



Bede Roughton, chairman of the parish council.

## Prayers for arsonist

Sacred Heart parishioners have been asked to pray for whoever set fire to their church yesterday.

"We must pray for the people who are so misguided," the chairman of the pastoral council, Bede Roughton, told 250 parishioners who attended Mass last night in the parish hall, Eastbourne St.

Mr Roughton said it would be easy to be consumed with anger at the senseless act which had caused hurt to so many people.

"But what is the gain in such anger? Surely it is better to consider what a dreadful plight it must be that allows people so disturbed to do such a thing? They must live with their desperation. We are far more fortunate as we have been blessed with the gift of great hope," he said.

A prayer was said asking for the arsonist to be given "that grace of conversion bestowed on St Paul".

Mr Roughton said St Paul persecuted the Church, but became one of its greatest saints.

Each member of the parish was in a state of shock or disbelief about the arson, he said.

It was heart-warming to be part of a Mass where people had gathered for mutual support, condolence and hope for the future of Sacred Heart Parish.

Mr Roughton said parishioners had "lost a loved one" and maybe all the memories of good times and perhaps the poignant memories of sad times as well.

"We need to share our memories of precious moments and keep them alive so we can always be aware of the blessings that we have received and we need to grieve in a natural way," he said.

There were some moving moments during the Mass as people stood and talked about the memories they had and what the church had meant for them.

Kevin Bryant said the church had been part of his life for 70 years.

Philip Horan said he had many happy and sad memories of the church, including the funeral of his mother a few weeks ago.

Without a church, parishioners will use the hall until the future becomes clearer.

## Fears of arson realised

Catholics in Hastings have long feared their 97-year-old wooden Sacred Heart Church, near the centre of the city, would be deliberately set alight.

An attempt was made to burn the church 11 years ago.

That attempt came shortly after a firebug destroyed St Patrick's Catholic Church, in Napier, on August 15, 1981.

As soon as Catholics in Hastings learned of the attempt on their church they rallied to protect the building.

They set up a roster, and mounted an all-night vigil till the danger was deemed to have passed.

It is not the first time Hastings' Sacred Heart parish has had to deal with the ravages of fire.

The original Sacred Heart Church in Eastbourne St was extensively damaged by fire on December 16, 1991. It was demolished, the site cleared and used as a new entrance to St Joseph's School and the parish grounds.

That church was built in 1881 on a Heretaunga St site and shifted to Eastbourne St when the other church, which was destroyed by fire yesterday, was built in 1894/95.



The flattened remains of Sacred Heart.

## Treasured items lost in blaze

The foundation stone for the Sacred Heart Church was laid on October 7, 1894.

The church was opened the following year by Archbishop Francis Redwood. It was paid for by parishioners.

It was graced by intricate stained glass windows and statues, some imported from Italy. They were all destroyed in yesterday's fire.

Local lore has it that some of the largest financial contributions toward building the church came from Irish workers at the Whakatu freezing works.

An organ for the church was bought in England in 1900 and donated in 1905 by two people whose names are nowhere on present parish records.

The church was refurbished to mark the parish's centenary in 1982.

One of the parish priests, Father Maurice Scully, said Sacred Heart Church had accumulated many items of value over the years, and it would take some time to make up a list of everything lost in the fire.

The more obvious losses included historic statues and stained glass windows, a large crucifix, the altar, sacred vessels, furniture, expensive vestments, and the church bell, which shattered as it fell to the ground during the fire.

Site project co-ordinator Arnold Sarchett said a piece of the bell was kept safely over night under the bucket of an excavator, while security guards patrolling the grounds chased away souvenir hunters.

Not everything in the church was destroyed. Parish priest Father Paul Duncan said a chalice and three ciboria locked in the church safe were later found "squeaky clean".

Father Duncan said that apart from the material loss, a piece of church history had gone. But parishioners were looking firmly forward.

### Project co-ordinator

Sacred Heart Parish has appointed a project co-ordinator to liaise between insurers and the people who will assess the damage to the church.

Pastoral council chairman Bede Roughton said Arnold Sarchett had been appointed to the position.

Mr Roughton said terms of insurance policies would be breached unless any work was liaised through Mr Sarchett.



Helpers remove equipment from the parish office.

## Memories revived of St Patrick's fire

Yesterday's fire revived memories for Napier people whose 89-year-old St Patrick's Church was burned to the ground on August 15, 1981.

The Saturday afternoon blaze drew thousands of people to the church, on the corner of Munroe St and Station St, where the new St Patrick's Church now stands.

The steeple of the old church, built in 1894, was a landmark for early mariners approaching Napier.

An eight-year-old girl, Joann Hancy, and her uncle Robert Hancy, were in the church for their regular Saturday afternoon prayers when Joann spotted a light

in an unused confessional box.

The fire spread at several metres a second along the newly-varnished interior walls and engulfed the church within minutes.

The fire was considered suspicious but police found no evidence pointing to arson.

However, about a year later, a youth confessed to Napier police that he set fire to the church.

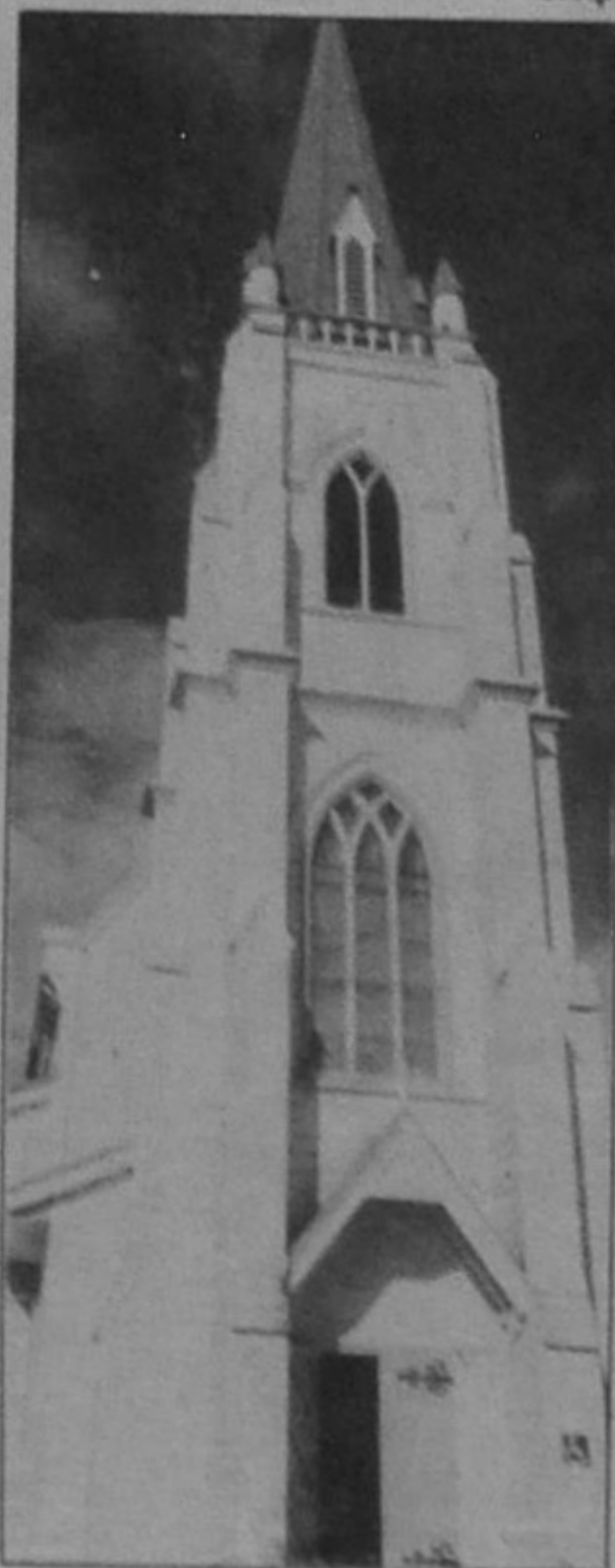
A photograph of the blazing church, with its steeple beginning to topple, was the first colour news picture published on the front page of the Herald-Tribune.

## Fund-raiser planned

A concert to raise money for a new Sacred Heart Church is being organised by the Hastings Municipal Theatre Trust. Napier mezzo-soprano Phillipa Reade, who won a Dame Sister Mary Leo scholarship a week ago for overseas study, has already offered to perform, along with the Hastings Citizens' Band and the Hastings Choral Society.

Trust chairman Ron Shakespeare said the trustees swung into action after yesterday's fire and unanimously agreed to stage the concert, which they hope will be completely sponsored so all funds will go to the church rebuilding fund.

The trust would also accept donations, Mr Shakespeare said.



Sacred Heart Church, a Hastings landmark since 1895.





## *Searching for clues*

Parish priest Father Paul Duncan and police officers searching for clues to the cause of yesterday's fire which destroyed Hastings' 90-year-old Sacred Heart Church.