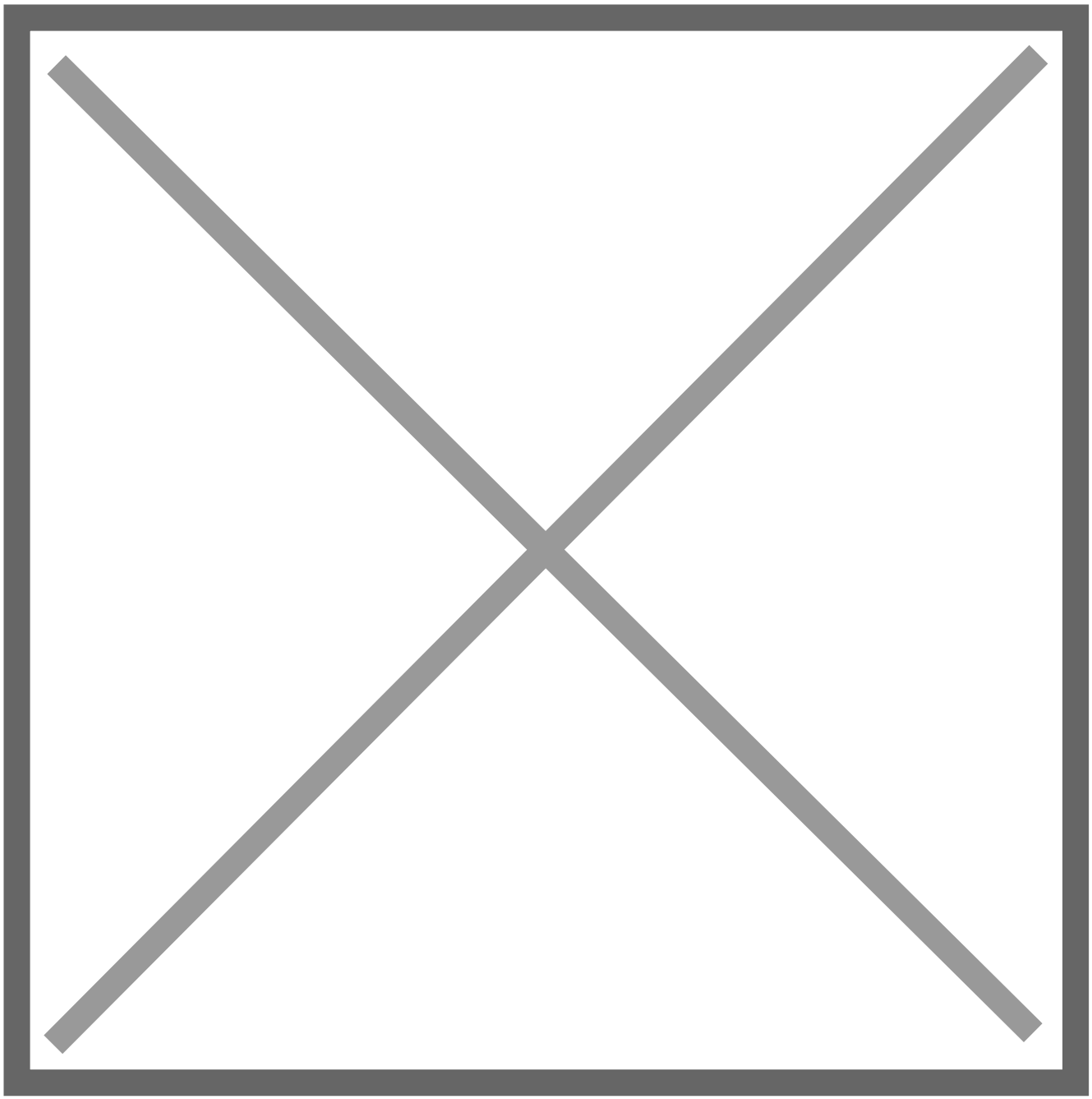
News



Fr. Olivier Maire, French provincial of the Montfort Fathers, is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS photo/courtesy Montfort Missionaries)



by Catholic News Service

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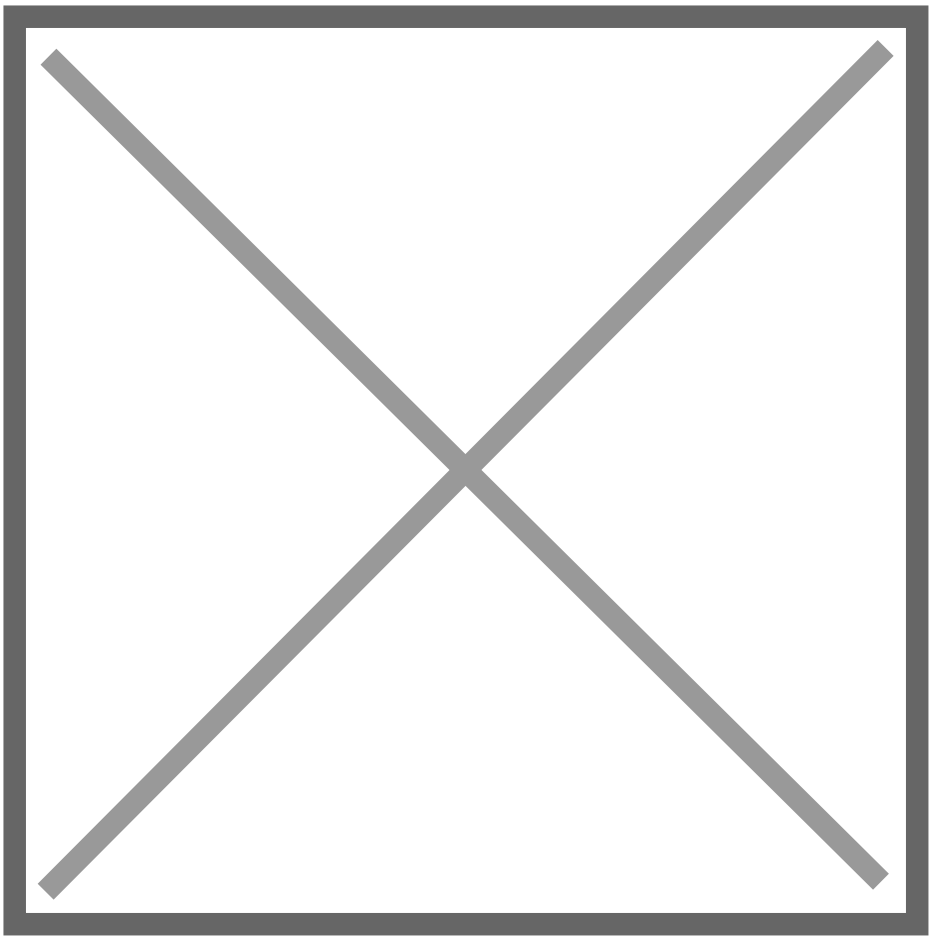
SAINT-LAURENT-SUR-SÈVRE, France — August 9, 2021
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A Rwandan immigrant awaiting trial for the arson of the cathedral in Nantes turned himself into police for killing the French provincial of the Montfort Missionaries.

Emmanuel Abayisenga, 40, a Catholic, had been released on bail earlier this year for the 2020 arson at Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Nantes. Montfort Fr. Olivier Maire, 60, had offered him housing in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, south of Nantes.

Media reported police sources said early indications were that Abayisenga had beaten Maire to death.

Fr. Santino Brembilla, superior general of the Montfort Missionaries, described Maire as a "religious, a priest and a missionary of great value, a specialist in Montfort spirituality who accompanied his entire community in coming to a profound understanding of the message of their founder, Louise-Marie Gignion de Montfort," Vatican News reported.



Fr. Olivier Maire, French provincial of the Montfort Fathers, is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS photo/courtesy Montfort Missionaries)

Archbishop Eric de Moulins-Beaufort of Reims, president of the French bishops' conference, tweeted: "The murder of Father Maire is a terrible tragedy. He will have lived following Christ until the very end, in the unconditional acceptance of all. While waiting for more complete elements that the investigation will bring, I pray for his family and his religious brothers. I pray for all the people traumatized by this tragedy, for his assassin too, who is at least psychologically adrift, and I assure (Lucon) Bishop (Francois) Jacolin of my fraternal support. May God grant us the grace to serve him always and in all."

French Sen. Bruno Retailleau sent a tweet paying tribute to Maire at the hand of someone he was housing out of charity.

"His death testifies to the kindness of this priest whom I knew well and whose depth of faith I had been able to appreciate. His death is a great loss," the tweet said.

On July 25, 2020, Abayisenga admitted lighting two fires in the area of a 17th-century organ and a third above an electrical panel in the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul a week earlier. He had been volunteering at the cathedral as a warden and had the keys to the building because he was responsible for locking it up on the day of the fire. He had been in the country since 2012.

Maire's murder provoked criticism of French immigration policies from right-wing politicians, who questioned why Abayisenga was still in the country.

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