

# Christmas Eve blaze destroys church

Investigation into the cause of the Dec. 24 fire that damaged St. Margaret's Church resumed yesterday.

The early morning fire on Christmas Eve Day

made necessary the moving of Christmas Eve masses to St. Theresa's High School. Not all of the Christmas Eve churchgoers were able to attend the 8:30 p.m. mass. People

were turned away after the maximum permitted of 600 were inside the school.

Rev. Wayne Manne in an interview praised firefighters who donned oxygen tanks and masks

and entered the church to remove religious articles, including the tabernacle, vestries, chalices, and even a few statues, while other firefighters were trying to extinguish the flames.

Firemen were unable to save the church's William Tracker organ, before the fire one of only two working in Ontario.

Firefighters also spared the stained glass windows of the 74-year-old Catholic church.

The 1,400 member congregation will be attending mass in the high school at least into the fall of 1987.

The church is insured for \$1.5 million.

Passersby reported the fire shortly after 3 a.m. The fire had been burning for some time. When firemen forced their way through the second set of entrance doors, they found a hole burned in the floor.

Midland and Penetanguishene firemen poured perhaps a local record amount of water on the fire. When the water pressure in the hydrants

began to fall, the fire department tapped into Mitsubishi's water supply. Fire Chief Hal Belfry said he can't remember a previous need to use Mitsubishi water.

Midland and Penetanguishene firefighters fought the fire while Tay Township firefighters stood on standby at the Midland fire hall. Tiny Township firefighters similarly stood ready at the Penetanguishene fire hall.

Rev. Manne said that he and Rev. Tony Vander Vechte were asleep when knocking at both the front and back of the rectory woke them. They could smell smoke in their house, situated in the shadow of the high, stone foundation church. Firemen were on the scene when the two men went outdoors. "We discovered that there was more to the fire than smoke," Rev. Manne said.

The two priests removed parish records from the rectory in anticipation of the possibility of the fire

spreading.

"The firemen did a tremendous job," Rev. Manne said. "They were very orderly." Firemen wanted to break the church's stained glass windows to get at the flames, but broke only ordinary windows, he said.

Gaping holes in the roof of the church lets daylight fall onto a floor and pews covered with pieces of burnt roof and other fallen debris. No part of the church stayed dry during the attempt to extinguish the fire.

Ontario Fire Marshal's Office investigator John McKenzie shook his head yesterday when asked if he had ruled out any causes of the fire.

## PGH births

Mr. and Mrs. Peter Tuzky of 87 Robert Street West, Penetanguishene are pleased to announce the birth of a baby boy, born Dec. 21 weighing 8 lbs. 7 1/2 ozs.



Church interior

An Ontario Fire Marshall's Office Investigator yesterday resumed the investigation into the Dec. 24 fire which did serious damage to St. Margaret's Church. Above is the interior of the church as seen

from the altar. Firemen, upon entering, found a hole burned in the floor below the beam which is above the men's heads in the picture.

## Wye visiting hours

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