

THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY

A JUST-MEDIA FILM

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Prepared by

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

They Killed Sister Dorothy is a documentary drama. At stake is whether illegal loggers and cattle ranchers in the State of Para, Brazil, can continue to clear cut the Amazon rainforest, kill peasant farmers and take their land without fear of prosecution.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Most of this drama takes place between February 2005 and May 2007 in the State of Para in northeast Brazil, a place often compared to North America's "wild west," due to rampant lawlessness and corruption.

The events take place in Belem, capital of Para. Sister Dorothy Stang, an American nun, lived and worked in Anapu, a new town deep in the Amazon Forest. A short segment is filmed in Brasilia, capital of Brazil.

More than 772 peasant farmers have been murdered in land conflicts in Para over the past 30 years. Only nine cases have come to trial. No one who ordered and paid for a murder has been convicted and jailed.

One fifth of the Amazon rainforest has been destroyed. It is likely that an additional twenty percent of the forest will be lost over the next two decades. In August 2004, 2,500 acres of forest in the Anapu area were cut and burned. Dorothy traveled 1,000 miles to Brasilia to testify before a congressional committee investigating the destruction of the forest. Lot 55, where Dorothy was murdered, is made up of 10 square miles of virgin rainforest; it central to the Project for Sustainable Development (PDS), initiated by the Brazilian government as a conservation project and developed by Dorothy.

The Brazilian legal system has no law against perjury. A first offender with a sentence of more than 30 years has the right to a second trial.

SHORT CAST OF CHARACTERS

There are no actors in this film. Everyone is “caught on camera.”

Sister Dorothy Stang: an American Sister of Notre Dame de Namur who began her service in Brazil in 1966

David Stang: Dorothy’s brother

Sister Becky Spires: Dorothy’s friend and co-worker, now working among indigenous people of Brazil

Sister Julie (JoAnn) Depweg: Dorothy’s friend stationed in Belem, Brazil

Sister Jane Dwyer: Sister of Notre Dame presently working among the people of Anapu, Brazil

Felicio Pontes: Federal Prosecutor

Edmonson: Prosecutor for the State of Para

Raifran das Neves Sales: confessed gunman

Clodoaldo Carlos Bastista: confessed accomplice

Vitalmiro Bastos de Maoura (Bida): landowner charged with ordering and paying for the murder

Regivaleo Perira Galvao, Taradoa (Sleazy): landowner also charged with ordering and paying for the murder.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – PERSONAL RESPONSE

What emotions did you experience as you viewed the film?

Were there any surprises for you?

Which scenes touched you most deeply?

Did you identify with any of the persons in the film?

If you had been on the jury, would you have convicted Bida?

Why or why not?

What more do you want to know about Dorothy’s story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - IMPACT

- 1) Sister Dorothy often wore a tee shirt printed with “The death of the forest is our death.” What role does the Amazon Forest play in maintaining the health of our planet? What would we lose if the forest were destroyed?
- 2) Sister Dorothy asked the question, “How can we share this magnificent planet so that more people can have a sustainable way of life?” What are our answers to that question?
- 3) Dorothy wanted to bring awareness of what is happening in the Amazon “so that there will be a tomorrow.” She gave the PDS at Lot 55 the name of Esperanza, place of hope. How do we envision our planet’s tomorrow? What is our hope?
- 4) Sister Dorothy became involved in the struggle to save the Amazon rainforest because that is where she lived. What in our own back yards needs attention so that the planet can survive?
- 5) Sister Dorothy worked with the local, regional and national governments to hold them accountable to their promises to protect the rainforest. Who are the government officials where we live whom we could contact to ensure that our environment is protected?
- 6) Comment on this statement: “Dorothy didn’t speak as much about God as about human dignity and the future of the planet. On the contrary, the ranchers and lawyers talked about God frequently!”
- 7) Will this film make a difference in your life?