

# I-Team Report: Mystery in the Rectory

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By Chuck Goudie

October 21, 2009 (CHICAGO) (WLS) -- A Chicago pastor was found in his Southwest Side home, stabbed more than twenty times and it was ruled a suicide.

The I-Team has been looking into this two-week-old case that has stunned those who knew the priest.

The death of Fr. Waclaw didn't receive much attention outside his parish near Midway Airport. A press release from the archdiocese reported that he died of "self-inflicted injuries." But after the I-Team learned that those injuries included nearly two dozen knife wounds, we began investigating a mystery in the rectory.

Fr. Waclaw hosted religious shows on polish TV and radio. He taped one show three days before he was found dead.

"He was very, very popular amongst our viewers, amongst the Polish community," said Robert Szabla, Polvision producer. "Last time I saw him was like three days before he died and ...he was talking about his plans about going to Poland, he told me he was going to buy the ticket to go to Poland to visit some family."

The priest's heart was at Our Lady of the Snows parish north of Midway Airport where black bunting signals that something terrible happened.

It was Thursday, October 8. Morning mass was set to start at 8:15 followed by a funeral at 9, both events on Waclaw's calendar.

But when the normally punctual pastor didn't show up, police were called to the rectory across the street.

He was found on a bathroom floor, multiple stab wounds in his stomach and other cuts on his wrists.

"There is no question this was a slow, very violent death," said Steve Patterson, Cook County Sheriff's Department.

There was no suicide note. The priests' cash and jewelry were not taken.

On Wednesday night, county police were still questioning some people who had dealings with Fr. Waclaw immediately prior to his death and the case remains open.

But sources familiar with the investigation say because there was no trail of blood from the messy scene, because the priest was found in a locked bathroom, and because some acquaintances reported his unusual behavior of late, it had to have been a suicide.

"It was obvious that he was home alone. It was obvious that there was no struggle. It was obvious it was a suicide," said Patterson.

A spokesman for the Cook County Medical Examiner told the I-Team they ruled suicide based on a visual examination of the more than 20 stab wounds and that no autopsy was necessary.

At the pastor's wake, hundreds of parishioners lined up to pay their respects. The finding of suicide met with disbelief by those who said Fr. Waclaw believed only God could take a life.

"I just don't think he would do something like that because it's such a mortal sin against God. I mean he was so devoted, so devoted to his God, Christ and the Blessed Virgin. Especially during the month of October, which is the month of Mary," said Tom O'Dowd, retired parish teacher.

The pastor had some personal concerns. He was recently accused of civil racketeering in a lawsuit filed by the husband of a parishioner in a messy divorce.

According to the suit, Fr. Waclaw raised \$577,000 from churchgoers to help the woman pay legal bills.

Then the priest testified against an attorney in the case at a state disciplinary hearing, describing threats by the lawyer. Fr. Waclaw said the attorney told him to steal money from the church and when he refused was offered \$5,000 cash to forget about it.

The lawyer's license was suspended by the state on September 28.

Friends say if Fr. Waclaw had problems, he never showed them.

"He never talked about the dark side of life. He was always full of joy, you know, he wanted us to enjoy life in accordance to the Bible, in accordance to religion, and to live life to the fullest and that's why, in my opinion, he was the last person that I know who could commit suicide," said Szabla.

The church building is in Chicago but the rectory is in unincorporated Cook County so it's a sheriff's department case.

Cardinal George officiated the funeral mass last week and a spokesman for the archdiocese says Catholic church officials have no information that his death was anything but a suicide.

The priest's body is being returned to his native Poland for burial.

Polvision: Chicago's Polish TV: [www.polvision.com](http://www.polvision.com)

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