

Blaze razes hall at quake-torn parish

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By Pamela Kramer
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Parishioners of Holy Cross Church in Santa Cruz will have a lot to pray about at Mass today.

Early Saturday, their parish hall on High Street was destroyed by fire — a loss made especially hard because Holy Cross Church was heavily damaged in the Oct. 17 earthquake that last year devastated much of the area.

The quake struck one month after parishioners had celebrated the

100th anniversary of the church building.

"This (hall) was where we were saying Mass on weekends," said the Rev. Joe Occhiuto, associate pastor.

Two walls of the gutted building had collapsed by Saturday afternoon, and Occhiuto said he expected the rest of the building would be demolished by the end of the week.

The fire, he said, leaves the parish no choice but to hold services

outdoors, in the parish school quadrangle.

"Hopefully, the weather will hold," he said.

The cause of the fire at the Roman Catholic parish remained under investigation, according to a statement by the Santa Cruz fire department. No one was injured in the 4 a.m. blaze, which caused an estimated \$750,000 damage.

"It seems to be snowballing," Occhiuto said. "It gives us a lot to pray for, but also a lot to be thank-

ful for."

The cost of repairing the quake-damaged church also has been estimated at \$750,000, according to the associate pastor.

Saturday, parishioners readied the quadrangle for services. A local business and another parish contributed sound systems, while parishioners raided the out-of-session Holy Cross school for chairs. All the folding chairs used for Mass were destroyed by the fire.