

News Bulletin – Jesuits in Europe

News Service of the Conference of European Provincials
News flash - October 29th 2008

Two Jesuits killed in Moscow

Two Jesuits, Fathers **Otto Messmer** and **Victor Betancourt**,
killed in Moscow

The Press and Information Office of the Society of Jesus in Rome sent today this very sad information:

On Saturday 25 October, Father **Victor Betancourt**, an Ecuadorian Jesuit working in the St. Thomas Philosophical, Theological and Historical Institute in Moscow, was killed in his home. Two days later, after returning from a trip abroad, Father **Otto Messmer**, **Superior of the Russian Region**, was also killed in the same place. On Tuesday 28 October, alarmed by the fact that he hadn't heard from the two men, a fellow Jesuit who lives in another community went to visit them at home. On finding the dead bodies, he immediately contacted the police.

The police investigations have yet to come to any firm conclusions about cause of these violent deaths.



Father **Otto Messmer**, son of a profoundly Catholic family of German origin and a Russian citizen, was born on 14 July 1961 in Karaganda, Kazakhstan. He entered into the Society of Jesus on 1 September 1982 in Vilnius and was ordained a priest on 29 May 1988 in Riga. He took his final vows in Novosibirsk on 7 October 2001 and was appointed Superior of the Independent Region of Russia of the Society of Jesus on 13 October 2002. Two of his brothers are Jesuits: Monsignor Nikolaus, Bishop of the Kyrgyzstani city of Bishkek, and Hieronymus, from the German Province.



Father **Victor Betancourt** was born on 7 July 1966 in Guayaquil, Ecuador. He entered into the Society of Jesus on 14 September 1984 in Quito and was ordained a priest in the same city on 31 July 1997. He undertook his Jesuit training in Argentina, Ecuador, Germany and Italy. In 2004, he defended his doctoral thesis in Theology in the city of Rome. Since 2001, he had been responsible for those considering a vocation as Jesuits and at the time of his death he was a theology professor in the St. Thomas Philosophical, Theological and Historical Institute in Moscow.

Father General, Adolfo Nicolás SJ, issued an appeal to all Jesuits to provide assistance and support to, and demonstrate their solidarity with, the Jesuits of the Russian Region in this difficult moment. He expressed his closeness to families of the deceased and thanked the Church for issuing its condolences as soon as the news of the tragedy was made public.

Father General Nicolás urged the whole Society to pray that our fellow Jesuits rest in eternal peace and for an end of all forms of violence.