Adventist Heritage

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Sent: Wednesday, August 10, 2011 5:12 PM
To: Adventist Heritage
Subject: NAD NewsPoints, Adventist Teacher/Principal Found Dead at Memphis Jr. Academy

Adventist Teacher/Principal Found Dead at Memphis Jr. Academy

We greatly regret to report that one of our educators was killed this morning. We in the North American Division mourn her loss and join with the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference in praying for all those affected by this terrible tragedy. We are looking with eagerness for Jesus’ coming when all heartaches will cease and we will be reunited with loved ones.

One preliminary news story about this event, as posted by CBS News: "Memphis principal found dead; student in custody"

Statement from Steve Haley, President of the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference of Seventh-day Adventists:

"We are deeply saddened to have just learned of the tragic death of Suzette York, our teacher/principal at Memphis Jr. Academy, who was killed earlier today, allegedly by a student at the school. Our prayers are lifted on behalf of Suzette’s husband and family, the staff and students at MJA. We have no further news or details to add at this point and please resist calling the conference office as the above represents all the detail we are prepared to release at this point."

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America operates a system of more than 1,000 elementary and secondary schools and 15 colleges and universities.

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August 10, 2011 2:30 PM

Memphis principal found dead; Student in custody

MEMPHTIS, Tenn. - Police in Memphis say a school principal was killed in an apparent homicide at a private school, and a 17-year-old student is in custody.

The victim has been identified as principal Suzette York of Memphis Junior Academy, reported CBS News affiliate WREG Memphis.

Police say the body of the 49-year-old woman was discovered by a teacher shortly after 11 a.m. Wednesday at the private school in east Memphis operated by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

A school administrator told WREG: "We have lost a great teacher and valuable member of our school."

Police spokeswoman Karen Rudolph said a 17-year-old student was taken into custody at the school.

A pastor of the suspect said: "I baptized that young man. I can't believe he'd be involved in this. I need to know more."

A motive and cause of death were not immediately disclosed. WREG reported that the victim was found stabbed to death inside a classroom.

Marvin Lowman, executive secretary with the Kentucky-Tennessee conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, said York had been principal at the school since 2008.

Peter Hunter, who attended the school for seven years and now has a 6-year-old cousin in the school, said York was a caring, sweet woman who enjoyed teaching young people.

"She was a wonderful person who was very much involved with her students, a person who cared deeply about the development of her students," he said. "This was not the way she was supposed to go."

Photos: Memphis teacher murdered

Hunter said York was a science and math teacher who had left the school, but returned to become an administrator.

"She came back here because she had a passion for the people," he said.

Hunter said the school had a nurturing environment where the goal was to treat everyone as family.

"It shows you that something like this can happen anywhere," he said.

Some three hours after the slaying, about 30 people attended a 40-minute prayer service at the nearby Mullins United Methodist Church.
"We are afraid," the Rev. Scottie Brafford said during the service, referring to recent violence in Norway and elsewhere. "We do not know where the bottom is any longer."

On its Web site, the Memphis Junior Academy is described as "a Seventh-day Adventist school located in Memphis, TN. Our staff is committed to providing quality education in a Christ-filled environment. Our school is part of the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist school network. The Seventh-day Adventist educational system includes elementary and high schools, colleges and universities in countries around the globe. MJA offers education to students from Pre-K4 through 11th grade."

Classes at the one-story, red brick school began Monday. A sign out front Wednesday said "Welcome back."

The school was surrounded by yellow crime scene tape after the body was found. Police officers milled about.

Linda Taylor told The Commercial Appeal she received a call from her husband who said the school called and told them to pick up their 14-year-old son, Josiah, because there was an emergency. The school didn't say that someone had been killed.

"I'm just wondering what's going on," she said at the scene.

Coverage by CBS affiliate WREG Memphis: