

# Explosion causes large fire at Bonners Ferry Catholic church



A scene from the fire at St. Ann's Catholic Church in Bonners Ferry Thursday morning. (Boundary County Emergency Management / Courtesy)

## SR staff reports

A fire early Thursday morning destroyed St. Ann's Catholic Church in Bonners Ferry.

Christian Welp, a spokesman for the Diocese of Boise, said fire started was reported early Thursday. The diocese does not have any information about the cause of the fire.

"The damage is pretty extensive," Welp said.

He said it's too early to say how long it might take the church to rebuild.

The fire is under investigation for arson by the Idaho Fire Marshall's Office, and evidence has been collected from the church, the Boundary County Sheriff's Office reported in a news release.

The church, 6712 El Paso St., was engulfed in flames by the time emergency crews arrived about 1 a.m., the sheriff's office said.

Mick Mellett, the director of Bonners Ferry Funeral Home and a local firefighter, was called to the church about 1:15 a.m. He has attended the church since 1978.

“It’s devastating that the church has burned,” he said. “It’s a total loss.”

He said the building has been extensively remodeled in the last 10 to 15 years.

The fire comes less than two months after St. Ann’s and Trinity Lutheran Church were vandalized.

Pastor Andy Hinderlie of Trinity Lutheran said that he noticed vandalism in his church on the morning of Feb. 23 when he saw that a Christmas tree that had been cut to resemble a cross had been turned upside down.

A framed picture of Jesus was broken and his face was gauged. A cross on a baptismal font was broken off. A calligraphy sign quoted a Bible verse was sliced.

“Almost all the crosses that could be were turned upside down,” he said. “What we felt was more concern for the person who did it.”

Hinderlie said his church has offered to let St. Anne’s use its facilities while it rebuilds.

*This story is developing and will be updated.*