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**FIDES SPECIAL FEATURE**

## **MISSIONARIES KILLED IN THE YEAR 2017**

*“The Church is Church if it is a Church of martyrs”*

*Pope Francis, 22 April, 2017*

## **MISSIONARIES KILLED IN 2017**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In the year 2017, 23 Catholic pastoral care workers were killed worldwide: 13 priests, 1 religious brother, 1 religious sister, 8 lay persons. For the eighth consecutive year, the place most affected, with an extremely elevated number of pastoral care workers killed is AMERICA, where 11 pastoral care workers were killed (8 priests, 1 religious brother, 2 lay people); in Africa 10 pastoral care workers were killed (4 priests, 1 religious sister, 5 lay people); in Asia 2 pastoral care workers were killed (1 priest, 1 lay person).

According to information gathered by Agenzia Fides, from 2000 to 2016, 424 pastoral care workers were killed worldwide, including 5 Bishops.

As it has been for some time, Fides' list does not only include missionaries ad gentes in the strict sense, but all pastoral care workers who died violent deaths. We do not propose to use the term "martyrs", if not in its etymological meaning of "witnesses" since it is up to the Church to judge their possible merits and also because of the scarcity of available information in most cases, with regard to their life and even the circumstances of their death.

Once again the majority of the pastoral care workers were killed in attempted robbery, and in some cases violently attacked, a sign of the climate of moral decline, economic and cultural poverty, which generates violence and disregard for human life.

In these situations, priests, religious and laity share the same daily life with ordinary people, bringing the specific value of their evangelical witness as a sign of hope. Those who were killed are only the tip of the iceberg, as the list of pastoral workers or simple Catholics, assaulted, beaten, robbed, threatened, as well as Catholic structures at the service of the entire population, assaulted, vandalized or looted is certainly long. The provisional list compiled annually by Agenzia Fides, must therefore be added to the long list of many of whom there may never be news, who in every corner of the world suffer and even pay with their lives for their faith in Christ. Hardly any investigations conducted by the local authorities lead to identifying and convicting the perpetrators and the instigators of these killings or the reasons why they were carried out.

The condemnation of the instigator of the assassination of Spanish Jesuit missionary Vicente Canas, who was killed in Brazil in 1987, is exemplary. In the first trial, celebrated in 2006, the defendants were acquitted for lack of evidence; the new trial on 29 and 30 November, led to the condemnation of the instigator, the only survivor out of the those who were accused.

"Violence against the clergy has increased in recent years, without seeing concrete actions to stop it", said Father Omar Sotelo, Director of the Mexican Multimedia Center, which annually presents a report on the violence and murders of priests and religious in the Latin American country. "The population is permanently exposed to crime, we know it well, but now above all priesthood has become a dangerous ministry; in the last nine years, Mexico is the country with the highest number of priests killed".

"We denounced the attacks against the Church and especially the abduction of the servants of God", said Archbishop Marcel Utambi Tapa, Archbishop of Kisangani and President of the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO), during a press conference in Brussels. "Priests are not engaged in politics. If there have been appeals by some pastoral workers, it is in the context of civil commitment,

respect for values such as justice, peace and reconciliation". The Church does nothing but "preach justice, peace, respect for good governance, within the framework of its social doctrine".

During the Liturgy of the Word in memory of the "New Martyrs" of the XX and XXI century, which he presided on April 22, 2017 in the Basilica of St. Bartholomew on the Tiber Island, in Rome, Pope Francis said: "The memory of these heroic, old and recent witnesses confirms us in the awareness that the Church is a Church of martyrs. And martyrs are those who ... had the grace to confess Jesus until the end, until death. They suffered, they gave their lives, and we receive the blessing of God for their witness". The Pope reiterated that the cause of any persecution must be sought in hatred, "the hatred of the prince of this world toward those who have been saved and redeemed by Jesus through His death and resurrection", and stressed that "the living legacy of martyrs today gives us peace and unity. They teach us that with the strength of love, with gentleness, one can fight against arrogance, violence, and war - and that peace can be achieved with patience".

This year's list does not include **the Bishop of Bafia, in Cameroon, His Exc. Mgr. Jean-Marie Benoit Bala**, whose body was found in the waters of the Sanaga River on 2 June. In the car there was "a strange message (...) next to his identity card and other personal belongings" informed a communiqué from the Episcopal Conference of Cameroon, underlining: "We the bishops of Cameroon are convinced that Bishop Jean Marie Benoît did not commit suicide; he was brutally murdered". The communiqué pointed out "the sad list of Bishops, members of the clergy and consecrated persons assassinated in circumstance still not clear today". At the end of the investigation, the Attorney General said he believed that "drowning is the most likely cause of the Bishop's death", therefore he was not murdered but committed suicide. A few days later, the President of the Episcopal Conference reaffirmed the Bishops' position (see Fides, 10/7/2017).

The list does not include the name of **Venezuelan priest José Luis Arismendi**, 35 years old, who died on Holy Saturday, April 15, due to the lack of medicines. For two days the priest waited for the medicines which were to treat a suspected meningitis, but unfortunately, the medicines Card. Baltazar Porras, Archbishop of Mérida, managed to get from Caracas was pointless because they did not arrive in time. Although he was not killed by the hand of someone in particular, this priest can represent the many Venezuelans who died due to lack of food, assistance, medicine following the serious political and social crisis crossed by the country (see Fides, 19/04/2017).

It is also noteworthy to mention the two operators of the International Red Cross (ICRC), **Lukudu Kennedy Laki Emmanuel**, killed on September 8 in South Sudan during an ambush on a convoy that had brought humanitarian aid, and the Spanish physiotherapist **Lorena Enebral Perez**, killed on September 11 in the rehabilitation center where she worked in Mazar-e-Sharif, as representative of those who, on every continent, are making sacrifices to alleviate the suffering of the population.

## THE SCOURGE OF KIDNAPPINGS

There is still much concern regarding the spread of kidnappings of priests and nuns, some concluded in a tragic manner, others with the release of hostages, others remain in silence.

The Colombian missionary **Sister Gloria Cecilia Narvaez Argoty** was kidnapped on 8 February in the village of Karangasso, in Mali. The Al Qaeda group of Mali, through social media, published a video in July where the nun and five other foreign hostages kidnapped by the jihadist network appear. Despite the concern and mobilization of the Church and governments, there is no certain news.

Also in Nigeria **six Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Christ**, (three professed sisters Sister Roseline Isiocha, Sister Aloysius Ajayi and Sister Frances Udi, and three aspirants, meaning young women in the process of formation to join the community) were kidnapped on November 13 from their convent in

Iguoriakhi by armed men who entered the formation house during the night. Pope Francis also appealed for their release.

A happy outcome was the release of **Father Tom Uzhunnalil**, the Salesian kidnapped on March 4, 2016 in Aden, Yemen, in the attack carried out by the Islamic State militants on a care home for the elderly of the sisters of Mother Teresa in which four nuns and another 12 people were killed, released after 18 months of imprisonment, and that of **Fr. Teresito Soganub** (called "Father Chito"), the Vicar of the Apostolic Prelature of Marawi, in the Philippines, kidnapped on May 23 and released after 117 days of imprisonment by the terrorists of the "Maute" group, linked to the Islamic State, which had occupied the city of Marawi, on the island of Mindanao, kidnapping, besides the priest, also a group of faithful, two of whom were killed during a bombing. The kidnapping of **Fr. Maurizio Pallù**, an Italian priest of the diocese of Rome, who was kidnapped in Nigeria, near Benin City, where he is a missionary as a catechist of the Neocatechumenal Way, lasted from October 12th to 17th. **Fr. William Walter Rozario**, a priest from Bangladesh, of the Diocese of Rajshahi, disappeared on 27 November, was found by the police in Sylhet, in the northeast of the country, on 2 December. His story remains to be clarified because the police claim that the priest went away alone and did not suffer any violence, while the local Church is convinced that he was kidnapped.

There have been many rumors in these years, without any confirmation, on the fate of Italian Jesuit **Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio**, kidnapped on July 29, 2013 in Raqqa, Syria. His abduction has never been claimed.

The abductions of priests and religious in **Nigeria** have increased for extortion in recent years, especially in the southern States. Most of them are released after a few days. The Nigerian Episcopal Conference has banned the payment of any ransom in the case of the abduction of priests and religious. According to information gathered by Fides, at least five priests were kidnapped this year alone in southern Nigeria. Fr. Samuel Okwuidegbe, a Jesuit priest, was abducted by unidentified persons on 18 April on the road from Benin City to Onitsha, and was released on Saturday 22 April (see Fides, 25/4/2017). On June 18, a State intervention team managed to release Fr. Charles Nwachukwu, of the diocese of Okigwe, in the State of Imo, who had been kidnapped by 5 armed bandits on June 16 (see Fides, 28/6/2017). The most dramatic episode occurred on 1 September with the abduction and killing of Fr. Cyriacus Onunkwo in the State of Imo, whose body was found on September 2 (see Fides, 12/9/2017). Fr. Lawrence Adorolo, pastor of St. Benedict church of Okpella, in the State of Edo, was kidnapped on 27 September while he was on his way back from Auchi to his parish and released on 30 September. We have not received any news regarding Fr. Gabriel Oyaka, Nigerian religious spiritan (Congregation of the Holy Spirit), kidnapped on 7 September 2015 in the State of Kogi (see Fides 10/9/2015).

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, Fr. Pierre Akilimali and Fr. Charles Kipasa were abducted by unidentified persons from the parish of Notre-Dame des Anges in Bunyuka, in the diocese of Beni-Butembo, province of North-Kivu, in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, on the night between Sunday 16 and Monday 17 July. The National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) denounced the climate of insecurity in the area, reprimanded the Congolese authorities to their duty in order to "guarantee the safety of people and their property" and recalled that since October 2012 there has been no news regarding the fate of three Assumptionist fathers, Jean-Pierre Ndulani, Anselme Wasikundi and Edmond Bamutute, kidnapped from their parish of Notre-Dame des Pauvres of Mbau (see Fides, 22/10/2012). Despite initiatives, appeals and public demonstrations, there has been no news regarding Fr. Pierre Akilimali and Fr. Charles Kipasa. In the same province of North Kivu two members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Muhindo and Joseph, were kidnapped on the morning of 7 June, on the road between Kirumba and Kaseghe, and were released on 15 June (see Fides, 8/6/2017). The ICRC announced that the team was carrying out humanitarian activities, overseeing the distribution of food and other essential goods.

Kidnappings in **Mexico** are also frequent, many of which are not reported, and therefore do not find space in the media, for fear of endangering the lives of the kidnapped and to speed up their release. On March 28, Fr. Oscar Lopez Navarro was abducted, who was carrying out his pastoral ministry at the

parish of San José Obrero of Altamira. Mgr. Dibildox, Bishop of Tampico, denounced that unfortunately "crime is increasing" in Tamaulipas. Until today they had respected the Church, but as we see, even priests are not respected, those who are giving their lives for the good, for the people". The priest was released on March 30 (see Fides, 30 and 31/03/2017)

## THE MEMORY, STRENGTH FOR THE FUTURE

In some cases the memory of the sacrifice of pastoral workers is renewed over time, thus becoming support and encouragement for communities to continue to be on their trail.

Families of farmers in Anapu, in southern Pará (Brazil), met on 12 February to commemorate the death of **Sister Dorothy Stang**, who was killed for her struggle for the poor in the region (see Fides, 15/02/2005). The communities where Sister Dorothy worked demanded proper agricultural reform and to stop the growing deforestation of the area (see Fides, 16/02/2015). Sister Dorothy Stang, aged 73, was a missionary from the United States, and was killed on the morning of February 12, 2005 with six shots.

"Dead City" in Butembo on the first anniversary of the assassination of **Fr. Vincent Machozi**, Assumptionist priest, who denounced the illegal exploitation of coltan in the region (see Fides, 22/3/2016). The entire population of Butembo participated in the commemoration of the courageous priest, animated by the club "Fr. Vincent's friends" who presented a video on the gestures of the murdered father. A requiem Mass was celebrated at Lyambo de Kalemire parish (see Fides, 21/3/2017)

During the XIV Meeting of Missionary Youth, held in El Escorial (Madrid) from 21 to 23 April, a space was reserved for the memory and homage to **sister Isa Solà**, Spanish missionary of Jesus and Mary, who was attacked and killed on a Haitian road in the capital while driving her car, on September 2, 2016, for robbery purposes (see Fides, 3/09/2016). For years she was committed to the humble and poor with whom she practically lived after the 2010 earthquake. Maria Angeles Aliño, Provincial Superior of the Religious of Jesus and Mary in Spain, explained that in these seven months, "the memory of Isa Solá has always been present in our community", and underlined that she has a very strong influence among the younger sisters (see Fides, 21/04/2017)

On July 21, 1987 Spanish Bishop **Mgr. Alejandro Labaca Ugarte**, O.F.M. Cap., Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Aguarico (Ecuador), and Colombian religious **sister Inés Arango**, who were trying to save the indigenous people Tagaeri, threatened by an incursion in their land by oil companies, were brutally killed . On the 30th anniversary of their martyrdom, REPAM produced a documentary entitled "Life for the Amazon" (see Fides, 24/07/2017)

On October 5, 2016, **Father Juan Heraldo Viroche** was found dead in his home in Tucuman, about 70km from the capital of Argentina. He was well known in the area for his fight against drug trafficking. "Father Juan bravely faced the mafias who manage the drug trade, and had threatened him and others in his community. The circumstances of his tragic death have yet to be clarified by the authorities" read the Episcopal Commission text, one month after his violent death (see Fides, 4/11/2016). Still today the circumstances of his tragic death have yet to be clarified by the authorities who believe he committed suicide. The Mass celebrated for Fr. Juan Viroche's soul on the first anniversary of his death was presided by Mgr. Fernando Maletti, Bishop of Merlo-Moreno and spokesperson of the National Commission of drug addiction of the Episcopal Conference of Argentina, concelebrated by many priests working in this sector, and saw an enormous presence of young people (see Fides, 06/10/2017)

The story of the **Dutch Lazarist Bishop Mgr. Frans Schraven and of the eight European missionaries**, killed by Japanese soldiers 80 years ago, for having tried to protect more than 200 Chinese girls that the military wanted as sex slaves, was remembered by scholars and professors at the symposium "The Conference on the 80th Anniversary of Zhengding Church Massacre at the start of the anti-Japanese War" was held on 25 October in Beijing by the Institute of Christian Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and by the Faith Cultural Society of the Catholic Church. Academics, ecclesiastics, historians and political representatives present at the conference agreed to recognize the objective contribution that the Catholic Church in China offered to the nation and to the Chinese people during the war with the Japanese invaders. Various interventions, starting from that bloody episode, also enhanced in greater terms the contribution provided by Catholic missionaries to the development of the Chinese society, especially in the fields of education, culture and health, and also through charitable works in favor of the most needy (see Fides, 9/11/2017)

## THE RECOGNITION OF THE CHURCH

On Holy Thursday, April 13, the Archbishop of Rouen (France), His Exc. Mgr. Dominique Lebrun, announced the opening of the diocesan phase of the cause of beatification of **Fr. Jacques Hamel**, who was killed on the morning of July 26, 2016 while he was celebrating Mass in the church of Saint Etienne du Rouvray, in Normandy, by two militiamen of the Islamic State, who killed the priest at the altar. Pope Francis granted a dispensation to open, a few months after his death on April 13, 2017, the diocesan phase of the Beatification process of Fr. Hamel. On the first anniversary of the tragic event, in the same church and at the same time Fr. Hamel was celebrating Mass, the Archbishop of Rouen, celebrated Holy Mass in front of a packed church and television cameras. Other initiatives in memory of Fr. Hamel and for peace were organized in different communities on the anniversary of his death (see Fides, 25/7/2017)

On 25 March the diocesan phase of the cause of beatification of the Servant of God **Father Ezechiele Ramin**, a Comboni Italian missionary (MCCJ), killed in Brazil on July 24, 1985, concluded. A year before, on 20 January 1984, he arrived in Brazil, and then went to Cacoal in Rondonia, where he takes the problem of indigenous land distribution at heart. Fr. Ezechiele was brutally killed on 24 July 1985 as he was returning from a mission of peace: he had met some landless farmers who had occupied part of the Fazenda Catuva, on the border with the state of Mato Grosso, and had asked them to withdraw. A few days later Pope John Paul II describes him as a "martyr of charity". In Brazil the memory of Father Ezechiele is still very much alive, especially among indigenous peoples and farmers (see Fides, 27/3/2017)

This year the Holy Father has authorized the promulgation of several decrees concerning martyrdom. The martyrdom of **Mgr. Jesús Emilio Jaramillo Monsalve**, of the Institute for Foreign Missions of Yarumal, first Bishop of Arauca, killed in hatred of Faith in 1989, near Fortul (Colombia). Mgr. Jaramillo was seized by armed bandits on 2 October 1989 along with three priests and a seminarian while he was on a pastoral visit to Fortul, 800 km east of Bogotá. He was found dead the following day, killed by four bullets in his head. (see Fides, 7/7/2017).

**Sister Leonella Sgorbati**, an Italian missionary, died in Mogadishu (Somalia), on September 17, 2006, gunned down while she was going to the hospital where she served. Even Mohamed Mahamud, the guard who had tried to rescue her also died. From 1970 she was a missionary in Kenya and on April 18, 2002 she started the first nursing school in Mogadishu (see Fides, 10/11/2017).

The martyrdom of Italian missionary **Fr. Tullio Maruzzo**, of the Friars Minor. He left for Guatemala in 1960, and began the evangelizing work of the natives, dedicating himself to their education, so that they knew how to defend themselves from the landowners who took possession of their lands. On the

evening of July 1, 1981, he was killed along the road by some criminals along with his catechist, the Franciscan Tertiary **Luis Obdulio Arroyo Navarro**.

On November 4, in Indore, India, **Sister Regina Maria Vattalil** (nee Maria), of the Sisters of the Poor Clares Franciscans, killed in India in hatred of the faith, on February 25, 1995, was beatified. Sister Maria, 41, was originally from Kerala, and she worked in Udaynagar, in the diocese of Indore, in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh for two and a half years.

She was killed while traveling by bus from Udaynagar to Indore. Two men forced her to get off and in front of passengers, she was hit with more than 50 stab wounds. The nun was mainly engaged in favor of farmers and village women, she was engaged in providing social assistance, teaching civil rights to tribal populations in Udaynagar, in an area dominated by large landowners and moneylenders (see Fides, 24/3/2017 ). Her murderer, who is in prison, has repented and has embraced the Christian faith, and was present at the liturgy of beatification.

On September 23, the missionary **Fr. Stanley Francis Rother** became the first officially recognized American martyr. A native of Okarche, Oklahoma, USA, after several years of pastoral commitment as a parish vicar, he asked to be assigned to the mission that the diocese of Oklahoma City and Tulsa had in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala. He learned Spanish and the language of the local population, the Tz'utujil, in order to celebrate the sacraments. He visited families, catechized the little ones, celebrated thousands of baptisms, hundreds of marriages and first communions, he had great charity for the needy. At the outbreak of the civil war in Guatemala, Father Rother resulted in the lists of people to be eliminated. He returned home, but only for a short time, as he did not feel like leaving his flock for a long time without a pastor. On July 28, 1981, a few months after his return to Guatemala, he was assassinated by three men who entered his home during the night.

Among the blessed canonized on October 15th by Pope Francis, there are also two Portuguese priests and a group of lay people who were martyred together with their pastors in 1645, in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte, half a century after the beginning of the evangelization of those lands, and are considered the "Protomartyrs of Brazil". Two communities, that of Cunhaù led by **Father André de Soveral** and that of Natal whose parish priest was **Father Ambrosio Francisco Ferro**, were massacred together with their pastors a few months later. St. John Paul II, during the beatification of these martyrs, on March 5, 2000, said in his homily: "In this immense country, the implanting of the Gospel encountered many difficulties. The Church's presence was gradually strengthened through the missionary activity of various orders and religious congregations and by priests of the diocesan clergy. The martyrs beatified today came...belong to this generation of martyrs who watered their homeland, making it fertile for a generation of new Christians. They are the first fruits of the missionary work, the Protomartyrs of Brazil" (see Fides, 14/10/2017).

In the same celebration **Blessed Cristobal, Antonio and Juan** were also canonized, they were teenagers, martyrs, killed in hatred of the faith in Mexico in 1529. "The child Martyrs of Tlaxcala, are martyrs of Latin America, because they were the first to bear witness to the faith", said His Exc. Mgr. Francisco Moreno Barron, Bishop of Tlaxcala. They are among the first natives of American ethnicity who converted to the Catholic faith and are also Promartyrs of America, the first to shed their blood for Christ on this continent (see Fides, 30/06/2016; 24/03/2017)

## OVERVIEW OF CONTINENTS

### AMERICA

In America, 8 priests, 1 religious brother, 2 lay people were killed.

In **Mexico**, Fr. Joaquin Hernandez Sifuentes was killed, who disappeared on January 3 and was found a few days later; Fr. Felipe Carrillo Altamirano, killed on March 26 was apparently the victim of an assault for theft purposes; Fr. Luis Lopez Villa, was killed on July 5th by criminals who broke into his parish; on 3 August, Fr. José Miguel Machorro died in hospital, he was stabbed on May 15 at the end of the Mass he was celebrating.

In **Bolivia** Helena Agnieszka Kmiec, a Polish volunteer of the Salvatorian Missionary Volunteers, was murdered on January 24 in an attempted theft.

In **Venezuela** the Franciscan religious Diego Bedoya was found dead at dawn on April 10th, killed during a robbery.

In **Colombia** Fr. Diomer Eliver Chavarría Pérez was killed on the evening of 27 July in his parish; on 3 October, during an attempted theft, Fr. Abelardo Antonio Muñoz Sánchez was killed.

In **Brazil**, Fr. Pedro Gomes Bezerra was found dead in the rectory on the morning of 24 August.

In **Argentina** Ricardo Luna, layman, guardian of the parish, was killed on 23 August

In **Haiti** Fr. Joseph Simoly was killed during an apparent robbery on December 21

### AFRICA

In Africa, 4 priests, 1 religious sister, 5 lay people were killed.

In **South Sudan** a catechist of Kajo-Keji, called Lino, was killed on January 22 in a chapel along with five other people.

In **Madagascar** Fr. Lucien Njiva, a Capuchin, was killed by thieves at 1:00 am on Sunday 23 April, in the convent of Ambendrana Antsohihy, in Madagascar.

In **Burundi** Fr. Adolphe Ntahondereye died on 11 May, two weeks after his release, due to the stress during his abduction.

In **Nigeria**, Fr. Cyriacus Onunkwo was kidnapped and killed in the state of Imo on September 1; George Omondi was killed on March 18 in an attempt to stop the thieves who had targeted the church of which he was the guardian; three lay catechists, **Joseph, John and Patrick**, were killed in an attack by Boko Haram in Pulka.

In **Kenya** Fr. Evans Juma Oduor was found unconscious on the evening of Sunday, October 22, he was taken to the hospital where he died; Sister Ruvadiki Plaxedes Kamundiya, a religious, was raped and killed on October 22.

### ASIA

In Asia, 1 priest and 1 lay person were killed.

In the **Philippines**, on December 4, Fr. Marcelito Paez was killed by four men while he was driving his car; on August 20, lay catechist Domingo Edo was killed while he was going to lead a liturgy of the Word.



## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH**

*Fides News Agency welcomes any extra information or correction to this year's list or to those of previous years*

The body of **Fr. Joaquin Hernandez Sifuentes**, of the diocese of Saltillo, Coahuila (Mexico), who was missing since 3 January, was found a few days later by the Mexican authorities, along with two other bodies. The Bishop of the diocese of Saltillo, His Exc. Mgr. José Raúl Vera López, O.P. thanked the authorities and called on citizens to realize that even members of the clergy can become victims of any crime, not only simple citizens: "We live in a wrecked environment, in a shattered society, and priests do not live under a bell jar".

(See Fides, 09/01/2017; 13/01/2017)

**Helena Agnieszka Kmiec**, a Polish volunteer, 26, a member of the Salvatorian Missionary Volunteers, was murdered in the early hours of 24 January 2017 in Pacata area of the Bolivian capital, Cochabamba. A few days earlier she had arrived, together with another Polish volunteer, at the "Edmundo Bojanowski" school of the Siervas de la Madre de Dios nuns, run by the religious association "Lucyna Teresa Jdolowska", where they should have stayed for six months. Helena was stabbed to death by two criminals, who were then arrested, during an attempted theft inside the building where she was staying. Helena was part of the missionary voluntary service since 2012. According to the testimonies of those who knew her, right from the beginning she was strongly involved in activities at a national and regional level, always ready to take responsibility for missionary initiatives, also willingly using her musical talent. She served in Romania, Hungary and Zambia.

A **catechist** of the parish of the Sacred Heart of Kajo-Keji (South Sudan) called Lino was killed on Sunday, January 22 in the chapel in the city of Lomin, along with five other people by an armed group. The situation in the area is dramatic due to insecurity and attacks on villages in the area, led by the army of South Sudan against those who are deemed hostile to the populations to the central government in Juba.

(See Fides, 25/1/2017)

**George Omondi**, a layman, 47, was killed in the night between 18 and 19 March in an attempt to stop thieves who had targeted the parish of Nyalenda, the slum of Kisumu, Nigeria, and the priest's residence, the missionary of Mill Hill Fr. George Kraakman. The man, who since 2008 was the guardian of the church, was repeatedly wounded in the head and neck while preventing thieves from reaching the missionary's home, but was overwhelmed by the criminals. Transported to the hospital, he died as soon as he arrived. He was married and had five children. Police have combed the area following an increase in violent crimes, especially at night.

**Father Felipe Carrillo Altamirano** was killed on Sunday, March 26 in the village of El Nayar, Prelature of Jesús María del Nayar, Nayarit state (Mexico), apparently victim of an assault for theft. The Mexican Bishops' statement commented the sad news: "Jesus Christ give us the strength to fight in order to build a reconciled and peaceful, just and fraternal world. Death is not the end of the message of love

that our Savior brought us but the fullness of life. With his priesthood, father Felipe embodied these certainties that give us faith".

The Territorial Prelature of El Nayar is located in the Mexican state of Nayarit, and is one of the 20 municipalities of this state.

(See Fides, 28/03/2017)

**Franciscan Brother Diego Bedoya**, a member of “Hermanos Franciscanos de la Cruz Blanca” (White Cross Franciscan Brothers) who runs Casa Hogar in the town of La Victoria, Aragua state of Venezuela, was found dead at the break of day yesterday, Monday 10 April, in his office. He was reportedly murdered during a burglary, and had a knife wound to his neck.

Diego, 35 years of age, a Colombian, had been in Venezuela for more than 15 years engaged in pastoral ministry at Casa Hogar which cares for elderly people and disabled children. The thieves escaped with a PC and other valuable objects, besides all the food supplies for the guests at the center. (See Fides, 11/04/2017)

Malagasy Capuchin Friar, aged 46, **Fr. Lucien Njiva**, was killed during the night of 22 April at the Friary in Ambendrana Antsohihy.

Around one in the morning at least five bandits broke into the friary, attacking and wounding 26 year old deacon Jeremy. On hearing the cries of the deacon, Fr. Lucien ran to the spot to help him, but the bandits shot him dead with a Kalashnikov rifle.

The bandits wanted to steal the friary bell to extract the metals of which they are made and sell it on the black market. The Friars had thwarted an earlier burglary attempt and managed to frighten them away. The assault on the friary of Ambendrana Antsohihy is the latest in a series of robberies in Catholic convents and churches with violence and looting.

(See Fides, 26/4/2017)

**Fr. Adolphe Ntahondereye**, Vicar of the parish of San Francesco Saverio di Gatumba (in the west of Burundi on the border with the DRC) died on May 11, two weeks after his release, due to the stress during his imprisonment.

On 9 April Fr. Ntahondereye was kidnapped along with two other people after falling into a road ambush by a group of armed men. The three men were released after 17 days of imprisonment.

According to Archbishop Bujumbura, Mgr. Ngoyagoye Evariste, "the priest, who had not left his hospital bed where he had been admitted after his release, died as a result of ill-treatment that had been inflicted on him which aggravated his precarious state of health".

(See Fides, 12/5/2017)

The 71-year-old **diocesan priest Luis Lopez Villa** was killed by criminals who managed to break into San Isidro Labrador Parish, in the municipality de Los Reyes.

The Bishop of the Diocese of Netzahualcóyotl, His Exc. Mgr. Hector Luis Morales Sánchez, commented that Father Lopez Villa was brutally murdered while he was in his room on Wednesday, July 5th. A first police report informs that the priest had been bound and immobilized, hands and feet with tape, and had two deep wounds, one on the neck and one on the left side of the chest.

(See Fides, 07/07/2017)

**Fr. Diomer Eliver Chavarría Pérez**, was killed on the day of his 31st birthday, on the evening of July 27, in the parish of Raudal, in the village of Puerto Valdivia, in the department of Antioquia (Colombia). Mgr. Jorge Alberto Ossa Soto, Bishop of the diocese of Santa Rosa de Osos in which Father Chavarría Pérez was incardinated, issued a statement invoking the conversion of the assassins and reaffirmed the rejection of all forms of violence against the lives and dignity of people. The Bishop thanked the Lord for the gift of the priestly life "of this son and brother at the service of evangelization", "sacrificed in the exercise of his mission".

(See Fides, 29/07/2017)

On August 3rd, **Fr. José Miguel Machorro**, a 55-year-old Mexican, died in hospital. The priest, who had just finished celebrating Mass at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico was stabbed three times on the altar by a thirty-year-old man. Some of the faithful immediately called for first-aid, while another group stopped the aggressor and waited for the arrival of the security forces. It seems the aggressor suffered from a psychotic disorder and was unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality. The priest's condition worsened due to a brain death situation.

(See Fides, 16/05/2017/19/05/2017/03/08/2017)

Catechist **Domingo Edo**, was killed on August 20 while he was going to lead a liturgy of the Word in the village of Bong Mal. He was an operator of the Social Action Center of the diocese of Marbel, on the island of Mindanao, in the Philippines.

There was also a young minister with him who was injured in the ambush. The incident occurred in the Tampakan mine area. Domingo was committed to the defense of the land rights of indigenous peoples, threatened by the expansion of the mine. In the past years, other human rights activists were killed in the same area, and the perpetrators have gone unpunished.

**Fr. Pedro Gomes Bezerra**, 49, was found dead in his home in Borborema, in the Brazilian state of Paraibo, on the morning of August 24. The priest's body, wrapped in a sheet, was stabbed at least 29 times with a knife. No evidence of theft was found and nothing was stolen. The car was found abandoned in a rural area, about fifteen miles from the scene of the crime.

The statement of the diocese of Guarabira informs that the priest had been carrying out his pastoral ministry for about two years in Nossa Senhora do Carmo, in Borborema. From 1999 to 2007 he had been serving in Belem, where he had set up a nursing home, the Good Shepherd, and had given great testimony of faith and social commitment.

(See Fides, 28/8/2017)

**Ricardo Luna**, a layman, 29, guardian of the parish of the Virgen Inmaculada, of the college and of the annexed center, in the Villa Soldati area of Buenos Aires (Argentina), was killed on 23 August with a gunshot to the head. Most likely the perpetrators of the crime were a gang of teenagers, who had threatened him with death in the days before as he had repeatedly prevented them from stealing. They killed him without stealing anything. Ricardo, who had been doing this job for four years, was loved and respected. He was married and had three children. After the murder the inhabitants of the area organized a public demonstration demanding justice and security.

A Nigerian priest, **Fr. Cyriacus Onunkwo**, was kidnapped and killed in the State of Imo, in southern Nigeria. In the late afternoon of 1 September Fr. Onunkwo's car was blocked near Banana Junction, Amaifeke, by some armed men who kidnapped him. The priest, who carried out his pastoral ministry in Orlu, was going to his native village, Osina, to attend his father's funeral, who had died on August 28.

The priest's body was found on September 2 near the village of Omuma, there were no wounds on the priest's body. In the days that followed, the police arrested six members of a gang dedicated to street robberies. The criminals confessed being responsible for the kidnapping of Fr. Onunkwo, in order to extort ransom money from his family and the Church. The priest died out of suffocation because his mouth and nose were cellotaped by the criminals.

(See Fides, 4/9/2017; 12/9/2017)

**Father Abelardo Antonio Muñoz Sánchez**, 41 years old was killed on October 3 during an attempted theft, in San Antonio neighborhood in Rionegro, on the main road leading to La Ceja (Colombia). Two criminals approached the priest who was getting out of a taxi to visit some relatives, who intimidated him with a gun because they wanted his wallet. After the priest refused to hand over his wallet, the criminals shot him several times causing his death. The police managed to capture the killers. Fr. Abelardo Antonio Muñoz Sánchez, of the diocese of Girardota had been a priest for 10 years and worked for 4 months at the parish of Cisneros, in the department of Antioquia.

(See Fides, 04/10/2017)

**Sister Ruvadiki Plaxedes Kamundiya**, a 49-year-old Catholic religious, was brutally murdered on Sunday 22 October in Mutoko, in the Province of Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe. The police arrested a suspect, Enock Potani, 20 years old, who confessed he killed the nun. According to the police, the young man has mental disorders.

Sister Ruvadiki Plaxedes Kamundiya, who was a teacher at Hartmann House, a member of St George College in Harare, went to the Mother of Peace community in Mutoko on Sunday, October 22, on a tour in view of a school trip of St. George's College

Before returning to Harare, she wanted to gather in prayer at the John Bradburn Shrine, where she was attacked, raped and killed. Her body was found in the waters of the dam in Mutemwa the following day. (See Fides, 25/10/2017)

**Fr. Evans Juma Oduor**, was found unconscious on Sunday evening, October 22 near a sugar cane plant near Chiga Market Center in Muhoroni. The burned carcass of his car was five kilometers away from where the priest was found.

Brought to the hospital, Fr. Evans, who had head injuries, died a few hours later, on October 23, without regaining conscious. Fr. Evans was parish priest at the church of Sigomore, part of the Archdiocese of Kisumu, in the West of Kenya.

According to the local press, two weeks before, Fr. Evans had launched a public appeal to the government to stop killing the Luo, Raila Odinga's ethnic group, the leading opponent of outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta in the August 8th presidential election, then nullified by the Supreme Court, on the appeal of Odinga himself.

(See Fides, 24/10/2017)

**Fr. Marcelito Paez**, called Tito, an elderly priest of the diocese of San Jose, was killed in Jaen town, Philippines. He was shot by four motorcycle-riding gunmen around 8 pm on December 4, while the 72-year-old was driving his car. He was rushed to a hospital in the nearby town and died about two hours later due to gunshot wounds. It was a real execution, that Bishop Mallari "strongly condemns", asking the authorities "to investigate and do justice to his death".

Fr. Paez was a diocesan priest who served the diocese for more than 30 years and retired in 2015, although he continued his pastoral and apostolic work. In his service to the Church, he was known for his active involvement in the defense of social justice, especially in human rights issues that affected the poor.

The priest was currently the coordinator in Luzon of the "Rural Missionaries of the Philippines RMP", a body that in the Philippines brings together religious men and women and lay people, men and women, with the idea of offering an active Christian presence in rural areas.

Just on the day he was killed, Fr. Paez assisted in facilitating the release of political prisoner Rommel Tucay.

(See Fides, 6/12/2017)

Three catechists, **Joseph Naga**, **John Manye** and catechist student **Patrick**, are among the people killed in an explosion on 11 December in Minawao camp in Pulka, in northeastern Nigeria, which welcomes Nigerian refugees repatriated from Cameroon. Some members of Boko Haram made their way into the camp and blew themselves up killing a dozen people, including community catechists.

(See Fides, 13/12/2017)

**Fr. Joseph Simoly**, 54, Haitian, was killed on December 21, not far from his home, on the road to Frères, municipality of Pétiion-Ville, by three gunmen on a motorbike. The priest had just completed a transaction in a bank when he was targeted by the gunmen who pumped several bullets into Father

Simoly as they tried to rob him. He was rushed to the Haitian Community Hospital (HCH) but died while receiving treatment.  
(See Fides, 23/12/2017)

## SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR 2017

N°	Name and Surname	Nationality	Institute o Diocese	Date and place of death
1.	Fr. Joaquin Hernandez Sifuentes	Mexico	Diocesan	12/1 – Coahuila (Mexico)
2.	Lino	South Sudan	Lay catechist	22/1 – Lomin (South Sudan)
3.	Helena Agnieszka Kmiec	Polish	Voluntary Missionary	24/1 – Cochabamba (Bolivia)
4.	George Omondi	Nigeria	Lay person	18-19/3 – Kisumu (Nigeria)
5.	Fr. Felipe Carrillo Altamirano	Mexico	Diocesan	26/3 – El Nayar (Mexico)
6.	Friar Diego Bedoya	Colombia	Religious	10/4 – La Victoria (Venezuela)
7.	Fr. Lucien Njiva	Madagascar	Capuchin	23/4 - Ambendrana Antsohihy (Madagascar)
8.	Fr. Adolphe Ntahondereye	Burundi	Diocesan	11/5 – Gatumba (Burundi)
9.	Fr. Luis Lopez Villa	Mexico	Diocesan	5/7 – Los Reyes (Mexico)
10.	Fr. Diomer Eliver Chavarría Pérez	Colombia	Diocesan	27/7 – Antioquia (Colombia)
11.	Fr. José Miguel Machorro	Mexico	Diocesan	3/8 – Mexico City (Mexico)
12.	Domingo Edo	Philippines	Lay catechist	20/8 – Marbel (Philippines)
13.	Fr. Pedro Gomes Bezerra	Brazil	Diocesan	24/8 – Paraibo (Brazil)
14.	Ricardo Luna	Argentina	Lay person	23/8 – Buenos Aires (Argentina)
15.	Fr. Cyriacus Onunkwo	Nigeria	Diocesan	2/9 – Omuma (Nigeria)
16.	Fr. Abelardo Antonio Muñoz Sánchez	Colombia	Diocesan	3/10 – Rionegro (Colombia)
17.	Fr. Evans Juma Oduor	Kenya	Diocesan	23/10 – Kisumu (Kenya)
18.	Sister Ruvadiki Plaxedes Kamundiya	Zimbabwe	Religious	22/10 – Mutoko (Zimbabwe)
19.	Fr. Marcelito Paez	Philippines	Diocesan	4/12 – Luzon (Philippines)
20.	Joseph Naga	Nigeria	Catechist	11/12 – Pulka (Nigeria)
21.	John Manye	Nigeria	Catechist	11/12 – Pulka (Nigeria)
22.	Patrick	Nigeria	Catechist student	11/12 – Pulka (Nigeria)
23.	Fr. Joseph Simoly	Haiti	Diocesan	21/12 – Pétion Ville (Haiti)

**Religious Status**

Priests	13	(12 diocesans; 1 OFM Capp)
Religious Brothers	1	(Hermanos Franciscanos de la Cruz Blanca)
Women Sisters	1	
Laity	8	

**Country of Origin**

Africa	10	(5 Nigeria, 1 S.Sudan, Madagascar, Burundi, Kenya, Zimbabwe)
America	10	(4 Mexico, 3 Colombia, 1 Brazil, 1 Argentina, Haiti)
Asia	2	(Philippines)
Europe	1	(Poland)

**Place of death**

Africa	10	(5 Nigeria, 1 S.Sudan, 1 kenya, Burundi, Madagascar,Zimbabwe)
America	11	(4 Mexico, 2 Colombia, 1 Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Haiti)
Asia	2	(Philippines)

**PASTORAL CARE WORKERS KILLED FROM 1980 TO 2016**

**Vatican City (Agenzia Fides)** – According to data in Fides’ possession, in the decade from **1980-1989** **115 missionaries** lost their lives in violent manners. This number, however, is doubtful, based only upon the cases which made news.

The collective summary from **1990-2000** presents a total of **604 missionaries killed**, still according to our information. The number is significantly higher than the previous decade, however, one must also consider the following factors: the genocide in Rwanda (1994) that caused at least 248 victims among church personnel; the increased speed of the mass media in disseminating the news even from most remote places; the total does not include only the missionaries *ad gentes* in the strictest sense, but all church personnel killed in a violent manner, or who sacrificed their lives aware of the risks they ran, while not abandoning the people in their care.

During the years **2001-2016** the total of the pastoral care workers killed is **393**.

YEAR	TOT	BISH	PRIE	DEA	BRO	REL	SEM	ICL	CAT	LAI	VOL
1990	17		10			7					
1991	19	1	14		1	3					
1992	21		6		2	13					
1993	21	1C+1	13			4	1	1			
1994	26		20		1	4	1				
1994*	248	3	103		47	65		30			
1995	33		18	1	3	9				2	
1996	48	3	19		8	13	1	2	1	1(ct)	
1997	68	1	19		1	7	40				
1998	40	1	13		5	17	4				

1999	32		17			9	4		2		
2000	31		19			7	3	1			1
2001	33		25			5	1	1		1	
2002	25	1	18		1	2	2	1			
2003	29	1	20		1		3			2	2
2004	16		12			1				3	
2005	25	1	18		2	3				1	
2006	24		17		1	3				2	1
2007	21		15	3	1	1	1				
2008	20	1	16		1					2	
2009	37		30			2	2			3	
2010	25	1	17		1	1	2			3	
2011	26		18			4				4	
2012	13		11			1				1	
2013	23		20			1				2	
2014	26		17		1	6	1			1	
2015	22		13			4				5	
2016	28		14			9	1			4	

\* = Data referring just to the Rwanda genocide.

BIS: Bishops; C: Cardinals; PRIE: diocesan and religious priests; DEAC: deacons; BRO: religious brothers; REL: religious sisters; SEM: seminarians; ICL: members of institutes of consecrated life; CAT: catechists; LAI: laity; VOL: volunteers; ct: catecumeno.

**DATA, COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE PASTORAL CARE WORKERS KILLED IN RECENT YEARS MAY BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE: [www.fides.org](http://www.fides.org)**

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