

# Fire marshal: Friday church blaze 'was intentionally set'

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**MERIDEN** — The blaze last week at a Colony Street storefront church was caused by arson, Fire Marshal Steve Trella said Thursday.

The fire, which severely damaged the roof of 141 Colony St. and displaced the Church of Restoration, on the first floor, occurred early on the morning of Sept 26. It took firefighters two hours to put it out.

An electrical engineer, Trella and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms were involved with the investigation. ATF commonly assists in arson investigations.

"The fire was intentionally set," Trella said.

He could not divulge the



Dave Zajac / Record-Journal

Felix Cajigas-Medina, left, and Chris Hindinger, of Wallingford's Clean Sweep Restoration Services, clean up damage at Meriden's Church of Restoration from last Friday's fire.

Talk About It

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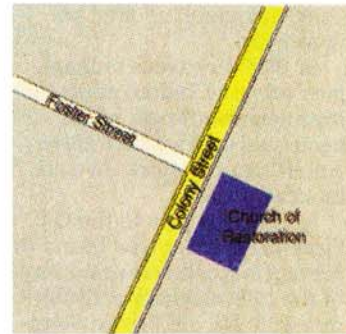
source of the fire, Trella said, due to a pending investigation by the Police Department.

Building owner Bob Malerba could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Though the fire didn't burn the first floor, water from the firefighters' hoses and smoke damaged most of the church's furniture and service elements.

Members of the nondenominational Church of Restoration met at Pastor Ed Sherman's house for services Sunday.

Parishioners are "a little bit stunned," Sherman said. "But everybody is encouraged. I've



always taught them that we had to live by faith."

Sherman couldn't think of why anyone would want to set the church on fire, he said, but wondered if someone might have broken in for shelter and

accidentally caused the blaze. The rest of the building was not being rented.

Clean Sweep Restoration Services of New England, a Wallingford-based company, volunteered to try to save some of the church's possessions, Sherman said.

The floor of the church was littered with water-stained ceiling tiles on Thursday. The smell of smoke still hung heavy in the air.

Most of the salvageable contents of the church had been moved out of the building and into the back of a Clean Sweep truck in front of the property. Stacked chairs, tapestries, pieces of a drum set and a wooden pulpit sat waiting to be carted off to Clean Sweep's warehouse, where company es-

timator Chris Hindinger said they would be surrounded by plastic sheeting. Inside, fans would blow air around the items to dry them.

Metal items will then be polished and upholstered items will be steam cleaned, he said.

"The musical instruments are iffy," Hindinger said.

Several churches have offered Sherman their facilities to hold services, but he said he prefers not to use someone else's space.

"I was hoping someone would donate (an empty space) for us to use," he said. "It's hard with the finances right now."

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