

Man charged with breaking into nearby churches

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The Rev. Jerome Smith feels relieved. That's due to the arrest, and subsequent arraignment Tuesday in 48th District Court, of Carl David Reichert. A string of church burglaries since April in Oakland and Macomb counties led to Reichert's arrest.

Smith's West Bloomfield United Methodist Church was among the victims — twice.

"For a while I thought we were donating computers to the wider world," said Smith. "I'm sure we (churches) were easy targets."

In April, a computer valued at \$1,500 was stolen from the Walnut Lake Road church. The replacement system, also worth

about \$1,500, was stolen in mid-July.

Smith said he wasn't about to have a third computer stolen from the church. "If we replace the computer again we may not house it here. Like a Scud missile."

Reichert, an unemployed 28-year-old Hazel Park resident with a criminal history, was not arraigned for the United Methodist break-ins, although West Bloomfield police Lt. Carl Fuhs said he is suspected of both.

Reichert was arraigned on charges for related crimes in 48th District Court before Magistrate Nancy Ninowski. He is charged in two July break-ins of the Church of Our Savior in West Bloomfield and another that month at the Congregational Church of Bir-

mingham in Bloomfield Hills. Computers also were taken from both churches, with a television and VCR taken on the second trip to Church of Our Savior.

Not guilty pleas were entered on behalf of Reichert, who was not accompanied by an attorney at the proceedings. Ninowski scheduled a preliminary examination for 8:30 a.m. Aug. 19, before 48th District Judge Edward Avedon. A \$10,000 cash/surety bond on each charge was set.

Charges are expected to be filed against Reichert this week for church break-ins in Rochester Hills and Bloomfield Township.

Reichert is also charged with the June 30 theft of a 1990 Ford Escort that ultimately led to his

arrest Saturday night in Detroit, Fuhs said.

If found guilty, Reichert could face up to 10 years in prison for each of the break-in charges and a five-year term for car theft, Ninowski said.

Triggering the string of charges was Reichert's arrest Saturday in Detroit's 11th Precinct. Police, acting on the car theft warrant originating from West Bloomfield, stopped the stolen Escort, driven by Reichert.

Reichert, on June 30, drove a female acquaintance to work (located on Orchard Lake Road) but drove the car away without her permission and did not return it, Fuhs said.

Since then, according to Reichert at his arraignment, he's

been on the road "sleeping either in the car or a motel room." He said he was previously living with his parents in Hazel Park.

Found inside the car at the time of Reichert's arrest was a computer, believed to have been stolen Friday from a church in Eastpointe. Authorities then began determining whether there was any connection to the other Oakland and Macomb break-ins.

According to Fuhs, the case was difficult to solve because "there's such a wide area and nothing was ever (done) the same."

There were indications at some crime scenes that the thief pried or used force to gain entry into the churches. Sgt. Dean Hess, who led the township's investigation,

said doors often were left unlocked. He didn't know whether the defendant had cased the buildings.

Church of The Shepherd King was a third West Bloomfield break-in target, although that one, also in July, was unsuccessful, Fuhs said.

During the arraignment, it was brought out that Reichert has had earlier problems with the law: he is on probation from a previous larceny by conversion under \$100 charge out of Clare County, which he pleaded guilty to on Jan. 4; he was charged with child neglect in a Pontiac court.

Pastor Murray Blackadar, of the Church of Our Savior in West Bloomfield, declined to comment Tuesday about Reichert's arrest.

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The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

The telephone service is paid for by the league's education fund. The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that works to keep voters interested and informed about governmental issues.

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