

# Church Fire May Be Forever a Mystery

No cause determined, but church vows to rebuild

Investigators have no definitive answers for parishioners of Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church, who lost their place of worship in a fire that not only destroyed the building but any indication as to what created the blaze. A Metro Arson Task Force is officially listing the cause as "undetermined."

In other words, they may never know whether it was a natural gas explosion or if it was caused by arson.

The three-story brick building at 106 N.E. Ivy St had towered over neighboring rooftops since 1919 until collapsing on Feb. 6. The midnight fire began almost

instantly, gutting the entire church, imploding the steeple and destroying nearby parked vehicles.

Trees were scorched and a few neighbors' rooftops and window blinds were badly damaged.

For weeks the investigating team, made up of Portland fire investigators, Oregon State Police, Eugene and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, sifted through ashes and damage and interviewed neighbors, witnesses and church leaders.

Portland Fire and Rescue Lt. Allen Oswald said they found no detectable evidence of arson or



PHOTOS BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A pile of rubble and many unanswered questions are all that remain of the Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church building. Investigators recently listed the fire's cause as "undetermined."

vices programs, did not suffer as much damage, and was valued at \$242,390.

As the investigation began, a community gathered to ease the pain of Reverend A. Wayne Johnson and his congregation, exhibiting how well loved the iconic church was in its northeast Portland neighborhood.

Morning Star currently meets on Sunday mornings at the Rose City Cemetery & Funeral Home chapel, 5625 NE Fremont St., for services at 9:15 and 10:45, but the church has vowed to rebuild at its old site.

Morning Star will receive an insurance payment for the fire and has been given thousands of dollars from private individuals and companies and the City of Portland.

Further donations are needed, and can be made to the Morning Star Catastrophe Relief Fund at any Wells Fargo Bank branch.

evidence indicating an electrical short, heating malfunction or other problem.

The church carried a market value of \$399,000. The annex, where they housed social ser-

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## Bush Closes Latin America Tour

Met with disapproval of immigration laws

(AP) President Bush, working to rebuild strained U.S.-Mexico relations, promised Tuesday he would do his best to get a deeply divided U.S. Congress to change American immigration policies that are hated south of the border.

"My pledge to you and your government, but more important to the people of Mexico, is I'll work as hard as I possibly can to pass comprehensive immigration reform," Bush said during a sun-splashed arrival ceremony that opened two days of meetings with Mexican President Felipe Calderon in this



A woman walks by posters of President George W. Bush that read "wanted for war crimes" in Medellin, Colombia on March 7. Bush wrapped up his Latin America tour in Mexico on March 13.

Yucatan Peninsula tourist haven.

Relations between the two border countries have only grown worse since Bush signed a law calling for construction of more than 700 miles of new fencing along the long border the two countries share.

Calderon has lambasted the fence—a mix of physical and high-tech barriers. He likens it to the Berlin Wall, and argues that both countries need to improve Mexico's economy to lessen the desire to seek work in the United States.

Before their talks, Calderon had a tough message for Bush: The United States must do more to solve thorny issues of drug trafficking and immigration.

He was gentler at Bush's side, but with the same message.

"We fully respect the right that the government and the people

of the United States has to decide within its territory what will be best for their concerns and security," he said as he welcomed Bush. "But at the same time we do consider in a respectful way that migration can't be stopped with a fence."

When he first became president, Bush promised that Latin America would vault to the top of his agenda. But after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the administration's focus was riveted on South Asia and the Middle East. That left many Mexicans feeling neglected by their northern neighbor, and some view Bush's trip as a case of too little, too late.

Bush and Calderon's two days of talks are meant to better relations, not yield dramatic announcements.

## Obama Reaches Out

Discusses campaign agendas with black media

African American support is there for U.S. presidential hopeful Barack Obama, but as his campaign heats up, the Illinois senator took his first step in engaging with the black media during a press conference with black publishers from across the country.

Obama met over the phone with representatives from African American newspapers on March 2, outlining campaign objectives for the next several months:

"I will make sure our events target issues everybody's concerned with, including health care, education and Iraq," he said, "but I do anticipate talking more about an urban agenda and civil rights issues, which have been neglected over the past few years."

Obama said he plans to aggressively target black voters without polarizing the white vote. When asked about voting rights he discussed a bill he introduced in January that would make deceptive voting practices a felony.

Obama also counted economic justice, young black voters and



Weeks into his presidential campaign, Barack Obama addresses the African American media.

prison reform as his campaign priorities.

Obama formally announced his candidacy in Springfield, Ill., on Feb. 10. Raised in Hawaii by his mother, a white woman from Kansas, and his father, a black man from Kenya, Obama's racial background and relevance to other African Americans has come into question. Recent opinion polls portray him as the second most popular choice among Democratic voters for their party's nomination after Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), who has historically found success with black voters.

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