



*\* RAZED ROOF... Catholic Archbishop of Armagh Dr Sean Brady and parish priest Father Kieran MacOscar at Mullavilly church which was attacked by arsonists*

*Picture: Ann McManus*

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## Priest sees second church gutted

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By Stephen McCaffery

FOR the second time in four years, Fr Kieran MacOscar has seen arsonists destroy a church in his parish.

Monday morning's fire at Mullavilly's Church of the Immaculate Conception follows the destruction of St Patrick's Church at nearby Stonebridge.

It follows the burning of the church's old school and two firebomb attacks on the parochial house.

Fr MacOscar said the devastating scenes he faced on Monday morning were the result of the actions of "evil people".

As firefighters drove from Armagh and Portadown to the burning church, they said they could see the fire's glow from more than a mile away.

"I got a phone call at three o'clock in the morning from a parishioner who had seen the flames," said Fr MacOscar, parish priest at Mullavilly, just outside Portadown, for 12 years.

"By that stage though the flames were shooting up from the roof. There was nothing anyone could do.

"I am deeply saddened. But we have received great support from our neighbours, both Protestant and Catholic."

Church of Ireland minister the Rev Brian Harper told reporters the scene of devastation at Mullavilly had moved him to tears.

Church of Ireland Archbishop Robin Eames visited the scene and said he was shocked by what he saw.

"I extend my prayerful sympathy to the Roman Catholic clergy and people of the parish of Mullavilly and to Archbishop Brady on the loss of their church and condemn those responsible without reservation".

Archbishop Sean Brady was at the burnt out church from early yesterday morning. He spoke of his own deep disappointment with the continuing series of attacks.

"I was here at the Church of the Immaculate Conception a short time ago for Confirmations.

"It was a joyous occasion and makes today's scenes all the more shocking.

"But this is not the end. The people here, with Fr MacOscar and Fr Gates, will rebuild and begin again."

Further messages of support were issued by the Garvaghy Road Residents' Committee, clergymen from the Catholic parish of Drumcree and Presbyterian Moderator the Rev Robin Greer.

Their remarks were joined by calls for calm from SDLP leader John Hume and party colleague Seamus Mallon.

Mr Mallon said: "I am asking that everyone with any influence in this type of situation do all in their power to immediately put an end to these attacks, be they on Catholic churches, Protestant churches, Orange Halls or wherever".

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