

# St. Clare suffers vandalism

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Three teenage boys vandalized the parish center at St. Clare in Essex April 8, spraying fire extinguishers throughout the former school building and causing at least \$62,000 in damages. The youths were arrested that same day - Easter Sunday - after they were caught setting fire to a wooded area behind the church.

"It was a major inconvenience," said Deacon Paul Mann, pastoral associate. "They emptied every one of our fire extinguishers and it was everywhere - in the day care, the lavatory, in kids' coats."

The vandalism also "fouled up" computers in the building, Deacon Mann said, adding more expenses that have yet to be determined. Insurance and the families of the teens will cover the costs of repairing the damage, Deacon Mann said.

The parish center is home to a day-care center, religious education and youth programs and meeting rooms.

The destruction was especially troubling to parishioners, Deacon Mann said, because the boys who were arrested were former students of the school or otherwise associated with the parish. He did not believe there was any specific motive for the vandalism.

"I imagine that it was three guys being goofy," he said. "Their parents are very embarrassed about the whole thing and said it wasn't typical of their kids. They feel terrible about it."

In a letter in the April 14-15 parish bulletin, Father C. Lou Martin, pastor, said the church had been the target of other recent vandalism. The outdoor pavilion area was subjected to broken lights, windows and picnic tables. He did not know if those who committed that damage were involved in the vandalism of the parish center.

“Let’s pray for the teens that a light will be turned on in their heads,” Father Martin said. “I suspect their parents will be praying the same.”

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