

#### 44. Wilbert Lee and Freddie Pitts. My argument against the death penalty.



Freddie Pitts came within 6 hours of being murdered by the state.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Wilbert Lee and Freddie Pitts, both blacks, were convicted of the robbery and murders of two white gas station attendants. The murders occurred on August 1, 1963 in Port St. Joe, Florida. While no physical evidence linked them to the deaths, the prosecution used their own confessions, which were beaten out of them, and they also used the testimony of an alleged eyewitness. The defendants also suffered from having incompetent defense counsel.

A few weeks after they were sentenced to death, a white man arrested for another gas station robbery confessed to the murder for which Lee and Pitts were convicted. When he learned of this confession, the local sheriff wanted nothing to do with it, saying, "I already got two niggers waiting for the chair in Raiford for those murders." A polygraph examiner who had heard the white man confess took the matter to the press, and soon a new trial was ordered, at which Lee and Pitts were again convicted.

Some time after the second conviction, the alleged eyewitness recanted her testimony and the state Attorney General admitted that the state had unlawfully suppressed evidence. The defendants were released in 1975 when they received a full pardon from Governor Askew, who stated he was "sufficiently convinced that they were innocent." In 1998, the Florida Legislature awarded the defendants \$500,000 each in compensation.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee\\_and\\_Pitts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_and_Pitts) (now removed)

<http://canucwhatic.blogspot.com/p/death-row-meet-exonerated.html>



A six-by-nine-foot cell was home for Willie Lee (above, l.) and Freddie Pitts (r.) for 12 years. They were on Death Row for nine years before former Florida Gov. Reubin Askew pardoned them.

### Wilbert Lee and Freddie Pitts

(left) were beaten, denied legal counsel, and threatened with death if they didn't sign "confessions" for the 1963 robbery and murder of two Port St. Joe gas station attendants.

Within 28 days, an all white jury, white judge, white prosecutor, white policeman -- convicted both of them, sending them off to die in Florida's electric chair. While all this transpired, the real killer, Curtis Adams Jr., a white man who had already been convicted of another murder continued his killing spree.

Florida's governor Reubin Askew, who served from 1971 through 1978, in 1975 approved a full pardon for Freddie Pitts and Wilbert Lee, who had spent 12 years in prison, eight of them on death row for another man's crime . Despite their innocence, news that he was considering the pardon was poorly received in the Panhandle and cost him votes in his 1974 re-election.

At the time, Pitts, 31, and Lee, 40, walked out of prison. The state gave them \$100 each.

***Pulitzer-prizewinning Reporter Gene Miller of the Miami Herald began an investigation that helped win a new trial for Pitts and Lee in 1972. The two men were so hopeful about the outcome that just before their second trip to court, they passed up a chance to join a jailbreak. But Adams refused to repeat his confession on the stand, the tape made by the lie detector expert was barred as hearsay evidence, and the all-white jury took only 90 minutes to find Pitts and Lee guilty of murder all over again. They would have been convicted, said a shaken defense attorney, even "if the Twelve Apostles testified for them." Refusing to give up, Miller\* and others continued to fight until Governor***

*Reubin Askew agreed to order a new investigation a year and a half ago. Askew personally participated in part of the inquiry and sent his legal aide to talk with Adams. He confessed again, recanted and then confessed a third time to Florida Attorney General Robert Shevin.*

*"I thought there was our case and maybe a few others like it. But last fall I went to a conference at Northwestern University in Illinois and found 30 others who were innocent and got released. I was shocked! And there are others. Who knows how many didn't get out because they couldn't get the legal help or had no outside support?" - Wilbert Lee*

<http://www.justicedenied.org/polygraphs.htm>

Justice: Denied -- The Magazine for the Wrongly Convicted  
Polygraphs... A Danger to Innocent People?

By Clara A. Thomas Boggs

In January of 1998, the head of the Justice Committee in San Diego asked us to take advantage of a polygraph offered free by a prosecutor who offered to go public and help those who passed it get publicity to help their cases. I put the matter to Robert Rosenthal, an attorney for my daughter. He said "No Way" should we consider this for our daughter, saying that the possibility for false positives is there especially if a test is highly sensitive. He told us that even a breeze coming into the room could trigger something in a person who has spent so much time in prison and who relives the past on a constant basis. He said his experience is that a person who's been in prison as long as my daughter has can take on guilt that doesn't belong to them. Robert also said that the whole point of my daughter's mental makeup is that Strawser manipulated her because she is emotionally vulnerable to manipulation. He said that an accused person goes on being accused in prison and it makes their minds vulnerable.

Robert said he took a polygraph test years ago, and the machine showed he lied when he told the absolute truth. He doesn't trust the polygraph in any way, believing it sets people up, for there is an infinite variety of responses people may have which may be interpreted as guilt but are not guilty. That a person is innocent doesn't mean he or she is emotionally stable enough for a polygraph. Rosenthal said he doesn't want any of his other clients to take such a test.

Interestingly, it was shortly after the time of the Justice Committee's offer that I learned of Brian Pardo's involvement with Darlie Routier's case and of the conclusions he'd drawn from Darin's failure with the polygraph test, and I asked if anyone knew how to get in touch with him so I could send him Rosenthal's information and an editorial in the Miami Herald. No one knew, but as fate would have it, Mr. Pardo has indirectly turned up in my life through the articles Justice: Denied has done about Routier. The offer of a polygraph for my daughter aroused my interest in these tests and I began to collect information since then. I have excerpted bits and pieces for you about polygraphs here, all with proper attribution when available.

Reading a book review of *May God Have Mercy: A True Story of Crime And Punishment*, about an innocent man who was executed, this line caught my attention: "Despite a phone call from Mother Teresa, Wilder uses the fact that Coleman fails the lie detector test (a result that surprises no one who knows anything about the polygraph) to deny all appeals for mercy, much less clemency, thereby (at least symbolically) pulling the switch himself."

According to several witnesses of the Darin Routier test, the examiner acted as an accuser, hardly the best environment to test someone who's already in stress. Guilt is a feeling that casts a spell over many people's lives whether it's justified or not. One has only to think about a battered child who believes he is guilty for the abuse he receives to understand this. If the administrator of a test has an agenda, it cannot help but surface and color the interaction between him and the person tested. In the case of Darin Routier, the

June 6, 1998, Dallas Morning News reported that Mr. McLemore, Pardo's assistant, said, "The polygraph examiner and Darin were in each other's face. It was a very heated situation."

A "heated situation" is hardly the ideal environment for a test that imposes its own stresses. The burden should be on the tester to be noncommittal and not invested in the outcome.

In November 1997, a Miami Herald editorial, Of lies and justice -- Polygraph Tests, said that a lie detector is only as good as its operator and that some liars can fool machines and operators. It follows that this machine can misinterpret the immense range of human emotion.

"Lie detector" is the common name we use for the polygraph, revealing our naivete more than any truth about it. The polygraph is not infallible, much less an unerring truth machine.

DNA tests are admissible in courts because they are infallible. Polygraph tests have not achieved this success because they are usually unreliable, and are banned as evidence in courts.

The Miami Herald article writer spoke about a former airman who was court-martialed for using drugs, passing bad checks, and going AWOL. He passed a polygraph test in which he denied using illegal drugs and his urine tests were positive for drug use.

Polygraph tests have their uses, but cannot be considered as a way to determine someone's guilt or innocence. If, however, someone claiming innocence passes this test, it warrants looking further into the case for the same reason that we should attend to any claim of innocence. Freddie Pitts and Wilbert Lee used polygraph results to begin a journey that eventually spared their lives and freed them from Florida's Death Row.

Those who distrust polygraph tests have famous company. Sam Reese Sheppard, whose father's murder case inspired the movie *The Fugitive*, said his father did not take the test because he thought the people conducting the test would be prejudiced against him. The media at the time, however, crucified Dr. Sam for not taking the test. He was eventually vindicated. Dr. Sam Sheppard, now deceased, convicted more than 40 years ago and sentenced to life in prison for the murder of his wife, won a new trial and was acquitted after twelve years of legal battles. His son, Mr. Sheppard, said that after authorities had everyone around his father take a lie-detector test, they said, in effect, "Aha, he did not take a lie detector test, he must be guilty."

Mr. William G. Hagerbaumer, a man who has made it his avocation to study the reasons people are wrongly convicted in child sex abuse cases, wrote, "The basic problem with the idea of using the polygraph to detect deception, is that it does not detect deception. It detects emotional responses in the person to whom the polygraph is attached. People may respond emotionally whether or not they are being deceptive. People may fail to respond emotionally whether or not they are being deceptive.

"The studies assume that a polygraph detects deception and then they attempt to measure successful detection of deception, successful detection of non deception, false positives, and false negatives. As there is no direct correlation between emotions generated and deception, there is a wide variation in test results. . . ."

"It is likely that many people will have an emotional response when they attempt to deceive. It is important to realize that there are many other factors that lead to emotional responses. It is also important to realize that not everyone has an emotional response

when attempting to deceive."

"Nothing definitive can be said about the results of a polygraph examination. They are used, however, to intimidate people into being more truthful, and can also be used to intimidate people into making false confessions." Another thing to consider is that a sociopath may not believe he did anything wrong and will register as telling the truth when he is lying. Most lawyers can tell us about a client or two who can deceive the machine.

Ian Begg, now a Professor Emeritus at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, where he was part of the psychology department, wrote to the Witch Hunt Forum: "Polygraphs are recordings of changes in skin conductance/resistance when certain questions are asked, compared to a baseline when other questions are asked. If the change is big enough, the polygrapher might signal the response "deceptive." The basic theory underlying the use of polygraphs is that whenever a person lies, there are physiological changes in the body. Even if the theory is right, in which case the machine could detect intentional lies, honestly mistaken answers are not lies. Even at its best, the machine cannot detect departures from external truths; we need a time machine for that. . . ."

"Polygraphs are not lie detectors, and amytal is not truth serum. These are catchy names, but they imply more than the techniques can deliver. The main use of polygraphs is to bully ignorant people into making confessions. Asking "are you willing to take a lie detector test on your answers" can cause some people to disclose more information, or change their answers. . . ."

"In short, polygraphs are just 'witness demeanor' dressed up in a white coat. Neither has sufficient demonstrated discriminative validity to detect even intentional lies. And to repeat, no procedure based on present behaviors can determine historical truth. The concern of the current list is most often not with the sincerity of the complainant, but with the reliability of the "memories" as indicants of external reality. Psychologists and polygraphers cannot provide that information. And courts can't either, unless they have corroboration of the factual allegations."

(Since Professor Begg retired in 1998, he has been completing the licensure (articles and bar admissions) for criminal law, working in the real world defending real people charged with crimes.)

Most people don't understand that a polygraph is only a machine that reads physiological responses, such as heart rate, body sweat, and is not a device that miraculously "knows" when someone lies. Poor responses can occur for many reasons. Some people can trick the machine, polygraph results are subject to operator error, and people respond to stress in many different ways. Law officers have been known to trick suspects by using a mimeograph machine that ejects a paper with the report that the suspect is lying. Usually the accused is asked to come down to the local police department and submit to polygraph. The person who is ignorant about polygraphs will often eagerly go to the station and let himself be hooked up to the machine believing he'll pass.

Not likely. Police will also often conduct an intimidating interrogation while a polygraph test is in progress, and suspects have reported that officers standing by would pressure them the whole time. Then when the suspect fails the test, the police have their "probable cause."

The number of people who report telling the truth on polygraph tests only to find themselves called liars, plus those who freely admit to having lied and gotten away with

it, is troubling, especially since so many people seem to be impressed when told that someone passed or didn't pass the test. There's also the wrinkle that a person will respond truthfully when he or she believes something untrue. If I believe something, it is true for me. So it seems to be with most people. The truth is not established, but my belief is recorded as an honest answer. There is also the fact that people may respond with anger, sorrow and agitation when the subject of the test has to do with a crime. Add to that each person's trigger words, like mother, God, sex, and any number of things, and the unreliability of these tests rises.

People sometimes have emotional responses when they deliberately lie and sometimes do not emotionally respond to telling the truth. A polygraph machine is simply not a lie detector. It will register false positives and false negatives and will vary from one test to the next.

To use polygraphs as lie detectors is to indulge in pseudo science. There is no way to tell if someone is lying or telling the truth if we can't match it against hard evidence and in that case the test is useless because you have the evidence.

The problem with the polygraph's electro-dermal response (EDR) is that there is extreme variance from one person to another on whether or not, and to what extent, mental issues manifest in a body response. We all know people who react in extreme ways to both positive and negative stimulation, while others seemingly have no physical response to the most extreme situations. Highly self-critical people are a case in point. They would tend to have extreme EDR reactions to everything.

Unfortunately, the fact is that we are all impacted when an accusation is made and tend to believe, rather than disbelieve it. We will only make progress when we can assume the stance of a wise parent and work at discovering the truth.

At the June 1999 American Psychological Society annual conference in Denver, Colorado, several studies presented should make us rethink the way we view lying, and our ability to judge it.

According to the studies, one in 10 people who lie are convinced they're telling the truth, raising fears that some people are immune to lie detector tests and do not show the tell-tale signs of a liar.

Dr. Danielle Polage from the University of Washington did two studies of 140 people, showing that people with a good imagination can convince themselves, after being told to lie, as part of a control group, that they are telling the truth.

The findings of the study show that a majority of people will not be affected by lying about an event, only strengthening their memory of the truth, but a full 10 per cent came to believe that the lied-about event was true and later denied that they'd lied.

The issue of people who make false confessions can be especially pitiful. They may lie when their defenses are worn down or they think they may get less prison time. The irony is that after they live with their lie, they come to believe it.

The congenital liar lays another pitfall for us. Who has not been deceived by a clever liar? They look us in the eye with candor, earnestly, and we believe. People are generally convinced that they can tell when someone's lying. The facts refute their naive belief in their own abilities. Many studies have been done about our infinite ability to be deceived. There is no substitute for investigation and sober thought. Our emotions will mislead us too often to count on them.

There is no magic truth serum. There is no magic machine that can infallibly separate lies

and truth. Let us be humble in the face of our own certainty.

Bertrand Russell: "The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubts."

"The great masses of the people will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one." -- Adolf Hitler -- "Mein Kampf"

<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/node/1916>

Wilbert Lee, 64, and Freddie Pitts, 55  
Convicted 1963; RELEASED 1975

**THE CRIME:** Juries twice convicted Lee and Pitts of killing two gas station attendants at Port St. Joe in the Florida Panhandle. The case was built on confessions, which Pitts and Lee said were beaten out of them. No physical evidence linked them to the crime. Joe Townsend, the polygraph operator who extracted the confessions, later came under fire for coercing confessions from suspects in other cases.

**HOW THEY GOT OUT:** Another man — sentenced to life for another homicide — confessed to the murders. Polygraph operator Warren Holmes reported the confession to Miami Herald reporter Gene Miller, whose stories helped prompt a second trial. Again, the jury convicted Pitts and Lee. In 1975, then-Gov. Reubin Askew pardoned the two. “I am sufficiently convinced that they are innocent,” Askew said.

**WHERE THEY ARE NOW:** Lee and Pitts, who met at a moonshine party at Lee’s house the night of the crime, became like brothers. After moving to Miami, they found a network of friends and lawyers to help them adjust. “When you step into a free society, it’s like stepping on a merry-go-round,” says Lee, whose family left him while he was on death row. He started working for the state, counseling troubled juveniles, a job he later lost because of his felony conviction. He was then hired to counsel inmates in Miami-Dade’s jails. Pitts, who hasn’t seen his two daughters since prison, worked for a while in security but preferred the outdoors. Now a truck driver, he is married and lives in Miami Shores. Last year, the Legislature awarded each man \$500,000 — the first time it has ordered restitution for persons wrongly sentenced to death. Both men, frequent lecturers against the death penalty, say the money won’t buy back the lost time. “It’s like giving the monkey some peanuts,” Lee scoffs.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2005/jun/18/local/me-miller18>

## Obituaries

June 18, 2005|From Associated Press

Gene Miller, a longtime reporter and editor for the Miami Herald, who won two Pulitzer Prizes for stories that led to the release of four people wrongly convicted of murder, died Friday. He was 76.

Miller died at his home near South Miami after suffering from cancer, his family told the Herald for a story posted on its website.

"He was the soul and the conscience of our newsroom," Herald reporter Martin Merzer wrote. "He coached novice reporters. He turned butterfingereed writers into prize winners. He challenged senior editors when he thought they were wrong, which was pretty often." "Gene lived life out loud," said Herald Executive Editor Tom Fiedler. "He had a booming laugh and no tolerance for the intolerant and the pompous."

Miller worked at the Herald for 48 years, retiring in 2001. His first Pulitzer was in 1967 for two investigations that freed prisoners Joe Shea and Mary Katherin Hampton, who were convicted of separate murders they didn't commit.

He won his second Pulitzer in 1976, after eight years of reporting about the case of Freddie Pitts and Wilbert Lee. The two were sentenced to death in 1963 after being convicted of the murders of two gas station attendants in the Florida Panhandle town of Port St. Joe.

A third man ended up confessing, and a polygraph expert told Miller about the case. The Herald eventually published 130 articles about the case, most by Miller. He reported that police officers had found no evidence so they had beaten confessions out of Pitts and Lee. The attention ultimately led state Atty. Gen. Robert Shevin and Gov. Reubin Askew to free Pitts and Lee in 1975. Years later, Pitts and Lee were awarded \$500,000 from the state of Florida.

Miller was born in Evansville, Ind., on Sept. 16, 1928. He played the oboe as boy. He graduated from Indiana University with a degree in journalism in 1950. He served in Army counterintelligence during the Korean War years.

As a reporter, he worked for the Journal-Gazette in Fort Wayne, Ind.; the Wall Street Journal; and the News Leader in Richmond, Va., before joining the Miami Herald.

In a self-written obituary that he had left in the Herald's clip file, Miller said he was fired by the Wall Street Journal because he "lacked respect for the price of crude cottonseed oil."

In his obituary, Miller suggested that "in lieu of flowers, have a martini." His family suggested that contributions be made to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, 1101 Wilson Blvd., Suite 1100, Arlington, VA 22209.

Survivors include his wife, Caroline Heck Miller; four children from a previous marriage; a stepson; and eight grandchildren.

[http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2001-04-26/news/0104260045\\_1\\_sexual-activity-polygraph-abuse-victims](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2001-04-26/news/0104260045_1_sexual-activity-polygraph-abuse-victims)

### Lie Test Backs Abuse Claims

April 26, 2001|By ELLIS BERGER Miami Bureau and Staff Writer Jose Dante Parra Herrera contributed to this report.

MIAMI — The confessed murderer of a nun at Holy Cross Academy has passed a lie-detector test in which he was questioned about being "subjected to sexual acts" by the school's two top clerics, according to a copy of the report obtained by the Sun-Sentinel.

Veteran polygraph expert Warren D. Holmes conducted the examination last week of Mykhaylo Kofel, 18, the Ukrainian monastic student charged with the murder of Sister Michelle Lewis, 39.

Miami-Dade police sex crimes detectives launched an investigation into Kofel's allegations of molestation the day he was arrested. They have been joined by the state Department of Children & Families and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, which have opened their own investigations into the southwest Miami-Dade County parochial school.

Allegations of sexual abuse surfaced as Kofel confessed to the March 25 murder. He told detectives he was molested by Abbot Gregory F.G. Wendt, Holy Cross' headmaster, and by the Rev. Damian J.A. Gibault, the school's supervising principal, during his almost five years at the academy.

Wendt, 56, and Gibault, 44, continue to deny the allegations through their attorneys and the public relations firm of Wragg & Casas, which declined to comment Wednesday. Kofel was among five Ukrainian monastic students who lived with Gibault in a small monastery on the Holy Cross campus. Wendt recruited the boys from Ukraine, telling their families he would train them as monks and educate them at his school.

Gibault tried to adopt Kofel, who refused to cooperate and told his parents in Ukraine not to sign the papers. Wendt did adopt another of the Holy Cross monastic students, Petro Terenta, now 20. The boys' families were told the adoptions were for immigration purposes.

Kofel's attorney, Assistant Public Defender Edith Georgi, commissioned the polygraph examination. In a two-page report, Holmes said it is "the opinion of this examiner that Mr. Kofel did not lie in his verbal responses to the pertinent test questions."

Georgi has also hired a psychologist who specializes in the behavior of sex abuse victims. "We believe we've validated the allegations by Mr. Kofel on two levels, initially by an expert psychologist and now with a well-respected and reliable polygrapher," she said Wednesday.

As the polygraph examination got under way, Kofel provided "some background information" in which he told Holmes that "Wendt initiated the sexual activity" by fondling him through his clothing, the report said. Kofel was 14 at the time.

"He stated that the Abbot Wendt did this on at least four separate occasions during his first year of attendance at Holy Cross Academy," Holmes wrote.

Gibault "engaged in sexual activity with him on at least 15 separate occasions

commencing when he was in the eighth grade," Holmes said Kofel told him before he began the test.

"He said these acts created anger and despondency to a point where he considered and attempted suicide several weeks prior to his arrest," Holmes wrote.

Once Kofel was attached to the polygraph instrument, he was asked four specific questions related to the preliminary interview. Kofel was asked if Wendt fondled him at least four times through his clothes, if Gibault had sex with him at least three times, and if Gibault performed another sexual act on Kofel at least four other times.

Kofel answered yes to all three questions.

Kofel answered "no" to the fourth and final question: "Are you now lying about the sexual acts committed either by Abbot Wendt or Father Gibault?"

Holmes concluded that the results show "no physiological reactions indicative of deception."

The questioning did not address the murder or Kofel's allegations of abuse by his own father. In his confession to police, Kofel said he wanted to come to the United States for religious reasons and to escape his father's abuse.

"He was beating up my mother, and basically abusing her and me, too. And also sexually abused me about five times," Kofel said in his confession.

Sun-Sentinel correspondents in Ukraine could not immediately reach Kofel's parents, who do not have a telephone, for a response.

Holmes is a prominent polygraph examiner who has worked on a number of widely publicized cases. He helped clear Freddie Pitts and Wilbert Lee, two black men convicted of a 1963 murder by an all-white North Florida jury. They were pardoned after spending more than nine years on Death Row and compensated with \$500,000 each from the Florida Legislature.

Polygraph results generally are not admissible in court, unless both sides agree. But they could be compelling reasons for leniency in a murder case in which prosecutor Gail Levine has reserved the right to seek the death penalty, although a final decision has not been made by her office.

Miami police spokesman Delrish Moss, a former homicide detective, said a polygraph test is only as good as the person who administers it.

"The purpose of the polygraph is more one of elimination," Moss said. "There is a lot of science to it. I don't have a lot of confidence in them, but I know people who swear by them."

He said he knows of suspects who failed the test but were cleared by the evidence and the testimony of others. It is also possible, he said, for a guilty suspect to lie and pass the test.

Sister Michelle's murder has almost been overshadowed of late as 14 lawyers, representing Holy Cross, Wendt, Gibault, Terenta, three more monastic students, and other potential witnesses contest virtually every aspect of the investigation.

Holy Cross' carrier, Wisconsin-based Church Mutual Insurance Co., is paying the attorneys' fees.

One of the lawyers even has his own attorney: Joseph Blonsky, who routinely handles legal issues for Holy Cross and is listed as either the registered agent or an officer in three

corporations involving Wendt and Gibault.

The prosecution and defense want to question him about corporate activities, but Blonsky has claimed attorney-client privilege.

Blonsky is not listed as a board member or registered agent in Wendt and Gibault's most recent corporation, although he drew up and filed the documents submitted to the secretary of state.

In this corporation, Holy Protection Monastery, the registered agent and director is Wendt's adopted son, Terenta, who is also named as a director. The only other officers are Wendt as president and director, and Gibault as vice president, secretary, treasurer and director.

The corporation was created in 1999, shortly after Terenta turned 19. It is the only one of four active corporations involving Wendt and Gibault that does not include Blonsky as either registered agent or member of the board.

Blonsky has not responded to questions over the past two weeks about Terenta's involvement in the corporation, his adoption by Wendt or Holy Cross' split with the Byzantine Catholic church hierarchy that it once reported to.

According to the articles of incorporation, Holy Protection Monastery was formed to "establish an Eastern Christian community of prayer, which exists to provide worship services for its members and their visitors."

It also will "promote monastic vocations and institutions ... facilities for those wishing to be instructed in the monastic tradition ... accommodations for individuals who may wish to participate in religious retreats or days of recollection ... an infirmary ... spiritual books and religious articles pertaining to Eastern Christianity."

The address listed for the corporation's office is a single-family house at 3471 SW 24th St. in Miami. The owner is listed as Christine Wendt, the abbot's mother.

The house appears to have been vacant for at least several months. The grass has been cut, but an open note in the door wishes a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to Christine Wendt, who now lives at Holy Cross Academy.

Staff Writer Jose Dante Parra Herrera contributed to this report.

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