

Fire destroys Danbury church

Robert Miller Updated 7:32 pm, Saturday, June 29, 2013

DANBURY -- St. Nicholas Church, founded in the city 90 years ago, was decimated by fire Saturday afternoon. "My guess is the church is totaled," said Fire Chief Geoff Herald as fire crews from out the area shot cascades of water over its collapsed roof and into the gold-dome church on Pembroke Road.

The Rev. John Cigan, the church's pastor, who had held services in the church Saturday morning, sobbed as he watched firefighters battle the blaze and was too overcome with emotion to speak about the loss. "It's awful," said church member Donna Stelzel, as steam and gray smoke clouded the blue sky. "I came here to pray. All I can do is cry."



Firefighters rushed to the scene about 2 p.m. Saturday after receiving a call about the blaze. Volunteer units from throughout the area joined the Danbury department at the scene.

After firefighters had the blaze under control, they continued to pour water into the church to make sure the fire was extinguished. Water poured out of St. Nicholas' front door and cascaded down the church's front steps. Firefighters had to break the church's stained-glass windows to get water inside. "I wish I didn't have to look," church member Steve Sedlak said. "I helped build that church."





St. Nicholas Church is a Byzantine Catholic Church. While it uses the rites of the Greek Orthodox Church, it is part of the Roman Catholic Church.

The church first was located on Roberts Avenue near Western Connecticut State University in 1923. Having outgrown that small chapel, it moved to its new location on Pembroke Road and opened its doors to parishioners in 1996.

Stelzel said the church brought some of the elements of Roberts Avenue -- including some stained glass windows -- and installed them into the new church. Stelzel said the Pembroke Street church was beautiful. Like other Orthodox churches, it had a screen of icons in front of the altar.



But Herald said when churches catch on fire, they're notoriously hard to control. "They have lots of open space, lots of surfaces," he said. Mayor Mark Boughton was at the scene Saturday to both watch the firefighters and to console Ciggan and other parishioners. "Thankfully, no one was hurt," Boughton said. Boughton also said he thinks the church will move quickly to rebuild. "It's a vital, busy congregation," he said.

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