Cemetery vandalized

St. John's officials: Remains undisturbed during desecration

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LAFAYETTE — Vandals cracked tombs, broke crosses and damaged marble statues in the cemetery of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, but the remains of the buried were not disturbed, said the Rev. Keith DeRouen, pastor of the church.

"We're in the tedious process of trying to locate who is responsible for these tombs to make sure they understand the remains have not been tampered with," DeRouen said.

The earliest tombs in the cemetery date to the early 1820s. Police said 26 tombs sustained an estimated $20,000 in damage.

The destruction probably occurred Thursday night, said Lafayette Police Department spokesman Cpl. Mark Francis. Investigators have few clues, but suspect it could be transients, he said. Anyone with information is asked to call CrimeStoppers at 232-TIPS.

Francis said homeless people have been known to sleep in the cemetery on occasion. A broken whiskey bottle was found at the scene, he said.

"The tragedy of course is some of these are very old tombs," said DeRouen. "The carved marble statuary is very difficult to replace. Anybody could have done this."

DeRouen said security at the cemetery has been stepped up within the past year. New lights were installed and the gates to the cemetery remain locked after hours. Police will increase their patrols around the cemetery, he said.

"It's disheartening," DeRouen said. "It's the place where people come to remember the blessing that their loved one has been in their lives. To have that disturbed by this senseless act of destruction robs the place of the peace that it is supposed to be. ... It represents everything that is ugly in the world. The cemetery is supposed to be a place of peace and it is certainly an important place of our faith."

One of the more than 25 graves desecrated in the cemetery of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist on Thursday night.