



Two police officers in Wichita, Kan. pull a pro-life demonstrator from under a car July 31 at the entrance to an abortion clinic. The demonstrator had tried to block the car from entering the clinic's parking lot. The car later entered the clinic grounds.

AP/Wide World Photos

## Arson sweeps through churches in Archdiocese of San Antonio

SAN ANTONIO (CNS) — Eight Catholic churches have been damaged amid a wave of fires that have swept through 13 San Antonio churches in the last 19 months, leaving more than \$1 million in structural damage.

Investigators blame arsonists for the rash of fires, in which one Protestant church was hit twice in one week in mid-July.

Officials have not released the estimated cost of damages to the contents in the churches.

The most recent target among Catholic churches was the 79-year-old Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in downtown San Antonio. An early-morning fire June 30 resulted in heavy damage to the sacristy and to the paintings above the altar, according to *Today's Catholic*, archdiocesan newspaper. Fire blacked the newly painted interior, arched ceiling and stained glass windows.

The archdiocese and the San Antonio Community of Churches are offering a \$7,000 reward for information leading to an arrest of the arsonist or arsonists.

Archbishop Patrick Flores said in a statement that an archdiocesan committee has been set up "to review how to best protect our properties from arsonists and vandals with monitored security systems." A report is due by Sept. 1, he said.

Capt. Dan Davila of the fire department's arson investigation division said the arsonists typically break in through a door or window and rummage through donation boxes before setting a fire. The arsonists generally start the fire in the sacristy, where vestments are kept.

A case is pending against two juveniles arrested and charged with arson shortly after one fire. But authorities were still investigating the other fires.

## Priests inspire protesters at Wichita abortion clinic

WICHITA, Kan. (CNS) — About a dozen Catholic priests were among more than 80 members of the clergy arrested Aug. 3 for trespassing outside an abortion clinic in Wichita.

The arrests came as hundreds of protesters continued efforts to stop abortions from being performed at the clinic.

Speeches by Wichita Bishop Eugene J. Gerber and Gov. Joan Finney, a Catholic, also bolstered protesters blockading the Women's Health Care Services clinic.

As of Aug. 5, 1,905 arrests had been made since Operation Rescue began protests at three Wichita clinics July 15. The national anti-abortion organization has targeted Wichita because at one of the clinics — owned by Dr. George Tiller — late-term abortions are performed and Tiller accepts referrals from across the country.

Participants say they have been encouraged by the conspicuous presence of priests and nuns among protesters. During a rally before one of the demonstrations, Bishop Gerber said he supports the intent of the efforts as long as it is dignified, non-violent and respectful of person and property.

"When I saw the bishop on the news at the rally, we just all went, 'Hooray!'" said Diane Helten, a member of St. Joseph's Parish in Ost, Kan. "It was great," she told *The Catholic Advance*, Wichita's diocesan newspaper.

At the rally at the Wichita Plaza Hotel, Bishop Gerber noted that while the Catholic Church does not identify with Operation Rescue's methods, "we share their intent."

Operation Rescue, a non-denominational

organization, seeks to stop abortions by preventing potential clients from entering medical offices where abortions are performed.

Finney became the first sitting governor known to address an Operation Rescue rally, according to the organization. She commended participants Aug. 2 for the "orderly manner and the dignity with which you have conducted yourselves."

"When we come right down to it, it is the character and the courage of our state which is at risk," Finney said. "We shall not achieve the ideals for which this state is founded as long as Kansas turns its back on the powerless, the helpless, the unborn."

Bishop Gerber said the participation by priests and nuns in the blockades is part of the individuals' spiritual journey.

"I assume it's another (mental and emotional) state they have discerned and that they have decided this is the time they must become more visible," he said.

Carolyn Bergkamp, a member of St. Louis Parish in Waterloo, Kan., told *The Catholic Advance* she was proud of the priests and religious participating in the protests and that non-Catholics are just as happy to see them.

"There's something different about priests," she said. "They're special people and everyone respects them no matter what religion they are."

The presence of priests and nuns reinforces the convictions of those in the protest movement, said Father James D. Conley, director of the diocesan Respect Life Office and chaplain of St. Paul Parish-Newman Center in Wichita.

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