

May 23, 2023

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Douglas Fire Department Responds to Multiple Fires at Local Historic Churches

Douglas, AZ (May 23, 2023) - The Douglas Fire Department (DFD) addressed a series of fire incidents yesterday morning, with the first report received at approximately 10:50 AM, originating from the intersection of 11th Street and D Avenue.

Upon arrival, DFD discovered visible smoke emerging from the St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Fire crews immediately launched into intensive firefighting operations. While battling the blaze, a separate structure fire was reported on the 1200 block of 23rd Street, prompting DFD to request on-scene assistance from the Pirtleville and Sunnyside Fire Departments. DFD also contacted the Cochise County Office of Emergency Management to ensure standby availability of additional resources. Swift action from the Pirtleville and Sunnyside Fire Departments ensured the situation was promptly addressed.

Simultaneously, smoke was detected emanating from a swamp cooler atop the First Presbyterian Church located at 10th Street and D Avenue, adjacent to St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. The intensity of the smoke rapidly escalated, leading fire crews to initiate aggressive firefighting operations at this second site.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church unfortunately suffered substantial structural damage due to a roof collapse, leading to what appears as a complete loss. Meanwhile, fire crews maintained their effort at the First Presbyterian Church, which experienced substantial fire activity overnight, resulting in additional damage. Unfortunately, First Presbyterian also appears to be a complete loss although a large part of the structure remains standing.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church and the First Presbyterian Church have proudly stood as enduring landmarks on the historic Church Square for over 110 years. Accompanied by the First Baptist Church and the Grace Methodist Church, located on 10th and 11th Street and C Avenue, this sacred square holds a cherished and significant place in the rich history of Douglas.

The Douglas Historical Society recognizes Church Square for its remarkable distinction as the only block in the nation that features four different churches, each representing a unique

denomination. This gathering of sacred spaces not only reflects the diverse faith traditions within the community but also symbolizes the deep spiritual significance woven into the fabric of Douglas' history.

Expressing his sympathies, Mayor Donald C. Huish stated, “The incidents at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church and the First Presbyterian Church are a profound loss for the community of Douglas that extends beyond the physical damage to two of our city’s most historic and cherished churches. My heart goes out to every member of our community affected by this loss The Douglas community stands together with these churches and pray for their comfort and strength during this challenging time.”

DFD has confirmed that both churches were unoccupied during the events, and as of now, no injuries have been reported. Furthermore, there have been no indications of any individuals being displaced as a result of these fires. The investigation into the causes of the fires is currently underway, and updates on the investigation and ongoing efforts will be provided as soon as they become available.

The City of Douglas extends heartfelt appreciation to the Douglas Fire Department, Douglas Police Department, Pirtleville Fire Department, Sunnyside Fire Department, and the Cochise County Office of Emergency Management for their exceptional on-scene support during the fires. The City also expresses sincere gratitude to the Douglas Public Works Department, APS, Southwest Gas, and the Douglas Elks Lodge for their assistance during the fires. The remarkable teamwork and collaboration demonstrated by these organizations greatly contributed to resolving the incident. Additionally, the City of Douglas would also like to thank the community for their unwavering support, as their solidarity and resilience played a crucial role in overcoming these challenges together.

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