

Arsonist Sentenced for COGIC Church Attack

Justice has been done for the **Church of God in Christ**.

Thomas Gleason, 24, was sentenced on Wednesday in federal court for his role in the arson of the predominately African-American Macedonia Church of God in Christ just hours after the election of President Barack Obama. Gleason was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Michael A. Ponsor to 54 months in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release. Gleason was also ordered to pay over \$1.7 million in restitution, including \$123,570 to the Macedonia Church of God in Christ.

In June 2010, Gleason pleaded guilty to conspiracy against **civil rights**, damage or **destruction of religious property**, and use of fire to commit a felony. Gleason's co-conspirators, Benjamin Haskell and Michael Jacques, were previously sentenced to nine years in prison and 14 years in prison, respectively.

According to evidence presented in court, in the early morning hours of Nov. 5, 2008, within hours of **President Obama** being elected, Gleason and his co-conspirators burned down the Macedonia Church of God in Christ's newly-constructed building, where religious services were to be held for its predominantly African-American congregation. The building was approximately 75 percent completed at the time of the fire, which destroyed nearly the entire structure, leaving only the metal superstructure and a small portion of the front corner intact.

"Attempting to destroy a place of worship not only hurts those who congregate there, but affects the entire community," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil

Rights Division. "The Justice Department will vigorously prosecute acts such as this one that interfere with a person's right to worship."

"The parishioners of the Macedonia Church of God in Christ deserve to have some sense of closure to this matter," said U.S. Attorney Carmen M. Ortiz for the District of Massachusetts. "I have the utmost respect for Bishop Robinson and his parishioners who have endured so much pain from these crimes, but have managed to maintain unwavering faith and dignity. I truly hope that justice has provided them with a sense of peace as they resume their prayers in their beautiful new church."□