News



Mercy Sr. Arlene Semesky, pictured in an undated photo, was killed June 16, 2023, in East Township, Pennsylvania, when the car she was in with three other members of her order, collided with an SUV. Semesky lived at the St. Rita Parish convent in Webster, New York, in the Rochester Diocese and was to have celebrated her 60th jubilee in the religious congregation in September. (OSV News/Courtesy of Sr. Kathleen Mary O'Connell)

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Rochester, N.Y. — July 19, 2023
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A Sister of Mercy from Rochester was killed in a two-vehicle crash July 16 in Pennsylvania that also involved three other congregation members.

According to a Pennsylvania State Police report, Mercy Sr. Joanne Deck was driving a 2017 Chevrolet Equinox SUV when it collided with a 2014 Dodge Ram truck. The crash occurred at 9:53 a.m. in East Township, Pennsylvania, near Erie. The report stated that Deck's SUV was traveling south on Gay Road and stopped at the intersection of Lake Road. It then proceeded straight through the intersection, at which point it was struck on the driver's side by the pickup truck.

The sisters' vehicle rolled over and came to rest on its wheels in a grass area north of Lake Road, according to the report.

Mercy Sr. Arlene Semesky, 79, a passenger in the SUV, died at the scene. She was to have celebrated her 60th jubilee in the congregation in September.

Deck was airlifted to UPMC Hamot Hospital in Erie with serious injuries. She remained in critical condition in the hospital's intensive care unit as of mid-afternoon July 17, according to Sr. Kathleen Wayne, a leader for the Sisters of Mercy in Rochester, Buffalo, New York, Erie and Pittsburgh.

The SUV's two other passengers, Mercy Srs. Katharine Ann Rappl and Marissa Butler, were transported by ambulance to UPMC Hamot Hospital with non-life threatening injuries; however, Wayne noted that Rappl remained in intensive care through mid-afternoon July 17. Two juvenile male passengers in the truck also were brought by ambulance to UPMC Hamot Hospital for minor injuries.

Semesky, Deck and Rappl lived together at the St. Rita Parish convent in Webster. Butler lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and had resided in Webster with the three other sisters during her novitiate. Wayne noted that Semesky, Deck and Rappl had gone to visit Butler the weekend of July 15-16 while she was on retreat in Erie; all four

were on their way to Mass when the accident occurred.



Bishop Salvatore R. Matano of Rochester, New York, celebrates a July 17 Mass at the diocesan Pastoral Center in Gates in memory of Mercy Sr. Arlene Semesky, who died in a car accident in Pennsylvania July 16. Three other members of her order were injured in the crash. (OSV News/Catholic Courier/Jeff Witherow)

According to a statement from the Diocese of Rochester, Bishop Salvatore R. Matano offered the regularly scheduled 12:15 p.m. Mass at the diocesan Pastoral Center July 17.

"The Diocese of Rochester unites in prayer with the Sisters of Mercy community," the statement said. "As a family of faith, we ask Mary, Our dearest Mother of Mercy, to intercede before the Lord for Sister Arlene Semesky, RSM, that she be granted eternal rest and peace, and that Our Mother Mary intercede on behalf of the other Sisters of Mercy, and the passengers who also were injured in the accident, asking her Son Jesus, the Divine Physician, to bring them healing."

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Semesky was a native of Elmira. She graduated from Notre Dame High School in 1961 and entered the Sisters of Mercy Sept. 8, 1963. She held degrees in food service administration, food science and home economics education. She worked in the motherhouse kitchen soon after entering the congregation, then moved to Notre Dame High, where she taught and also worked in the school lunch program for nearly 30 years.

She later ministered in Elmira with Elcor Health Services and Meals on Wheels. After relocating to the Rochester area, she sewed many popular items for Kate's Gift Shop at the motherhouse.

"We are eternally grateful for the prayerful support of so many people, including Bishop [Salvatore] Matano, Father Tim Niven [pastor of St. Rita] and our Sisters of Mercy across the institute," Wayne said.