

# American killed in Kabul attack recalled as 'courageous, determined'

**By Kimberly Bender**

*Catholic News Service*

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Paula Kantor, the lone American among 14 people killed during an attack on a hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan, “was very courageous and very determined to do what she set out to do,” said her mother, Barbara Kantor.

Paula Kantor, 46, was a scientist and development specialist who spent the last 20 years of her life working to improve the lives of women and families in the poorest areas of the world through developing better sources of food. She had joined the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, in February and was in Kabul leading a new project to help people increase their livelihoods in the significant wheat-growing areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Ethiopia.

Kantor was staying at the Park Palace Hotel in Kabul when it was besieged by Taliban gunmen May 13. Kantor was the only American killed in the attack, which left eight other foreigners dead.

She was living in Egypt but was in the process of moving to Islamabad, Pakistan, and had been scheduled to leave Kabul that day.

Her parents, Anthony and Barbara Kantor, who are parishioners at St. Leo the Great Catholic Church in Winston-Salem, said they were extremely proud of her work.

“Our comfort is she died doing what she loved to do and she lived her life doing what she loved for the benefit of so many other people,” Barbara Kantor told the Catholic News Herald, newspaper of the Diocese of Charlotte. “Not many people can say that about their lives.”

“Paula was really devoted to helping the poor,” her mother said. “She was often told it was such a big area of need that she wasn’t going to solve anything. She’d reply, ‘People have to make the first steps or nothing’s ever going to change.’”

Paula was Catholic, her mother said, but she couldn’t publicly demonstrate her faith in the Middle East, where Christian minorities have increasingly faced hostilities and attacks.

“She did the work of the Lord in a different way,” Barbara Kantor said. “And we were here praying for her.”

Kantor spent decades in the field of gender and social development particularly in

poorer countries. She earned a bachelor of science in economics from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1990, then went on to earn a master's degree in gender and development from Britain's Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex.

In 2000, she earned a doctorate focused on international economic development and gender from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She published more than a dozen peer-reviewed academic publications and dozens of briefs and conference papers.

Kantor worked with WorldFish in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Egypt, and for the International Center for Research on Women in Washington, developing intervention research programs in the area of gender and rural livelihoods, including a focus on agricultural value chains - the process of moving food from the farm to the consumer in developing countries.

She had worked in Kabul previously, as the director and manager of the gender and livelihoods research portfolios at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, an independent research agency, from 2008 to 2010. She also had taught in the departments of consumer science and women's studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In a May 15 statement, the Afghanistan agency's director, Nader Nadery, said Kantor "gave her life ... to make sure millions of people, especially women, get a chance at a better life. She was aware of the risk she was taking to serve in conflict and terrorist-affected places. While we grieve her loss, we shall never forget the cause she gave her life to."

Thomas Lumpkin, who is director general of the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, better known as CIMMYT, echoed those remarks in his own statement May 15: "Paula's desire to help people and make lasting change in their lives often led her into challenging settings. Her dedication and bravery was much admired by those who knew her and she leaves a lasting legacy upon which future research on gender and food security should build."

Barbara Kantor said she was fortunate that her daughter's last visit to North Carolina earlier this year was longer than a few days as she worked on obtaining a visa to work in Pakistan.

"She was very courageous and very determined to do what she set out to do," Barbara Kantor said. "And she was self-confident that she could do it. She was self-motivated and a motivator."

In addition to her parents, Paula Kantor is survived by her brother, Anthony John; her sister, Laura Styrlund, and husband Charles; and a niece, Lindsay, and a nephew, Christopher.

A memorial service will be held in June at St. Leo Great Church in Winston-Salem. A

date has not yet been set.

*Bender is online reporter at the Catholic News Herald, newspaper of the Diocese of Charlotte.*

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