

NEWS BRIEFS

Open Door giving Campolo award

Open Door Community Church, 709 W. Lee Ave. in Sherwood, will honor the Rev. Ed Bacon, a retired Episcopal priest, at its annual fall conference Nov. 17-19.

Beginning at 7 p.m. Nov. 17 with a concert by the Rev. Vince Anderson, Bacon will then be given the Peggy Campolo Carrier Pigeon Award, which is named after Campolo — the person who inspired Randy Eddy-McCain — Open Door's pastor — to begin the church, according to its website. Bacon is being recognized for his years supporting LGBT rights and striving for unity among faiths.

After breakfast at 9 a.m. Nov. 18, Bacon will give a talk, after which Ragan Courtney will make a presentation. A panel discussion that includes Bacon, the Rev. Stan Mitchell of GracePointe Church in Nashville, Tenn.; Peggy Campolo; and Jay Bakker will take place.

Anderson will give a workshop, "Singing the Psalms," at 2:15 p.m., and the evening will wrap up with a concert by Cynthia Clawson at 7 p.m. and a talk by Mitchell at 8.

The conference concludes with a 10:45 a.m. worship service Nov. 19 in which Mitchell will speak, after which there will be a potluck.

— ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Priest's relic goes to home church

OKARCHE, Okla. — A first-class relic of "native son" Stanley Rother was presented to his hometown parish during a recent much-anticipated Mass and special gathering.

The relic — a piece of the priest's rib — was carried down the aisle in a reliquary shaped like a cross by his brother, Tom Rother, during the Mass on Oct. 15 at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, which Tom Rother and his family still attend, *The Oklahoman* reported.

"I think it's wonderful," Marti Rother, wife of Tom Rother and Stanley Rother's sister-in-law, said with a smile. "I just think it's something we will each go to every day to pray to."

The Rev. John Peter Swaminathan, Holy Trinity's pastor, thanked Oklahoma City archbishop Paul Coakley for remaining true to his promise to give the relic a permanent home at the church that Rother attended as a youth.

"A small town in Oklahoma has now become a prominent place on the U.S. map," Swaminathan said, anticipating thousands of visitors to Rother's hometown parish.

Rother was 46 when he was killed July 28, 1981, by unknown assailants in Guatemala. An Okarche native, Rother was an Archdiocese of Oklahoma City priest serving as pastor of the Santiago Atitlan parish in Guatemala at the time of his death.

— THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Once-lost Jewish papers on display

NEW YORK — The American public is getting a chance to view newly discovered Jewish documents that had been presumed destroyed during the Holocaust.

Ten documents brought over from Lithuania went on display Oct. 24 at New York's YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, which is working with the Lithuanian government to archive the 170,000-page collection.

The documents were hidden to protect them from the Nazis during World War II. They resurfaced during a move in 2016, and YIVO confirmed their significance this year.

The wide-ranging collection includes manuscripts by famous Yiddish writers, religious writings, poetry and record books of shuls and yeshivas. There are letters by Sholem Aleichem, whose writings inspired the *Fiddler on the Roof* character Tevye, and a Yiddish postcard written by the artist Marc Chagall in 1935.

Highlights of the Manhattan exhibition, which can be seen by appointment until January, include a 1751 astronomy manuscript with descriptions and drawings of the solar system and an 1883 Russian censor's copy of a theatrical poem by Abraham Goldfaden, founder of the modern Yiddish theater.

— THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Sika Henry (center), is shown a moment before winning her second consecutive Newport News One City Marathon in Newport News, Va., in March 2016. Special to the Democrat-Gazette/ALEXANDRIA WILLIAMS

Moved by the spirit

Co-founder of black runners' group encourages church members to get off the pew and get into shape

FRANCISCA JONES
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Tony Reed has been a distance runner for more than 40 years.

The Dallas accountant has logged more than 43,000 miles over the course of his career, and was the first black man to run marathons on all seven continents, according to *Runner's World* magazine and Webster University.

The clothes he wore when he achieved that milestone are on display at the Smithsonian, and an interview he gave with *The HistoryMakers* — the nation's largest collection of black oral history — is part of the Library of Congress' permanent archives.

Reed's eyes are on another goal these days. As co-founder and executive director of the National Black Marathoners Association, he is asking church leaders to inspire parishioners to get off their couches and get moving.

Reed, 62, will hold a free workshop from 8 a.m. to noon Nov. 11 at the Centre at University Park, 6401 W. 12th St., in Little Rock. The workshop is aimed at convincing churches and other faith-based organizations to form running and walking programs as a way to get members to focus on health in a way that is physical and spiritual.

Only 5 percent of core distance runners in the United States — those who run or walk at least three days a week — are black, according to Reed, and one of the aims of the workshop is to increase that percentage through messages delivered from the pulpit.

"The one place where African-Americans go on a regular basis as a family to get motivated and inspired is church," Reed said.

THE INSPIRATION

Studies indicate that a regular running or walking routine can help reduce blood pressure and heart rate and aid in the prevention of a range of ailments.

According to the American Heart Association, black people are at an elevated risk for diabetes, heart disease and stroke. High blood pressure tends to develop earlier in their lives, and the cases tend to

be more severe.

Reed was diagnosed as being prediabetic when he was 8 years old.

The high school he attended in St. Louis required participation in sports, but it wasn't until 1976 that he read that diabetes patients who began and maintained a fitness program were able to reduce or discontinue their insulin usage altogether.

So he set a goal running 3 miles a day.

"And at 62, I'm still not on death's door," Reed said.

He co-founded the National Black Marathoners Association — which has around 6,000 members — as a nonprofit organization to highlight the achievements of black distance runners, encourage more black people to participate in running and walking programs and to promote a healthy lifestyle.

This year, the association partnered with USA Track and Field to present running workshops around the country where ethnic minorities in faith-based organizations such as churches are encouraged to form running and walking clubs. "We have role models for football, baseball and basketball, but when you talk about [black] role models in distance running, a lot of African-Americans don't know anything [about them]," Reed said.

He pointed to long-distance runners such as the late comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory, Reed's role model as a young man; Ted Corbitt, who founded the New York Road Runners Club; and Marilyn Bevans, the first black woman to complete a marathon in less than three hours and to be nationally ranked. All three are members of the association's hall of fame.

"We work to challenge those various myths," Reed said.

Health care costs associated with medications used to manage diabetes and high blood pressure often take money from other areas of the family income, such as food, education and tithing.

Parishioners often appeal to their church for help with financial obligations such as medical bills and funeral costs, but the church also serves as a place of inspiration for change.

So it only made sense to Reed that the church could serve as a start-



See **RUNNERS** on Page 5B

Stolen statue returned to church in huge recovery

ELISABETTA POVOLEDO
THE NEW YORK TIMES

MONTERODUNI, Italy — The recent return to Monteroduni of a 16th-century statue of the archangel Michael — stolen by thieves some 20 months earlier — was a heartfelt affair.

A marching band led a procession through the narrow streets of the town, in the Molise region, about two-and-a-half hour drive from Rome. The band was followed by a religious confraternity in full regalia, as members of the military police's art-theft unit carried the statue to Monteroduni's main church.

With a sizable portion of the town's residents marching happily in tow, children popped balloons and scattered confetti, bells rang joyfully and some older residents wiped away tears of joy.

"Evviva San Michele," came a cry from the crowd.

If Monteroduni's 2,000-plus residents had ample reason to celebrate the return of the statue of the town's patron saint, the agents who recovered the artifact were even more ecstatic.

The investigation that led to its recovery, and that of objects stolen from dozens of churches throughout Italy and abroad, turned out to be "one of the most important operations in recent years," said Paolo Albano, the chief prosecutor of the nearby town of Isernia, who coordinated the case.

But the inquiry also underscored the fragility of Italy's ecclesiastical patrimony, scattered among the country's more than 60,000 churches, a treasure trove that includes masterpieces by Titian, Michelangelo and Caravaggio as well as statues and precious artifacts such as chalices, candelabras and countless illuminated manuscripts.

Of the 449 thefts registered last year by the military police's art-theft investigative unit — the Carabinieri for the Protection of Cultural Heritage — just under half occurred in churches.

The isolation of many churches makes them hard to protect from such thefts. Closing churches is one option, but for the Roman Catholic hierarchy, "a closed church is a loss," said the Rev. Valerio Pennasso, director of the Italian Bishop Conference's national office for ecclesiastical heritage.

So dioceses do what they can to keep churches open — for the faithful and tourists — even outside liturgical hours.

The church isn't sitting by idly in the face of thefts, however.

Since 1996, Italian clerics have been called on to photograph and document their churches' assets, which have now been cataloged in an nationwide database, a census that Pennasso said is about 78 percent complete.

Any objects that disappear are also added to the Carabinieri's own



The New York Times/GIOVANNI CIPRIANO

Members of Italy's art theft police unit examine a stolen 16th-century statue of the archangel Michael and other religious artifacts they've recovered after months of investigations at their headquarters in Naples, Italy. The country's 60,000 churches are a vast trove of artwork and artifacts, and protecting them from theft is a full-time task.

database of stolen art, which at more than 1.2 million images is the largest such catalog in the world, said Gen. Fabrizio Parrulli, who leads the Carabinieri corps.

Guidelines have been drafted to better protect churches from theft and vandalism — with suggestions such as having volunteers monitor churches, substituting valuables with copies and fixing artifacts in place.

And about 20 years ago, the bishop's conference began setting aside just over \$22,000 a year to help churches install alarms, safety measures such as barriers and closed-circuit television cameras.

At the same time, many churches have transferred their most precious artifacts to local diocesan museums,

See **STATUE** on Page 5B

Offline October eschews social media's miasma

Anyone trying to reach Carson Kurovski and his family at night in their home outside Denver needs to remember one thing:

Unlike most high-school juniors, Kurovski doesn't keep his smartphone within an arm's length of his pillow. In fact, the whole family leaves mobile phones downstairs at night, including his parents.

"It's amazing how much it helps me get a better night's sleep, since my phone isn't going off all the time," he said, reached on his smartphone after classes at Heritage High School in Littleton, Colo.

Wait, there's more. Back in September, Kurovski and some friends made strategic — some would say radical — tech changes after the news of two teenagers' suicides, in two days, at area schools. Some students in this circle were friends with a Heritage student who committed sui-

ON RELIGION



TERRY MATTINGLY

cide last year. After several planning sessions, they launched OfflineOctober.com and urged friends to delete four specific apps — Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter — from their phones for a month. The goal, Kurovski explained, was to stop "hiding behind screens. ... We wanted to try spending more time face to face, instead of just looking at phones."

The project grew through word of mouth, calls, emails, texts and, ironically, social media. Local news coverage helped spread the slogan:

"Don't post a story. Live one." Students started planning informal gatherings to cook, play games, go hiking or just hang out.

At some point, their work caught the eye of someone whose support could help take the movement to another level: the leader of the Catholic Archdiocese of Denver.

Archbishop Samuel Aquila knew all about the suicides, of course, with 72 Colorado streets taking their own lives in 2015 and another 68 in 2016. He was intrigued by the Offline October response. "One theme that I see running through the stories of teens who struggle with suicidal thoughts is the pervasive influence of social media on their identity and sense of self-worth," said Aquila in his regular *Denver Catholic* column. "The teenage years have always been a time of uncertainty, but the technology and emotional development

take place."

It's controversial, of course, to link smartphones, social media and suicide. But the painful reality is that bullying is so often subtle, wrote the archbishop, and bullies now use social-media apps — along with the nearly 80 percent of ordinary teenagers whose daily lives include regular, or obsessive, use of Snapchat and Instagram.

Bullying always "attacks the basic dignity of another human being through demeaning the person," wrote the archbishop. With smartphones everywhere, "bullies gained access to their peers on a scale never seen before. Not only did fallen human nature obtain a virtual megaphone it could use 24/7, but the anonymity offered by some apps removed the accountability provided by platforms that require users to identify themselves." "The introduction of these

apps has also led to a new phenomenon in which ... teens resort to 'digital self-harm' by posting anonymous hateful messages about themselves for their friends to see. This allows them to get attention from their friends while also airing their internal feelings."

Support from the Denver archdiocese could help Offline October make the leap to other cities and states through Catholic churches and schools, building on the grassroots effort that began this year among Colorado students, said Joe Roberts, junior class president at Heritage and one of the project's co-founders.

It's perfectly understandable that many students have expressed anxiety about taking part, he said, since "it's hard for some of them to even consider giving up the big social-media apps that kind of run our lives. However, it has been encouraging to re-

ceive online messages from students, and their parents, sharing stories about how curbing their social-media habits have improved communication in their homes, including smartphone-free breakfasts and dinners.

Roberts said plans are already underway for next year's Offline October.

"If one person does this, you have a chance to get a chain reaction going among your other friends," he said. "Everybody kind of has a fear of being left out of things. ... What we're saying is that we can be there for each other — face to face. We can do real things, not just look at pictures of what other people say they're doing."

Terry Mattingly is the editor of *GetReligion.org* and Senior Fellow for Media and Religion at The King's College in New York City. He lives in Oak Ridge, Tenn.

SPECIAL EVENTS

■ **Canon Missionary Baptist Church**, 1700 S. State St., will host the musical *PraiseFest* featuring the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's Little Rock Choir. **Voices Everywhere** gospel choir at 6 p.m. today. (501) 374-0485.

■ **Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church**, 815 W. 16th St., will celebrate its 154th anniversary at 4 p.m. Nov. 11 with guest Stephen Hayes. Michael Washington will speak at the 10:45 a.m. service that day. (501) 374-2891.

■ **Covenant Church (Presbyterian Church of America)**, 4511 W. Wedington Drive, Fayetteville, will host Peter Jones at John Brown University, 2000 W. Johnson St., Sileam Springs, at noon and at the church at 7 p.m. Friday, at a pastor's breakfast at 8 a.m. and a youth luncheon at noon Nov. 11 and at the 8:30 and 11 a.m. services Nov. 12 for its first annual theological conference. Free admission. (479) 871-1981.

■ **Breckenridge Theater**, 1200

Breckenridge Drive, will host a showing of *Walk With Me: A Film About Trich Nat Hash*, sponsored by the Ecumenical Baptist Society of Little Rock, at 7:30 p.m. Thursday. Tickets are \$11.87 per person and are available at gathr.uscreening2107.

■ **King Temple**, 110 S. 12th St., Fort Smith, will celebrate its 103rd anniversary at 9:01 a.m. and its 10:45 a.m. Sunday with guest Matthew Hays. (501) 473-9219.

■ **First Baptist Church Higgins**, 9700 Arkansas 365, will celebrate its 105th anniversary at 3 p.m. Nov. 12 with guest Edward Park. (501) 897-9992.

■ **First Baptist Church Highland Park**, 1701 S. Pine St., will celebrate its homecoming and 124th anniversary at 9:45 a.m. Nov. 12. The theme is "Laboring Together as We Move Forward by Faith," with guest Jameel Wesley. (501) 669-2707.

■ **First Baptist Church of North Little Rock**, 811 S.A. Jones Drive, will celebrate its 143rd anniversary at 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. Sunday. fbcnr.com (501) 374-9394.

■ **Full Counsel Metro Church's College Care Ministry Team** will host a free college enrollment workshop for college-bound students and their parents from 1:30-2:30 p.m. today at the Cox Creative Center, 120 River Market Ave. Up to 25 cash registers at collegecareteam@gmail.com. (501) 960-1830.

■ **Jacksonville First Assembly of God**, 221 N. Elm St., will celebrate its 75th anniversary at 10:30 a.m. Sunday. (501) 982-5018.

■ **Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church**, 1900 Simpson St., will celebrate its 100th anniversary at 2:30 p.m. Nov. 12 with guests in Allen and Percy Gilbert. (501) 352-0881.

■ **McAlmont Church of Christ**, 1824 East 46th St., North Little Rock, will hold a free Thanksgiving meal after its 10 a.m. service Nov. 19. (501) 455-3844.

■ **Pax Christi Little Rock** will hold the "conversion" Building a Bridge between the Catholic Church and the LGBT community from 7-9 p.m. Tuesday in

Fitzgerald Hall's Room 103 at St. John's Catholic Center, 2500 N. Tyler St. (501) 258-8653 or (501) 252-4326.

■ **Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church**, 8500 Woodson Lateral Road, Woodson, will celebrate its 116th anniversary at 9 p.m. Nov. 11 with a food and link-up dinner. (501) 397-6197.

■ **Pulaski Heights Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**, 4724 Hillcrest Ave., will celebrate its 50th anniversary and its 25th anniversary as a designated Open and Affirming congregation at 10:30 a.m. Sunday with speaker Arnold Hays at 2:30 p.m. at St. Stephen's Cross. Afterward, Pulaski County Circuit Judge Wendell Griffen will speak at lunch. Little Rock member Thelma Mother-shed-Ward will be the guest of honor. phcc-ft.org or (501) 663-8149.

■ **St. John Free Will Baptist Church**, 2501 E. 17th St., Fockontona, will celebrate its 150th anniversary from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Nov. 19. (870) 892-3807.

■ **Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church**, 5900 John F. Kennedy Blvd., North Little Rock, will offer a coffee-house at 7 p.m. today with snacks and desserts, beverages including coffee, and live music. (501) 753-8134.

■ **St. James United Methodist Church**, 1000 N. Pleasant Valley Drive, will host its annual Shopping Spree and Bazaar from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. today with arts and crafts, holiday items, T-shirts, gourmet baked goods. Free admission and parking. sjames.org or 501-217-6700.

■ **St. John Missionary Baptist Church**, 11923 Zion Hill Road, Cabot, will host a concert with Sue Dodge at 10:55 a.m. Nov. 12. Admission will be host its annual Harvest Revival at 7 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, with guests Michael Carter, Don Moses and Daniel Bearden. (501) 722-2710.

■ **Synagogue Agudath Achim**, 7901 W. Fifth St., will present the concert "A Band of Brothers and

Chuck and Louann King, with interperetive dance by Yvonne Diez Peters. Adult tickets are \$15 and children under 12 are \$5 at 2du11f.org (501) 225-1689.

■ **Saint Mark's Episcopal Church**, 1000 N. Mississippi St., will serve breakfast from 8:45-9:15 a.m., a service commemorating those interred in St. Mark's Columbarium at 4:30 p.m. and host a Choral Evensong service at 5 p.m. Sunday. st-marks.com or (501) 225-4203.

■ **Zion Hill Baptist Church**, 11923 Zion Hill Road, Cabot, will host a concert with Sue Dodge at 10:55 a.m. Nov. 12. Admission will be host its annual Harvest Revival at 7 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, with guests Michael Carter, Don Moses and Daniel Bearden. (501) 722-2710.

■ **Synagogue Agudath Achim**, 7901 W. Fifth St., will present the concert "A Band of Brothers and Sisters" at 8 p.m. Thursday. Music will include Israeli folk music and Broadway tunes, performed by John and Nancy Shuffie and

One of Us documents three Hasidic Jews who break away

KENNETH TURAN

LOS ANGELES TIMES (TNS)

In the mythology of personal growth, liberating yourself leads invariably to increased happiness. Yet what characterizes the seekers in the powerful *One of Us* is nothing that straightforward.

As directed by expert documentarians Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady (*Jesus Camp*, *12th & Delaware*), *One of Us* spends two years following three individuals whose quests for meaning, purpose and even personal safety cause them to abandon the Hasidic religious community they grew up in but came to view as suffocating to the point of despair.

Although none of the subjects, connected to different degrees to the Satmar sect, regrets leaving and joining the wider world, their after stories as well as their before ones touch on loneliness, insecurity and even trauma.

Runners

• Continued from Page 4B

ing point for better fitness. "The church is the salvation behind motivating families to pursue different long-term goals and objectives," Reed said. "Therefore, [the association] felt the faith-based organization is a really great place for people to start and maintain physical fitness programs.

"The two go hand in hand."

WORSHIP AND WALK

For the members of Fitness Witness Ministries at Fresh Winds Church in Florissant, Mo., getting more active started with a short walk

As text on the screen briefly informs us, Hasidism is "a highly insular group of ultra-Orthodox Jews." Yiddish speaking, suspicious of outsiders and bound by adherence to strict rules of worship and life.

Though the movement was born in 18th-century eastern Europe in part as a way to bring joy to everyday worship, being almost wiped out by the Holocaust, one observer notes, created an ethos of perpetual crisis. Children, for instance, are in part viewed as community property essential to ensure the group's survival.

Focused on the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Williamsburg and Borough Park and the upstate New York enclave of Monsey, *One of Us* reveals a world that turns a cold shoulder and worse to those who don't walk in lockstep with norms.

"The community is your family, they offer so much

after service one Sunday. Led by the Rev. Milton Mitchell, the church's pastor, the group began with a 2-mile walk.

"Those that could walk half a mile walked half a mile; those that could walk a mile walked a mile," Mitchell said. Mitchell, 64, has completed more than 35 marathons in at least 20 states. Mitchell believes running has helped him avoid the struggles associated with diabetes and high blood pressure that some of his siblings have endured, and that was something he wanted to bring to church.

"I wanted to make sure I made a connection between our physical bodies and our spiritual bodies," said Mitchell, who is also a member of

One of Us

Cast: Ety, Chani Getter, Ari Hershkovitz, Luzer Twersky
Directors: Heidi Ewing, Rachel Grady
Now streaming: Netflix
Release date: Sept. 20
Rating: Not rated
Running time: 1 hour, 35 minutes

help, they're never alone," says a young woman named Ety, adding that when you leave "you lose all that." Without it, former Hasids run the risk of becoming unmoored lost souls, people without a country.

Ety is one of the three people *One of Us* follows, and her story is in some ways the most disturbing and involving.

Unwillingly married at age 18 to a man she barely knew, Ety has had seven children in

her 12 years of marriage. Now seeking a divorce because her husband is physically abusive, she's introduced calling 911 for assistance after the New York Police Department's late-night removal of her husband led to his relatives pouncing threateningly on her door.

Younger than Ety is Ari, an 18-year-old we first meet in a barber's chair getting his ritual side locks shorn. "I didn't want to live the lie," he says. "I didn't feel like the person I looked like." Ari is a chain-smoking teen filled with questions about the existence of God; his path of departure began with his discovery of Wikipedia ("a gift from God") on the forbidden internet.

But conversations he has with a white-bearded community member indicate, and as the film demonstrates, Ari finds that living in a fully secular society is more difficult

to raise another \$8,000 for the next group of students. The association's runners have raised \$35,000 for higher education and has more fundraising events in the works.

MOTIVATING OTHERS

Reed hopes to provide church leaders and parishioners attending the Little Rock workshop with information on how to start and maintain a Couch-To-5K program and how to keep members motivated.

"I'd like to think that what we are trying to say is that in the African-American community so that we can develop healthier individuals, runners and walkers," Reed said.

He also will advise attend-

ees on how to make health and fitness a part of every service.

"When you're looking at an endurance event — and life itself is an endurance event — you look toward God to help you," Reed said. "When we ask [runners] what they think about when they run, they say it's their time to talk to God."

Despite its name, 60 percent of the National Black Marathoners Association's members aren't actually marathoners. They are simply who are trying to stay fit as part of a group. There are no dues, and membership — along with participation in the workshop — is open to anyone regardless of race.

None of the members of

the ways the Hasidic community, by using the legal doctrine of status quo mandating no change to the way children have previously been raised, has learned to make secular laws work to its advantage.

"What have I ever done? Have I ever hurt the children?" she asks rhetorically at one point. "Twelve years I kept my mouth shut. Not anymore." It's a heartbreaking situation all around.

Helping Ety and many others who depart from the Hasidic path is an organization called Footsteps, a nonprofit group that offers emotional and education support.

"Nobody leaves unless they're willing to pay the price," says Chani Getter, a counselor. "And the price for freedom is really high." It's the accomplishment of *One of Us* to show exactly what that price is and how difficult it is to pay

Fitness Witness had ever walked or run a mile before the ministry began, Mitchell said, but the benefits among its members — from lowered cholesterol levels or lowered blood pressure to rebounding more quickly from surgeries — have been clear.

God and perseverance in the program have made that possible, he said.

"To me, [a factor] that's always in a run [is] the faith part," Mitchell said. "You have to look ahead and keep moving, so you have to press.

"That's my challenge to my church: to keep pressing toward the mark."

More information about the workshop can be found at tinyurl.com/yccsmn44.

len, and agents are examining the others to determine their provenance.

As it happens, the first of these confiscated objects to come up as a match was the Monteroduni statue.

The statue, along with the shield and sword, was returned to Monteroduni on Sept. 29, the day on saint's day. It was placed in a side chapel during Mass after the procession, but at nightfall Paulin retired it to "a safe place."

Statue

• Continued from Page 4B

where security systems are generally more advanced.

That was not a viable option for the archangel statue in Monteroduni, an object of devotion that had been prominently placed in the main nave so that people could pray before it.

"People here never thought of the statue in economic terms," said the Rev. Paolo Paulin, the parish priest. "It was always a thing of the heart and affection."

The archangel, had no surveillance cameras or alarms, and on Jan. 19, 2016, someone casually strolled in and made off with the slight statue, just under 2 feet tall, as well as the silver-plated shield and sword of another sculpture depicting the archangel.

"This is a town where everyone knows each other, and we couldn't ever conceive that such a crime could happen," said Gabriele Biello, secretary of the Confraternity of St. Michael the Archangel.

After the theft was made public, two residents of the town said they had seen "suspicious characters" lurking

near the church. The Neapolitan Carabinieri, who had been investigating daytime thefts in churches in nearby towns, showed photographs of suspects to the witnesses. One man was positively identified.

That initiated a "classic investigation," said Capt. Giampaolo Brasili, head of the Naples branch of the anti-theft squad, which carried out the inquiry — including tails, wiretaps and, eventually, searches of warehouses and homes in several Italian regions.

Around 20 people are under investigation, including suspected thieves, dealers, middlemen and collectors.

Agents and prosecutors are continuing to pursue leads. "We don't know if we've broken up the most important ring in Italy" of stolen ecclesiastical objects, Brasili said. "But it was certainly important."

Wiretapped conversations among the dealers led to some of the collectors, who were identified in the phone calls as "the cardinal" — and in particular to one in Ciampino, a town on the outskirts of Rome.

In May, the Carabinieri raided several apartments in Ciampino tied to this "cardinal," a setup that Brasili described as more like a hoard-

er's lair than an art collector's care. "There were objects amassed everywhere, so many that you couldn't see or enjoy them all," he said.

Investigators would not say whether the collector knew he was buying stolen goods, although Brasili noted that "ecclesiastical objects were referred to be in a church — a 'chalice in [someone's] home sounds off."

Hundreds of the man's artifacts were confiscated and compared with those in the database kept by the Carabinieri, which included the three Monteroduni treasures. More than 100 of them had been sto-