

Burned church nearly rebuilt; three convicted

News in the [May 17, 2011](#) issue

As a white man surrendered to federal marshals in mid-April, workers were rebuilding the pulpit of the Macedonia Church of God in Christ, a church he was convicted of burning down the night of President Obama's election.

Michael Jacques, 26, surrendered a day after a jury convicted him on civil rights and arson charges. Jacques expressed sympathy for parishioners of the Macedonia Church of God in Christ, Springfield, Massachusetts. Their \$2.5 million church was burned to the ground several hours after Obama was elected the nation's first black president.

"I'm sorry that that did happen," Jacques told reporters outside the courthouse. "I obviously didn't do it. My heart does go out to those people. But I am innocent, and I will appeal, and justice will prevail."

Along with two other white men, Jacques confessed to having a role in the gasoline-fed blaze that razed the church. Jacques later recanted, claiming investigators pressured him during a six-and-a-half-hour interrogation.

The two others—Benjamin F. Haskell and Thomas A. Gleason, both 24-year-old local men—pleaded guilty in June. Haskell was given a nine-year sentence; Gleason will be sentenced in October.

By the time Jacques is sentenced on September 15, the new Macedonia Church of God in Christ will have been open for three months if construction continues on schedule. "We're 90 percent finished, maybe 95 percent," said James A.

Tarrant, the church's principal contractor, as he pounded nails into the pulpit area of the 18,000-square-foot building. —RNS