

Priest Killed in Phoenix Church Burglary

A 29-year-old priest was shot dead and another injured during what police described as a burglary at a Catholic church in Phoenix, late on Wednesday, authorities said.

Sergeant Steve Martos, spokesman for the Phoenix Police Department, said officers were notified of a break-in at about 9 p.m. at the Mater Misericordiae (Mother of Mercy) Mission Catholic Church.

The crime occurred in the living quarters attached to the church, he said, and police currently had no suspects.

"We are hoping to be able to have some conversation with the injured priest at some point, hopefully later today, to gather some more of that information," Martos told reporters at the scene, where yellow police tape was strung around the church and investigators searched for clues.

The slain priest was identified as the Rev. Kenneth Walker, 29, assistant pastor, according to the Diocese of Phoenix and the church's website.

The injured priest is the Rev. Joseph Terra, pastor, who was in critical but stable condition. They belong to the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, a religious order, the diocese said.

"We are stunned and deeply saddened to learn of the tragic assault perpetrated last night," the diocese said in a statement, asking for prayers.

The survivor notified police, Martos said, and was able to give officers some information after the incident.

"However, because of the severity of his injuries, obviously the primary goal was for them to attend to those injuries,"

Martos said, adding that it was not immediately clear if anyone else was in the church when the break-in took place.

A car stolen from the church was later found unoccupied, police said.

*Additional reporting by Eric M. Johnson and Mary Wisniewski;
Editing by Alexandra Hudson, James Dalglish and Jonathan Oatis*

© 2014 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.