

White man found guilty in arson at black church

by [Jack Flynn](#)

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SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (RNS) Breaking a two-day deadlock, a federal jury convicted a white man, Michael F. Jacques, on all three charges Thursday (April 14) for a fire that destroyed a black church the night of President Obama's election.

The guilty verdicts rocked Jacques and his family members, who had hoped the deadlocked jury might result in a mistrial. But the three civil rights and arson counts mean the 26-year-old will likely spend the next decade in prison.

Two other white defendants -- Benjamin F. Haskell and Thomas A. Gleason, both 24, of Springfield -- pleaded guilty last year to torching the Macedonia Church of God in Christ on Nov. 5, 2008, to express outrage at the election of the nation's first black president.

"On the morning of Nov. 5, 2008, we all hoped this was not arson," Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul H. Smyth said, standing outside the courthouse. "In the few days that followed, our worst fears were confirmed."

As the verdicts were read Thursday, two jurors broke into tears. At the defense table, Jacques sat motionless for a few moments before defense attorney Lori H. Levinson put her hand on his shoulder.

Outside the courthouse, Levinson said she was disappointed with the verdict. As Jacques exited through a swarm of television cameras, he stopped and said, "The jury got it all wrong; I'm innocent. I'm not a racist."

Jacques' sentencing is set for Sept. 15.