



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Department of Public Safety & Corrections • Public Safety Services

8181 Independence Blvd. • Baton Rouge, LA 70806

www.lasfm.org

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CONTACT: Ashley Rodrigue
Public Affairs Director

DATE: 4/11/19

PHONE: 225-620-5115
ashley.rodrigue@la.gov

Opelousas Man Arrested In Connection With St. Landry Church Fires

ST. LANDRY PARISH- An Opelousas man has been taken into custody in connection with arson fires at three churches in St. Landry Parish.

Holden Matthews, 21, was booked into the St. Landry Parish Jail on three counts of Simple Arson of a Religious Building.

On March 26, a fire was reported at the St. Mary Baptist Church in the 100 block of Saqueget Road in Port Barre. On April 2, a fire was reported at the Greater Union Baptist Church in the 1400 block of Hwy 742 in Opelousas. On April 4, a fire was reported at the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in the 3900 block of Highway 182 in Opelousas.

Investigators have determined all three fires were intentionally set. Several pieces of evidence, both from the scenes and from technological resources, have confirmed Matthews as the primary suspect.

At this time, the investigative team is still vetting several potential motives. However, information investigators have uncovered, and that Matthews has offered, suggests a possible connection with a genre of music called "black metal" and its associated history with church burnings in other parts of the world, which have been documented in movies and books. Any questions as to the potential motives of hate are continuing to be vetted by federal authorities.

The collaboration on this case was comprised of around 100 individuals primarily from the SFM, ATF, FBI and Louisiana State Police. Additionally, assistance was provided by the Louisiana Attorney General's Office, St. Landry Parish Sheriff's Office and several other local law enforcement and fire agencies. The SFM is also grateful to the Florida Bureau of Fire, Arson and Explosives Investigations for sending a team to participate in the investigation.

"I am so proud of the team work that has returned a sense of security to this community by determining a cause for these fires and putting the person responsible for them behind bars," said State Fire Marshal H. "Butch" Browning, "I, and all of the investigators involved in this, have been emotionally committed to this case, not only because of the significance of these churches, but also the threat of additional fires. This

outcome goes to show what happens when well-oiled public safety partnerships pay dividends. I can never give total condolences to these church communities for the losses of their places of worship. However, I hope this begins to help their healing.”

The SFM would also like to thank the community for its patience and cooperation with this investigation.

