

## Fire strikes Sacred Heart

by Patti Hoffmann

A massive blaze destroyed the rooftop and damaged the interior of Sacred Heart of Jesus, Polish National Catholic Church at 2200 5th St. NE. Captain Anura Si-Asar of Minneapolis Fire Department reported firefighters responded to the fire at 6:52 p.m. Monday, April 19. The two-alarm fire had flames shooting off the roof as well as the bell tower. The interior of the church sustained heavy damage from water and soot after the roof and ceiling collapsed. Father John Kutek, the pastor at church said, "All the parishioners have the church in their hearts, and all are grieving the loss."

The wood/stucco structure was built in 1914 and because of this construction, it was like tinder. There were no reported injuries. Responding to the Northeast, Minneapolis Fire Chief Bryan Tyner said the cause of the fire was undetermined. "Investigators were not able to access the building due to the structural damage" he said. "The case will remain open."

Although the city was on edge awaiting the verdict of the Chauvin trial, a spokesperson for the parish, Caroline Kutek, wanted

SACRED HEART ▶ 13



Firefighters fought the Monday night blaze April 19 at Sacred Heart of Jesus Polish National Catholic Church, 2200 5th St. NE. Fr. John Kutek, quoted in the May 2 Star Tribune, said dents on the door indicate to him that someone may have broken in and set the fire; the cause is still under investigation. (Photo by Patti Hoffmann)

## Johnson Street reconstruction gets underway



by Vince Brown

The half-mile long reconstruction of Johnson Street NE north of 18th Ave. NE and south of Lowry Ave. NE was scheduled to begin May 3, and at press time barricades and detour signs were being placed. The project includes pavement replacement, improvement of right of way for all users and modes of travel, and adding green space/boulevard.

The scope of work includes new roadway with curb and gutters, new sidewalk with ADA ramps, utility improvements (storm and water), landscaping (boulevard and trees), a shared use trail on the west side of Johnson, signal improvements at 23rd Ave. NE and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) at 22nd Ave. NE. Estimated cost is 5.8 million.

Construction will happen in four stages (areas) with one stage following another, then final asphalt (to grade) and striping of the entire roadway at the end. Stages are subject to change in regard to weather and underground surprises. Each stage will have pavement removal, followed by un-

derground work, soil corrections, backfill and final grading, asphalt paving, forming and pouring curbs and gutters and driveways. Temporary driveway ramps will be installed so property owners can access their property safely. The last step, raising the manholes with final paving and striping, is predicted to finish up in November 2021.

Residents with private property (sprinkler systems, decorative pavers, flowers, other items), in the boulevard or right of way (2-4 feet behind sidewalk) have been advised to relocate these items from the construction area.

From the city's construction notes for the project: "There will be times that will be difficult to access into and out of the area. We'll work with you on individual access to your property. Access to driveways will be closed for short periods during driveway apron concrete placement. We'll be coordinating with property owners. Typical work hours to be Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-6 p.m." Any Saturday work will be communicated by email ahead of time.

Business and residential access will remain in place throughout construction. Large deliveries for businesses should be coordinated with the city ahead of time. Residents directly impacted by the construction are encouraged to park on side streets.

Traffic will be detoured onto 18th or Lowry heading west, using Central Ave. as the north/south connection.

Metro Transit buses will also be re-routed to Garfield (three blocks east) during construction. Northbound buses will travel on Johnson, turn right at 18th Ave, take a left on Garfield, left on Lowry, and right on Johnson to resume their regular route. Southbound buses will travel on Johnson, turn left at Lowry, right on Garfield, right on 18th, left on Johnson, and resume their regular route. Bus route and schedule changes can be found at <https://www.metrotransit.org/>.

Residents can see current construction information and sign up for weekly email updates at <https://www.minneapolismn.gov/government/projects/johnson-st-ne/>.

Why can't black plastic be recycled?..... 3

From Nepal to Audubon: Culture-influenced food..... 5

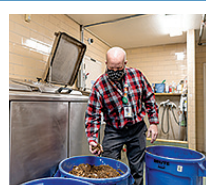


Art-A-Whirl® & Arts Insights.....4, 5, 6  
Tech makes batting practice a new ball-game.....9  
Huskies Softball.....9



Ukrainian Orthodox church gets new pastor.....11

North Park demonstrates bio-digester.....12



Editorial, Letters.....2  
Food & Fun.....3, 16 / Worship Directory.....7  
Items of Note.....7 / In Business.....8  
The Northeast Experience.....10  
Public Notices, Classified Ads.....14, 15

# GoFundMe set up

## 1 SACRED HEART

to let the community know that the fire “was not connected in any way to George Floyd/ Derek Chauvin or protestors.” Whatever the outcome of the fire investigation, she wanted to communicate to all that “holding hate in your heart will never bring our church back and we would like to rally to build our community together.”

Miraculously, items were salvaged from the church. Parishioners and neighbors were there to help with recovery. The altar, pews, some figures and the stations of the cross were saved. Other statues and stained glass will need repair and with funding, they can be rescued. All the church vestments were destroyed except incredibly - the vestment that Father Kutek wore when he was first ordained a priest back in Poland. That garment was spared and suffered no damage.

Sacred Heart of Jesus is part of the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC). The PNCC was founded in 1897 in Scranton, Penn., over theological differences with the Roman Catholic Church. A few of the differences: The PNCC is not under jurisdiction of the Pope or Vatican and is set up in a democratic fashion locally. The PNCC also allows priests to marry and have a family. In 1991, Father Kutek immigrated from Poland and since 1993 he has been dedicated in serving as the pastor. He and his wife and children have felt the church

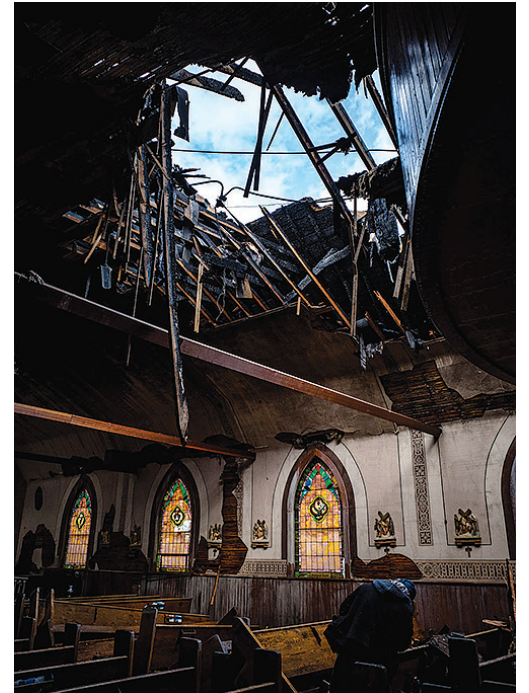
was a great part of the family dynamic and call it home.

Looking forward from this disaster, Fr. Kutek stated, “The church will rise out of the ashes and although this is devastating to the church, as Christians and Catholics we want to move forward in peace.” Sunday morning Holy Mass is now being held at 10:00 a.m. at Pulaski Auditorium (2114 5th St NE), the parish hall located across the street from the church. Most of the parishioners and their families have been attending this parish for generations. Counseling is available after the Sunday service for any parishioner who needs help dealing with the loss.

COVID-19 had already impacted the parish financially and the fire added considerably to that burden. Father Kutek is “waiting for a light from above and guidance from God” on what the future holds for the parish. One can never fully understand the damage a fire can do to a parish and any donations to help the church to go forward would be appreciated. Checks can be sent to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church at 420 22nd Ave. NE, Minneapolis, MN 55418. A GoFundme account has been set up at [gofundme.com/f/help-sacred-heart-rebuild-our-church](https://gofundme.com/f/help-sacred-heart-rebuild-our-church).

**Fire damaged the bell tower, and the roof gave way. Efforts are underway to salvage whatever is possible.**

(Photos by Mike Madison)



# 57 volunteers bag 362 lbs. of litter



## Earth Watch

On April 24, volunteers from Columbia Heights were joined by residents from Lino Lakes and Roseville who wanted to do their part to protect the earth. Families used the event to teach their kids about preventing pollution and the need to protect earth’s resources. The event was organized by HeightsNEXT.

Elected officials rolled up their sleeves, too. Columbia Heights Mayor Amada Marquez Simula was joined by U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, state Rep. Sandra Feist and state Sen. Mary Kunesh-Podein.

The Columbia Heights Dairy Queen partnered with HeightsNEXT to provide

volunteers with a coupon for a free Dilly Bar. Other businesses along Central Avenue were also invited to join in the Earth Day Cleanup by clearing their properties of trash or debris that may have accumulated there.

The City of Columbia Heights provided cleanup supplies and assistance to support volunteers’ work. Cleanups like this supplement the city’s ongoing efforts to reduce litter and prevent pollution.

According to Connie Buesgens, HeightsNEXT president, “Participants’ actions stopped trash from accumulating at storm drains and potentially causing localized flooding. They also kept these pollutants from entering storm drains and flowing through pipes under the street into the Mississippi River where they harm wildlife and make treatment of our tap water more difficult.”

Celebrating a job well done, volunteers posed for their traditional photo, outside the Columbia Heights Public Library. Four elected officials joined in the effort to pick up litter on Saturday, April 24.

(Photo and article courtesy of HeightsNEXT)

Cigarette butts were the most frequent pollutant volunteers encountered, a product that doesn’t break down for months to years and can cause a variety of problems for both humans and animals.

Residents who want to organize their own cleanup crew should contact Columbia Heights Public Works at 763-706-3700.

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