

Six St. Louis-area black churches damaged by fire

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ST. LOUIS — A reward of up to \$2,000 is being offered for information leading to the arrest of the culprit in a string of fires that have now hit six predominantly African American churches in and around St. Louis.

Ebenezer Lutheran Church, at 1011 Theobald Street, is the latest church to report damage.

Capt. Garon Mosby, spokesman for the St. Louis Fire Department, said members of the congregation called authorities about 9:25 a.m. Sunday (October 18) after arriving for a worship service and noticing damage. The fire was already out by the time firefighters arrived, Mosby said.

Although he could not provide additional details, Mosby said that the damage was not extensive. But that the incident was being investigated along with the five other church fires that have happened in the area since October 8.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Defamation League condemned the series of fires on Monday.

“While no racial motive has yet been established, the fear and intimidation in the African-American community is substantial and must be validated,” read an Anti-Defamation League news release.

The Jewish organization raised similar concerns when a series of church fires occurred in the South after the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June that killed nine.

Other St. Louis churches that have reported fires are Bethel Nondenominational Church, New Northside Missionary Baptist Church, St. Augustine Catholic Church, New Testament Church of Christ, and New Life Missionary Baptist Church.

Roderick K. Burton, pastor of New Northside Missionary Baptist Church, has invited the St. Louis faith community to come together at his church at noon Wednesday to pray.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the St. Louis City Fire Department Investigative Unit and the St. Louis Regional Bomb and Arson Unit are working together to investigate the incidents.

The \$2,000 award is being offered by St. Louis Regional CrimeStoppers and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

This is the timeline of the predominantly African American churches struck by fires:

- Oct. 8: Bethel Nondenominational Church
- Oct. 10: New Northside Missionary Baptist Church
- Oct. 14: St. Augustine Catholic Church
- Oct. 15: New Testament Church of Christ
- Oct. 17: New Life Missionary Baptist Church
- Oct. 18: Ebenezer Lutheran Church