

WORLD & NATION

Catholic leaders mourn slain Capitol policemen

By Lynnea Pruzinsky Mumola
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Washington-area Catholic leaders expressed shock and disbelief as they prayed for the two police officers gunned down July 24 in the U.S. Capitol.

"The shooting itself was totally shocking — unbelievable," said Father Michael O'Sullivan, pastor of St. Peter Parish, one of two parishes on Capitol Hill.

Mulling over the apparent numbness of American society to violence, he said, "I do think maybe we have as a community failed to identify the difference between freedom and license. It goes back to the moral principle — nobody is free to do wrong."

Killed in the line of duty were Capitol Police Officer Jacob J. Chestnut and Capitol Police Special Agent John Gibson, a member St. Elizabeth Seton in the Washington suburb of Lake Ridge, Va., which is in the Arlington Diocese.

Russell Eugene Weston Jr. of Rimini, Mont., described as a friendless loner with a history of mental illness, was charged with shooting Chestnut in the head at a security checkpoint upon entering the building and then killing Gibson in the shootout that followed. Gibson wounded Weston.

Father Salvatore A. Criscuolo, chaplain for police in Washington, said that death on the job always looms as a possibility for police officers in the United States, where one officer is killed in the line of duty every 52 hours.

"They know every day can be their last day," the priest told the *Catholic Standard*, newspaper of the Washington Archdiocese.

Father Criscuolo said that members of the Capitol Police had just attended the funeral services earlier that day for District of Columbia policeman Thomas Franklin Hamlette, who was shot and killed July 18. "Little did they know within a few hours they would be going through the same thing," he said.

Karen Granger, administrative manager at St. Joseph's, the other Capitol Hill parish,

said parishioners were shocked.

"Our reaction was just like everywhere else in the country," she said. "It was unsettling to know it was just down the street."

Father Criscuolo said he went to the Capitol Police headquarters and the Capitol over the weekend to offer support to the officers who had to continue their duties while grieving.

"They have lost two members of their family. They are hurting," he said.

He said that the officers realize there is no level of security that will completely shield them from every danger, and they know the Capitol building must remain open to the public. "People have to see the legislators," he said.

He said other Capitol Police were thankful for the support they have been receiving from around the country. He noticed the respectful tone of tourists at the Capitol and said he heard that one visitor even left a Purple Heart in addition to the flowers and notes that have been placed on the Capitol steps.

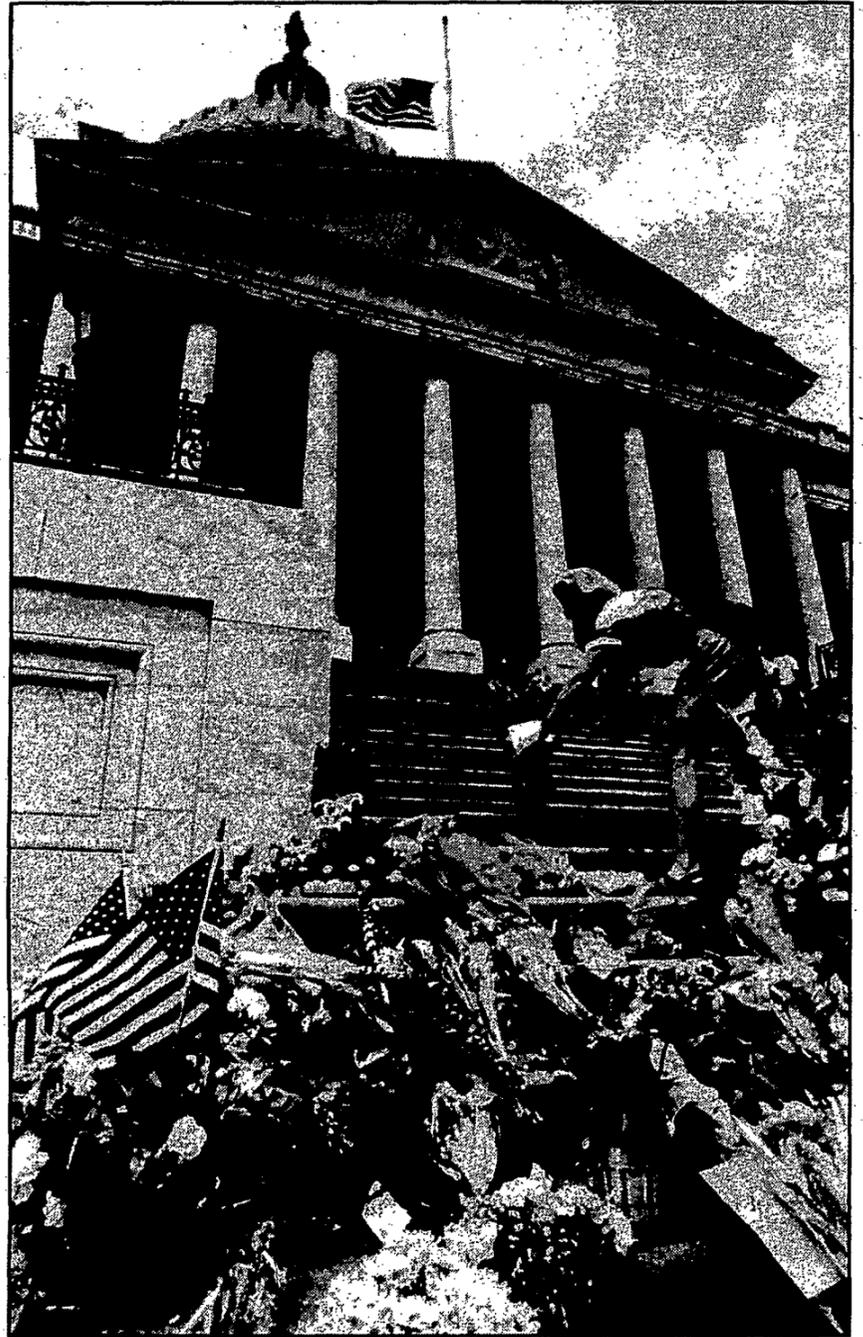
By an act of Congress the bodies of the two slain officers were scheduled to lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda July 28 — an honor rarely accorded to anyone except presidents.

"These two men were heroes long before they died," Father Criscuolo said. "They were heroic by how they chose to live their lives."

According to initial reports, Weston suffered from paranoid schizophrenia but had quit taking his medication for mental illness.

Msgr. John Kuhn, director of the Anchor Mental Health Association, a Washington archdiocesan agency that serves people with mental illnesses, said he was inclined to believe those reports because "with medication (people with mental illnesses) can be stabilized and live normal, productive lives."

"Studies prove that the mentally ill are no more prone to violence than people in the 'normal' population," Msgr. Kuhn said.



CNS/Reuters

A woman places flowers on the steps of the U.S. Capitol July 26 in honor of two policemen killed inside the building two days earlier. Shooting suspect Russell Eugene Weston Jr. allegedly charged through a security point, shot and killed the officers and wounded a tourist.

Priest held for murder of Guatemala's Bishop Gerardi

GUATEMALA CITY (CNS) — A Guatemalan judge said he found enough evidence to rule that a priest charged with murdering a bishop must remain in jail pending a trial.

Judge Isaias Figueroa of the city's first criminal court ruled July 27 that Father Mario Orantes, who found the murdered body of Auxiliary Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera of Guatemala City, is not eligible for bail.

Figueroa told Reuters, the British news

agency, "The charge is murder." He also confirmed that he had ordered the arrest of Father Orantes' 11-year-old German shepherd, Baloo.

Father Orantes lived in a parish house with Bishop Gerardi, whose head was crushed with a large cement slab outside their home April 26. Margarita Lopez, the cook at the house, was arrested July 22 along with Father Orantes. Figueroa said the charge against Lopez was complicity.

Church officials reacted cautiously to the arrests, and the Guatemalan bishops held an emergency meeting July 23 to discuss the situation.

Afterward, one Catholic official who asked not to be named said the church's position remains the same as at the time of the murder: The crime should be investigated fully so that the murderers and any others involved are brought to justice.

"The capture of Father Orantes does not change that position," he said.

Before the meeting, Auxiliary Bishop Mario Rios Mont of Guatemala City said: "Father Orantes was in the house at the time of the murder. So was the cook. I have no information beyond that."

After the bishop's murder, many thought it might have been politically motivated. The crime occurred two days after the bishop released a comprehensive human rights report saying that most of the atrocities during Guatemala's 30 years of civil war were committed by the military.

Ronald Ochaeta, director of the Human Rights Office of the Guatemala City Archdiocese, said in a July 22 statement that "the Catholic Church advocates for the truth," and authorities should investigate anyone suspected of the crime.

Bishop Gerardi was coordinator of the Human Rights Office.

Archbishop Victor Martinez Contreras of Quetzaltenango-Los Altos, president of

the Guatemalan bishops' conference, was quoted July 23 in the Guatemala City daily *Prensa Libre* as saying that the church supports Father Orantes, "but this does not mean that we know the truth."

Father Orantes told a local radio station he did not know why he was arrested.

"It is absurd. Is it a crime to find someone assassinated?" he said.

At the time of the arrest, some human rights workers speculated that it was the government's response to Ochaeta's charge that two soldiers, including one member of the Presidential Guard, were implicated in Bishop Gerardi's murder.

Carlos Vielman, a 24-year-old homeless man, was arrested for the bishop's murder April 30 and remains in jail. Church workers have ruled out Vielman's involvement, saying his height does not match witnesses' description and he has a crippled arm, making it impossible for him to lift the cement slab.

Sincere thanks to
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