

Dekalb church fire ruled arson

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A fire that gutted the parish hall and smaller sanctuary of a Memorial Drive church in DeKalb County early Thursday was arson, investigators said.

Georgia Insurance Commissioner John Oxendine offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of suspects in the fire that severely damaged Brazos de Amor Church at 5723 Memorial Drive near Stone Mountain, as well as a July 18 fire at another DeKalb church.

Oxendine said both fires were set, but there is no evidence linking them. The other church was Lucas Temple True Church of God in Christ on Glendale Road.

"Anybody that will intentionally set fire to a house of worship is an extreme risk and does not need to be left on the street. That person has a total disregard for our society," Oxendine said at a news conference outside the church.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is assisting in the investigation.

The fire, which broke out around 6 a.m. Thursday, gutted the church's parish hall, Sunday school rooms and a smaller sanctuary used by a separate congregation. The main sanctuary in the 200-member church suffered minimal water and smoke damage, fire officials said.

The fire had "multiple origins," Oxendine said, though he refused to say how many places in the church had been targeted by arsonists or what fuel had been used.

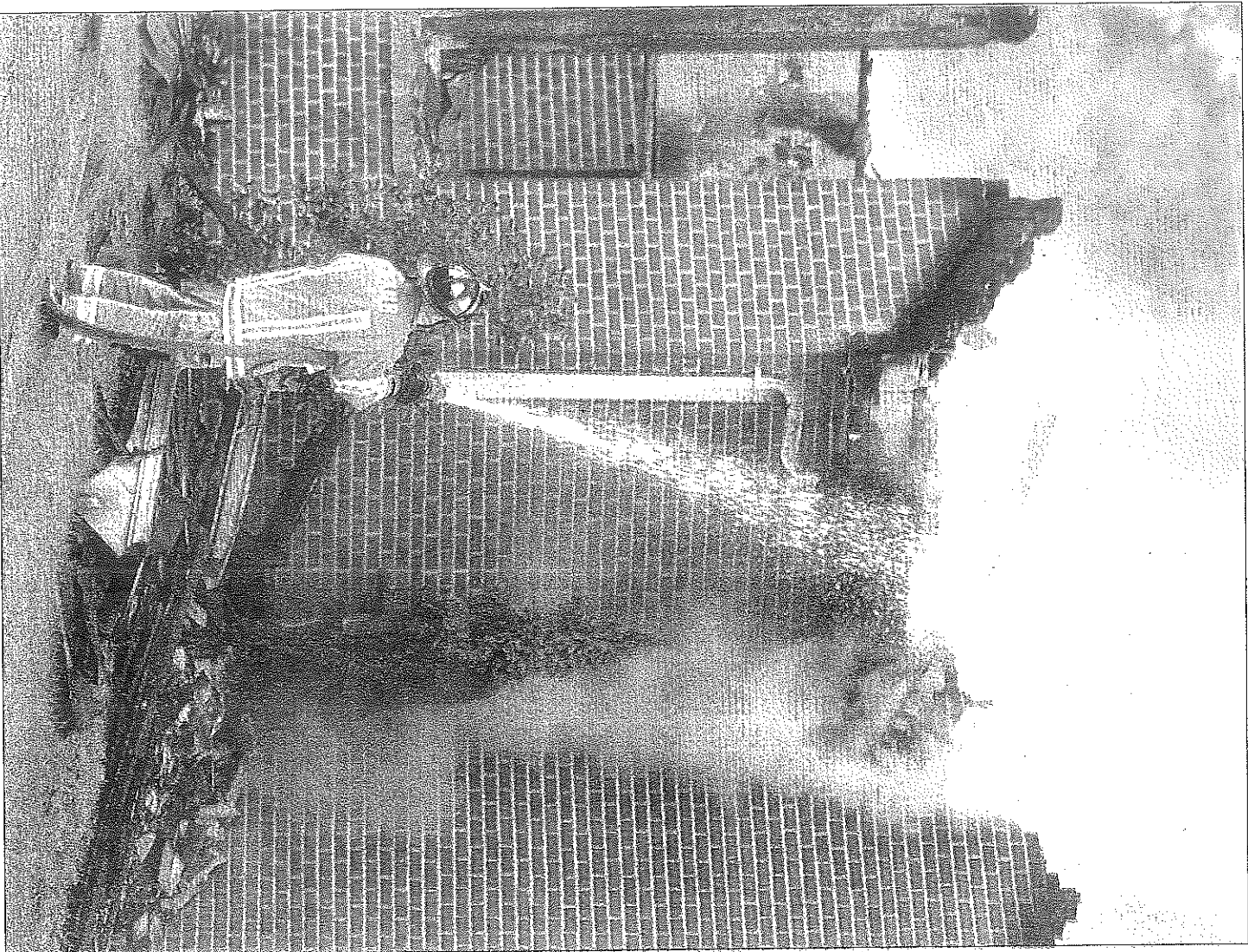
The blaze ripped through hallways of the parish hall, burning through the roof. Items spared included a sign saying: "Bienvenidos a Brazos de Amor (Welcome to the Arms of Love)."

"The only thing that was spared was our sanctuary," said church leader Amy Alcorita. "I know God is going to use this to lift us up."

Egle Osoro said members come from as far away as Marietta and Sandy Springs. Osoro, a Venezuelan, said the worshippers are mostly immigrants representing countries throughout Latin America.

The Rev. Jerry Alcorita, pastor of the Southern Baptist church, said the church is insured and will be rebuilt. He vowed to hold services there Sunday, possibly on the lawn.

Staff writers Brenden Sager, Mike Morris and Bill Montgomery contributed to this article.



Photos by JOHN SPINK / Staff

A DeKalb County firefighter hoses a hot spot Thursday after fire broke out at Brazos de Amor Church at 5723 Memorial Drive, gutting the parish hall, meeting rooms and a small sanctuary.



Elva Alcorita (left), wife of pastor Jerry Alcorita, hugs daughter Anna Darias outside Brazos de Amor Church, where a fire broke out about 6 a.m. Thursday. Jerry Alcorita vowed to hold services at the church Sunday, possibly on the front lawn, because of smoke and water damage to the main sanctuary.