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Sr. Stang's accused murderer gets new trial

by Yone Simidzu by Catholic News Service

SAO PAULO, Brazil -- Five years after the murder of U.S.-born Sister Dorothy Stang, a man accused of ordering her killing will face his third trial.

Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, nicknamed Bida, will begin a new trial March 31. He remains in jail following a court order that he return to prison because of the power he wields in the region where the crime occurred.

Initially, de Moura was found guilty of ordering the murder of Sister Dorothy, a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. His lawyers are seeking his release from prison. Another man accused of ordering the murder, Regivaldo Pereira Galvao, is also awaiting trial.

With de Moura back in jail, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur decided to halt disclosure of Sister Dorothy's letters to government authorities denouncing the troubles peasants suffered at the hands of powerful land owners.

American Notre Dame Sr. Rebecca Spires said the disclosure of Sister Dorothy's documents would be "inconvenient" at this time.

"We don't want to harm the procedural work and we have a positive, collaborative relationship with the authorities," she said in a telephone interview in mid-February.

The more than 300 letters, written mostly by hand, were in two cardboard boxes in the little room where Sister Dorothy lived in Anapu, a small village in the middle of the Amazon jungle. She documented every infringement on the rights of the poor communities of the area and wrote to all competent authorities about land disputes, deforestation, crimes against the environment and violence against peasants.

It took more than a year to sort through the letters, which were attached to the case's court proceedings.

Initially, Notre Dame de Namur sisters wanted to disclose the documents to the public at the beginning of Lent to prod authorities to get the long-delayed trial moving again. However, Spires said the congregation will wait to see further developments in the trial before making the documents public.

The Feb. 12 anniversary of Sister Dorothy's death was commemorated with a vigil and dance in Anapu, because she loved dance and was a very joyful person, said Spires.

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