

Franciscan nun who fought nuclear testing dies from injuries suffered in accident

WASHINGTON - Franciscan Sister Rosemary Lynch, who prayerfully called for the end of nuclear weapons testing in the Nevada desert for more than 33 years, died Jan. 9, four days after being hit by a car during an early morning walk. She was 93.

The accident occurred as she and a friend, Franciscan Sister Klaryta Antoszezewska, were nearing the end of their daily walk through their central Las Vegas neighborhood. Police said the nun was hit by a car backing out of a driveway. She was knocked to the ground and struck her head on the pavement.

She had been in a coma after the accident and was moved from a local hospital to a hospice center, where she died.

As of Jan. 11, Las Vegas police were continuing their investigation of the accident.

Sister Rosemary, who co-founded Pace e Bene, an international network focusing on education in justice, social change and nonviolence, began visiting the Nevada National Security Site, formerly the Nevada Test Site, in 1977 after moving to Las Vegas. She continued to visit the site until the accident that caused her death, friends said.

"Sister Rosemary was the symbol of the resistance to nuclear testing," said Sister Megan Rice, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Child and a fellow staff member of the Nevada Desert Experience, which coordinates prayerful witnesses at the test site.

"That initial contemplative stance she took, being out there and contemplating the desert and being aware of the very real atom bomb being exploded, caught on and people came eventually in the thousands," Sister Megan told Catholic News Service.

Sister Rosemary's awareness of what she considered the dangers of nuclear testing

began to grow after a long career of teaching and service to her religious congregation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity.

She took final vows in 1934 and spent 26 years as a teacher and administrator in Catholic schools in Los Angeles and Havre, Mont. In 1960, she was sent to Rome by her congregation where she was elected to the central leadership team. She worked for the congregation for 15 years and stayed in Rome until 1977 working for an international education association.

Her role with the congregation required that she visit some of the order's provinces around the world. During the visits, she came face-to-face with people living in destitute poverty, suffering from leprosy and experiencing severe hunger. Sister Rosemary's experience influenced how she viewed the affluence of Western culture and led to her commitment to work for social change.

Returning to the United States in 1977, Sister Rosemary settled in Las Vegas, where she joined the staff of the Franciscan Center. Her work on ending nuclear weapons testing began when she and a group of Franciscans and other peace activists visited the test site to remember the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima and the 20th anniversary of a peaceful demonstration by Quakers calling for the end of nuclear testing in 1957.

Sister Rosemary returned to the site for several years and eventually made friends with test site workers. In 1981, she began meeting with a group of Franciscans to plan the observance of the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis of Assisi. They organized what became known as the Lenten Desert Experience, a 40-day retreat at the test site to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons and to begin to reverse social injustice.

The effort led to the formation of the Nevada Desert Experience. The group continues nonviolent, prayerful vigils during Lent and at other times of the year.

Funeral arrangements were pending Jan. 11.