

# Hrep News

*"If nothing else, value the truth."*

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Special Edition

## Security guard sets fire to Jesuit Chapel

Damage estimated at \$100,00; apparent motive was heroism

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Around 5:45 last Friday afternoon, Jim Knapp, S.J. was sitting on his back porch when saw the fire alarms flashing inside the school. Moments later, Knapp received a call from the security company notifying him of a fire in the North American Martyrs Chapel. Knapp rushed up to the chapel, arriving at the same time as the fire department. By the time he got there, the fire was burning high on the right side of the altar, the flames reaching the ceiling.

In fighting the fire, the firemen preserved the chapel as much as they could, causing little water damage. Knapp noted that the firemen seemed to understand the holiness of the chapel, and thus fought the fire very carefully. One fireman rescued the tabernacle, which was



The charred surface of the altar after Friday's fire. Char marks like those on the side edge (in the center of the picture) suggested arson.

in imminent danger from the flames.

Knapp's appreciation for the firemen's preservation of the chapel turned out to be a great understatement. Firemen actually pried burning pieces of wood from the chapel wall and threw them out a nearby window. By taking this quick action and using little water, they preserved the beautiful carved wooden statues of the North American Martyrs. These eight statues, as well as the altar, have been in the chapel since 1947, when the Mother's Club donated the ornate pieces to SLUH.

When the fire was extinguished, the authorities began to try to determine how the fire was started. The security guard on duty, Chuck McIntyre, spoke with custodian Harold Nelson. Nelson recalled speaking with McIntyre a mere

fifteen minutes before the fire, and that McIntyre told him that he "needed excitement." When Nelson heard about the fire, he said his "first inclination was that he (started the fire.)"

According to Nelson, he told McIntyre that the authorities would easily catch the suspect because of the security cameras in the building. Following this comment, Nelson says that McIntyre ran off toward the switchboard. Other reports confirm that McIntyre tried to rewind the video camera to erase the footage of the fire, even though there are no cameras in the chapel. Nelson said only that "something just told (him)" that McIntyre had started the fire.

In response to the guard's strange actions and suspicions about the fire's cause, the firemen called St. Louis Police Department arson detective Tom Seymour.

In addition to McIntyre's nervous reactions, several details about the fire gave credence to the theory of arson.

First, the arson squad conducted thorough investigations, comparing the tabernacle candles in the North American Martyrs Chapel to similar ones in the student chapel in the school to shore up their suspicions of arson. McIntyre told investigators that the candle fell over, but scorch marks all around the dressing of the altar suggested that someone deliberately started the fire.

Second, the heat of the flame was also unusual. If the candle alone had started the

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The drywall behind the destroyed altar panel.

## FIRE

(from 1)

fire, it would have made a fairly low heat blaze. Instead, the flames were hot enough to melt the glass in which the candle was held. Investigators believe that this increased heat was the result of a fueled fire.



Above: Workers clean the chapel ceiling Monday. Bottom right: More cleanup.

After the firemen stopped the blaze, Seymour began to question almost every person who was in the building at the time of the fire. McIntyre allegedly confessed to starting the fire during his interview. Seymour recalled that McIntyre spoke extensively about his grandfather's death, becoming distraught as he did so. According to Seymour, McIntyre said that he was angry with God for the death of his grandfather and that starting the fire was a sort of revenge against God.

Others have speculated that McIntyre wanted to gain a promotion by secretly starting a fire and then reporting it, coming off in the end as a hero. Arson investigators often refer to a "hero syndrome" as an explanation for such an act. At this point, however, no one can say for sure what motivated McIntyre. Principal Robert Bannister noted, "It is disturbing to see that people are in this mental situation to do something like this."

After his confession, police arrested McIntyre, charging him with arson. SLUH President Paul Sheridan, S.J. says that the school will press charges. SLUH's security contractor, Sentry Security, will be

liable for the damage.

In light of recent and increasing criticism of SLUH's security system, many wonder if this latest incident will bring about change. Vice President for Administration Brian Sweeney says that SLUH will create a Director of Security position. This director would choose a security contractor and focus more attention on security than there is now. Until then, Sweeney says, SLUH will most likely continue the contract with Sentry. "We don't know if we'll stick with (Sentry), because there have certainly been numerous incidents over the years. But we've had other companies and they've been just as bad."

Sentry Security did express its regret for the damage. Sentry's owner, Dick Mueller, said that the company was fully insured and would pay for the damages. In his defense, Mueller cited Sentry's reputation, saying, "We've been in business for over 30 years...we represent national and international companies all over the metropolitan area." Despite Sentry's reputation, SLUH has had a flood of different security guards from Sentry. It is estimated that in the 8 years that SLUH has employed Century Security, almost 50 different guards have come and gone.

Besides the arson charges and security concerns, SLUH still must repair the chapel. The cleanup effort began on Monday; SLUH recruited Woodard Fire & Water Restoration to restore the chapel to its previous beauty. Sheridan estimated that the restoration would take a month to complete.

It will not come cheaply, however. When the crew tore up the rug to replace it because of fire damage, they discovered 50-year-old asbestos floor tiling. Though not a danger to the school, the asbestos must be removed, which will cost between \$50,000 and \$75,000, putting total repair estimates near \$100,000.

The restoration company estimates that the asbestos cleanup will take around a week. After that,

about 80 hours of cleaning and refurbishing work remain. "We see all kinds of things from minor damage to houses being completely burned down, so this is pretty minor as far as damage goes...but what was lost obviously makes it more important," said Woodard crew chief Paul Long.

Art teacher and interior design specialist John Mueller will help restore the paneling, rugs and wallpaper of the chapel. The restorations will attempt to come as close as they can to bringing the chapel back to its original state, using the same manufacturer that made the old panel (in 1947) to make the new one.

For the Jesuit community, the damage to the chapel means the violation of a sacred place. Knapp said, "The chapel is a beautiful place...I have had lots of important experiences in my Jesuit life there." Knapp said he is especially glad that the wooden statues were not damaged. He calls them the "really irreplaceable" items in the chapel. Knapp added, "Theologically speaking, God is still with us no matter what."

*(Interviews for this story were conducted by Andrew Ivers, Kevin Moore, Brian Kane, Patrick Meek, and Matt Hoffman.)*

### PNNightbeat

SLUH Lacrosse defeated CBC 9-8 last night in the state quarterfinals. They will play DeSmet in the semifinal on Wednesday at 8 p.m. at Soccer Park.

