

# Ex-priest killed in prison

John J. Geoghan, 68,  
 found bound, strangled

BOSTON (CNS) — The brutal murder in prison of defrocked Boston priest John J. Geoghan, a serial child molester whose case sparked a national scandal and forced the U.S. church to adopt major policy changes, drew a muted response from victims, attorneys and the Boston Archdiocese.

Authorities said Geoghan, 68, was bound, beaten and strangled to death in his cell Aug. 23 by inmate Joseph L. Druce, who is already serving a life sentence for the 1988 murder of a gay man. The attack occurred in the protective-custody unit at Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center, a maximum security prison in Shirley.

At a press conference in Boston Aug. 25 Worcester District Attorney John J. Conte said Druce had carefully planned the attack "for over a month" and apparently acted alone, but an investigation would determine if he had any accomplices.

He said Geoghan died of strangulation and blunt trauma, including broken ribs and a punctured lung, after attempts by a nurse to revive him failed.

He described Druce, a reputed racist and member of the neo-Nazi Aryan Nation, as having "a long-standing phobia, it appears, toward homosexuals of any kind." He said Druce appeared proud of what he had done and "looked upon Geoghan as a prize."

Geoghan had been accused in civil lawsuits of sexual misconduct with nearly 150 minors, ranging from indecent exposure to fondling to rape. Nearly all his victims were boys.

He was in the second year of a 10-year prison sentence for fondling a 10-year-old boy in a public swimming pool in the early 1990s. He still faced trial on other charges involving a 12-year-old boy.

In a brief statement Boston archdiocesan spokesman Father Christopher J. Coyne said the archdiocese "offers prayers for the repose of John's soul and extends its prayers and consolation to his beloved sister, Cathy, at this time of personal loss."

He said Aug. 25 that Boston Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley would not have "any further public statement about John Geoghan's tragic death."

Msgr. John Abruzzese, a Boston priest currently serving in the Vatican, called the death "a tragic end to a tragic life."

Msgr. Abruzzese told Catholic News Service in Rome that he was an altar server at Geoghan's first



Reuters/CNS

A corrections officer stands guard Aug. 24 outside the Massachusetts prison in Shirley where former priest and convicted child molester John Geoghan was killed by another inmate Aug. 23. He was reportedly gagged and strangled in his cell in a protective-custody unit of the prison.

Mass more than 40 years ago.

"The thing that bothers me most," he said, "was that he was able to abuse so many children and no one realized how sick he was and removed him from ministry."

Of the ex-priest's murder he said, "I am outraged both at what he did and what was done to him."

Raymond Flynn, a former Boston mayor and former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, said Geoghan "deserved prison in a safe setting" for his crimes, but "nobody deserves to be murdered like that."

At a news conference in Boston, attorney Mitchell Garabedian, who handled the civil lawsuits of most of Geoghan's alleged victims, said the victims are "not happy about this. This is not going to help victims heal."

He said the victims would rather have seen Geoghan live on in prison and reflect on his crimes.

One of the alleged victims, Michael Linscott, told reporters that Geoghan's death does not change the suffering of those he molested.

"He still had a lot of penance to do," Linscott said.

Garabedian was the lead lawyer in a \$10 million dollar settlement last September by 86 Geoghan victims and the Boston Archdiocese. Before that, the archdiocese had settled 35 cases with other Geoghan victims.

Among the 542 clergy sexual-abuse cases still pending in the archdiocese, 26 plaintiffs claim to have been abused by Geoghan. The

Boston Archdiocese recently offered up to \$65 million to settle all those claims together.

Geoghan served as a Boston priest for more than 30 years, despite several complaints of child molestation, before he was finally suspended from ministry in 1994. Four years later, as the number of complaints and lawsuits against the archdiocese grew, he was defrocked, or forcibly returned to the lay state.

Conte said there was substantial evidence that Druce had "planned in advance" for his attack on Geoghan. He had the T-shirt and socks used to tie and strangle Geoghan hidden on his person and used a book he had previously cut to size in order to jam the cell door shut, keeping guards out as he carried out his attack, Conte said.

According to authorities, when the prisoners left their cells to return their lunch trays to a common area, Druce followed Geoghan back into his cell.

Druce then jammed the cell door from the inside, tied Geoghan's hands with the T-shirt and strangled him with the socks. He also reportedly jumped at least twice from Geoghan's bunk onto his chest.

The killing has prompted sharp criticisms of the Massachusetts prison system and questions about the safety of other priests serving prison terms for molesting children. In the prison culture, child molesters are regarded as likely targets of violence by fellow inmates.

## BISHOPS ASK GOVERNOR TO STOP EXECUTION

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (CNS) — Although they reiterated their condemnation of convicted murderer Paul Hill's actions, the Catholic bishops of Florida have asked Gov. Jeb Bush to stop Hill's scheduled Sept. 3 execution and commute his sentence to life in prison without possibility of parole.

Hill, a former Presbyterian minister, was sentenced to death for killing Dr. John Britton and clinic escort John Barrett outside the Ladies' Center abortion clinic in Pensacola in 1994.

## DOCTORS MAY BE SUED OVER CONTRACEPTION

PORTLAND, Ore. (CNS) — The Oregon Legislature approved a bill Aug. 18 that some fear could leave doctors open to lawsuits if they refuse to give free emergency contraception to rape victims who request it.

The 23 to 4 vote in the state Senate halted a monthlong effort by the Catholic Church to create clear exemptions to the bill for conscience reasons. The bill provides state funding for medical procedures for rape victims, including emergency contraceptives.

The church rejects some "morning after" drugs as possible agents of abortion, because the compounds can prevent already fertilized eggs from implanting in a woman's uterus.

## FINANCIAL PLAN TO HELP ARCHDIOCESE RECOVER

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (CNS) — Property sales, cutbacks in tuition aid and higher parish assessments are part of a financial plan the Archdiocese of Louisville has unveiled to get back on its feet following a \$25.7 million clergy sexual-abuse lawsuit settlement.

The plan includes the first hike in decades of the cathedralium, an assessment paid by the 123 parishes of the archdiocese to help fund the ministries of the bishop. It also includes lowering interest rates the archdiocese pays on parish deposits, consolidating archdiocesan offices, shifting some parish-related expenses from the archdiocese back to parishes and cutting back clergy benefits to priests suspended for abusing minors.