



# IMMACULATE HEART<sup>OF</sup> MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

## A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

JULY 23, 2017

Dear friends in the Lord,

In 2004 I participated in a pilgrimage for priests and bishops to the shrines of the Central American martyrs of the 1980s and 90s. We celebrated Mass in the chapel where Archbishop (now Blessed) Oscar Romero was gunned down in 1980 and on the site where the bodies of four North American Church women were discovered after they had been raped and murdered later that same year. We prayed in the rose garden where the bodies of six slain Jesuits at the University of Central America, their housekeeper and her daughter were found in 1989. We visited the garage where Bishop Juan Gerardi was killed in 1989, two days after presenting the Church's findings on the years of murder and oppression in Guatemala.

Over and over we heard terrible stories of murders, massacres, torture and brutality. But we also heard of the heroic courage and faith of countless campesinos, missionaries and lay leaders. Their martyrdoms were and remain tremendous victories of love and grace over sin and death.

All of this comes to mind now because July 28 is the 36th anniversary of the death of Father Stanley Rother. A missionary priest of the Oklahoma City archdiocese, Rother was shot to death in 1981 while serving the poor of Guatemala. He was 46. He established the first farmers' co-op, a school, the first hospital clinic, and the first Catholic radio station, which was used for catechesis. Above all, he gave his heart to the indigenous Mayan people, choosing to remain with them in spite of being told that he was on a death list. Rother was one of 13 priests slain during Guatemala's 36-year-guerrilla war, a tragedy that claimed an estimated 140,000 lives. No one has ever been prosecuted for his killing, but the bullet recovered from the crime scene was American-made and military grade, likely paid for by our tax dollars.

Pope Francis formally recognized Rother as a martyr in 2016, making him the first recognized martyr to be born in the U.S.; he will be beatified on September 27 this year.

Blessed Stanley Rother, may your prayers help us to defend the poor and to share Christ's love with all. Pray for us!