

# Baltimore Priest Shot by Man Who Accused Him of Abuse

By FRANCIS X. CLINES

BALTIMORE, May 14 — A suspended Roman Catholic priest was shot and seriously wounded outside his home here by a man who told the police he had been sexually abused by the priest nine years ago, the authorities reported today.

The shooting occurred on Monday night when the 52-year-old priest, the Rev. Maurice J. Blackwell, was confronted on the sidewalk by the gunman and shot three times.

Six hours later, Dontee D. Stokes, 26, surrendered and, the police said, admitted he shot the priest in retribution for his having abused Mr. Stokes when he was a 17-year-old parishioner.

Father Blackwell was cleared of the abuse charge at the time by diocesan officials and the police. But he was later suspended as pastor of a West Baltimore parish in a separate case involving accusations of sexual misconduct with another minor that the priest eventually confirmed, according to the diocese.

The shooting was the second instance of violence since the sexual abuse scandal among priests began to mushroom last winter. In April a Cleveland priest who had been summoned to answer charges of groping parochial school students committed suicide by shooting himself.

"I am appalled that another act of violence has occurred in the city of Baltimore," Cardinal William H. Keeler said at a news conference after a previously scheduled private meeting with 170 diocesan priests for a discussion of the abuse scandal.

"The tragedy touches a person I have known personally," Cardinal Keeler said, referring to Father Blackwell.

He added that the priests had prayed for "all the victims" at their gathering.

"Many said they hesitated to wear their collar when they go out," Cardinal Keeler said in describing a sense of shame, not physical fear, among priests.

The continuing scandal has



WBAL-TV via Associated Press



The Baltimore Sun, via Associated Press

Dontee Stokes, right, surrendered to the Baltimore police six hours after the Rev. Maurice Blackwell, a suspended priest, was shot three times.

## For the second time, violence linked to a church's sexual abuse scandal.

brought unprecedented anger and mistrust to bear upon the reliability of the clergy and the stewardship of some in the hierarchy who have been accused of protecting possible abusers.

In the case of Father Blackwell, a review panel of professionals from the laity appointed by Cardinal Keeler faulted the diocese's handling of the charges by Mr. Stokes in 1993.

The panel found the accusations "consistent and credible" in reviewing them after the diocese's reinstatement of the priest to St. Edward's parish in West Baltimore.

"They didn't have all the details that I had in this case," Cardinal Keeler maintained in his news conference outside St. Mary's Seminary and University.

When the second set of charges surfaced, Father Blackwell was suspended and stripped of his authority to perform priestly functions after 19 years in the clergy.

The priest was reported in stable condition at the University of Maryland Trauma Center with wounds in the left hand, hip and side.

Mr. Stokes, a worker in a neighborhood barber shop who had no previous criminal record, was held without bail on charges of attempted murder, assault and illegal possession of the .357-caliber pistol used in the shooting.

"No one looked at his plea," Mr. Stokes's mother, Tamara, told WBAL television in describing years of anguish by her son.

"The nuns knew about it; the priests knew about it," she declared, saying her son was seeking an apology from the priest. "Yesterday was his breaking point."

Father Blackwell had been praised over the years for his work among his impoverished parishioners at St. Edwards. His innovations included inviting more than a dozen troubled teenage boys from dysfunc-

tional families to live with him in the rectory, according to an article in The Baltimore Sun in 1993 in which the priest's wards defended and hailed him as an ideal father figure.

Lately Father Blackwell lived in the Reservoir Hill neighborhood, a once-affluent area now riddled with drugs and violence.

"He was interested in getting people off of drugs; that was his main thing," Melvin McGee, 53, a neighbor, said in praising Father Blackwell as a social worker in antidrug programs here and Washington.

"We had no problem with him because he was a great dude," said Mr. McGee, who said he knew of the accusations against the priest.

Cardinal Keeler said his meeting with the diocese's priests focused on ideas to better protect children and strengthen the clergy.

"Always it seems the negative is being lifted up and it is so painful, so very, very painful," he said of the scandal.

"The biggest fear I heard expressed is that we would not do anything, that we would be immobilized," the cardinal said of his priests' message.

"And please God we shall not be immobilized," he added, referring to the national bishops conference on the scandal scheduled to take place next month.

The Baltimore Diocese is the historic taproot of the American church, where working-class immigrants built churches and parochial schools to shepherd their children with the most prized among them called to the religious life.

Tonight, local television news presented wall-to-wall coverage of "The Church in Crisis," with additional stories on a lay parochial school teacher arrested this year for fondling his students, and a former priest accused 13 years ago of trying to rape a nun. Fresh updates were promised by sunrise.

"We must pray," said Cardinal Keeler of the task of turning around the church's plummeting public image. "We must repent."