

Hostage situation escalates

"He's had a lot of girlfriends. He gets along well with their parents, but then he'll stress or whatever and just pop."

David Hemminger
friend of Joseph Palczynski

DUNDALK, Md. (AP) — A shot was fired Monday inside the house where an alleged killer has been holding his ex-girlfriend's mother and two other people hostage since Friday, authorities said.

After the shot, police used a loudspeaker to urge the suspect, Joseph Palczynski, to let them bring in an ambulance. But authorities said they were uncertain about what had happened.

"We don't know that anyone has been hurt inside," Baltimore County Police spokesman Bill Toohey said. "We have just had this one shot."

Palczynski, 31, has been on the run since March 7, when police say he kidnapped his ex-girlfriend, Tracy Whitehead, and killed the couple she was staying with and a neighbor. A fourth person was killed and a boy was wounded when Palczynski allegedly carjacked a vehicle.

Palczynski, who has spent much of his adult life in prison and mental health institutions, shot his way into the home of Lynn Whitehead on Friday, and took her and two others hostage.

On Monday, a man and a woman, believed to be the hostages, yelled out the window to police that Palczynski would do something drastic if police didn't put Tracy Whitehead on the phone.

Shortly after the shot was fired in the house, several shots were fired, apparently from the windows of the house, as Palczynski had done earlier in the day and on Sunday. Police who had been pleading with Palczynski while stationed in an armored vehicle moved away from the house.

Newspaper and broadcast reports have said Palczynski's main demand has been to speak to Tracy Whitehead. Police have said they will not discuss the negotiations.

Police escorted people out of the blue-collar neighborhood Sunday night in armored cars and prevented dozens of residents from entering or leaving their homes because of the standoff. About a dozen people were trapped in their homes Monday, and some used walkie-talkies to relay details of the standoff to

each other and those outside the blocked-off area.

Palczynski had threatened Tracy Whitehead's family before the hostage standoff began, a family member said.

Susan Milliner, a cousin, told The Baltimore Sun that when Palczynski held Tracy Whitehead captive for 30 hours, he told her he was going to "get her family."

Laura Whitehead, Tracy Whitehead's sister, told The Sun she asked for police protection Thursday.

Toohey, the police spokesman, said Monday that the Whitehead family turned down police offers to place officers inside and outside the house and ignored advice not to go home.

Friends and relatives of Palczynski said he has had a lifelong battle with a bipolar disorder and repeatedly failed to take his medication.

"He's had a lot of girlfriends," said David Henninger, an attorney and friend of 16 years. "He gets along well with their parents, but then he'll stress or whatever and just pop."

Death toll estimates vary in cult killings

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Prisoners dug a long trench Monday, and a bulldozer shoveled charred corpses into a common grave, the final resting place for hundreds of members of a religious cult led by a former prostitute.

Most of the victims apparently were women, and police counted the bodies of 78 children, the interior minister said. He put the total number of dead at 330.

"These are the ones we could count," Interior Minister Edward Rugumayo said. "The others are unrecognizable."

Rugumayo spoke to reporters in Kampala after inspecting the burned hulk of the church hall just outside Kanungu, 215 miles southwest of the Ugandan capital. He said that in addition to the 330 bodies found after Friday's fire in the church, five bodies were spotted through a hole in a nearby pit latrine.

Rugumayo said police were sure there were more bodies in the latrine, a walled, communal structure common in African villages, but were awaiting digging equipment to excavate the pit. He did not offer an explanation of how

or when the bodies got into the latrine.

Official estimates of the number of deaths have varied between 235 and 600. On Monday, bodies were shoveled into a long trench dug by inmates, but it did not appear that officials were counting victims.

"What emerges out of all this," Rugumayo said of the sect, "is that the authorities never suspected anything."

He said the 10-year-old Christian sect, known as the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, was founded by Cleodonia Mwerinde, a former prostitute who had the chapel built on the grave of her father. The sect had about 1,000 members in nine districts in Uganda and was legally registered as a nongovernmental organization.

"There are still sect members out in other districts, and they are being pursued," Rugumayo said. "We're going to close down all the branches of this sect and are going to be more vigilant about NGO-registration in the future," he said. "But we can't stop freedom of worship."

Details about the sect were sparse. Police had earlier identified the five primary leaders as the 40-year-old

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Mwerinde; Joseph Kibweteere, 68, also known as "The Prophet;" and former Roman Catholic priests Dominic Kataribabo, 32, Joseph Kasapurari, 39, and John Kamagara, 69.

Local Roman Catholic Church officials have not spoken about the fire and deaths; officials said all local bishops are away on a retreat. The press office of the Vatican said Monday it had no information and no comment about the reports that some sect leaders had been priests.

Police said earlier Monday that the five main leaders — including Mwerinde, whom her followers called

"the one who has had a vision" — all died. But Rugumayo said later that only two leaders' bodies had been positively identified — the manager of the sect's farm and "a priest."

There was no explanation for the discrepancy.

Gerard Banura, a professor of theology at Kampala's Makerere University, said the group was an offshoot of the Roman Catholic Church.

"The whole thing centered around worship because these were people who were very uncomfortable with the way worship was being carried out by the church," he said.

Two arrested in theft of 55 Oscar statuettes

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Two employees of a shipping company were arrested in the theft of 55 Oscar statuettes, most of them found in a trash bin, authorities said Monday.

Anthony Keith Hart, 38, and Lawrence Edward Ledent, also 38, were arrested Saturday and booked for investigation of grand theft, Police Chief Bernard Parks said during a news conference at police headquarters.

Hart and Ledent, employees at the Roadway facility in Bell for about 10 years, were being held on \$100,000 bail.

"They did it for profit. They thought they could make money," Police Detective Marc Zavalla said.

Investigators followed a lead to the men, but Zavalla and the police chief wouldn't elaborate.

A Roadway representative said there are security measures at the Bell facility, including surveillance cameras, but he noted there were 65 to 70 people working at the time of the disappearance. The company had shipped the statuettes from the manufacturer in Chicago.

Bell is the same Los Angeles-area community where 4,000 Oscar ballots were misplaced at a post office earlier this month.

Parks said the men told police where they thought officers could find the missing Oscars, but officers didn't find them there.

Instead, salvage man Willie Fulgear found 52 of the missing Oscars late Sunday, while rummaging through a trash bin in the city's Koreatown section. Three were still missing.

"I've got more Oscars than any of the movie stars," said Fulgear, who makes a living salvaging and recycling discarded items.

The eight half-pound statuettes were packed in 10 boxes and wrapped together on one palette, which weighed about 470 pounds.

Police Capt. David Powers said a special mark proved they were the awards. But it is unlikely any of the awards would be returned in time for Sunday's presentation.

"This is a theft, a criminal investigation, and we have to proceed cautiously," Powers said early today.

World and Nation Datelines

■ Vermont Two students die after snow cave collapses

STRATTON, Vt. (AP) — Two college students spending a night outdoors were killed in the collapse of their snow cave, apparently after a piece of heavy machinery dumped snow on their shelter while they slept, investigators said.

Jake Shumway, 19, and Robert Carr, 18, freshmen on spring break from Plymouth State College in New Hampshire, were found buried in the collapsed cave by friends Saturday morning at the Stratton Mountain ski resort.

Avid outdoorsmen, Carr, Shumway and a group of friends had gone to Stratton to watch the U.S. Open Snowboarding competition. They dug the cave at the edge of a parking lot, while the rest of their group spent the night sleeping in cars and campers.

■ Washington Clinton administration proposes ban on MTBE

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Clinton administration moved Monday to ban the gasoline additive MTBE, an octane booster that has helped clean the air but has begun to contaminate water supplies around the country.

MTBE, or methyl tertiary butyl ether, is now used in one-third of the gasoline sold in the United States, primarily in areas with smog problems. The ban, expected to take up to three years to implement, is a "backstop measure" in case Congress can't agree on a way to phase out MTBE, said Carol Browner, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

As many as 9,000 community water wells near leaking underground storage tanks in 31 states may be affected by contamination from MTBE, Browner said.

■ Jerusalem One dead, one wounded after Israeli soldiers shoot at car

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli soldiers opened fire on a Palestinian car at a checkpoint Monday, killing a woman and wounding her husband, after a drive-by attack against Israelis nearby.

The shootings came a day before the arrival of Pope John Paul II and two new steps in the peace process: a transfer of West Bank territory to the Palestinians and the resumption of negotiations.

The soldiers shot at the car at a roadblock near the Israeli settlement of Tsurif, Palestinian security officials said.

It was not clear why the soldiers opened fire. The Israeli military had no immediate information about the incident.

■ Virginia US Airways warns customers of possible employee strike

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — US Airways is warning its customers to prepare for a possible strike Saturday by its flight attendants, urging them to prepare alternative arrangements.

The flight attendants' union has said it would target random routes with impromptu walkouts to cause maximum chaos. In response, the airline has said it would shut down rather than subject passengers to unpredictable travel.

About 10,000 US Airways flight attendants are working under a contract that expired at the end of 1996 and gave them their last pay raise of 4 percent.

WEATHER	
TODAY	TOMORROW
Mostly cloudy high 54, low 41	Partly cloudy high 60, low 42

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