

Mike Royko

Maybe We Need An 'Operation Steeple Stop'

Chicago police are criticized often enough for not jailing top gangsters. But they seldom get credit for some of their more remarkable achievements.

For instance, few people realize that in recent months the police probably set some sort of record for raiding churches and nabbing ministers.

The official police arrest statistics do not, unfortunately, contain a breakdown of churches and ministers.

But my own official figures show that at least five churches have been raided and at least three ministers pinched.

The most recent raids took place at the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 48th and State. This church is said to be directly linked to the Missouri Synod.



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There the police grabbed several people in two separate raids, including that church's top man—the Rev. Larry (The Clergyman) Morkert.

Mr. Morkert, who once did a long stretch in a St. Louis seminary, admitted that he has been using the church for more than just preaching sermons and singing hymns.

During the week, he has been opening the place from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and has admitted fugitives from nearby DuSable High School. They come there to get "food fixes"—taking bread and meat directly through the mouth.

(Among veteran bread-liners, this is known as main-lining.)

OTHERS COME THERE with, and to read, books passed on to them by book-pushers at DuSable, including several admitted teachers.

The place is also a hangout for volunteer college students who give high-school and pre-grammar school students hot tips in such things as reading and math.

Known dropouts and truants have been seen in the church.

Mr. Morkert's alibi was:

"We've been working with these kids, especially the dropouts and truants, trying to get them to go back and stick with school. We've been successful with quite a

few.

"We're also running a pre-school program for small kids and tutoring DuSable students having troubles with studies. They come over during their lunch hours and study periods.

"As far as I can determine, this is simple police harassment. They don't like the fact that we're working in the community, advising people on their rights, giving the young ones a place to go and get together. The commander of the districts even told me he thought I shouldn't open the church during the day and that I should boot them out."

THE POLICE WHO RAIDED the church said they found two empty whisky bottles in the women's wash room. An empty wine bottle also was found in the church.

Mr. Morkert said he thinks the police put the whisky bottles in the washroom. But he admitted the wine bottle was his and that he emptied it himself. "In giving communion," he added. He is charged with contributing to the delinquency of minors.

Earlier, there was the hard-hitting raid at the Wellington Congregational Church, 615 W. Wellington. The police nabbed the Rev. James (The Clergyman) Shiflette, an admitted Presbyterian, for showing a film without a city permit.

And striking on the South Side, the police raided two churches used by ministers working with teen-age gangs.

The police have managed to do all this despite the urgency of their other duties, such as meeting ticket quotas, getting the blue cars washed and making out reports.

They've even pulled in admitted accomplices and associates of the ministers—church and street social workers. And all while handicapped, of course, by Supreme Court rulings that make it difficult to keep a minister in jail once you get him there.

BUT THE POLICE COULD be even more effective in this important area of law enforcement if a few things were done:

- The police should have a special citywide "Church Squad," just as they have units concentrating on robbery, burglary, traffic, narcotics, public relations and the syndicate. It could quickly strike anywhere in the city when a clergyman is reported stepping out from behind his pulpit and trying to influence teen-age gangs, dropouts, the poor and others who are the rightful subjects of the police.

- The public should be asked to co-operate in something like Operation Crime Stop. Maybe it could be called Operation Steeple Stop. Anyone seeing his minister, priest or rabbi — or someone else's, for that matter — up to no good, should turn them in to Operation Steeple Stop. Remember, Families that Stay Together, Pray Together—if the preacher makes bond.

- And finally, tougher laws are needed for clergymen. The police must have more effective tools. To begin with, there might be an arena, and maybe some lions. . .