

Churches Don't Burn

The walls of Asbury United Methodist Church have been scorched by flames and blackened by smoke.

The roof lies on the floor of the nave. Pews and other handcrafted furnishings have been badly damaged by water and burning rubble, probably beyond repair.

Almost all the stained glass windows, the work of European artists and artisans of another era, have been smashed. The lead that held the pictures together has been melted or grotesquely twisted.

The magnificent organ, a showpiece for its builders, has been ruined.

The mural over the altar, in which A. N. Lindenmuth, an Allentown artist who has been dead for some 20 years, portrayed Christ's Sermon on the Mount has been obliterated.

The loss is a heavy one for the congregation which built the edifice 50 years ago and hoped that, like the cathedrals and chapels of the old world, it would be a living symbol of their faith that would stand for centuries to serve many generations.

It also is a loss to the community. The art and the artistry were for all to share. It wasn't necessary to go inside to appreciate at least some of the beauty of the windows as the light shown through at night or to hear the organ on a summer morning.

A fire in a church or synagogue arouses broad and widespread sympathy, particularly in a community like this one where there are so many church people of practically every faith and creed and so many churches. Thousands have had some experience with the costs and effort involved in building them, with the energy and sacrifices required. Asbury has their sympathy and their prayers.

A church, however, is not a building and a fire cannot destroy it. Buildings burn, but churches remain. This will be so as long as even a handful of people have the kind of faith the members of Asbury have demonstrated in this community over so many years. It's a faith that cannot be obliterated. It lives anywhere and can everywhere.