

Shades of Gangland!

Parish Robbery

A Bit Bizarre

Cicero, Ill. — (RNS) — Four gunmen, including a "bogus" priest are still at large some two weeks after a bizarre raid and robbery at a Catholic rectory here.

Meanwhile, four priests who were intimidated, threatened and then "exiled" from the parish, are puzzled and worried by the whole train of events—even now.

Cicero police Capt. Roland Brani said that police still have no idea who the men are, but that the circumstances of the case "smell pretty fishy."

In reconstructing the incident, Capt. Brani said that shortly before midnight, a man dressed like a priest asked to talk with one of the assistants, Father James Flynn.

After "chatting a while," the stranger went out to his car to "get some literature" and came back with a briefcase.

According to the police officer, the man pulled out a .45 automatic pistol, opened the door and admitted three masked gunmen, brandishing shotguns. The pastor and two other priests were roused from their sleep. The gunmen forced the pastor, Father Francis J. Pokorney, to sign "severance" checks for all the priests and the housekeeper, and they also made off with \$1,200.

Finally, the four priests were told to dress and pack a bag, which they did. They were then put into two cars and told to drive to Milwaukee.

Less than 15 minutes later, the four priests returned to the rectory with police.

Waiting for them at the door was Father Henry Lovett, a former priest of the Camden, N.J., diocese, who had been once associated with the Catholic Traditionalist Movement and who is now "pastor" of St. Joseph's Traditionalist Church in Cicero, a few blocks from the parish. The church is not recognized by the Chicago archdiocese.

Father Lovett explained that he was called to the rectory by Our Lady of the Mount parishioners, who told him the four priests had abandoned it.

All five priests were taken to police headquarters where Father Pokorney filed a complaint against Father Lovett charging disorderly conduct. A judge dismissed the complaint the next day.

According to Capt. Brani, the gunman who posed as a priest specifically asked for Father Flynn, and during questioning Father Pokorney said he heard one of the gunmen mention the name of a John Pelligrini, president of a segregationist group known as the Concerned Citizens for Cicero and Berwyn.

In May, at a meeting of the citizens group, Pelligrini is alleged to have named Father Flynn as one of the "integrationists" who are a threat to the community. He allegedly told about 200 persons at the meeting that letters to the archdiocesan personnel board had not yet gotten rid of Father Flynn, so "new tactics will be used."

Capt. Brani, who related that some \$1,200 in Mass collections, personal funds, watches and radios were taken in the robbery, said the gunmen could have been hired to intimidate the priests or it could have been a simple robbery with bizarre overtones.

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