

Relief officials agree to bring in machinery

A Metro-Dade County Florida firefighter April 29 crawls through a tight crevice deep inside the rubble of the bombed federal building in Oklahoma City. The death toll from the bombing rose to 139, including 15 children. About 40 people are still missing. Relief officials, who acknowledged earlier this week that there is virtually no hope of finding any more survivors of the attack, will start to use heavy machinery to drag debris out from the structure rather than further risk rescuers safety.



Reuters/RNS

McVeigh's parish, hometown torn

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The boyhood pastor of Oklahoma City bombing suspect Timothy J. McVeigh said the tragedy has left McVeigh's former hometown deeply shaken.

Monsignor Paul J. Belzer, pastor of Good Shepherd Church in Pendleton, said he and the ministers of the United Church of Christ and the three Methodist churches scheduled an interfaith prayer service for the town at Good Shepherd the evening of April 26.

In a telephone interview April 25, Monsignor Belzer was asked what he planned to say at the service.

"I don't know yet," he said. "We'll concentrate, of course, on the loss of life in the bombing, on the torn lives in Oklahoma City."

"But our town's also torn apart by this. His (McVeigh's) father's from this town, he has friends and relatives here."

Monsignor Belzer said McVeigh's father, William, "comes to Mass every Saturday night. The Wednesday of the bombing he was here working at bingo."

"We heard about the bombing and talked about it," he added. "Then on Friday the FBI arrived at his house and

told him, 'It was your son Timothy.'"

Monsignor Belzer said Pendleton, a community of about 4,000 people, is one of those places where most people know most of the other people in town.

He called William McVeigh "a very down-to-earth person" who is good with children and involved in parish, neighborhood and community affairs.

"He always has a garden, but not for himself," the priest said. "He raises things like onions and spinach and potatoes for all his neighbors and friends."

Monsignor Belzer, who has known the family for about 20 years, said he did not know Timothy McVeigh well, but remembered him as liking basketball and attending Mass regularly with his father.

"He was a pretty bright student — he got a Regents' Scholarship," he said, referring to a New York college scholarship program based on academic achievement.

"When his grandfather died last November, he came back and helped his dad clean out the house. He was cooperative and helpful," the priest said.

In the three years since he finished his military service, Timothy McVeigh reportedly got deeply involved in the world of gun-toting, right-wing anti-government movements in Michigan, Arizona, Kansas and Oklahoma.

Asked if he had any explanation for the direction McVeigh apparently took, Monsignor Belzer paused a moment and sighed.

"I don't know what to say," he said. He said the Timothy McVeigh he knew "was always polite. He was gentle and good with kids."

"It's frightening what a group can do to brainwash a person and move them in a different direction," he said. "It's like some of these (religious) cults, they're very good at pulling you in. One day someone's fine, and the next day they're a totally different person."

Asked if he intended to try to talk to McVeigh in prison, Monsignor Belzer said, "I understand he isn't talking to anyone right now. I'd like to talk to his father again soon and see whether it's worth trying to pursue, if I should try to talk to him."

Contributions to help with relief efforts in Oklahoma City may be sent to: Catholic Charities USA — Oklahoma Explosion, Disaster Response Office, 1731 King St., Alexandria, Va. 22314



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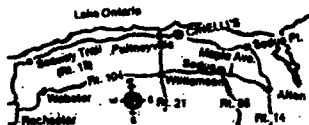
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