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Father Jesse Euresti

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Search for priest continues in Mexico

Fearing foul play, Austin parish holds daily mass

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NUEVO LAREDO, Mexico (KXAN) - Mexican authorities continued their search Thursday for an Austin priest they believe may have been murdered at his home in Nuevo Laredo.

They were also still looking for the man Father Jesse Euresti, of the East Austin [Cristo Rey Catholic Church](#), allowed to live there while he shuttled back and forth to Austin. Authorities have told family members they want to question the man in connection with Euresti's disappearance.

Meanwhile, members of his Austin parish are holding daily Mass to pray for his safe return - although the scene in the city just across the border from Laredo, Tx., looked grim when family members and police arrived there Wednesday.

A pool of blood greeted family members as they walked into Euresti's home - on the floor, on the walls, in the garage that had been left open.

"I know he is dead. I know he is dead," cried his sister, Rachel Rios, as she stood in the garage. "Look at all the blood."

Family members say they didn't trust the caretaker and hope police can find him to answer questions about the disappearance.

"He was a troublemaker," said Euresti's nephew, Richard Euresti, speaking of the home's caretaker.

Euresti, 69, was last heard from around 2:30 a.m. Tuesday, telling family members he had arrived. But later in the day, a friend reported that the priest was missing after stopping by the house and noticing the alarm was off and the garage door was open.

"The way things look, it doesn't look good," Richard Euresti said. "We want to know what happened. Everyone does."

The house was ransacked, there was a knife in view, blood spattered on the floor and walls, and his mattress was missing.

"So, we know something happened," said Manuel Euresti Rios, his nephew. "They took him away, you can tell they

Missing in Mexico

- [Statement from Diocese of Austin](#)



[Search for priest continues in Mexico](#)
Father Jesse Euresti of Cristo Rey Catholic Church in East ...

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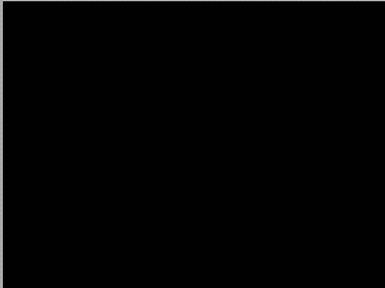
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dragged his body."

See below for an inside look at the house:



The Catholic community is extremely disturbed by the news.

"We are shocked by this information," said Bishop Gregory Aymond, bishop of the Diocese of Austin. "We do not know whether he is missing or has been killed. Please remember Father Euresti, his family and parishioners in prayer."

The Cristo Rey Catholic Church said it will offer prayers for Euresti every day at its noon and 6 p.m. mass celebrations until something further develops surrounding the priest's disappearance.

Euresti's family members said he bought the house in the gated Nuevo Laredo community just four months ago, with plans to retire there. He was born and raised in Austin and graduated from Stephen F. Austin High School in 1957. His family and friends warned him against retiring there.

"We kept telling him 'Why buy, why not stay here,' but I guess it was something he wanted to do," said Josephine Juarez, a parishioner.

"He's been there for all of us," said family friend Mary Lou Ortega, speaking from Father Jesse's home. "He loved Mexico. This is what he wanted."

Relatives said Euresti would go to his Nuevo Laredo home on Calle Guerrero every week for a couple days before returning to run the Cristo Rey Catholic Church.

Euresti has been a leader at the church since 2006. Some parishioners remember first meeting him at the church 50 years ago when he was a teenager in seminary school and lived around the corner from the church.

"I was just an altar boy," said Luis Zavala. "He worked with the community here." Zavala joined hundreds of others at the church Wednesday to sing and pray together.

Below is the report from 6 p.m. on Wednesday regarding the case:



Euresti has been a priest since 1965, serving in area communities for decades, including parishes in Waco, Luling, Lockhart and Cameron. Euresti also served as a chaplain in the United States Air Force.

Euresti's family is traveling to Nuevo Laredo to get more information, working with the [U.S. Consulate](#) to locate him. The local police department in Nuevo Laredo, as well as the offices of U.S. and Mexican consulates, confirmed an ongoing investigation into the priest's disappearance.

Austin police have opened a missing-persons report, and Laredo authorities are reportedly looking into the case as well.

"My uncle could just disappear there...that's possible, it's happening everyday there," said Beatrice Rios, his niece.

Violence against both locals and visitors from the U.S. has skyrocketed in some parts of Mexico, particularly along the border, and almost nowhere more than in Nuevo Laredo with sprawling mansions and bitter poverty.

Euresti was born and raised in Austin but loves Mexico, his family said. He shrugged off his family's fears for his safety when he decided to live there.

"We were all telling him, 'Please don't do that,' but my uncle had been to Mexico many times. He loves Mexico," his nephew Rios said.

Nuevo Laredo is a city of about 500,000 people, about 230 miles south of Austin, just across the border from Laredo, Texas.

- KXAN reporter Erin Cargile contributed to this report

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