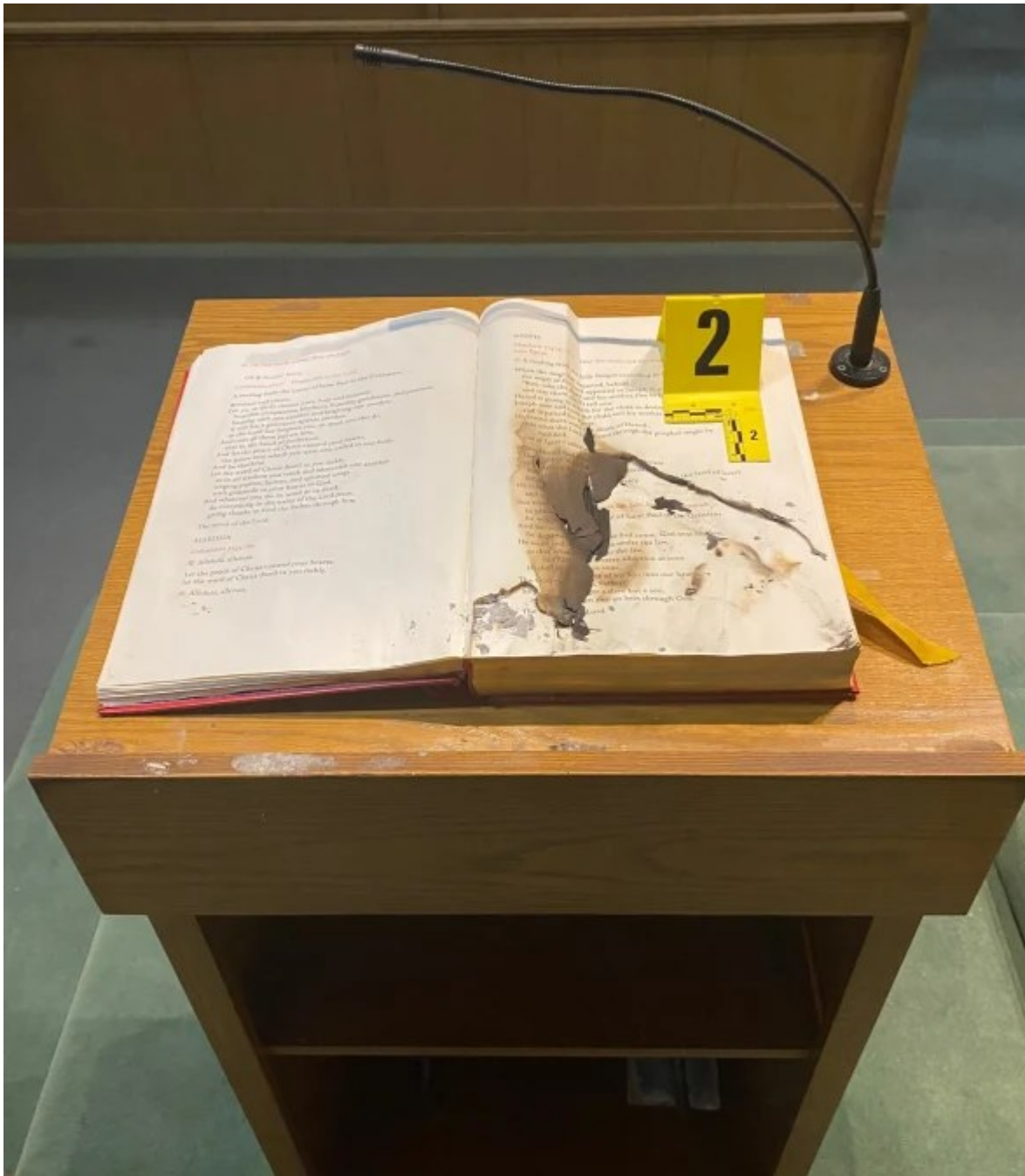


# Altar at Massachusetts church set afire, items from food pantry stolen

“Police Chief Michael Jenkins and Fire Chief Timothy M. Harhen say that the East Bridgewater Police and Fire Departments are investigating after a local church was vandalized and a fire was set on Friday.

One or more people are believed to have entered St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church at 210 Central St. during the middle of the day. Most of the damage took place near the altar, where a fire was set that burned the altar cloth and a Bible.

“There is no place for this type of incident in East Bridgewater, no matter the denomination,” Police Chief Jenkins said. “We are working with the parish to determine how this happened, and why. We ask that anyone with information please step forward.”



*East Bridgewater Police Department photo.*

East Bridgewater police and fire units were dispatched to the church at about 3:40 p.m. During their initial investigation, first responders learned that the parish pastor smelled smoke at about 3:30 p.m. and went inside. Investigators observed that the fire around the altar had been put out with a fire extinguisher, based on the yellow, difficult-to-remove powder seen throughout the front of the church.

Investigators subsequently determined that a water jug was removed from the water dispenser in the adjacent sacristy. Investigators believe the suspect or suspects attempted to

douse the fire with the water, then used the fire extinguisher when that failed.

At the front of the church, the entrant lit the votive candles and left used matches littered nearby.



*East Bridgewater Police Department photo.*

Investigators determined that the suspect or suspects took items from the food pantry, dropping some items as they exited through the rear entrance.

An employee was at the food pantry at 2 p.m. and did not notice any damage or smoke, so police believe the incident happened between 2 p.m. and 3:40 p.m.

An investigation by the East Bridgewater Police and Fire Departments, with assistance from the State Police Fire and Explosion Investigation Unit attached to the State Fire Marshal's Office, remains ongoing.

Investigators ask any neighbors or residents who have information about this incident to call East Bridgewater Police at 508-378-7223. Investigators also ask residents to look out for anyone wearing clothing or shoes with yellow fire retardant powder, which is not removed easily."-East Bridgewater Fire Department.



*East Bridgewater Police Department photo.*