

Ornaments returned

Rogue priest hoarded items looted from closed church, bilked faithful, lived high life

By Marylyne Pitz
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Statues, crucifixes, candlesticks and gold chalices that belonged to a former Catholic church in Donora will be delivered to a nearby parish Tuesday, four years after the former pastor, now imprisoned, took them.

"We've already returned one five-ton truck that was loaded," said Andrew F. Richards, the U.S. postal inspector who spent two years unraveling a scheme run by the Rev. Bernard Kaczmarczyk, 67, former pastor of Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church.

Richards, who valued the items at \$75,000, said Kaczmarczyk stripped Holy Name's church, bookstore and rectory just before it closed in October 1992.

"He took them without permission," Richards said.

Kaczmarczyk is serving a 27-month prison term for operating a phony charity called the Mary Mystical Rose Foundation. The priest admitted spending \$495,000 on a Florida home, gambling trips and a luxury car.

"The last thing you want is for this stuff to be stored by a convicted felon for future use," Richards said.

Kaczmarczyk stored statues in a Washington County family's basement and storage shed, and stashed the rest of the church's goods in a West End storage facility owned by a Donora businessman. He

also took two photocopiers worth \$5,000 each.

Kaczmarczyk told the family and the businessman that the diocese would either redistribute the items or destroy them, Richards said.

No theft charges were ever filed against Kaczmarczyk because theft is a state charge, and the priest was the target of a federal investigation.

Kaczmarczyk also took four "Rosa Mystica" statues that Holy Name bought from a religious order called Opus Rosa Mystica, based in Germany. Two were 4 feet tall, and the others were 18 inches tall. Rosa Mystica refers to apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Montichiari, Italy, in 1947 and afterward.

For some time, one of the 4-foot statues stood atop Kaczmarczyk's television set in Coral Gables, Fla.

Kaczmarczyk's accomplice, the Rev. Francis G. Bolek, 35, is serving an 18-month prison term. Bolek, who was stationed at St. Bernadette's in Monroeville, admitted to using \$340,000 in donations for a house adjacent to Kaczmarczyk's in Coral Gables, entertainment, jewelry and clothing.

The priests pleaded guilty to mail fraud charges for their involvement in the Mary Mystical Rose Foundation. Set up in 1987, the foundation sent letters to potential donors saying its purpose was to raise money to buy, from the Pittsburgh diocese, a tile mosaic at Holy Name and turn it into a shrine.

Holy Name was closed as part of a diocesan reorganization. The recovered religious items will be sent to Our Lady of the Valley, a Donora parish created in the reorganization.

The Rev. Ronald Lengwin, a diocesan spokesman, said yesterday that some statues, already delivered to Our Lady of the Valley, were damaged.

"There were some statues with cracks in them. There were some chalices. There was old luggage. That's all they have to this point."