News



The bell tower of Most Blessed Sacrament Church in Franklin Lakes, N.J., is seen standing Dec. 12, 2019, after a fire destroyed the rest of the church the previous morning. One person suspected of arson is in custody, officials said. The structure was gutted by the flames, and as the news spread through the small town, neighbors, some of whom have been a part of the congregation for decades, flocked to the scene. (CNS/Octavio Duran)

by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

FRANKLIN LAKES, N.J. — December 13, 2019

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

After a fire destroyed Most Blessed Sacrament Church in Franklin Lakes in the early hours of Dec. 11, the suspected arsonist was arrested. He was receiving burn treatment at a local hospital prior to his court hearing.

"We are thankful for the efforts of the police, firefighters and public safety workers who immediately responded to calls and battled the blaze during frigid conditions to try and save Most Blessed Sacrament Church," said a Dec. 12 statement from the Newark Archdiocese.

James Mayers, a 26-year-old local resident, was arrested at the scene of the fire that had been set with a cigarette lighter and gasoline. He was charged with first-degree aggravated arson and third-degree burglary, according to a report by NJ.com, a digital news content provider and website in New Jersey.

The archdiocesan statement said: "We are moving forward to ensure parish life continues and we are currently identifying alternative sites for Masses, liturgies and parish activities. We ask everyone to please pray for all who have been affected by this incident."

Parishioners gathered outside the charred remains of the church Dec. 12 remembering the importance the nearly 60-year-old parish had for many of them.

"Every family memory is wrapped up in that church," Diann Isola, a parish member for more than 50 years, told NJ.com. "It's a very sad day."

Isola and her husband, who were married at the church 30 years ago, said it was beautiful. "It's just a shame – an absolute shame," she said about the fire.

The parish, which serves more than 2,000 families, was founded in 1960 by the Archdiocese of Newark.

The adjacent parish school, the Academy of the Most Blessed Sacrament, was not harmed by the fire, but the school was closed Dec. 11.

Franklin Lakes Mayor Frank Bivona said the church fire affects "more than parishioners," but that the congregation will "rise from the ashes, stronger than ever."

"I think the best thing we can all do right now is to say a prayer for them," he said in an interview. "Our focus will be on helping Most Blessed Sacrament, and its parishioners, get back on their feet."

Advertisement