

Bonner Querschnitte

Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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Tribute to Mirjam Scarborough (1957-2011)

(Bonn/Cape Town, 06.01.2010) The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) of the World Evangelical Alliance pays tribute to its staff member, Rev. Dr. Mirjam Scarborough, who succumbed to bone marrow cancer on 4 January 2011 at the age of 53.

She was Co-Director of the Cape Town Bureau of the IIRF and the managing editor of the International Journal for Religious Freedom. She joined the IIRF in August 2007 and helped develop its Cape Town Bureau, bearing much of the administrative load.

She shared in the conceptualization of the International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF) in 2008 of which she became executive editor. She ably managed the day-to-day editorial work of the first three issues.

She brought the female perspective to the editorial group. She also introduced interviews to the journal and published two of them with an outstanding advocate of religious freedom and a Romanian Christian woman who had suffered serious persecution in the past.

Mirjam emphasised the pastoral and the grass roots perspective on the suffering church. She had hoped to conduct an oral history research project based on faith-related persecution stories.

She helped represent the IIRF internationally and in South Africa at various academic and Christian conferences. The General Assembly of the World Evangelical Alliance in Pattaya, Thailand, in October 2008, was the occasion to launch the Journal, which she helped distribute to the participants. The event also became the international breakthrough of the Institute as such.

A second major event of the IIRF in which Mirjam participated was the international consultation held in Bad Urach, Germany in September 2009. It dealt with „Developing an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission“, which was close to her pastoral concern. Her report on the consultation



Dr Sauer and Dr Scarborough at promotion ceremony 2010



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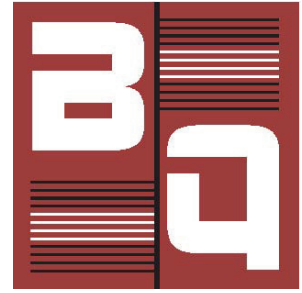
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which was due to appear in IJRF remained uncompleted due to the outbreak of her illness a few months later.

In between the editing of the first two issues of the journal in June 2009 she received her doctorate at the University of Cape Town with a dissertation on the sense of call as a potential support factor for missionaries in their mission experience. This was based on oral history and archival primary sources.

When she had to rest her duties for journal and Institute due to her condition in late 2009, she was given the title of honorary editor of IJRF in acknowledgement of her services.

Mirjam Scarborough hailed from a Mennonite family in Menzingen/Zug, a small rural village in Switzerland. She graduated from High School in Bülach/Zürich and completed her theological studies in 1983 with a Master of Divinity Degree at the FETA/STH Basel.

She married Thomas Scarborough, a South African fellow student in 1982 and moved to South Africa. There she was ordained into the ministry of the Congregational Church (EFCC) in South Africa in 1983 and shared the pastorate with her husband in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. They modelled a simple life style in a multicultural inner city church which involved extreme crisis situations and work with refugees and millionaires, all in the same congregation in Seapoint. She was also active as a speaker and on various local interdenominational committees.

We remember Mirjam Scarborough as a sensitive and caring follower of Christ, who served in a quiet way in meekness, gentleness and humility.

We are filled with deep gratitude for her diligent contribution to establishing relevant academic research and publications benefiting religious freedom and the religiously persecuted.

Mirjam bore her own suffering with great grace and had a tremendous steadfastness throughout the year. She was ready to die and at the same time longed to recover to take part in this field of God's work again. Her husband reported that she was restful in her spirit when she died and there was a great peace that surrounded her, which is not something to be taken for granted.

We express our heartfelt condolences to her husband and son.

A spiritual legacy that Mirjam leaves behind is her understanding of God himself as a present powerful and gracious support of his church. This was of supreme importance to her – she asked her husband to emphasise this when she was gone – that the church should not be seen as a human task, but as the gracious work of God himself, and it was her concern that too many Christians were buckling under the burden of ministry and adversity because they believed that they needed to take the burden upon themselves – but God himself undertakes.

As Christians, we believe that her longing to occupy a room in God's house (as expressed in Psalm 84 which she requested for her memorial service), has been fulfilled. We are looking forward to rejoin her in the city of God described in the book of

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Revelation (21:1-4), where God himself will make all things new and also bring an end to all pain, persecution and injustice.

Dr Christof Sauer, Cape Town, South Africa
Prof. Dr Thomas Schirmacher, Bonn, Germany
as directors of the International Institute for Religious Freedom
on behalf of its international and South African boards and staff

Downloads:

- Photo: Dr Sauer and Dr Scarborough at promotion ceremony 2010

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