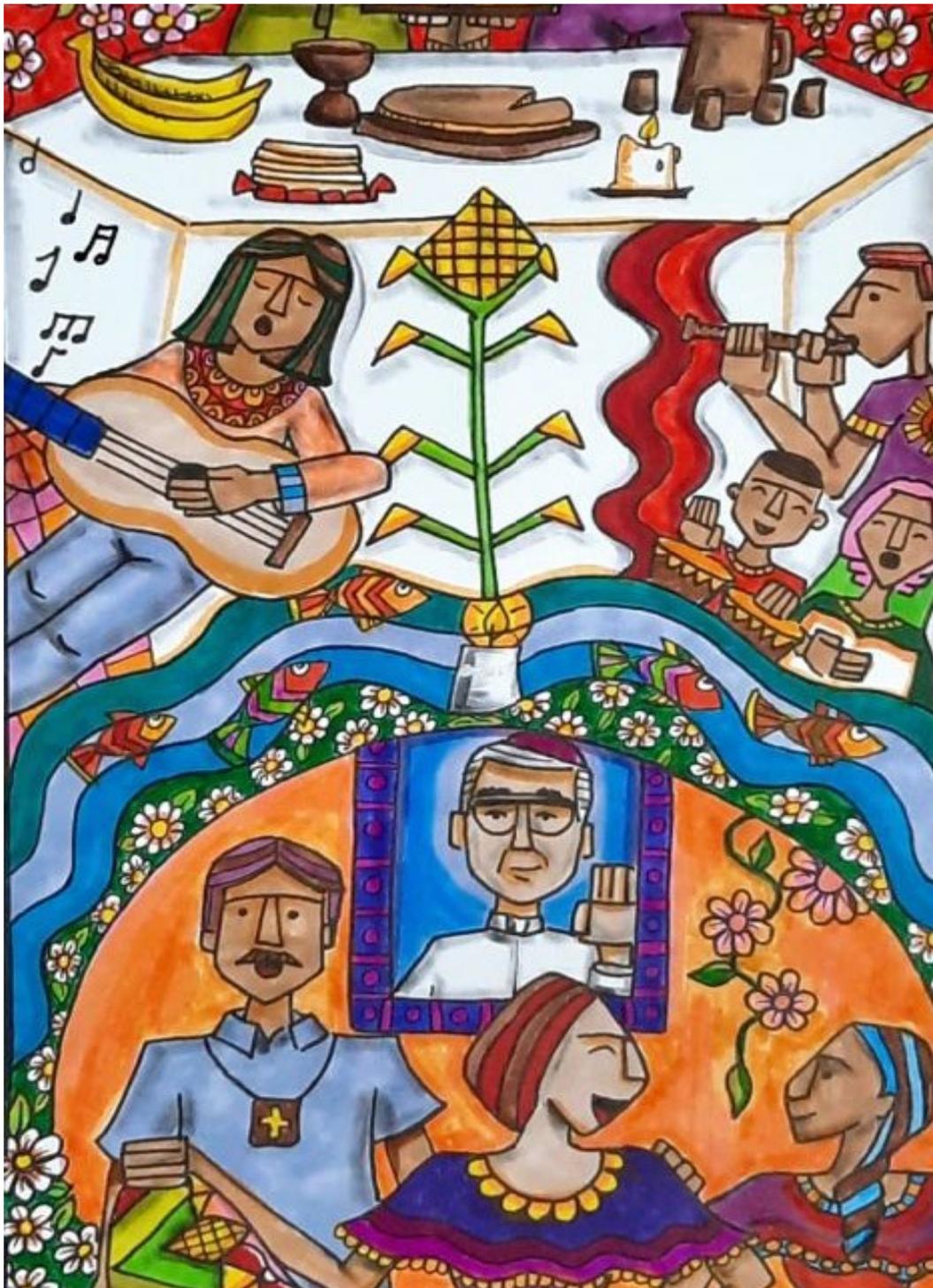


# Romeronews

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## Romero: Inspiration and Hope



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## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March – 4.00pm  
Romero Choral Evensong  
Preacher: Luis Orlando Pérez SJ  
St. Alban's Cathedral**

**Speaker at events 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> March  
Todd Walatka: Notre Dame University  
"Inspiration and Hope in Hard Times"**

**Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 6.00pm  
St Thomas Church, Canterbury**

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March 7.00pm  
Leeds Trinity City Campus**

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March 4.00pm  
Lecture: Oscar Romero and the  
Structure of Catholic Theology:  
Uniting What We Separate  
Durham Catholic Studies Centre**

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March 11.00am  
National Ecumenical Service  
St Martin in the Fields, London SW1**

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 6.30pm  
Mass St Edward's Church, Windsor**

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 12.30pm  
Mass St David's Cathedral, Cardiff**

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March 12.30pm  
Romero Schools Award Mass  
St George's Cathedral, Southwark**

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June  
CAFOD-Romero Trust  
Pilgrimage Holy Island of Lindisfarne**

Welcome to the 37<sup>th</sup> edition of the Romero News. At a time of increasing polarisation and division worldwide, Saint Oscar Romero's calls against violence and his message of peace with justice are ever more relevant. In today's world the voice of Pope Leo and church leaders stand as both a challenge and an invitation to rebuild the world on Gospel values and the option for the poor.



*Our guest speaker for the Romero week events around the country in March is Dr.*

*Todd Walatka, professor in the Department of Theology of the University of Notre Dame in the United States.* Todd is also the founding chair of the Romero Studies Working Group at the Kellogg Institute in Notre Dame. He has a doctorate in systematic theology from Notre Dame, specialising in Latin American liberation theology, Catholic social teaching, Christian spirituality, Jewish–Christian relations, and pedagogical formation.

Todd Walatka is the author of *Words of Life: The Preaching of St. Óscar Romero*, and editor of *Óscar Romero and Catholic Social Teaching*, reviewed by Frank Turner in issue 35 of Romero News.

In Walatka's own words "There are few voices more relevant for our own times than Romero. Here we have a saintly figure of the Americas whose long, complex journey as a priest and bishop reveals much about the modern Church and the challenges we face. The history of El Salvador in Romero's time is a sort of microcosm for the economic, political, and ecclesial transformations of the 20th century that still form our world today. Romero lived and died in a time of great polarisation, oppression, and violence, a time of the Church struggling to find its way in the modern world. Few journeys of faith capture so well the choices each of us faces and the courage it takes to live out the Gospel in its fullness.

For those who seek to truly understand and live out Catholic Social Teaching today, Romero's life and preaching offer an incredible resource".

**All are welcome to the Romero lectures around the country!**

## St Oscar Romero in *Dilexi Te* the First Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Leo XIV



*Carlos Ayala is the professor of Christology and Ecclesiology at the Jesuit School of Theology at the University of*

*Santa Clara. Originally from El Salvador he is a graduate of the UCA and founder of the University's radio station, YSUCA. Currently he is also professor of Pastoral Theology at the Hispanic Leadership School of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.*

Pope Leo XIV's first apostolic exhortation, entitled ***Dilexi te***, on Christ's love for the poor, sets out the programme for his pontificate. The centrality given to the preferential option for the poor is particularly striking. As we know – and as the exhortation reiterates – the centrality of the poor in the Christian faith has a biblical foundation: the God of the Bible is a God who chooses the poor (cf. Psalm 146:7-9), a Christological foundation: Jesus Christ personally made an option for the poor and considered them the first recipients of his message (Lk 4:16-20),

an apostolic motivation: the early Church was diligently concerned for the poor (Acts 2:42-47),

an eschatological motivation: at the final judgement, what ultimately counts is our attitude of acceptance or rejection towards the poor (Matthew 25:31-40),

an ecclesiological motivation: in Medellín, for example, the bishops spoke out in favour of the preferential option for the poor.

*Dilexi te* also emphasises the importance of being 'a Church for the poor' and warns that 'we are not on the horizon of charity, but of Revelation' (DT n.5). In this vein, it can be appreciated that, in the post-conciliar period, in almost all Latin American countries, the Church's identification with the poor was strongly felt. Pope Leo maintains that the Latin American Episcopal Conferences in Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo and Aparecida constitute significant stages for the whole Church (DT 89).

Number 89 of the exhortation makes direct reference to Saint Óscar Romero, considered an emblematic figure of the option for the poor. We quote:

"It was the very heart of the Church that was moved by so many poor people

suffering from unemployment, underemployment, unfair wages and forced to live in miserable conditions.

***The martyrdom of Saint Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, was both a testimony and a living exhortation to the Church.*** He felt the drama of the vast majority of his faithful as his own and made them the centre of his pastoral option. I myself [Leo XIV], a missionary for many years in Peru, owe much to this path of ecclesial discernment, which Pope Francis has wisely united with that of other particular Churches, especially those of the global South."

It is said that historical memory is the present of the past, that is, the evocation of a past event is made to the extent that it is relevant in the present. Saint Óscar Romero is a current source of inspiration and commitment. He is so for Pope Leo XIV, who sees in Saint Romero a testimony and a living exhortation to the option for the poor.

Today, of course, we must make an effort to identify the current faces of poverty. We speak, for example, of many people and peoples marked by pain, marginalisation, oppression, violence,

torture, imprisonment, war and deprivation of dignity.

The words of the holy martyr continue to resonate when he pointed out that there is a decisive criterion for knowing whether God is near or far from us: 'Anyone who cares for the hungry, the naked, the poor, the disappeared, the tortured, the prisoner, all that suffering flesh, has God near. Because God is there.'



*Picture of Romero on the bookshelf of the then Bishop Robert Prevost in Chiclayo, Peru*

But, as the exhortation states, it is not just a matter of charity, but of justice for the impoverished. It is not just a matter of palliative measures, but of structural ones. In this regard, paragraph 97 of the exhortation is very indicative. It states that structures of injustice must be recognised and destroyed with the force of good, through a change of mentality, but also with the help of science and

technology. Consequently, we must commit ourselves more and more to resolving the structural causes of poverty.

This paragraph also points out that all members of the people of God must make their voices heard in different ways, voices that awaken, denounce and focus attention on the reality of impoverished individuals and groups. Saint Óscar Romero is an example of what can and must be done. He is a constant source of inspiration for those who seek to build a civilisation based on justice, compassion, truth, respect for human dignity, care and love for and with the poor. This is recognised in Pope Leo XIV's exhortation. His testimony and legacy continue to be good news.



## Echoing Romero's Voice in Song

*Chris Olding has been a church musician for over thirty-five years, serving in a number of parishes and cathedrals across the UK. He is currently an organist and music co-ordinator at St Bede's Church, Basingstoke and a musician at Farm Street Church, Mayfair, London. Here he talks about his new Mass setting in honour of Oscar Romero.*

Saints can often seem remote, holy people from centuries past. But Oscar Romero was alive in my lifetime. I learned at school about his courage to speak up for the marginalised, only a decade after his death. Here I found an inspiration, somebody who spoke to me personally and to the needs of our world today. In 2017, I was commissioned by the Archbishop Romero Trust to write a hymn for the centenary of Romero's birth. "God, you raise up true disciples" was built upon a desire to let Romero speak for himself. The text weaves the words of his own homilies with reflections on our response today. The hymn speaks of a "gospel that disturbs us" and "words that

must demand a choice", because we must never remain a bystander to injustice. How should we respond? By rousing us "from our apathy" and seeing "the anguish on the faces of the poor". It is a prayer for "hearts emboldened" to "devote our lives to justice". Our worship in church must lead us outside, to be present "in the places lost to darkness" and "help the needy at our door". The hymn's tune, *Salvador*, is named for the nation where he lived and died, grounding the music in the soil of his ministry.

As a liturgical composer, I find that music can lift already powerful words to new heights, making them truly come alive. I composed a strong yet easy-to-learn tune to give resonance to Romero's voice and not distract from it. The meaningful impact of the hymn led Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark to commission a Mass setting dedicated to Romero. By using the hymn's familiar melody as its foundation, the setting allows us to enter into the liturgy through music already steeped in Romero's legacy. It is designed to be accessible for congregations and schools, ensuring that the spirit of Romero's simple and

compassionate lifestyle is reflected in music that is straightforward and uplifting. Some parts of the Mass setting are instantly recognisable, using the melody of the hymn directly. Other parts, such as the Gloria and Lamb of God, use new tunes inspired by the hymn but they still feel true to the original. The Great Amen naturally felt as though it should be sung to the rousing final line of the hymn! I'm delighted that the hymn and the mass setting have been taken up across the country, in our schools and churches, to make Romero's name, words and actions better known.

Both of these pieces are intended to be more than musical tributes; they are living prayers. As Archbishop Wilson notes in the introduction to the Mass setting, they are a "call to action". May this music inspire us all to follow in Romero's footsteps, striving to create a world that is more just and compassionate.

*"God, you raise up true disciples" and "Mass of St Oscar Romero" can be downloaded for free from:*

<https://tinyurl.com/yd5xv45x>

## Walking with Romero around London



*Jenny Rossiter is an accredited City of London Guide as well as Guide to several other boroughs around Central*

*London. She is also the Romero Trust's membership secretary. Jenny has always had an interest in cities and how they have changed and developed over the centuries. She has developed a fascinating pilgrimage walk around Central London to sites with a special link to St Oscar Romero.*

### **Romero in London Justice and Peace Walk from Westminster Abbey to St George's Cathedral in Southwark**

In 2025 Jenny developed this walk to celebrate the life of St Oscar Romero and the tenth anniversary of his beatification and subsequent canonisation. Although Romero never visited London, there are many references to him on this walk.

### **The walk starts at the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey**

In July 1998, during the Lambeth Conference, Queen Elizabeth II unveiled

ten statues of martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century over the Great West Door of the Abbey—with **Archbishop Romero** standing between Martin Luther King and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The martyrs are drawn from every continent and represent all who have been oppressed or persecuted for their faith.



### **Oscar Romero**

On 24th March 1980 Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador was shot dead while celebrating Mass in the chapel of the cancer hospital where he lived. He was beatified by Pope Francis on 23rd May 2015 and canonised in Rome on 14th October 2018.

Today, the memory of Oscar Romero inspires and is cherished by the people of El Salvador, as well as across the world by Christians and people of all faiths and none.

## **The Methodist Central Hall Westminster**

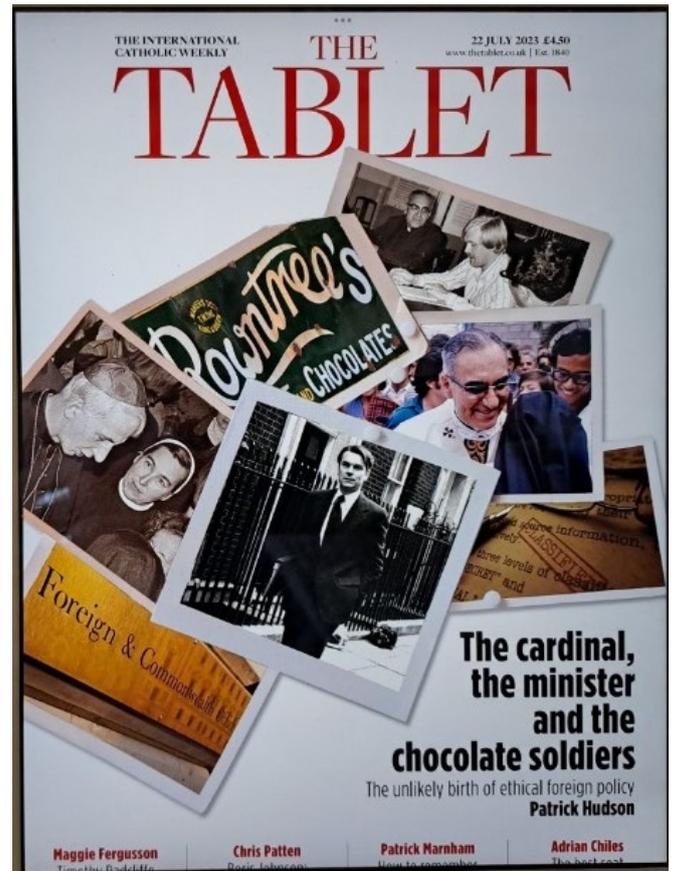
The Methodist Central Hall was built in 1911 and the very first assembly of the United Nations took place here in 1946. The United Nations observes 24<sup>th</sup> March as the International Day for the Right to Truth concerning gross human rights violations and for the dignity of victims, which is recognised as Romero Day, the date that he was assassinated after speaking out about violence and injustice in El Salvador.

### **Foreign & Commonwealth Office**

#### **The Campaign to prevent the sale of British armoured cars to El Salvador**

The Tablet magazine (22 July 2023), opposite, tells the story of how the Cardinal (Basil Hume), the minister (David Owen) and the chocolate soldiers (political advisors funded by Rowntree) with support from Julian Filochowski of the Catholic Institute for International Relations lobbied to prevent the sale of armoured vehicles to El Salvador's military government. It was successful and demonstrated that lobbying and using firsthand evidence, in this case from the church in El Salvador, and

Archbishop Oscar Romero, could and can make a difference.



#### **Cross River via Westminster Bridge St Thomas' Hospital and Covid Wall and the Houses of Parliament**

The COVID Wall monument was created in 2021 as a visual representation of the UK's catastrophic loss to Covid-19. The Wall stretches for 500 metres alongside the south bank of the River Thames. Directly across the river we can see the Houses of Parliament, where in August 1978 118 MPs and Peers of all Parties nominated Romero for the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. A 3-person parliamentary delegation subsequently travelled to El

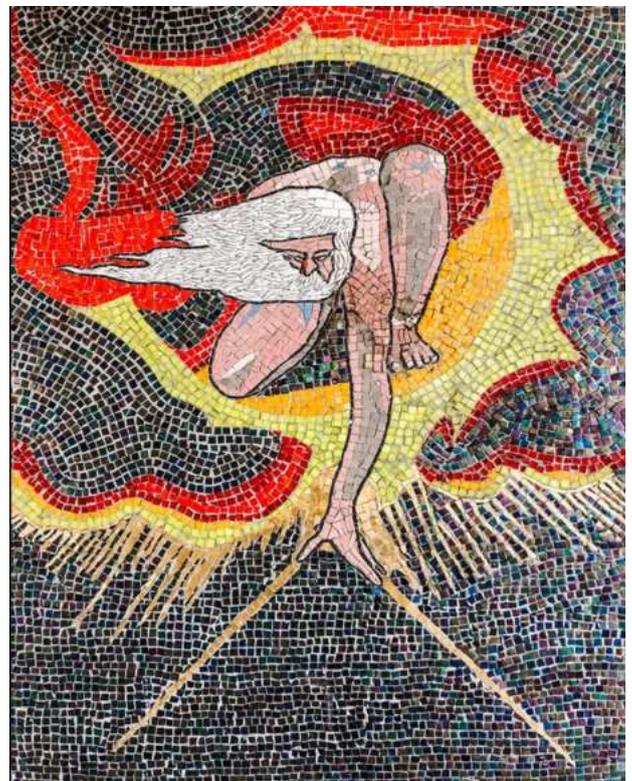
Salvador in December 1978 to inform Romero of their action, to investigate the human rights situation and to offer support to Romero. (Sir) Peter Bottomley was key to this initiative and he has remained a firm Romero supporter to the present day.

### **In front of St Thomas' is the Statue of Mary Jane Seacole 1805 – 1881 Jamaican-born nurse in Crimea**

Mary Seacole is honoured for her care for the sick and wounded. During the Crimean war she volunteered her nursing services but was rejected by Florence Nightingale. Not deterred, she sailed to Balaklava at her own expense to work on the battlefields with her mules loaded with medications and food. The armistice in 1856 left her with outstanding bills and on return to England she was bankrupt. Like St Oscar Romero, Mary Seacole was rejected. **'The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone.'** Matthew 21.42 and Psalm 118. Romero was rejected by the wealthy powerful Christians of El Salvador and even by some of his episcopal colleagues.

### **Cross Lambeth Palace Road down Upper Marsh to arches under Waterloo Station: Blake Tunnels**

“Blake’s Lambeth” is a collection of 70 mosaics installed in the tunnels alongside Archbishops Park, close to Waterloo Station. William Blake lived for ten of his most productive years in North Lambeth.



The mosaic project pays homage to his genius and some of his greatest work. The link to Romero here is of course “Memories in Mosaic” – the very best book on Romero with dozens of anecdotes and testimonies put together by María López Vigil.

## **Necropolis Station Westminster Bridge Road**

For 87 years, from 1854 until 1941, a bizarre train service - the London Necropolis Railway - ran an almost daily service from Waterloo Station to Brookwood Cemetery, Woking, carrying anything up to 2,000 bodies a year, and segregating both the living and the dead according to their class and their religion.

We are reminded of what Romero said – “My job is to go round picking up the dead bodies of the victims of the persecution against the Church” This is one of Romero’s frequently quoted statements in the context of the death squads leaving bodies scattered by the roadside every night.

## **Morley College Westminster Bridge Road**

In the canteen of the college you can see murals by Edward Bawden depicting Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, in recognition of the fact that the college stood on the pilgrims’ route to Canterbury. The murals tell the story of each of the 24 pilgrims mentioned in Chaucer’s great work. There is of course an Oscar Romero link here as those pilgrims back in the 14<sup>th</sup> century were

visiting the tomb of Archbishop Thomas Becket who like Romero was brutally assassinated.

## **Imperial War Museum Lambeth Road**

The Imperial War Museum is mostly dedicated to peace and informing the public of the horrors of war. We remember that Romero never endorsed violence.

## **St George’s Cathedral**

St George’s Cathedral was established here in 1848. A chapel dedicated to St George was built in London Road and by 1814 it had a congregation of more than 5,000. Demand was boosted by the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829. That same year Fr Thomas Doyle was appointed to the chapel and by 1850 Fr Doyle estimated his congregation to be 15, 000. In 1839 a new site on St George’s Rd was purchased and work started on a much larger church – AW Pugin designed the building, but his original design was not completed because the money ran out, so no spire was built. The work was carried out by Master Builder George Meyer who lived across the road. The church was opened in 1848 and became a Cathedral 2 years later. It was the first

Roman Catholic Cathedral in London. A nearby road bears Fr Doyle's name: Thomas Doyle Street.

Site of the Gordon Riots in 1790, banners saying **no Popery here!**

### **Enter Cathedral and the National Shrine of St Oscar Romero.**

Beautiful Cross by Salvadoran artist Fernando Llort, depicting Christ, Romero and the people of El Salvador and containing two precious relics of the martyred Archbishop. Declared a national shrine by the Catholic Bishops Conference in May 2023.



**The Archbishop Romero Trust can provide additional information and a London Guide to accompany a group on this walk. Please contact us on [romerotrust@gmail.com](mailto:romerotrust@gmail.com)**

**Suggested donation, to the Romero Trust, would be £10 per person.**

**Please see the website for further details and commentary on the Walk.**

**[www.romerotrust.org.uk](http://www.romerotrust.org.uk)**

**CAFOD & Romero Trust  
Holy Island Pilgrimage  
Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2026  
JOIN US !!**

The Holy Island of Lindisfarne is among the most atmospheric of England's historic sites. It echoes with the memories of the monks and saints of Anglo-Saxon and medieval Northumbria. It also offers abundant wildlife and wonderful coastal views.

Lindisfarne is only reachable across a causeway at low tide, which adds to the island's otherworldly aura. We will walk across the sands at low tide in the steps of St Aidan and St Cuthbert followed by Mass in the historic St. Mary's church.

**CAFOD in partnership with  
The Archbishop Romero Trust  
Pilgrimage to Holy Island  
Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2026**

Bring your Parish, School or local community together  
to arrange transport and join us for this special  
pilgrimage to Lindisfarne

Coaches depart from Purdy Lodge cafe, A1 and travel  
in convoy at **10:45 am** to Holy Island causeway.

**11:30** - Walkers depart from the 1st refuge on  
the causeway to cross the sands.  
Non-walkers are welcome to join service in  
St Aidan's Catholic Church at **12 noon**.  
Lunch - Bring or buy your own  
**3pm** - Mass in St Mary's Church

**Safe Crossing Times:  
10:50 - 18:00**

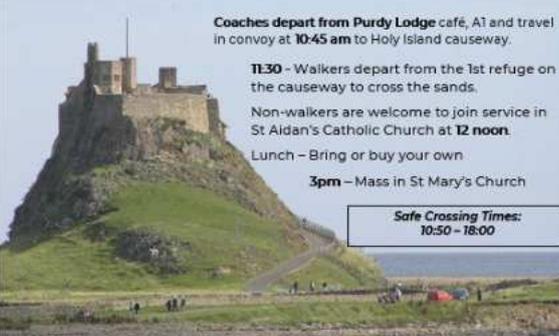


Photo: Malcolm Bengston

**CAFOD**  
A better world needs all of us

For more information,  
contact Rachel Blaylock:  
[rblaylock@cafod.org.uk](mailto:rblaylock@cafod.org.uk)  
07779 804243

**The Archbishop  
Romero Trust**

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There will also be a midday service for non-walkers at St Aidan's Catholic church. You can wander through the atmospheric ruins of the richly decorated priory church and learn more about the origins of Christianity in Britain.

To join us on the Romero Trust /CAFOD pilgrimage to Holy Island: arrange your own transport to Northumberland. Cars and coaches will depart in convoy at 10.45 am from Purdy Lodge, which is on the main road, the A1, at Adderstone Services, Belford, Northumberland, NE70, 7JU.

**Further details on CAFOD & Romero Trust websites or please contact:**

**[rblaylock@cafod.org.uk](mailto:rblaylock@cafod.org.uk)**

## Remembering the Martyrs



*During the late 1970s, Scots-born George Black worked in London with refugees from Chile before leaving the UK for Central America as a*

*reporter on the turbulent region. He went on to become an eminent, prize-winning author, in a long career with leading US journals including the Nation and New York Times. But George's heart never left Central America and, in particular, he never gave up on seeking out the truth about the murder of the four US women missionaries, killed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1980. This article, published by the Maryknoll congregation on the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their deaths finally names those responsible for the crime.*

For those of us who went to Central America as young reporters in the late 1970s, as bloody civil wars were erupting in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, one of the biggest challenges was to find some fixed compass amid almost unfathomable levels of violence and cruelty. Regardless of our own religious beliefs,

many of us found it in the Catholic Church, and nowhere more than among the Maryknoll Sisters. Over the years, they became a moral touchstone for me. If you wanted accurate information that cut through the infamous “fog of war,” you went to the Maryknollers. No one had a deeper understanding of the human rights situation or responded more effectively to the needs of the poor. You were guaranteed lively conversation at a Maryknoll house, and even surprising moments of joy and laughter. Those visits felt like finding sanctuary — even though we knew that was an illusion once the Salvadoran death squads began to kill priests and church workers. No one was safe. Not even American religious sisters.

By 1980, death squads were operating with impunity, emboldened by the election of Ronald Reagan. Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford were savagely murdered by five members of the Salvadoran National Guard 45 years ago, on Dec. 2 of that year, along with their friends, lay missionary Jean Donovan and Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel of the Cleveland diocesan mission.

Sisters Ita and Maura worked in the northern province of Chalatenango, aiding refugees from the first of the great rural massacres of the war, the slaughter of 600 people on the Sumpul River. Sister Maura had only recently arrived, replacing Sister Carla Piette, who had drowned in a flash flood. In the town of Zaragoza, near the grubby Pacific port town of La Libertad, Sister Dorothy and Jean ran a shelter for women and orphans fleeing the violence in the north. Three and a half years later, five guardsmen were convicted of aggravated homicide.



*From top: Ita, Dorothy, Jean and Maura*

To most of us who were there at the time, it was inconceivable that they could have acted without higher orders, and State Department officials such as Jeff Smith, the top lawyer assigned to the case, agreed. “It was always hard for me to believe that these guys acted on their own initiative,” he told me. But nothing could be proved.

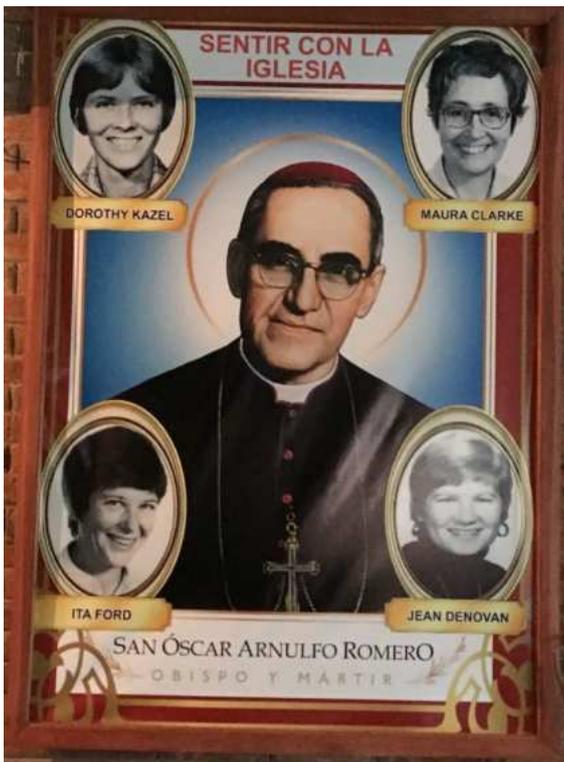
Once you crossed paths with the Maryknollers you never forgot them, and for the Maryknoll and Ursuline communities and a small group of lawyers, human rights advocates and surviving family members, the search for the truth was like an ache that never went away. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as research director for the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (now Human Rights First), I was privileged to work closely with Ita Ford’s late brother, Bill, a Wall Street attorney, and with lawyers from the Center for Justice and Accountability, on a series of lawsuits against two former Salvadoran defence ministers, José Guillermo García and Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, who had been discovered living quietly in Florida as U.S. permanent residents.

They were eventually extradited to El Salvador, but while the churchwomen’s murders were part of the case against them, there was no evidence that they had ordered the killings — just that they had been derelict in exercising command oversight.

Since then, the same small group has reconvened periodically to keep the case alive. In 2022 I took one more attempt at uncovering the true story, and *The New Republic* magazine offered me an assignment to explore all the unanswered questions in depth: how the operation had been conducted, who commanded it, who gave the orders. I found that as sources grew older, they spoke more freely, if only to unburden a troubled conscience.

Re-examining old evidence yielded new clues. The Freedom of Information Act unearthed documents long kept secret. Conscientious officials at the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (whose mandate has now been scaled back by the Trump administration) tracked down the most secret evidence of all, a clandestine tape recording of the National Guard sergeant who

commanded the death squad. With this, and the aid of advanced digital technology, the last pieces of the puzzle fell into place. They formed a dark and chilling picture that traced the murders to the very heart of El Salvador's death squads. The results were published in the May issue of *The New Republic*.



After this new two-year investigation, we now know the name of the officer who commanded surveillance of the Maryknoll sisters' arrival at El Salvador's international airport the night they were killed. We confirmed that the sergeant in charge of the murder squad did indeed receive orders directly from a superior officer and alerted other security forces in the area to the imminent operation. We

even discovered that the chief of police intelligence who directed the initial investigation of the crime was himself a death squad leader. The surveillance operation at the airport was run by a Chile-backed National Police unit commanded by perhaps the most notorious of all Salvadoran officers, Lt. Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, whose Atlacatl Battalion later carried out the worst atrocity of the war, the slaughter of 1,000 unarmed civilians of the village of El Mozote. The retired American officer who trained the battalion confirmed to me that Monterrosa had been an asset of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The police officer who ordered the initial criminal investigation of the missionaries' murders, Lieutenant Colonel Arístides Alfonso Márquez — described in one secret CIA cable as "a very mean person who is to be feared" — headed what was probably the largest, best organised and most secretive death squad in El Salvador.

Another lieutenant colonel and especially notorious right-wing extremist, Roberto Staben, was responsible for gathering specific intelligence against Sister Dorothy and Jean in Zaragoza. The

women were “terrorists,” he later told an American military attaché, according to one secret cable I unearthed. It had been “a routine wartime execution.” But what justified such a preposterous charge? the American asked. Because, Staben answered, they took “messages, medicines, shoes, clothes, and that sort of thing” to refugees.

Like all senior officers in the domestic security forces, these men came under the direct command authority of the vice minister of defence, Colonel Nicolás Carranza, the CIA’s principal asset in El Salvador, who was paid \$90,000 a year for his services.

It was hard to go back to El Salvador for the first time in decades, to relive memories of that traumatic time. Yet it was also inspirational. I visited the quiet cemetery in Chalatenango where Sisters Ita, Maura and Carla are interred.

In a field near Santiago Nonualco, where the four churchwomen were murdered, a small memorial chapel receives a steady stream of pilgrims. Villagers have erected a small white monument decorated with sculpted angels, photographs of the women and text from the Beatitudes:

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. ... Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:5, 9)*



### **Saint Romero in New York**

In December Pope Leo announced the new Archbishop of New York to be installed in February 2026.



His choice is 58 year-old Bishop Ronald Hicks of the Diocese of Joliet who spent years working among the poor in El

Salvador. At the beatification ceremony for Archbishop Romero in San Salvador in May 2015 the then Father Hicks helped carry the relics of the martyred archbishop to the altar.



On news of his appointment to New York, Bishop Hicks said: “I go with a shepherd’s heart...My favourite saint is St Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who, at the end of his life said something very beautiful to his people, and I love what he said: *How easy it is to be a good shepherd with these people.* And that was also my experience, it was easy because of the people, the unbelievable people from there”.

Bishop Hicks’ episcopal coat of arms includes the blue and white flag of El Salvador with a sprig of rosemary in the centre. In Spanish, the word for rosemary is “ROMERO”.



At such a critical time in the United States it is likely that Hicks’ voice as Archbishop of the second largest diocese in the country will have a national resonance.

### In Memoriam - Stephen Lloyd



Stephen Lloyd, who spent more than a decade as Treasurer of the Romero Trust, died on 30 October 2025. Stephen joined CAFOD

in the summer of 1992 as Head of Africa and worked in a number of different roles until his retirement in 2016.

Prior to CAFOD, Stephen worked in roles across Africa and in 1984 he was the

person to greet Bob Geldof off the plane in Ethiopia at the time of Band-Aid.

An accountant by training and a development worker by vocation, in 1998 Stephen set up CAFOD's regional office in Nairobi, and on his return to London six years later he joined the finance team. He ensured that sound financial management was always accompanied by an understanding of the challenges facing partner organisations, whom he continued to support with wisdom and kindness, as well as providing wise counsel to colleagues across CAFOD's international teams.

Alongside his work at CAFOD Stephen took up voluntary positions with other organisations, as a board member of the Jesuit Refugee Service and, particularly, as honorary treasurer of the Archbishop Romero Trust.

Stephen made two Romero pilgrimages to El Salvador and continued his treasurer's role long after his retirement from CAFOD. In February 2020 Stephen was awarded a papal honour as a Knight of Saint Sylvester (KSS), in a ceremony celebrated by Archbishop John Wilson of Southwark. After his retirement despite deteriorating health Stephen continued

to live life to the full. He always retained his extraordinary sense of humour and the capacity to find fun in life's quirks. He is much missed.

**May he rest in peace**



## **ROMERO ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

On 1 November Archbishop John Wilson celebrated a special Mass at St George's Cathedral, Southwark, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Archbishop Romero Trust and the 10th anniversary of the Oscar Romero Award Trust. He said: "Both Trusts have sought to keep alive the radiant witness of a man whose entire life was shaped by his faith in Christ: St Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, shepherd, martyr, and saint."

Describing himself as "an enormous Romero fan," Archbishop John said that Romero has inspired him "to take Christ seriously and ask what his Gospel

means for today, especially in relation to people experiencing poverty and oppression."

The occasion was also the premiere of the beautiful new Romero Mass setting by Chris Olding, described in the article "Echoing Romero's Voice in Song" (see page 6).



A surprise came at the end of the Mass for Julian Filochowski and Clare Dixon of the Archbishop Romero Trust and Mugeni Sumba, Coordinator of the Oscar Romero Award Trust, when they were each presented with Archbishop Wilson's Archbishop Medal. "It is my gift," said Archbishop Wilson; "I am using this occasion to recognise three people, who, in my 10 years here, have helped me to know and love Archbishop Romero." The full text of Archbishop John's homily is on the Romero Trust website:

[www.romerotrust.org.uk](http://www.romerotrust.org.uk)

## Jesuits of the UCA - RIP

The commemorative events of the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary massacre in November 1989 of six Jesuits and two of the women workers at the UCA (Central American University) were particularly poignant in 2025. In addition to remembering the victims of the massacre, thousands of mourners paid tribute to two outstanding Jesuits, Jose María (Chema) Tojeira sj and Rafael de Sivatte sj, who died just weeks before the November anniversary and who appear below, alongside their martyred colleagues, at the foot of the commemorative poster.



Fr Tojeira was the provincial superior of the Central American Jesuits at the time of the UCA massacre, and the first to be told of the killings. He went immediately to the residence at the UCA, finding there the bodies of all eight victims. Despite blatant disinformation attempts by the government it soon became clear that they had all been murdered by the Salvadorean army.



*Chema Tojeira 1947 - 1985*

Until his untimely death in September 2025, Fr. Tojeira tirelessly pursued the cause for truth and justice for his fellow Jesuits, Julia and Elba, the two slain women. He served as Rector (Vice-Chancellor) of the UCA from 1997 to 2011, after which he became the chaplain of the university pastoral ministry. He was also noted for his advocacy for human rights, transitional justice after the civil war, and environmental protection, serving as

director of the UCA's Human Rights Institute (IDHUCA) and as a vocal critic of abuses, not just in El Salvador.

He was a prolific commentator in the media known for his charm and sense of humour which prompted huge affection from the UCA community and the whole country.

The words of Fr Rodolfo Cardenal sj at Chema's funeral are the most eloquent tribute: "In his public appearances, he made the powerful uncomfortable. Not only because of his clear and blunt denunciations, but also because of the way he did it. His hard words were always accompanied by a smile, which made them nervous, because they thought that, in addition to discrediting them, he was laughing at them. That was not his intention. That smile was permanent. He couldn't help it.

Defending the poor was the fundamental choice that ran through his life. Chema was not concerned about his own life, but about the victims of injustice and violence. He sought the kingdom of God, confident that the rest would follow. He did not worry about tomorrow. Rather, he laughed, somewhere between confident and nervous. Chema was an envoy of

God, quick to laugh, good-humoured, approachable and cordial, leaving indelible memories in all of us. His life, his work, and his spirit will live on in us if we keep his memory alive, if we put his teachings into practice, and if we continue the work he began. His physical absence is a smiling and provocative presence, challenging us and encouraging us to follow in his footsteps.”

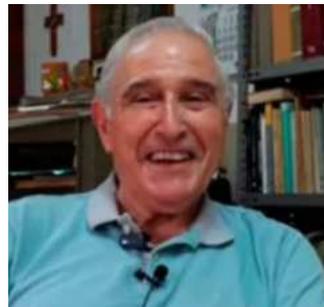


Fr Rafael de Sivatte was perhaps less known as a public figure than Tojeira, but his contribution to the UCA and to El Salvador was no less important. He was one of the Jesuits who heeded the call to volunteer to continue the work of the six UCA Jesuits killed in 1989.

A native of Barcelona, born in 1934, Father Rafa, as all called him, arrived in El Salvador for the first time in 1986 invited by Jesuits Ignacio Ellacuría, and Jon Sobrino, to teach Old Testament subjects in the UCA's Master's programme in Theology.

From that first time on, Rafa continued to go to El Salvador every year for three months. He quickly gained the trust and

appreciation of students, thanks to his engaging teaching style and his great human warmth.



After the November 1989 massacre in the UCA, Fr. Rafa took the decision to dedicate the rest of

his life to work in El Salvador, becoming the Director of the new Department of Theology and establishing the Master's programme there. He died of cancer on 28 August 2025. Without him the world-class Master's Degree in Latin American Theology at the UCA would not have been possible.



The third in the trio of losses to the UCA during the last months of 2025 was Father Juan Hernandez Pico sj, known universally as “Piquito”, who died on 27 November in Guatemala. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Piquito was a constant visitor to the UK, invited by CAFOD, CIIR and Justice and Peace to bring first hand evidence of the violent repression and suffering in Central America. He was our

guest speaker for the Romero week events organised by the Trust in 2011.



His lecture, entitled, “Romero and the Social Gospel: the challenge for us today” can be found on the Romero

Trust website. Born in Bilbao, in the Basque Country in 1936, Piquito was both a renowned theologian and sociologist, polyglot, author of numerous books including “Theology of Christian Solidarity” which he co-wrote with his friend and colleague (and Athletic Bilbao Football Club fellow fan), Jon Sobrino. He was famed as the “institutional memory” of the Jesuit Central American Province, a polyglot, and was a firm and faithful friend to many in the UK and across the world.

Out of the many tributes paid to Piquito, the most revealing is the following quote from his Jesuit community:

***“The first thing that can be said about Piquito is that the centre of his life was Jesus Christ. And that was the key to everything else.”***

**May they Rest in Peace**

## El Salvador Update

El Salvador has recently taken on an outsize role in the western hemisphere. With Donald Trump back as US president, Nayib Bukele has fostered a productive alignment with his policies.

Both Trump and Bukele share an affinity for cryptocurrency, fake news, social media and personal enrichment, and each stands to gain from the relationship. First elected in 2019, Bukele cultivated ties with the first Trump administration, signing an agreement to make El Salvador a so-called “Safe Third Country” to receive migrants seeking asylum in the United States.

After Trump’s return to the White House, in March 2025, the US rendered 238 Venezuelan nationals to El Salvador, where they were incarcerated without charge in the infamous Terrorism Confinement Centre mega-prison. Bukele also opened his airfields to US attack planes, which began flying lethal missions out of El Salvador in October. In the wake of the January 2026 US attack on Venezuela and the capture of

Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Bukele has signed up to Trump's Board of Peace.



### Bukele Forever?

In 2025 the party of President Nayib Bukele approved constitutional changes allowing him indefinite re-election as president and the extension of his term of office to six years. The decision also gets rid of the presidential runoff, which pitted the two top candidates in a second round. It was overwhelmingly approved by Bukele's New Ideas party, which holds a supermajority in Congress. Only three of Congress' 60 lawmakers opposed. Bukele's party had already let him continue in power despite constitutional bans. In 2024 he won re-election after the

Supreme Court judges elected by his party allowed him to run.

Observers fear that Bukele will seek to perpetuate himself in office for years, especially since his party voted to remove the judges of the Supreme Court's constitutional chamber, removing the last constitutional checks. The state of emergency has now been renewed 47 times, every month since March 2022.

### 34 years of peace?

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 1992 El Salvador celebrated the signing of the peace accords which brought an end to the civil war which cost the lives of 70,000 civilians. For Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez, the date remains as an urgent call to action.

On the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the peace



agreements in his homily during Mass in San Salvador, the

Cardinal stated that the country had lost the ability to face its past with responsibility. "We find it difficult to remember our history, or we are simply

not interested. We repeat the mistakes of the past," he lamented.

The Cardinal recalled Pope John Paul II's visit to El Salvador in 1983, in the midst of the war. He called for dialogue. The following year the peace process began and when the Pope returned to the country in 1996, he urged society to safeguard the hard-won agreement. But that spirit, said the cardinal, has faded.

"Today we live as if we were at war. Only in a different way," he said. In his opinion, war now does not reside in guns but in social breakdown: extreme polarisation, inability to dialogue, intolerance, offences, insults, slander, and lies that permeate public life. We are divided, unable to understand each other. The country lacks love, solidarity, justice, and truth. That is why there is no peace, he said.

In his reflection, he emphasised that peace was not a prize or a single act, but a demanding process to be cultivated on a daily basis. For him, peace is a gift entrusted to every person in the nation, but that commitment has weakened.

Cardinal Rosa Chávez's perspective posed a question to the nation: What remains of the Peace Agreements?

## Justice Delayed – again?

There is possible movement towards resolution of the case of the 1981 El Mozote Massacre. A judge has ordered the case into its final phase against the military commanders who led during some of the bloodiest years of El Salvador's civil war.

The infamous massacre took place on 10-11 December, 1981 when some 1000 were brutally killed by the army. Most of the dead were children, 57%, were under 18 years of age and 477 were 12 and under.

Several attempts to hold military leaders responsible for the massacre have been made but their prosecution was halted after president Nayib Bukele seized control over the Salvadorean judiciary in 2021. In late November 2025 the court finally ordered that the case against 13 defendants from the former high military command. Among the defendants is Guillermo García, the former Minister of Defence during the civil war.

Still, one must wonder whether a final judgment can be reached while any of the defendants, who are in their eighties and nineties, are still alive.



## ROMERO TRUST WEBSITE

If you haven't done so already, please visit our newly updated and designed website.

The Romero Trust has the most complete and comprehensive material on the life and work of Saint Oscar and is recognised internationally as a treasure trove of information on our beloved Saint.

The website redesign was created by

[www.caledonianwebsites.com](http://www.caledonianwebsites.com)

established in the Scottish Highlands

by Chris Boles who also runs a specialist website for Churches:

[Websites For Churches – Website Design for Churches and Religious Organisations](#)

We are delighted with the website upgrade and we hope you will find it an excellent resource to learn about St. Oscar Romero, his life and legacy.

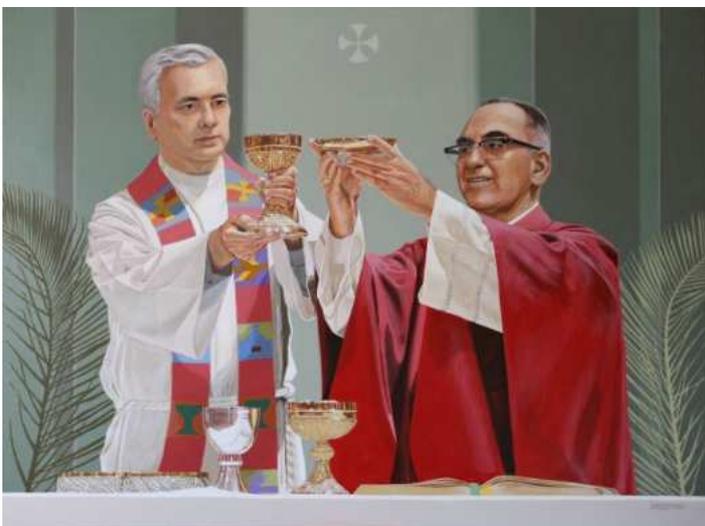
The beautiful design on the left panel is reproduced courtesy of the Masters' Programme of Latin American Theology of the UCA Central American University.

## MARTYRS OF EL SALVADOR PRAYER CARDS

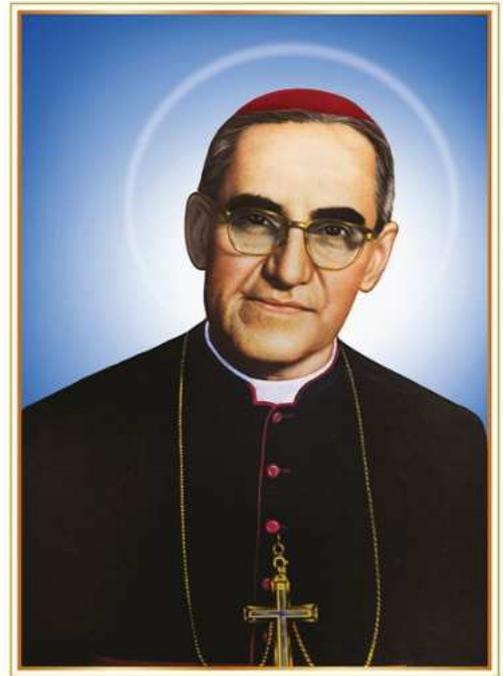


The Romero Trust has produced prayer cards of this beautiful portrait of Rutilio Grande and his companions, Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Lemus, by Salvadorean artist Cristián Lopez.

We also have available prayer cards of the “Great Amen” by Peter Bridgman.



And the official portrait of Saint Oscar Romero is still available from the Trust.



ST OSCAR ROMERO  
BISHOP AND MARTYR

Individual prayer cards are free of charge, just send us a self-addressed envelope. For bulk orders the charge is £10 for 250 cards.

## RESOURCES

A range of inspiring documentaries and feature films are available free to view on the Romero Trust website.

We particularly recommend:

**Roses in December:** *A moving account of the life and the death of lay missionary Jean Donovan, as remembered by her friends and family.*

**Righting the Wrong:** *An excellent overview of Romero's life and martyrdom. and the long process after his death leading to his canonisation by Pope Francis in 2018.*

**What Lucia Saw:** *A dramatic retelling of the true story of Lucía, the only witness to the killing of the UCA martyrs. A gripping and chilling tale of an attempted cover-up of the UCA massacre. **Highly recommended!***

**Find all the videos on:**

<http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/videos>

## The Southwark Romero Cross

The beautiful Romero Cross in St. George's Cathedral is the work of the celebrated Salvadorean artist, Fernando Llorca, who was present in Southwark at the inauguration of the Romero shrine in 2013. The Llorca family workshop has produced large copies of the double-sided cross and the Romero Trust has them available for purchase.

The small single-sided cross measures 4 inches is **£5 or 3 for £12 + £3p&p**

The large double-sided cross with a stand measures 12 inches and costs

**£15 + £5 p&p**

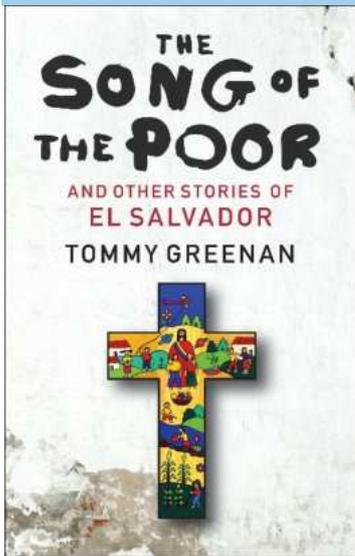


*Front of Cross represents Christ and Romero*



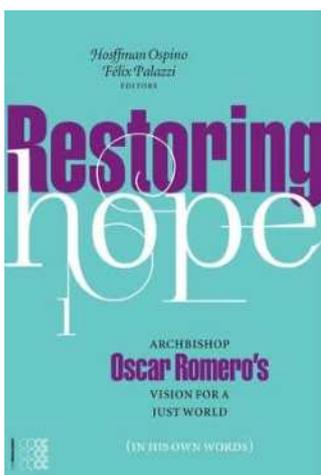
*Reverse of cross represents the People of God*

## BOOK OFFERS



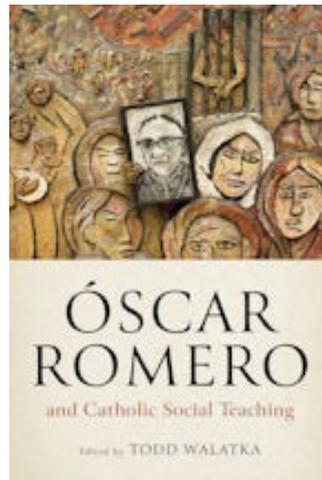
**The Song of the Poor** by Tommy Greenan, Scots missionary priest who served the poor in the war-torn villages of rural El Salvador.

A passionate and moving elegy which gives names to the nameless and voice to the voiceless. Tommy plunges us into the lives of a crucified people, the poor WITH spirit of the Beatitudes. **208 pp**  
**Special price of £12 + £3 p&p**



**Restoring Hope – Oscar Romero's Vision for a Just World.** 83 pages  
Ed. Hosffman Espino  
A selection of Saint Óscar Romero's

own words about hope from the homilies he preached when Archbishop of San Salvador **£10 + £3 p&p**

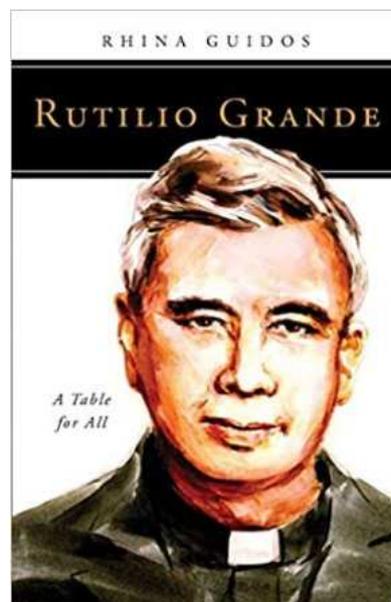


**Óscar Romero and Catholic Social Teaching**  
Edited by Todd Walatka  
Selected essays by 14 Romero scholars. This book

explores the life, mission, and writings of St. Óscar Romero in the light of contemporary work for justice and human development, and the challenges facing Christian communities today. **402 pp**

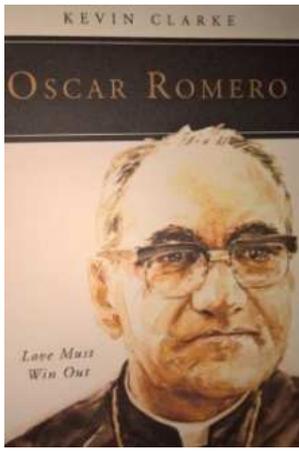
**Special price of £35 + £3 p&p**

**'Rutilio Grande - A Table for All'** by Rhina Guidos.



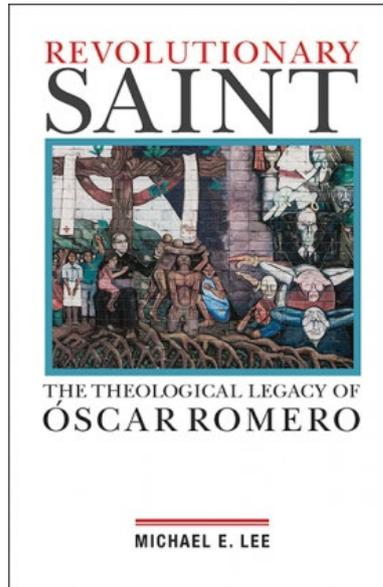
A short and readable biography which beautifully captures the life and ministry of Blessed Rutilio Grande".

**£8 + £3 p&p**



**Oscar Romero – Love Must Win Out** by Kevin Clarke. An excellent and very readable introduction to the life and times of Archbishop Romero.

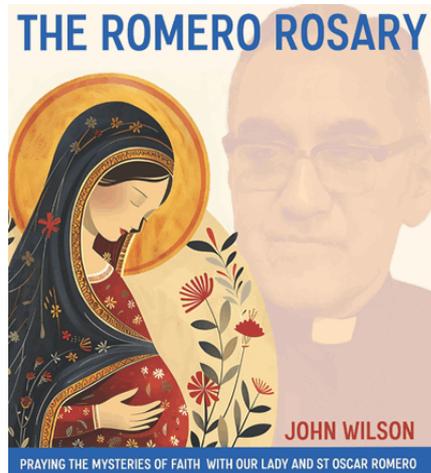
**£10 + £3 p&p**



**Revolutionary Saint – The theological Legacy of Oscar Romero** Michael E. Lee. Orbis Books. Highly recommended! Available in

bookshops at £20: and from the Romero Trust at the special price of:

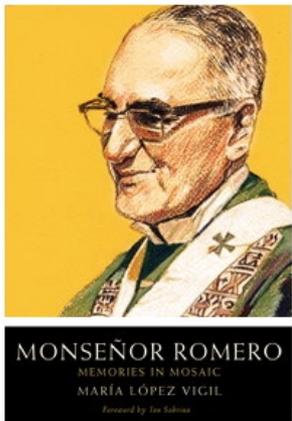
**£13 + £3 p&p**



**The Romero Rosary** by Archbishop John Wilson. A beautiful new book introduces the “Romero

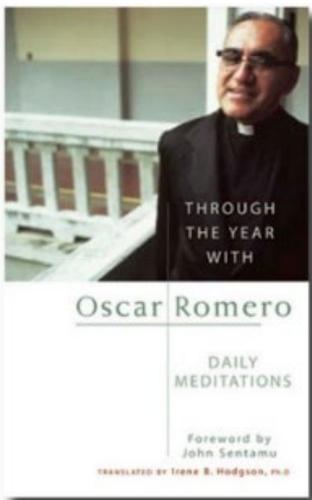
Mysteries”: charity, compassion, mercy justice & peace, illuminated for reflection and prayer by St Óscar Romero who said the “mysteries of the rosary are a precious summary of the Gospel”

**£10 + £3 p&p**



**Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic** Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero remembered by the people who worked with him, lived with him and prayed with him, compiled by María López Vigil. Arguably the best book on Romero. Unput-downable. Highly recommended.

**£15 + £3 p&p**



**Through the Year with Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations** Powerful and moving selections from Saint Oscar Romero’s homilies.

**£10 + £3 p&p**

## FRIENDS OF ROMERO

Join us as a 'Friend of Romero'. Just £10 a year. Support the Archbishop Romero Trust to raise awareness and celebrate the life and example of St Oscar Romero and the many martyrs of El Salvador, as well as supporting social justice initiatives in Latin America that carry forward the tradition of St Romero's work.

Your donations help us to produce this newsletter and organise events like Romero Week and the Romero Lecture.

The Trust's reserves are modest, and we rely on volunteers to carry out our work. If you can make a gift towards our work, we would be hugely grateful. Please send cheques payable to the Romero Trust to:

Archbishop Romero Trust,  
PO Box 70227, London E9 9BR

or visit our new improved website:

[www.romerotrusted.org.uk/donate](http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/donate)

Please remember that if you Gift Aid your donation we can claim an extra 25% from HMRC

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Please let us know if you prefer to receive the Romero News by post, by email or by both channels.

Please do inform us of any changes of your address and please send any feedback

Remember, the newsletter is also on the Trust's website, and you can contact us by email on:

[romerotrusted@gmail.com](mailto:romerotrusted@gmail.com)

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El Salvador Perspectives

# ARCHBISHOP ROMERO TRUST

## ROMERO SEASON 2026

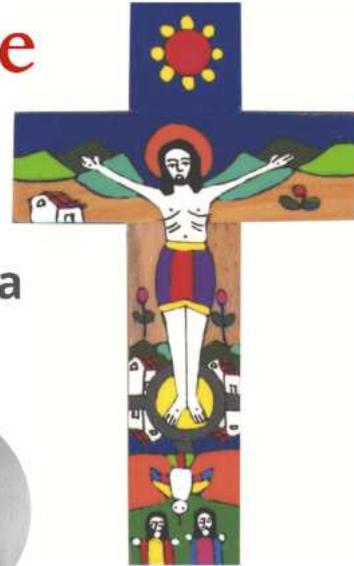
### Inspiration & Hope in Hard Times



Guest speaker:

**Professor Todd Walatka**

Professor of Theology,  
Notre Dame University, USA



#### Tuesday, 10 March, CANTERBURY

St Thomas of Canterbury Church,  
59 Burgate CT1 2HJ, 6pm

#### Wednesday, 11 March, LEEDS

Leeds Trinity City Centre Campus,  
Trevelyan Square, LS1 6AE, 7pm

#### Thursday, 12 March, DURHAM

*Oscar Romero and the Structure of Catholic  
Theology: Uniting What We Separate:*  
Romero Lecture, Durham University Centre  
for Catholic Studies, 4pm

#### Saturday, 14 March, LONDON

Annual ecumenical service,  
St Martin-in-the-Fields Church,  
Trafalgar Square, 11am

### OTHER ROMERO EVENTS

#### Sunday, 1 March, ST ALBANS

Choral Evensong at St Albans Cathedral, 4pm  
Preacher: Luis Orlando Perez SJ

#### Thursday, 26 March, LONDON

The Oscar Romero Award Mass, 12.30pm  
Celebrant: Archbishop John Wilson  
St George's Cathedral, Lambeth Road SE1 6HR

Full information at [romerotrust.org.uk](http://romerotrust.org.uk)

Email [romerotrust@gmail.com](mailto:romerotrust@gmail.com)

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