

Devastating Fire Tears Through Historic, 'Irreplaceable' Cleveland Church

A massive fire tore through a vacant Cleveland church early Friday morning, sending flames high into the sky as firefighters spent hours battling the intense blaze.

The fire erupted at Friendship Baptist Church near Central Avenue and East 55th Street on Cleveland's East Side, according to News 5 Cleveland. Cleveland Fire received the call just before 2 a.m., but the flames quickly grew into a massive inferno visible from miles away.

News 5 reporter Mike Holden said crews faced an "incredibly challenging" battle as fire ripped through the building from multiple directions.

Dramatic overnight video captured flames shooting into the sky as thick smoke billowed above the church. At one point, the fire was so intense it was visible from the Innerbelt Bridge near downtown Cleveland. Ash and debris also rained down onto surrounding streets.

Firefighters surrounded the church, attacking the flames from several angles. At least four ladder trucks could be seen pouring water onto the structure while additional crews worked from behind the building.



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More than two hours after firefighters were called to the

scene, the battle was still underway.

Cleveland Fire Department Lt. Mike Norman told News 19 that this is an estimated "\$500,000 loss," and that this is a "historic stone church, and it's irreplaceable, really."

While crews made significant progress against the flames, questions quickly turned to what could have sparked such a destructive fire.

The church was vacant, but News 5 reported concerns about activity at the property before the blaze. Holden said he was told off camera that neighbors had recently complained about people going in and out of the building.

However, authorities had not connected those reports to the fire, and no cause had been determined at the time of the broadcast.

For now, the cause remains a mystery.

As investigators search for answers, questions remain about what happened at Friendship Baptist Church before flames consumed the building.

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