

## Pastor, Father-to-Be Killed in Drug Sting

ATLANTA (Sept. 4) — Plainclothes officers shot and killed a small-town pastor when the 28-year-old father-to-be resisted efforts to question him about a passenger in his car who was the target of a drug sting, authorities said.

Jonathan Paul Ayers of Shoal Creek Baptist Church in Lavonia wasn't targeted in the probe that ended in gunfire at a gas station Tuesday, Georgia Bureau of Investigation spokesman John Bankhead said. But drug task-force agents opened fire on him after he tried to avoid them, putting his car in reverse and striking one of the officers.

Bankhead said agents approached Ayers after he dropped a woman off at a store in downtown Toccoa, which is about 90 miles northeast of Atlanta. The passenger was the person being investigated by the task force.

A grainy surveillance video from a nearby store shows two drug task-force agents emerge from a black SUV before Ayers' small car backs up. The two men fire into the passenger side of Ayers' car, and then it takes off with the agents running behind it, the video posted on WNEG-TV in Toccoa shows. The station owner would not release the video to The Associated Press.

Bankhead said Ayers died Wednesday, about an hour after he had surgery. He said the agent who was hit by Ayers' car was treated for minor injuries.

Bankhead would not disclose the identity of the woman who was in Ayers' car, but said she's been charged with cocaine possession and distribution.

On Thursday, Ayers' brother-in-law Matt Carpenter said the pastor had nothing to do with drugs.

"Any question of his character, particularly involving something like drugs, is just ridiculous," he said.

Carpenter said Ayers and his wife had wanted to live in a town closer to their family, but they settled near the Lavonia church where Ayers felt called to be a pastor.

"They were exactly where they were supposed to be," Carpenter said, adding that they had recently led the small

congregation's first mission trip, to Africa.

Carpenter said Ayers' wife, who is 16 weeks pregnant, is grappling with the idea of being a single mom.

"That's why it's hurting us all so badly," he said.

Ayers' wife declined to speak to The Associated Press.