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Church remembers missionary

Plaque, cross memorialize woman slain in Yemen

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Passing motorists can easily spot the new illuminated cross on the south wall of Layton Avenue Baptist Church in Greenfield, but few know that the gleaming stainless steel tubes commemorate the death of a modern missionary from the church who was slain in the Middle East.

A plaque mounted near the cross reads, "In Memory. Kathy Gariety. Called . . . justified . . . glorified. In God's Service Martyred - December 30, 2002."

On Sunday, exactly five years after an Islamic militant gunned down Gariety and two other American missionaries at a Baptist-run hospital in Yemen, the church will dedicate the cross at a 3 p.m. service.

"My intention is for the service to be a time of prayer and remembrance, but I also want it to be a time of resolve as well," said Keith Cogburn, the church's interim pastor. ". . . As long as we're here, we do have the commission from Jesus to share the Gospel worldwide, and we don't want anything to dissuade us from that, including acts of terrorism."

Several of Gariety's relatives will attend the cross dedication, including her brother Jerry, of Colgate, and sisters Pat, of Milwaukee, and Mary, of Oconomowoc.

Money for the project was raised by the congregation as part of its 50th anniversary celebration last summer. Relatives of Gariety also contributed. Raised Catholic, Gariety became a Baptist as an adult.

"The congregation always saw it as a very significant contribution to the advancement of the faith that this congregation here in Greenfield had sent somebody to one of the really tough places of the world to do ministry in the name of Christ," said Cogburn. "And so they were very proud of that."

The 7-foot-by-5-foot cross, produced by Breuer Metal Craftsmen of Beaver Dam, is the intersection of three crosses that gives the effect of a single cross. The church wanted an artistic design because Gariety had an artistic flair and did artwork around the church.

"It's modern art, with some different levels of interpretation," Cogburn said. "I don't necessarily think of it as Jesus and the two thieves who were crucified on Calvary. I think of it in terms of the three servants who died there in Yemen, Kathy and the other two workers."

Gariety, 53, was assigned to the hospital in Yemen as its purchasing agent by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board. She left Wauwatosa to go to Yemen in 1992, and continued to serve at the hospital in Jibla, about 125 miles south of the capital, San'a.

She loved children, and frequently interacted with them in Yemen, according to relatives and co-workers.

"She was a very caring person," said Jerry Gariety, 56. "If she'd have a walk that was 15 minutes long it would take her 45 because of the time spent talking to all of the children along the way (in Yemen). And she'd hand out little trinkets to them."

A fatal day

On the day of the hospital attack, Abed Abdul Razak Kamel hid a Kalashnikov rifle inside his jacket, walked into the building and opened fire on people attending a staff meeting. Killed along with Gariety were Martha Myers, 57, an obstetrician and surgeon from Alabama, and hospital director William Koehn, 60, of Kansas.

Yemen officials said that Kamel may have been linked to the al-Qaida terror network started by Osama bin Laden. Police found audiotapes by bin Laden at Kamel's house.

Kamel said at his trial in Yemen that he began scouting the hospital as a target in July 2001 because he believed that employees there were converting Muslims into Christians. Jibla residents and Southern Baptist officials later were quoted as saying that Americans at the hospital did not proselytize.

Cogburn said this week that Kathy Gariety and others there shared their faith through the example of their lives and their ministry, "their benevolence, kindness and graciousness."

When Kamel was convicted and sentenced to death, Jerry Gariety wrote a letter to the Yemeni government asking that Kamel be incarcerated but not killed.

"I said, 'I don't think it will do any good to take his life,' " Jerry Gariety recalled. " 'Will this make things better? I don't think anything will.' It's a great loss to their country to take away these people who were helping them. They (Yemenis) probably suffered the biggest loss."

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh ratified the death sentence, and Kamel was executed in 2006.

Serving humbly

The hospital in Jibla was founded 40 years ago by the Baptists, and provided care for hundreds of thousands of Yemenis over the years. A few years ago, it was transferred to Yemeni control, but several Americans continued to serve on the staff, according to the Baptist Press, a daily wire service for Baptist publications.

This May, full-time involvement in the hospital by Southern Baptists from the U.S. ended.

"The hospital is still there and it's fully operational," Cogburn said, adding that Layton Avenue Baptist and several other churches had sent the hospital a truck-sized container of medical equipment in August.

Cogburn said the three deaths in 2002 were a wake-up call to the dangers of ministry in the Middle East.

"There was a resolve to continue some kind of ministry in Middle Eastern countries," he said. "It has taken a different shape and it cannot in any way be high-profile anymore. But there's a lot that can be accomplished very quietly, very humbly."

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