



Department of Justice

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY ALICE H. MARTIN
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ALABAMA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, April 9, 2007

www.usdoj.gov/usao/aln

**CONTACT: JILL
ELLIS**

PHONE: (205) 244-2001

FAX: (205) 244-2171

FEDERAL PRISON TERMS GIVEN IN CHURCH ARSON CASE

BIRMINGHAM, AL - The three men indicted in connection with a string of church arsons in West Alabama appeared in U.S. District Court today. MATTHEW LEE CLOYD, and BENJAMIN NATHAN MOSELEY were sentenced today to serve ninety-seven months in prison for the offenses of conspiracy and arson to nine churches in rural West Alabama. U.S. District Court Judge David R. Proctor also ordered both to pay \$3.1 million in restitution. RUSSELL LEE DEBUSK, JR. was sentenced today as well to serve 84 months in prison for the offenses of conspiracy and arson to five of the churches. He was ordered to pay \$1.8 million in restitution.

"Today's sentencings should be a warning to anyone who would think about burning a church - it is a federal crime that results in quick prosecution and tough punishment," stated U.S. Attorney Alice H. Martin. "It is a tragic situation for all involved, the victims, the families and friends of the defendants, and the defendants themselves."

DEBUSK, 20, of Hoover, CLOYD, 21, of Pelham, and MOSELEY, 20, of Birmingham were charged in March 2006, after they conspired to damage and destroy by fire, five churches in Bibb, Pickens, Greene, and Sumter Counties. CLOYD and MOSELEY were also charged with damaging and destroying by fire four additional churches located in West Alabama. The three men pled guilty to the federal charges in December 2006. The affected churches and dates of the fires are listed:

2/3/06 Rehobeth Baptist, Bibb County

2/3/06 Ashby Baptist, Bibb County

2/3/06 Old Union Baptist, Bibb County

2/3/06 Pleasant Sabine Baptist, Bibb County

2/3/06 Antioch Baptist, Bibb County

2/7/06 Dancy Baptist Church, Pickens County

2/7/06 Morning Star Missionary Baptist, Greene County

2/7/06 Spring Valley Baptist, Sumter County

2/7/06 Galilee Baptist Church, Sumter County

The written plea agreements signed by CLOYD and MOSELEY contain waivers of the right to appeal and post-conviction relief. DEBUSK pled guilty without a written plea agreement at the change of plea hearing held in December 2006.

This case began during the evening hours of February 2, 2006, when CLOYD, MOSELEY, and DeBUSK, traveled from Jefferson County, Alabama, to Bibb County, Alabama, in CLOYD's dark green Toyota 4Runner to spotlight deer while drinking beer. After a period of time, the three drove to Rehobeth Baptist Church, broke into the church and set artificial flowers on fire. The three men fled the scene, but continued to other churches in the area, broke into the other churches and set fires and fled while the fires grew. Two volunteer fire fighters were injured while fighting the fire at Ashby Baptist Church.

In the days following the church fires, the three men followed the local news reports regarding the investigation into the series of church fires. CLOYD and MOSELEY became concerned that the investigators were getting close to discovering their actions so they made a plan to divert the investigation further away from Birmingham into West Alabama. On the night of February 6, 2006, CLOYD and MOSELEY drove to Galilee Baptist Church located in Sumter County, Alabama, broke into the church and started a fire inside the church. They then continued to other churches in the area and set three more churches in the West Alabama area on fire before returning to Birmingham.

Many hours of law enforcement and fire investigation were spent by agents and local law enforcement. Agents were able to trace tire tracks recovered at the fire scenes to CLOYD's Toyota 4Runner. On March 8, 2006, CLOYD was arrested near his Birmingham apartment. Agents also arrested MOSELEY and DeBUSK on March 8, 2006. The men have remained in U.S. Marshal custody since their arrest, and will receive credit for time served.

"The church fire case formally comes to an end today following heartache for church communities and a trail of charred destruction," stated James Cavanaugh, Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives- Nashville Field Division. "We used our expertise to find those responsible and we prepare each day to face similar challenges tracking arsonist and bombers. The defendants enter prison at a

young age, they admitted to their guilt, and now face the consequences for their torching spree."

"This is the final chapter of a disturbing story in the State of Alabama," stated Carmen S. Adams, Special Agent in Charge, Birmingham Field Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation. "Today's sentencing cannot change the tragedy caused to the membership of the houses of worship burned, or to the families of these young men. It may, however, assist in the healing of those impacted by these crimes."

Assistant United States Attorneys Herbert H. Henry and Michael W. Whisonant are prosecuting this case on behalf of the U.S. Government. In addition to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and its fellow Department of Justice component, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, agencies participating in the investigation were the Alabama State Fire Marshal's Office, Alabama Bureau of Investigation, Sheriff's Offices in Bibb, Greene, Hale, Pickens, Sumter, and Tuscaloosa Counties, along with Police Departments in Montevallo, Tuscaloosa, and Birmingham Southern College.

###