



MEDIA ADVISORY

Loveland Police Department

Timothy Doran
Chief of Police

For Immediate Release
May 4, 2023

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Update into arson investigation involving Abiding Love Lutheran Church

On January 19, 2023, an arson investigation was initiated involving the Abiding Love Lutheran Church, located at 2825 East 1st Street, Loveland, Colorado 80537. Loveland Police Detectives, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, and Firearms conducted a joint investigation to identify a suspect. Darion R. Sexton, age 21, was subsequently arrested and tried in federal court. Below is a press release from the Department of Justice pertaining to the adjudication of this case. Chief Tim Doran stated, "I am extremely proud of all of the personnel who participated in this investigation. This case serves as a positive example when law enforcement agencies come together to protect our community."

Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, May 4, 2023

Colorado Man Pleads Guilty to Federal Hate Crime for Church Arson

A Colorado man pleaded guilty today to a hate crime charge in connection with a fire he set to a church in Loveland, Colorado.

According to court documents and admissions during the plea hearing, Darion Ray Sexton, 22, intentionally set fire to the church in the evening hours of Jan. 19. Sexton admitted that he set this fire by throwing two Molotov cocktails at the church – one at the front door and the other at the basement. Sexton further admitted that he was motivated to set this fire due to the religious character of the church and that he intended to destroy the church.

"Protecting religious freedom and observance is a top priority for the Department of Justice," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "We will continue to vigorously prosecute those who attack houses of worship and target religious communities."

"We all have a right to feel safe and secure in our houses of worship – no matter our religion or belief," said U.S. Attorney Cole Finegan for the District of Colorado. "An act of violence in one of our sacred places is especially serious, and we will work with our law enforcement partners to vigorously prosecute all such offenses."

"The FBI treats hate crimes as the highest priority of our civil rights program because everyone deserves to feel safe to exercise their religion without fear of violence from others," said Special Agent in Charge Mark Michalek of the FBI Denver Field Office. "FBI Denver is committed to protecting those rights, and we will continue to aggressively work with our law enforcement partners to bring justice to all communities that have been targeted."

The sentencing hearing is scheduled for July 21. Sexton faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The FBI, ATF and the Loveland Police and Fire Departments investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Bryan D. Fields for the District of Colorado and Trial Attorney Maura White of the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section are prosecuting the case.

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The information contained in this news release is based on preliminary information available at the time of drafting. The Loveland Police Department's understanding of this incident may change as additional evidence is collected, analyzed, and reviewed. The purpose of this news release is to provide timely information to the public.