

Historic Middle Collegiate Church destroyed in fire

by [Roxanne Stone](#) in the [December 30, 2020](#) issue



Firefighters work to extinguish a fire that spread from the building next to Middle Collegiate Church on December 5. (AP Photo / Yuki Iwamura)

An early morning fire in Manhattan's East Village neighborhood has destroyed the 128-year-old building of Middle Collegiate Church, one of the oldest congregations in the city.

Nearly 200 firefighters worked to put out the fire in a slow drizzling rain, according to reports from the *Gothamist*. No one was killed in the fire.

The six-alarm fire began on the first floor of a nearby five-story vacant apartment building around 5 a.m. before igniting the church, New York City Fire Department

officials told local ABC news reporters. The church's roof was in flames by 6 a.m.

The apartment building was reportedly vacant because of an earlier fire there in February.

Middle Collegiate Church, currently led by Jacqueline J. Lewis, traces its roots back to Dutch Reformed congregations formed in the New York area in the 1600s.

Established in 1729, Middle Collegiate, known also simply as Middle Church, is the oldest of the city's four Collegiate churches, which include Marble Collegiate Church on Fifth Avenue, where Norman Vincent Peale was pastor for decades.

Middle Collegiate moved into the East Village location in 1892, according to the church's website.

"We are devastated and crushed that our beloved physical sanctuary at Middle Collegiate Church has burned," Lewis said in a statement. "And yet no fire can stop Revolutionary Love."

The church, which describes itself as "multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and fully inclusive," has become known for its strong social justice outlook, particularly regarding racial justice and LGBTQ issues.

"We know that God does not cause these kinds of tragedies but is present with us and to us as we grieve, present in the hugs and prayers of loved ones," said Lewis. The church, she said, would continue to meet digitally, as they have been doing since March, due to COVID-19 safety measures.

"We pray for the first responders. We pray for our neighbors who are also affected by this fire. And we covet your prayers as we grieve." —Religion News Service