

Historic New York Church Site Hit by Arson as Questions Linger Over Muslim Ownership

Firefighters responded to a fire Tuesday at the former St. Ann's Church complex on Buffalo's East Side, the second blaze there in less than a week.

Authorities ruled the latest fire arson.

The vacant property, a former Roman Catholic landmark, has drawn renewed attention amid its ownership by a group affiliated with a local Muslim organization that once planned to convert it into an Islamic center.

NEW YORK

The former St. Ann's Church in Buffalo has been destroyed by fire after an ARSON attack

The church has been slated to become a Mosque for a long time but has been tied up with red tape

The adjacent school was coincidentally destroyed by fire in January

— Catholic Arena (@CatholicArena) July 23, 2026

A Historic Parish Closes

St. Ann's Church, built in 1886 by German immigrants, served as an active Catholic parish until it merged with another in 2007. All activities at the site ceased around 2013 amid declining attendance, structural problems and high maintenance

costs estimated in the millions of dollars.

The Diocese of Buffalo, facing financial pressures that included a 2020 Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing tied in part to clergy abuse settlements, sold the complex – including the church, school and convent at 651 Broadway – in November 2022.

Sale to Islamic-Affiliated Buyer

The buyer was Buffalo Crescent Holdings Inc., which purchased the property for \$250,000. The company is affiliated with the Downtown Islamic Center, a local Muslim organization. News reports at the time stated the group intended to convert the complex into a downtown Islamic center, potentially including a mosque and community facilities.

The diocese said it followed canonical procedures to relegate the church to “profane use,” a technical term meaning it was no longer designated for religious worship. Such sales and conversions have occurred with other former Catholic churches in Buffalo and elsewhere.



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Repeated Fires Raise Concerns

In January 2026, a four-alarm fire heavily damaged the former school building on the property. A three-alarm fire broke out Friday in a rear section of the main church structure, followed by Tuesday's arson fire, which firefighters brought under control.

No injuries were reported in any of the incidents, according to WIVB.

Local officials and preservation groups have criticized the owners for failing to secure and maintain the long-vacant

site, which has seen reports of squatters. Buffalo Common Council Majority Leader Leah Halton-Pope said she had discussed security concerns with city officials hours before Tuesday's fire.

The city is exploring legal options to compel the owners to maintain the property. Investigations into the fires, including the latest arson case, continue. No public evidence has linked the owners to the blazes.

Many Catholics have expressed sorrow over the loss of the historic sacred space. Some view the sale and subsequent neglect as emblematic of broader challenges facing the U.S. Catholic Church, including shrinking congregations in changing neighborhoods.

Preservation Buffalo Niagara has called on the city to take stronger action to protect the landmark. Diocese officials have described the sale as a difficult but necessary step given the property's condition and the diocese's financial realities.

The property remains largely unsecured as authorities investigate the arsons and city leaders weigh next steps.

This story is developing. Updates will be provided as more information becomes available from fire investigators and city officials.

James Lasher, a seasoned writer and editor at Charisma Media, combines faith and storytelling with a journalism background from Otterbein University and ministry experience in Guatemala and at the LA Dream Center. A Marine Corps and Air Force veteran, he is the author of *The Revelation of Jesus: A Common Man's Commentary* and a contributor to Charisma magazine. For interviews and media inquiries, please contact media@.