

**MURDER CASE STUDY**  
**VICTIM: REV. REYNALDO RIVERA**



St. Francis Cathedral, Santa Fe

**MURDERER: UNKNOWN**



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Rev. Reynaldo J. Rivera, a Franciscan, was the pastor of St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe.

On the night of August 5, 1982 the phone at the rectory of St. Francis's Cathedral rang. Someone who identified himself as Michael Carmello asked for someone to come to a rest stop on I-25 near Santa Fe to anoint his grandfather who was dying of a heart attack. The priest who answered the phone was partially blind and could not drive at night.

Fifteen minutes later the phone rang again and the Rev. Rivera answered. He left for the rest stop in his Chevrolet Malibu.

Two days later his body was found in a field a mile south of the rest stop. He had been tied up for perhaps two hours (judging from ligature marks on the neck) before he was shot once in the stomach. The pay phone at the rest stop was out of order. The Malibu was found in I40, locked and out of gas.<sup>1</sup>

The scenario that was told to the public was improbable:

- Why would someone whose grandfather had had a heart attack call a priest and not also call an ambulance?
- Why didn't Rivera tell the caller to call an ambulance, and that he would meet him at the hospital?

But priests say their first response to a request for anointing would be to rush to the scene without interrogating the caller.

The police seemed to suspect that something was behind the murder, and later thought there might be a connection to the July 20, 1984, murder of the Rev. John Patrick Kerrigan, who had been in Jemez Springs, New Mexico, at the Paraclete Center where, the police noted, "pedophile priests were treated."<sup>2</sup>

Later, when James Harry Reyos became the suspect in the homosexual murder of Rev. Patrick Ryan in Odessa, Texas, on December 21, 1981, police also questioned him about the murder of Rivera.<sup>3</sup>

Santa Fe police theorized that the killer was "someone familiar with the Catholic Church but who also felt betrayed."<sup>4</sup>

No suspect has ever been identified.

"Unsolved Mysteries" of NBC aired shows about the Rivera murder. No leads developed from the show ever came to anything.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Terrell, "Similar Murder Remains Unsolved," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 7, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Terrell, "Similar Murder Remains Unsolved," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 7, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> "Are Deaths of Two Priests Related?" *Miami Herald*, November 21, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Steve Terrell, "Similar Murder Remains Unsolved," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, May 7, 1997.