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The interior of the Highway Tabernacle Church, 18th and Spring Garden Streets, after Thursday's five-alarm fire.

## Amid ruin, church vows to rebuild

By Murray Dubin  
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Red Bibles soaked in two feet of sooty water. A sanctuary balcony railing hanging askew like a broken wing. Stained glass windows punched out like construction paper. The sanctuary roof, now holey and blackened, open to the sky.

Despite the devastating effects of a five-alarm fire that raged through the Highway Tabernacle Church, 18th and Spring Garden Streets, Thursday night and yesterday morning, the Rev. Stephen Bogdan promised yesterday that there would be a Sunday morning service.

"We have our fellas ready to go in there Saturday and clean it up, and we're going to have our regular Sunday morning service in the chapel," said Mr. Bogdan.

"We're going to rebuild."

The brownstone gray-spired church has been a fixture on Spring Garden Street for more than 130 years. Yesterday morning, SmithKline Beckman Corp., located just two blocks away, gave the church \$10,000 to make sure it stays in the neighborhood.

"You're part of the community. You've been good to the community," said Peter Quinn, SmithKline's public affairs manager. Mr. Bogdan, visibly emotional, assured Quinn that the church

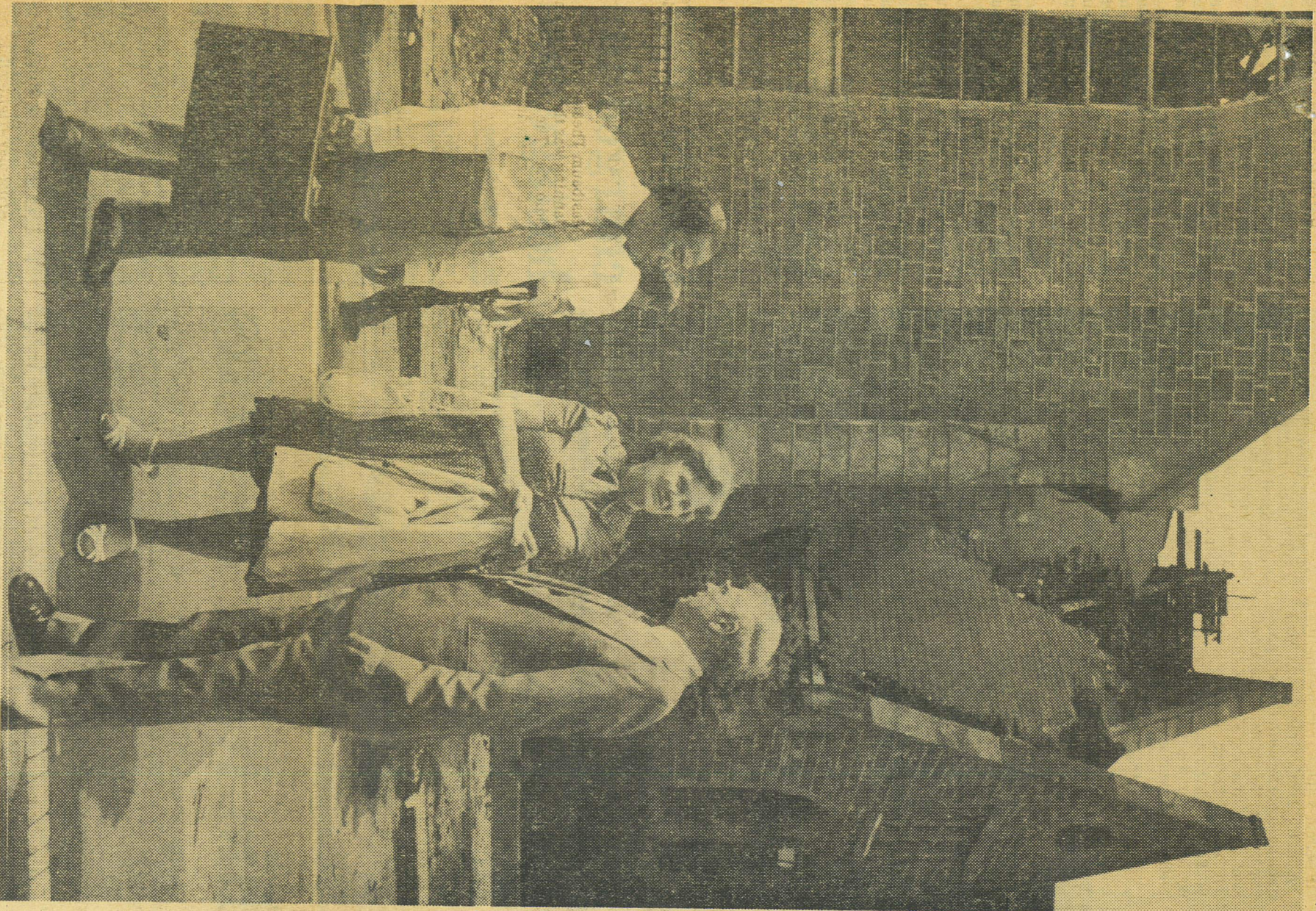
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Aerial view showing damage to sanctuary's roof; fire is believed to be of electrical origin.





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Mr. Bogdan (right) and wife Florence discuss tomorrow's service with parishioner James Yee.

## After fire devastates sanctuary, church faithful pledge to rebuild

**FIRE, from 1-B**

would not be closing its doors.

"You're not giving up. That's great. God bless you. Pastor," Quinn said.

Though the investigation of the fire's origin is not completed, "it appears that it was electrical, accidental and began in the west side of the building in the ceiling of the women's restroom," said Deputy Chief Roger Ullshater of the fire marshal's office.

The church houses two congregations with a total of about 300 parishioners — an Assemblies of God congregation and a smaller, Korean-speaking group known as the Korean Pentecostal Church.

Mr. Bogdan said he was seeking police permission for both congregations to hold a joint service at 10:45 a.m. Sunday outside on 18th Street, between Brandywine and Spring Garden Streets. He said his service would be translated for members of the Korean-speaking church, which is also an Assemblies of God congregation.

"We started the Korean church here two years ago," Mr. Bogdan said yesterday morning as firefighters watered hot spots on the church roof. "There were so many Koreans coming into the community. They were disenfranchised, rootless. We wanted them to know that they were wanted."

On Thursday night, Mr. Bogdan

and the Rev. Chong Kim, pastor of the Korean congregation, were each leading Bible classes on separate floors of the church. About 70 parishioners were in the building.

"About 8:45 p.m., Rev. Kim came running down the stairs yelling 'Fire, fire. I told some of our fellas to grab fire extinguishers. There was excitement, but no panic," Mr. Bogdan said.

The efforts to fight the fire failed. Even when the Fire Department came, Mr. Bogdan never imagined how serious the fire would become. "I thought it was localized. I had no idea it would get so big," he said. Outside the church, congregation member Dan Langan was talking about the church's outreach program to college students, the elderly and to people with drug and alcohol problems.

"It was just a building. It will be rebuilt. A church is people. In the Scriptures, it says God will give beauty from ashes," Langan said.

Gyu Chae, a minister in the Korean congregation, was inside the church Thursday night. "People were calm. They handled it well. Thank God, no one was hurt," he said.

Besides the extensive damage to the church, the next-door Metropolitan District Council headquarters of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America was damaged by the blaze.

"Our basement is under 12 feet of water. The boiler's down there, the phone lines. We've got thousands and thousands of dollars of damage," said Harrison Langley, secretary-treasurer.

Among the onlookers outside the church was Anastasia Grzybowski, 52, who was the church's janitor for 33 years before her retirement in January. She was in tears. "It's awful. It looks terrible," she said.

Mr. Bogdan said he had cried his tears already, some shed because of the enormity of what happened, others at the kindness of so many people who have offered help.

Before the fire began, he said, he was talking in the Bible-study class "about God still being the God of miracles." And now, after it, his faith has not lessened and God is still the God of miracles.

"The world looks pretty good to me," he said.