

Seton Hall film fest marks era of dialogue

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Seton Hall University will mark the 60th anniversary of its historic Jewish-Christian dialogue with a festival of films dedicated to building interfaith bridges and combating prejudice.

The six-week festival, part of the Catholic university's year-long "Building Bridges" celebration, will begin on Wednesday, Oct. 2.

The festival helps honor the pioneering work of the late Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher, who established the Institute of Judaean-Christian Studies at the South Orange university in 1953, as well as that of Sister Rose Thering, a nun of the Dominican Order and former Seton Hall professor who worked tirelessly to eradicate anti-Semitism until her death in 2005.

The eclectic collection of films at

the festival will feature subject matter from locales as diverse as Rwanda, the Philippines, Shanghai, and Israel. All present proactive solutions to interfaith challenges.

"I wanted to share films about people helping those who were persecuted — not just those involved in the Holocaust, but in many contexts where this is happening around the world," said festival chair/curator Luna Kaufman, 86.

Kaufman, a Holocaust survivor, is an author, educator, and chair emerita of the university's Sister Rose Thering Fund for Jewish-Christian and Holocaust Studies, which is sponsoring the event.

"As a result," she said, "each film we selected has a purpose, from showcasing the transformation in Rwanda following the genocide there nearly 20 years ago to the little-known story of how residents of the Philippines helped Jews during World War II and how American Muslims manage the prejudice, fear, and ignorance they've encountered in America since 9/11."

Rwandan-born Emmanuel Ruranga, 53, will be the guest commentator at the Oct. 9 screening of *God Sleeps in Rwanda*. The documentary looks at both the country's 1994 genocide caused by the country's warring Tutsi and Hutu factions as well as

Festival chair/curator Luna Kaufman said the films are about people helping those who were persecuted.

Sister Rose Thering Fund executive director David Bossman said the films being shown are part of "our commitment to continuing Sister Rose's work."

the way a group of Rwandan women helped a devastated community reconstruct itself. "It's a story of transformation and what we as humans share in common, not what divides us," said Ruranga, a New Jersey-based licensed clinical counselor and member of the Sister Rose Thering Fund board of trustees. "We are all 'our brother's keeper' and it's an awakening to all of us that no matter what human tragedy we go through, we can overcome it if we have an open dialogue and focus on forgiveness and reconciliation."

According to Kaufman, "All of the films present different solutions and show that positive actions were taken and that people were not just sitting on their hands during these injustices. It's in our hands to prevent these atrocities from perpetuating, and it may require a sacrifice, but people can make a difference."

"Through this film festival," she said, "we hope to empower people to not just stand idly by, but rather to help oppressed people against whom prejudice is directed and expand our scope to an international level. We must come to the assistance of oppressed people wherever they are and speak up."

"Luna's resilience as a survivor, emotionally, physically, and in a pro-



active way, helps open this dialogue to people of all backgrounds and that's what this film festival represents," said David Bossman, Sister Rose Thering Fund executive director and a professor of Jewish-Christian studies. "The films presented are the result of a comprehensive selection process and as part of our commitment to continuing Sister Rose's work... Through teamwork and community involvement, we look forward to further expanding these initiatives in the future to encompass more people and address an even bigger frame of reference."

In addition to the film festival, other events commemorating the anniversary have included public lectures, the 20th Annual Evening of Roses to benefit the Sister Rose Thering Fund, an art exhibit, and an academic conference celebrating the life and work of Oesterreicher, who championed ecumenism and tolerance until his death in 1993 at the age of 89.



— If you go —

Seton Hall University's Building Bridges Film Festival will run Oct. 2-Nov. 6 and will include the following films, all being screened on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. and featuring discussions with filmmakers and experts:

Oct. 2: *An Open Door: Jewish Rescue in the Philippines* — Director and producer Noël ("Sonny") Izon, an American of Philippine descent who was saved from the Germans, will serve as commentator. The screening is in honor of Seton Hall University president Dr. A. Gabriel Esteban, a native of the Philippines. *Bishop Dougherty Student Center, Seton Hall University*



Oct. 9: *God Sleeps in Rwanda* — A documentary about the women of Rwanda following the 1994 genocide and their emerging leadership. Commentator: Rwandan-born Emmanuel Ruranga, a member of the Sister Rose Thering Fund board of trustees. *Bishop Dougherty Student Center*

Oct. 16: *I Am Joseph, Your Brother* — This Israeli film (2001) covers the 2000 visit to Israel made by Pope John Paul II and changing relationships between Jews and

Christians, Judaism and Christianity, and the Israel and the Vatican. Commentators: Fr. Michael McGarry, formerly of the Tantor Ecumenical Institute in Israel, and director Amy Kronisch. *Bishop Dougherty Student Center*

Oct. 23: *Sister Rose's Passion* — The Oscar-nominated documentary highlights the life and work of the late Roman Catholic nun and former Seton Hall professor Sister Rose Thering in promoting interfaith relations and denouncing anti-Semitism. Commentator: director Oren Jacoby. *Bishop Dougherty Student Center*



Oct. 30: *Shanghai Ghetto* — This 2002 film, narrated by actor Martin Landau, chronicles the story of the more than 20,000 German Jews who escaped the Nazis and settled in Shanghai. Commentator: Seton Hall University history professor Dr. Daniel Leab. *Walsh Library, South Orange*

Nov. 6: *The Test of Freedom: Muslim Americans and the Struggle Against Prejudice* — This documentary depicts the problems of prejudice against Muslims in America. Commentator: Emmy Award-winning broadcast journalist and writer Anisa Mehdi, documentary film instructor at Seton Hall. *Walsh Library, South Orange*

The screenings are free, but seating is limited; guests are encouraged to make reservations by contacting Marilyn Zirl at 973-761-9006 or Marilyn.zirl@shu.edu.



I Am Joseph, Your Brother