

Nun who served in Baltimore believed murdered by nephew

Sister Angela Miller, a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who served six years in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, is believed to have been murdered by her nephew, Alan Smith, on or before the same day Smith set fire to Sister Angela's home in West Scranton, Pa., April 28.

Rosemary Smith, Sister Angela's sister and the mother of Alan Smith, was shot in the head and murdered by her son before he set the fire, according to a May 1 report in The Times-Tribune in Scranton. Alan Smith also died in the blaze, a death that was ruled a suicide.

Rosemary Smith and Alan Smith lived on one side of a duplex home on Washburn Street in Scranton, the newspaper reported, while Sister Angela lived on the other.

Investigators searched the home for Sister Angela's body, but failed to find it. They now suspect that Sister Angela was murdered by Alan Smith sometime before he set the fire. A search for her body is ongoing after police identified what they believe could be blood in the trunk of Rosemary Smith's car, The Times-Tribune reported.

According to The Times-Tribune, police officers arrived at the home April 28 to serve an emergency protection-from-abuse order filed by Rosemary Smith and Sister Angela. Alan Smith fired a shotgun blast at police soon after setting the fire, the newspaper reported.

Alan Smith had a history of run-ins with the law, pleading guilty in 2007 to stalking two teenagers and possessing child pornography, according to The Times-Tribune. He was also a suspect in the 2005 death of Joseph Morrison, the newspaper reported.

Deacon Paul Mann, pastoral associate at St. Clare in Essex, worked with Sister Angela when she was a popular middle-school teacher at St. Rita School in Dundalk from 1983 to 1986. She was also the co-moderator of the parish's high school youth group.

“The kids loved her because she was the cool nun, the fun nun,” said Deacon Mann, who worked with the youth group with his wife, Irene Mann. “Most religious have the air of mystique about them. She would just be real.”

Sister Angela taught math and religion, Deacon Mann said, and was part of a faculty known for high academic standards. St. Rita School was honored by the U.S. Department of Education as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in the 1986-87 school year.

Sister Angela served as the pastoral associate of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish in Highlandtown from 1989 to 1992.

Deacon Mann remembered visiting St. Elizabeth one Good Friday, seeing Sister Angela and a group of young women cleaning the church and bringing Easter lilies to store in the sacristy for Easter Sunday. After noticing that the women volunteers were all scantily dressed, Deacon Mann asked his friend if they were from the parish.

Sister Angela laughed and asked Deacon Mann why he thought they might not be parishioners.

“I said, ‘With their makeup and jeans, they don’t quite look like church people,’” Deacon Mann recalled. “Then she really laughed and said, ‘They’re not, but I’m trying to get them to be.’”

It turned out that Sister Angela had recently earned her counseling certification, Deacon Mann said. One of the women who came to her for counseling was someone who worked on the Block, Baltimore’s notorious red-light district. She found love and support from Sister Angela, who recruited her and her friends to volunteer at the church.

Irene Mann said Sister Angela regularly volunteered at St. Rita’s soup kitchen, “the Supper Table.” The nun would eat meals with the guests and offer informal counseling by asking how everyone was doing and what she could do to help them, Irene Mann said.

“She was very, very happy being a religious,” Irene Mann said. “She once told me

she couldn't image life any differently."

Father C. Lou Martin, pastor of Christ the King in Glen Burnie and a former associate pastor of St. Rita when Sister Angela served there, remembered his friend as "the kind of person who would reach out to people on the fringe."

In youth ministry, Sister Angela felt right at home working with a team of 13 adult advisors including young married couples and singles. She was the only religious sister on the team, he said.

"She was very energetic, just a go-get-it kind of person," said Father Martin, noting that Sister Angela was similarly engaged when working with the liturgy committee. "She could witness to her vocation."

Father Martin said Sister Angela began religious life with another religious community before entering the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

"She lived a good life," he said, "and she touched the lives of many people."

After leaving Baltimore, Sister Angela returned every few years in July to stay with other religious sisters at St. Rita and visit friends, including the Manns.

"She'd skip a year or two and then show up and it was like no time had passed," Irene Mann said.

The Manns said Sister Angela was very devoted to her family.

"She asked permission not to live in a convent (in Scranton) so she could take care of her parents," Irene Mann said. "She stayed there after they died."

In a vocations reflection published on her religious community's website, Sister Angela said religious sisters have always been involved and played an important part of her life.

"My elementary public school days were influenced by the Sisters of Jesus Crucified who taught me religious education classes on a daily basis after school at St. Michael's Parish in West Scranton," she wrote.

“During my junior and senior years at St. Patrick’s High School (now All Saints Academy) in West Scranton, the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who taught me there continued to influence my life and the idea of entering religious life,” she added. “This combined with our daily family rosary, my involvement in my parish church and school, and the truly Christian values my family instilled in my sisters and me lead to my religious life.”

Sister Angela said she kept entertaining the idea of entering religious life after attending Marywood College.

“For a few years, I thought I could change that idea,” she said, “but I couldn’t. I knew I had to do something about making a commitment in answering God’s call. I believe when one has a calling from God to make that special commitment in life, it never goes away no matter how one tries to avoid it.”

In a May 1 statement, Sister Ellen Maroney, president of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, said the sisters are “deeply grieved at the horrific and heartbreaking situation which took the lives of our Sister Angela Miller; her sister, Rose Smith, our employee at the IHM Center for 17 years; and her son, Alan.”

Sister Ellen said her community’s “hearts and prayers are joined in sorrow with Angela’s and Rose’s sisters, Theresa and Helen, and all their family members during this difficult time.”

Sister Ellen noted that for more than 15 years, her religious sisters have participated in efforts to bring awareness to the tragedy of domestic violence by supporting the Women’s Resource Center and the Empty Place at the Table.

“We unite with all who refuse to be numbed by tragedy,” she said, “but instead use their grief energy to work for the fullness of compassion and justice.”

As of the publication of this article, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, had not released Sister Angela’s list of pastoral assignments. Investigators were still looking for Sister Angela’s body and no funeral arrangements were announced. This story will be updated.

This story was updated May 2 at 9:50 a.m.

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