

Ex-Cenla priest slain

Chicago killing jolts local clergy, educators

By Mark Watson
Staff reporter

The killing in Chicago of the Rev. Paul Smith, a Catholic priest with a long history of service in the central Louisiana, has shocked this area's educators and clerics.

The Associated Press reported Monday that a nurse found Smith dead, bound hand and foot, Saturday in his South Side Chicago condominium. The Cook County Medical Examiner's office ruled his death a homicide. Disabled from an automobile accident two years ago, Smith, 65, suffocated because tape covered his mouth and eyes.

His car, which had been reported missing, was found Sunday two miles away. Police are searching it for clues.

Smith's sister, Agnes Dorsey,

"His death shocked me no end."

August Thompson
Local monsignor

of Baltimore, Md., said her brother must have known his attackers, because he was careful about who he would allow in his apartment, the AP reported.

In 1962, Smith became the second black priest ordained in the Diocese of Alexandria, said Monsignor August Thompson, who was the first African

American priest ordained here.

Although Smith technically was still connected to the Alexandria Diocese, he headed the nation's largest black Roman Catholic high school in Chicago for 25 years.

Smith served as a priest at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Cottonport and as associate pastor at Marksville's Holy Ghost Church from 1962-68. He taught at Holy Savior Menard High School from 1968-70.

"He was a very brilliant young man," said Thompson, who was a good friend of the victim. "He had done a lot of studying. He had a lot of degrees. He wanted to really do something for the school system, and he wasn't able to do that, he felt, here, so he asked Bishop Greco if he might go to Chicago, and Greco gave

him permission to go to teach at Holy Angels School there.

"And he was the principal there from 1970 to now. He also taught at Malcolm X College ... from 1974 until he was in an accident, two years ago, I guess."

The Associated Press reports that his auto accident injuries confined him to a wheelchair.

Smith earned a bachelor of science degree in English with a minor in philosophy in 1956 at Baltimore's Jesuit Loyola College. After his ordination, he pursued graduate studies and in 1969 earned a master's degree in English and administration from the University of Scranton, Scranton, Penn.

In the late 1950s, a friend of Smith's, Father William Driscoll, wrote to almost 40 bishops across

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the nation asking them to consider Smith's application to seminary before the late Bishop Charles Greco granted the request.

"In the 1950s, it was difficult for a black man to enter the priesthood," Smith said for a Loyola alumni magazine.

Thompson said, "He had a very good sense of humor, but he was also very strict as to what he thought should be done education-wise."

Smith built Holy Angels School into one of the nation's most respected institutions, with a presidential award and a long waiting list of students who wished to attend.

The school operates year-round, with a few weeks off at Christmas, Easter and July 4. Tuition is \$40 a month for students who reside in the parish, \$45 for non-parish residents. Donors across the United States supply much of the school's money.

Smith required the students' parents to attend Sunday Mass, even if they were not Catholic, Thompson said, "because they

had to know exactly what the Catholic Church is teaching."

"The people did it because they wanted the kind of education they could get there," Thompson said.

Mary Ellen Randall, a former Menard teacher who now lives in Pineville, said Holy Angels School "really, really impressed" her.

"It was an economically-deprived area, but the children were very polite, well spoken, groomed, and there was perfect order in the classrooms, and there was just so much pride that you could feel," Mrs. Randall said. "This, of course, was an all-black, Catholic school, and the teachers there were very enamored of him. They said, 'We want him to stay here, and if he leaves, we leave,' because at that particular time, he was thinking about taking a position on the East Coast."

"And his (students') parents were committed to the school. He had them involved. If they didn't pay their tuition, he would visit

the boss on the job, and he got the tuition. ... So often in these deprived neighborhoods, all you hear is bad news, and this was a guy who went in there and said, 'You're going to earn what you get, and you're going to act like a gentleman or a lady.' ... It was the kind of thing that anywhere in the United States, regardless of your economic status, race, anybody would have been proud to be in that school."

Smith visited Alexandria about a month ago, Thompson said. The injuries from Smith's auto accident caused him to move with great difficulty, Thompson said.

During his visit to Maryhill Renewal Center, Smith mentioned that he wanted to be buried there, Thompson said.

"His death shocked me no end, because I never thought it would be so soon," Thompson said.

Services, which are being handled by John Kramer & Son, are planned for Tuesday, but the time has not yet been set.