



Sisters in Ministry

Raising Awareness

For three days in June, the Ursuline Sisters and others in the Louisville community came together in an effort to raise awareness about the effects of torture on individuals, communities and nations. The events organized in Kentucky were done in conjunction with vigils held in Washington, D.C., as part of Mount St. Joseph Ursuline Sister Dianna Ortiz's efforts to bring an end to the practice. This year, 2009, marks 20 years since she suffered torture in Guatemala. Over the last two decades, she has worked through the Torture Abolition and Survivors' Support Coalition (TASSC), a group she founded to help survivors and prevent others from having to endure these horrific practices.

Ursulines took up the Call to raise awareness when they were approached by Marcy Allman, a woman who was working to arrange events in Louisville.

Sister Mary William Klipsch, who is active in the Ursuline Sisters Social Concerns Committee, and Ginny Schaeffer, director of the Angela Merici Center, worked with Marcy to organize the screening of

"Breaking the Silence" at Brescia Hall. The film profiles the experience of torture survivors with firsthand accounts of their suffering. It was shown on June 25 to an audience of more than two dozen people.

"I was looking for somewhere to show this film, and then a friend said I should try the Ursuline Sisters because they're very active in peace and justice issues," Marcy said.

"The Angela Merici Center is a ministry of the Ursuline Sisters," Ginny Schaeffer told the audience. "And part of that mission is to find needs in the community and meet those needs. Sadly, this is one of those needs."

"Torture begets torture. If we torture so, it will be done to us"
— Marcy Allman, *Co-organizer of Torture Awareness Events in Louisville*

More events followed the screening. A vigil and public witness were held at 6th and Broadway the following day. It featured several speakers talking about the effects of torture, as well as volunteers holding signs. A similar event took place on Saturday, June 27, at the corner of Grinstead Drive and Lexington Road, and, once again, the sisters were involved. For this event,



Above: Several sisters joined other attendees for a screening of "Breaking the Silence" on Thursday, June 25.

Right: Candles were set out as a symbol of the countries where torture is still practiced.



several sisters made signs decrying the use of torture. These were held by volunteers, who included Sister Mary Jo Gramig, and organizers.

During the vigil which lasted from 11 am until 1 pm, Lexington Road was lined with signs showing the countries where torture is used today. Right now, according to Marcy, about 190 countries continue to use torture,

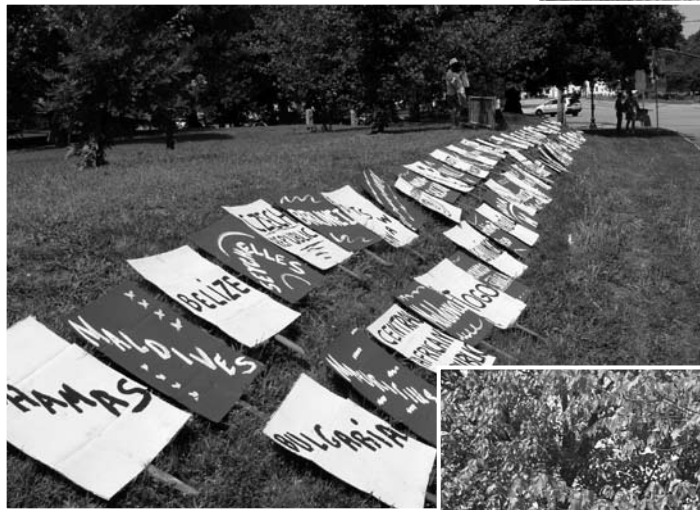
including the United States. A survivor who married a Louisville man was scheduled to speak at the event but a family emergency prevented her from attending. So, Marcy stepped in. Standing atop of tree stump and surrounded by the sisters' handmade signs, she spoke into a microphone attached to a tiny speaker hoping her message would reach the ears of even one person.

"These are people who are teachers or aid workers, not spies, and they are targeted and abused," Marcy said. "They are treated with atrocious behavior and horrifically tortured. We're urging our government to investigate any role our country has played directly or indirectly – it's not legal or just."

"Most people are honking or showing peace signs or slowing down to read the signs," Ginny said, while standing in the hot sun and holding a sign that reads 'torture is immoral.' "We've only had an occasional person shout something rude. Most seem to be open and ready to learn."

Several people on their way into the nearby park did indeed stop to listen; others just shouted their support or announced their disagreement with the vigil. One cyclist shouted as he pedaled by, "It stops terrorism." Those listening to Marcy speak were quick to respond to his remark. "That's just ignorant," said one woman. "That doesn't even make any sense," said a reporter who was there to cover the event.

"The world looks to America to be leaders in the



Above left: Signs lined Lexington Road with the names of countries still practicing torture.

Above right: Marcy Allman spoke at a demonstration decrying the use of torture.

Bottom: Ginny Schaeffer, director of the Angela Merici Center, was joined by Sister Mary Jo Gramig on Saturday, June 27 at the intersection of Lexington and Grinstead to demonstrate against the use of torture.

world," Marcy continued, unphased by any of the remarks, and focused on her mission. "There are military generals begging our government to stop the CIA because it puts our military in the field at a higher risk of themselves being tortured."

She then paused, her eyes tearing up and her words coming out slowly, filled with passion. "I love my country but I don't want to be a part of inflicting suffering. We don't want it done in our names, with our money and using our young people."