

Burning bush outside historic church sign of dry weather, not God

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Alton firefighters were able to quickly extinguish a fire outside Alton First Presbyterian Church on the corner of Fourth and Alby Thursday morning.

The fire consumed bushes along the sidewalk just outside of the church walls around its parking lot. Due to dry weather, vegetation can ignite easily. Something as simple as a

discarded cigarette butt could have started the small blaze along Alby. On Wednesday, a home along Fullerton in Alton was heavily damaged by radiant heat from a trash fire contained in a barrel igniting nearby dry zoysia grass.

While Thursday's fire was contained to some bushes, larger fires could occur if people are not careful with things such as bonfires and cigarette butts. Alton First Presbyterian Church Pastor David Crowley said his church was no stranger to large fires.

"Hearing about fire is always scary for us," he said Thursday upon hearing about the bushes. "We had a devastating fire in 1988 that destroyed the whole sanctuary. We built back on site, but it was an electrical fire. Electrical work was being done in the church and some of it arced and created a fire."

Crowley said that fire burnt so hot the pipes on the church organ melted and left small puddles of cooled molten metal on the floor following the blaze. That fire destroyed a building designed by noted St. Louis architect, Theodore Link in 1896. The new building, built in 1990, incorporated more of a long Gothic style over the wider style of the original structure.

Alton First Presbyterian Church was founded in 1821 - the same year Alton was originally founded - but shortly disbanded (Alton disbanded as well). It was reestablished in 1831, which was the same year Alton was reestablished, and continues to this day (much like Alton).

Crowley said church services occur on 10 a.m. every Sunday with a 6 p.m. reflective service following most Sunday evenings.