

Priest Double-crosses Extortionist as Police Recover Church Loot

By WALTER FUSZARA and DAN HERBECK

A South Buffalo priest teamed up with Burglary Task Force officers late Tuesday night to foil an unholy extortion plot and recover \$1,500 worth of stolen gold-plated church vessels.

Police said they recovered two ciboriums, a gem-encrusted chalice and a pyx stolen from St. Ambrose Church after arranging a moonlight meeting between the pastor of the church and a suspect who had offered to return the articles for \$200.

Norman J. Charnock III, 18, of 60 Downing St. was charged with grand larceny and possession of stolen property after the 10:45 p.m. arrest near a deserted railroad trestle off South Park Avenue.

Charnock, who police said has a \$100-a-day drug habit, was arrested after a footchase following a "drop" of the stolen items in exchange for cash.

THE SUSPECT was arrested by plainclothes Officers Edward Prabucki, Richard Santucci, Robert Davis, and Terence O'Brien, who had staked out the area in anticipation of the meeting.

The officers said they were assisted in the arrest by The Rev. William Stanton, pastor of the Ridgewood Road church where the items were stolen in a Sunday morning burglary. Father Stanton told police that the vessels and \$50 were taken from a safe in the sanctuary.

About 8 p.m. Tuesday, police



REV. WILLIAM STANTON
Aided in Arrest

said, the pastor received a phone call from a man who offered to return the stolen property for \$1,500. He dismissed the call as a prank.

When the man called again at 8:30 p.m., dropping his asking price to \$200, Father Stanton began to believe the story, and the police were brought into the case.

WITH FATHER Stanton, the Burglary Task Force devised a plan calling for an exchange of the money and property in South Park. But that plan had

to be scrapped when the thief called the pastor at 10:20 p.m. and ordered him to meet him behind Mangano's Bakery, 2439 South Park, in 25 minutes.

"I'll be armed," the suspect reportedly told the pastor.

Officer Santucci was secreted by the trestle with a night-scope, Officer Prabucki in the pastor's car, Officer Davis behind a neighboring building and Officer O'Brien inside the bakery for the meeting.

It was Officer Santucci who first spotted the suspect walking down the trestle. The suspect called to Father Stanton to come closer.

THE PRIEST set down the bag full of money and the suspect replaced it with a bag containing the vessels. Father Stanton moved into a safe position, and the hidden officers rushed the suspect.

Police said the man dashed into a wooded area but was captured after a chase of 500 yards by Officer Prabucki, a marathon runner.

The arresting officers said Charnock told them he was acting as a "go-between" for others who had stolen the vessels, and he pleaded for Father Stanton to appear at his arraignment.

"You know me, father," the suspect reportedly told the priest. "You know me from the church. I haven't done anything bad before. Will you speak up for me?"