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Sheriff: Shooter thought wife had sex with Louisiana pastor

By **Lateef Mungin** and **Marlena Baldacci**, CNN
updated 11:45 AM EDT, Thu October 3, 2013

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Pastor shot and killed while preaching

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

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Investigators are trying to sort out whether rape or affair played role in killing, sheriff says

Pastor Ronald J. Harris was singing when gunman entered

Woodrow Karey, a church deacon, has been charged with second-degree murder

(CNN) -- A sheriff says he's closer to finding the motive behind the fatal shooting of a Louisiana pastor who witnesses say was killed by a former deacon as the horrified congregation looked on.

Calcasieu Parish Sheriff Tony Mancuso said Tuesday the alleged gunman's wife had filed a rape complaint with police against Tabernacle of Praise Worship Center pastor Ronald Harris on September 25, two days before the shooting.

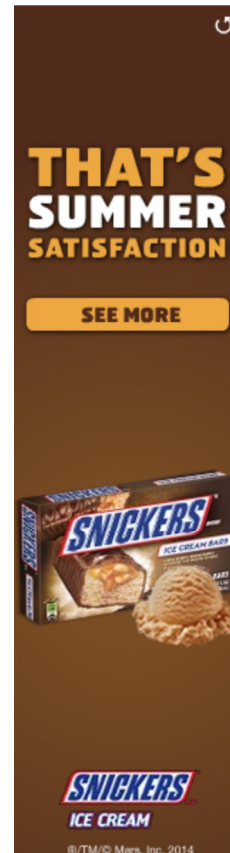
In the complaint, the woman said Harris had raped her several months ago, according to Mancuso.

He declined to release the report, saying it was part of the murder investigation against former church deacon Woodrow Karey. Mancuso said he had not determined whether a rape had occurred.

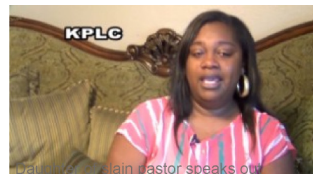
Witnesses told police that Karey walked into the Tabernacle of Praise Worship Center around 8:20 p.m. Friday and shot Harris twice -- the first time as Karey entered the church and then again at close range after Harris had fallen to the floor.

Deputies arrested Karey after he called 911 and told the dispatcher what he had done. He is charged with second-degree murder.

Karey told authorities that a week earlier he'd found text messages from his wife to the pastor. He believed, Mancuso said, that they were having sex and he confronted his wife. Days after the confrontation, Karey's wife filed the police report accusing the pastor of rape, Mancuso said.



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Authorities had not yet investigated the rape accusation by Karey's wife.

"We had not had an opportunity yet," Mancuso said. "Before we go to an accuser, we like to get the facts straight before we begin questioning."

Talisha Harris, the pastor's daughter, was in the church when her father was gunned down.

She said Karey entered the Lake Charles church as she was leading the 65 people in the sanctuary in the singing of "Our God is a Great God."

Karey fired his shotgun almost immediately, hitting a plant, Talisha Harris said. The second shotgun blast struck Ronald Harris in the back.

Then, Karey approached the fallen pastor, fired once more and "stood there to watch him take his last breath," she said.

The gunman ran, leaving a church in chaos.

"People were screaming," Talisha Harris said. "They were under the pews."

The slain pastor's son, Ronald Harris Jr., told CNN Monday that the family was "trying to be strong." He said his father and Karey had been close friends.

Armed in church

While rare, church violence is not unheard of.

In 2012, a former maintenance employee fatally shot a church volunteer at a house of worship just outside of Atlanta. Earlier that year, six people were killed at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin by a white supremacist who then killed himself.

Shreveport, Louisiana, pastor Ed Gonzalez said he was once approached by someone in his office with apparently violent intent, CNN affiliate KSLA reported.

"He walked in my office and told me God told him to take me out," the station quoted Gonzalez as saying.

The man eventually backed off, but the experience led Gonzalez to conclude the churches are easy targets. He now carries a weapon, as do several other members of his church.

"Pastors need to awake and realize that we live in a world of turmoil, hatred and bitterness, so they have to do something to protect those sheep," he told KSLA. "As long as there is sin on this earth we're going to have violence."

CNN's Tina Burnside and Rick Martin contributed to this report.



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