

# 5-alarm fire damages an old church

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A five-alarm fire that burned out of control into the morning hours today extensively damaged a historic church at 18th and Spring Garden Streets, routing members of the two congregations that share the towering edifice.

The brownstone church on the northwest corner of the intersection was built in the 1850s and, until 26 years ago, was the Fifth Baptist Church. It was taken over in 1960 by the Highway Mission Tabernacle Union Undenominational Church of Pennsylvania, and now is known as Highway Tabernacle Church.

About 70 members of the two congregations that share the church were conducting separate Bible-study classes in an adjoining auxiliary building when the fire first became apparent to them about 8:30 p.m., according to church officials. All were evacuated safely, officials said.

The fire started in a corner of the roof where the auxiliary building and the church join, according to witnesses and fire officials. It spread across the steep roof and rafters of the church.

Police Officers Roy Lopez and Steve Bennis, who were on patrol in the area, radioed in the first alarm at 8:38 p.m.

Lopez said an area surrounding what looked like a chimney "was engulfed in flame."

"It seems like it might have been going a little while and no one even noticed it — so much smoke and fire, and no one called," Lopez said.

Several church members, including the Rev. Chong Kim, pastor of the Korean Pentecostal congregation, and the Rev. Stephen Bogdan,



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**Fighting the fire at Highway Tabernacle Church, 18th and Spring Garden Streets, a team breaks through a stained-glass window.**

cascades of water on the roof from several deluge guns. They also poured a steady stream of water on the church's towering steeple and on adjacent Carpenters Union headquarters to keep them from burning.

City Managing Director James S. White, who went to the scene, said about 10 p.m. that the flames were moving from west to east across the huge, wooden rafters.

Flames 20 feet high roared through the roof, and smoke billowed high into the rainy night sky.

Firefighters used tall ladders to reach sections of the steep, vaulted

