News



Fire damage is seen at Blessed Sacrament Church in downtown Regina, Saskatchewan, after a suspected arsonist attacked the parish church Feb. 9, 2024, and was still at large. (OSV News/Courtesy Fr. James Hentges)

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A suspected arsonist struck at Blessed Sacrament Church in downtown Regina, Saskatchewan, Feb. 9.

Security cameras caught the culprit in the act in the early hours of the day, but the perpetrator has yet to be apprehended.

Fr. James Hentges, pastor of Blessed Sacrament, told local media he was not in the church at the time, but modern technology alerted him to the fire.

"The alarm went off immediately when it detected smoke," said Hentges. "My Apple iPods picked up the alarm and alerted me … that there was an alarm going off in my home."

The 48-second video the priest posted to his personal Instagram account, jameshentges, shows a masked perpetrator pouring contents from a fuel container near the front entrance of the church rectory and the parish office. The suspect then made several failed attempts before igniting the contents of the can. The entranceway quickly became shrouded in flames.

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According to a news release from the Regina Police Service, officers were dispatched around 3:40 a.m. to respond to the blaze after receiving a tip from a passerby. Firefighters were already on site when police arrived.

The pictures provided to The Catholic Register, Canada's national Catholic newspaper based in Toronto, show that the outer portion of the door was charred. According to the Archdiocese of Regina, there was some smoke throughout the rectory, but the church itself escaped from harm.

"Our crews managed to contain the fire to the exterior," said Gord Hewitt, Regina's deputy fire chief. "Internally, it was just smoke, which we managed to ventilate (from) the property."

"The parish is grateful that no one was home at the time and there were no further injuries or damage," said Deacon Eric Gurash, the Regina Archdiocese's director of communications and evangelization. "Authorities are investigating the incident, and the church community is grateful for the swift response of the Regina firefighters and the safety measures in place that helped mitigate the situation."

Hewitt confirmed that his team conducted "a thorough investigation" and determined "it was an intentionally set fire." The fire department is providing details to the Regina Police Service to assist in its probe.

The damage and cleanup forced Blessed Sacrament to cancel all Masses until Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14.

The parish and the police were seeking the public's help in identifying the suspect.