

WORLD & NATION

Nuns murdered in Maine; mentally ill man caught

By Catholic News Service

WATERVILLE, Maine — A savage attack on a convent Jan. 27 by a man with a history of mental illness left two elderly nuns dead and two injured.

Dead were Sister Edna Marie Cardozo, 68, superior of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament in Waterville, and Sister Marie Julien Fortin, 72.

Sister Mary Anna DiGiacomo, 72, was hospitalized in serious condition. Sister Patricia Ann Keane, 68, was hospitalized in stable condition.

Five other nuns in the Waterville convent were unharmed. The Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, whose order was founded in France in 1858, are cloistered nuns who devote their lives to prayer and perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Police responding to an emergency call by one of the nuns reporting a prowler found Mark A. Bechard beating Sister Keane with a religious statue in the convent chapel. He was arrested without resistance.

In the adjoining convent they found three other sisters beaten and stabbed.

The attack took place about 6 p.m.,

shortly after a Saturday afternoon prayer service in the convent chapel. Sister Cardozo died late that night of massive head injuries. Sister Fortin died Sunday morning.

The nuns' funeral was scheduled for Feb. 1 at Notre Dame Church, the largest church in Waterville.

Bishop Donald E. Pelotte of Gallup, N.M. — a Waterville native who regularly served Mass at the convent as a child and knew the sisters well — flew to Waterville for the funeral. Influenced deeply by the nuns, he entered the priesthood as a member of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, the male counterpart to their order.

Maine Public Safety Department spokesman Stephen McCausland called the attack on the nuns "one of the most heinous crimes ever committed in Maine."

"People are in a state of shock," said Father James Plourde, pastor of the three-parish Waterville Catholic Community. "They understand that no one is immune to this kind of tragedy, but it's difficult to swallow and to accept."

He said the surviving nuns "are in seclusion."

A hand-lettered sign on the chapel door advised visitors, "Chapel closed except for Mass. Pray for us."

Bechard, 37, lived at a group home for the mentally ill less than a mile from the convent. Police Chief John Morris said police were not able to establish a motive for the attack, but Bechard had a history of mental problems.

Nuns at the convent later said Bechard had applied for a job and had been turned down. He occasionally worshiped at the convent chapel.

Bishop Joseph J. Gerry of Portland asked people to pray for the nuns and for Bechard.

In a statement Jan. 28 he said, "I know that all people of good will are shocked at the violence" against nuns who "dedicated their lives to prayer and to adoration of the Lord."

After asking for prayers for the dead and injured nuns he added: "I am also moved to ask that we remember and be merciful in our judgment of Mark Bechard, who stands accused of these terrible acts of violence. Whatever may have driven him to commit these deeds, God, the father of mercies, is always ready to grant his forgiveness and peace."

"May Mark not give in to anger or hatred, discouragement or fear," the bishop continued. "But may his wounds also be quickly healed."

Contributing to this story was Claire M. Bastien in Brunswick.

Pope: Media guided more by economics than morals

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Modern mass media, more powerful than ever, often seem guided by economic interests instead of moral principles, Pope John Paul II said.

"An area so decisive for society cannot be abandoned to the whims of the marketplace, but should be properly defended," the pope said at a Sunday blessing Jan. 28.

Without suggesting specific regulatory measures, he said the church believes that the media must provide information in ways that respect moral laws, basic rights and human dignity.

When the media are well used, they can bring immense contributions to culture, to freedom and to a sense of human solidarity, the pope said. But it does not always work that way, he added.

Grand jury lacks evidence tying pro-lifers to violence

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A federal grand jury's failure thus far to find evidence linking abortion opponents to a violent conspiracy against clinics is no surprise to an official of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"The number of people interested in violence in the pro-life movement is so small, and this bears it out," said Helen Alvarez, director of planning and information for the NCCB's Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities.

The *Washington Post* reported Jan. 25 that the inquiry into the conspiracy would soon be closed.

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