt not only willing to return to El Salvador, but convinced that Chalatenango was the place where she could and would serve Christ's poor. With Ita she would search out the missing, pray with the families of prisoners, bury the dead, and work with the people in their struggle to break out of the bonds of oppression, poverty, and violence. Their days would be filled with difficulty and fearful danger at times, but Maura assured us of her certain confidence in God's loving care of her, Ita, and all the people.

In this spirit she returned with Ita to El Salvador late in the afternoon of December 2nd. Two of their good friends and collaborators in mission met them at the airport to take them back to Chalatenango. A few hours later, probably about ten o'clock, shots were heard by the ever-vigilant peasant folk. The bullets brutally put an end to the lives of the four valiant women: Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, lay missionary Jean Donovan, and Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford.

As we rejoice in their new life in heaven, we pray for the people of El Salvador, and for oppressed people everywhere, in the hope that the death of these four missionaries will not have been in vain.