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ROBINSON TRIAL Priest found guilty; cleric gets 15 years to life in

nun's murder

Jury takes 6 hours to reach decision

By DAVID YONKE BLADE RELIGION EDITOR

A murder case unsolved for 26 years was brought to an unexpectedly quick and dramatic end yesterday after jurors convicted a 68-year-old Toledo priest, Gerald Robinson, in the brutal, ritualistic murder of a nun.

The 12 jurors in the Lucas County Common Pleas Court trial deliberated just over six hours before reaching a unanimous verdict.

of Toledo.



Robinson, and attorneys John Thebes and Nicole Khoury react to the verdict. (THE BLADE/ANDY MORRISON)

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Judge Osowik then asked Robinson if he wished to say anything and the priest

who did not take the witness stand and never spoke during the three-week

trial — declined. The jammed courtroom was eerily silent but for an immediate gasp, followed by the stifled sobs of the priest's sister-in-law, Barbara Robinson

> The judge immediately imposed a sentence of 15 years to life in prison; Robinson will be eligible for parole in 10½ years. The slight, balding priest was

> > handcuffed and escorted out of

attorneys announced at a press

After three weeks of courtroom

testimony by 41 witnesses, with

more than 200 items of evidence

introduced, it took less than four

judge focused on procedure and

minutes for Robinson's verdict,

sentence, and removal. The

conference afterward they intend

the fourth-floor courtroom by

court deputies. His defense

to appeal the verdict.



Barbara Robinson, sister-in-law of the Rev. Gerald Robinson, listens to the guilty verdict and sentence in the 1980 murder. (THE BLADE/ANDY MORRISON)

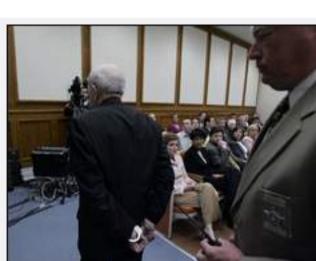
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made no remarks. Robinson, who is retired from the Toledo diocese and barred from public ministry, was taken down an elevator to a basement tunnel leading to the Lucas County jail.

the jail's second-floor medical unit. He is under a suicide watch for the next few days as a precautionary measure. according to Jim O'Neal, corrections administrator.

After he was booked, the priest exchanged his black clerical garb for a brown jail jumpsuit — he was not allowed to keep his rosary — and was held overnight in

Robinson will be taken within a few days to the Corrections Center of Northwest Ohio and then transferred to an as-yet undetermined facility.



Father Robinson is escorted from the courtroom by security officer Bob Dietrich after sentencing by Judge Thomas Osowik. (THE BLADE/ANDY MORRISON) Zoom | Photo Reprints

assistant Lucas County prosecutors who tried the case Dean Mandros, Larry Kiroff, and Chris Anderson — walked through the courtroom's wooden doors and were greeted with a burst of applause from a small group of observers who were standing in the hallway. Mr. Mandros immediately shook his head no, signaling them to

After the verdict, the three

stop. "I don't see it as a reason to

celebrate." Mr. Mandros said. "We're dealing with a homicide case. We're trying to hold the person responsible accountable. We didn't go back in the office and high-five each other."

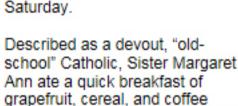
convicted for murder in the death of a Roman Catholic nun, and the ritualistic aspects of the slaying made the case even more unusual. "It is unlikely that the factual situation ... will ever be repeated," Mr. Mandros

Robinson is believed to be the first U.S. Roman Catholic priest ever tried and

Sister Margaret Ann, a nurse and former administrator of two different Sisters of Mercy hospitals, was choked and stabbed 31 times on the morning of April 5, 1980 — the day before Easter and her 72nd birthday.

said.

The nun, who lived in a convent in Mercy Hospital, slept later than her usual 5 a.m. wake-up that day because there was no 6 a.m. Mass in the chapel on Holy Saturday.



Entered Sisters of Mercy:

Nurse, St. Rita, Lima, Ohio 1933 - 1936 - Floor Supervisor, St.

1935 - 1936 - Assistant

1927 - 1933 - Novitiate and Student

Superintendent of Nurses, Mercy

1936 - 1937 - Science Teacher, Our Lady of Mercy High School,

1937 - 1939 - Superintendent of

Nurses, Mercy Hospital, Toledo 1939 - 1940 - Superintendent of

Nurses, St. Lawrence Hospital,

1940 - 1942 - Superintendent of

Murses, St. Rita Hospital, Lima

1942 - 1947 - Floor Supervisor,

1947 - 1948 - Floor Supervisor, Mercy Hospital, Toledo

Administrator, Mercy Hospital, Tiffin

Administrator, St. Charles Hospital,

1962 - 1966 - Associate Director of

Norsing Service, Mercy Hospital,

1966 - 1967 - Supervisor Medical

Patient Relations, St. Rita Hospital,

1969 - 1971 - Obstetrics Supervisor, Our Lady of Mercy Hospital,

Department, Sacristy Work, Mercy

SOURCE: Sisters of Mercry THE BLADE

correct decision," she said.

abuse, and said, "I hope you rot in hell."

unfortunately that's the way it is."

differently.

strong.

1971 - 1980 - Pastoral Care

and Surgical Nursing, St. Rita

1967 - 1968 - 2nd Counselor, Supervisor Medical and Surgical Mursing, St. Rita Hospital, Lima 1968 - 1969 - Counselor, Director of

Mercy Hospital, Titlin

Hospital, Toledo

Hospital, Lima

Coldwater, Ohio

Hospital, Toledo

1959 - 1962 - Superior,

1948 - 1954 - Supervisor,

1954 - 1959 - 1st Counselor Floor Supervisor, St. Charles

Sopt. 24, 1927

Rita Lima

Cincinnati

Hospital, Tolodo



Dean Mandros enjoy some banter during a press conference following the verdict yesterday. Mr. Mandros was lead prosecutor in the case. (THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY) Zoom | Photo Reprints

before heading to the sacristy, next door to the chapel, where she planned to make preparations for the evening services.

There the nun, who was hard of hearing, was attacked from behind. The killer wrapped a piece of cloth around her neck and choked her so tightly that he broke two bones in her neck.

Barely alive, Sister Margaret Ann was placed on the cold terrazzo floor and covered with an altar cloth.

Jurors agreed it was Robinson who used his SISTER MARGARET

distinctive saber-shaped letter opener to stab her ANN PAHL nine times over the heart in the shape of an Sister Mary Annunciata upside-down cross. (name change Sept. 1968) Born: Edgerton, Ohio, April 6, 1908 He removed the altar cloth, stabbed her 22 more

forehead with her own blood.

As a final act of degradation and humiliation, Robinson pulled the nun's dress up to her chest and her girdle and hose down over her ankles, then penetrated her with either a cross, the letter opener, or his finger, prosecutors said.

times, and then "anointed" Sister Margaret Ann's

The Rev. Jeffrey Grob, a Catholic priest from Chicago and an expert on church rituals and the occult, testified that the killer had a "specialized knowledge" of church ritual and that the murder was intended to mock Sister Margaret Ann and as an affront to the church and to God. In his closing argument Wednesday, Mr. Mandros

elements to the murder, it was "not a satanic cult killing." Rather, he said, it was "perhaps the most common scenario there is for a homicide: A man got very angry at a woman and the woman died. The only thing different is that the man wore a white collar and the woman wore a habit." Mr. Mandros called it a rage killing and said that

Robinson, angry at the nun and mad at the world,

Lee Pahl, 53, a nephew from the nun's hometown

A niece, Marilyn Duvall, 54, of Nashville, Ind., said

"had taken a lot, but he wasn't going to take any

said that although there were many ritual

Relatives of Sister Margaret Ann said yesterday that they felt a sense of relief with the verdict.

of Edgerton, Ohio, who attended much of the trial, smiled broadly in the courthouse and said he was glad that the long ordeal was over.

she watched the trial on CourtTV and was "holding her breath" waiting for the verdict. "I was quite relieved, and I think they made the Friends and relatives of Robinson declined to comment. As she exited the

In a press conference, prosecutors said they were surprised by the quick verdict.

"My keen analysis of the situation is that either we had presented a very

courtroom, Robinson's sister-in-law, wiping away tears, turned to Claudia Vercellotti, local co-coordinator of an advocacy group for victims of clerical

overwhelming case, or a very underwhelming case," Mr. Mandros said. Defense attorneys Alan Konop, John Thebes, and Nicole Khoury looked tired and dejected when they met with the media.

"Obviously, we are extremely disappointed with the outcome," Mr. Thebes said, tears welling in his eyes. "Today is difficult. But the jury has spoken and

Mr. Konop cut short questions about what the defense might have done

have been done," he said. "What was done was done. The verdict was rendered. We respect the verdict, and there will be an appeal and we do think there are some appealable issues."

"I'm not going to talk about second guessing, what should and what should not

the rest were persuaded during deliberations of the evidence. She said the prosecution's case about the murder weapon is what convinced her that Robinson was guilty, and that she felt the defense's case was not very

All 12 jurors opted to skip the press conference. One, Trushay Carpenter, told WTOL-TV yesterday that most jurors initially believed Robinson was guilty and

Contacted by The Blade last night, juror Denise West said: "It was a very, very difficult case, and I just want to put it behind me." She declined further comment.

Four other jurors contacted by The Blade last night declined to comment about

Bishop Leonard Blair, who placed Robinson on leave after his arrest April 23, 2004, said in a statement that it was "a sad day for the diocese of Toledo."

contributed to this report. Contact David Yonke at: dyonke@theblade.com or 419-724-6154.

Blade Staff Writers Ignazio Messina, Christina Hall, and Megan Gilbert

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the trial, and the others could not be reached for comment.

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