



# MISSISSIPPI STATE FIRE MARSHAL

MIKE CHANEY  
State Fire Marshal

PRESS RELEASE

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## **Church Fire Investigation Leads to Additional Confessions from Coast Arsonist**

**Jackson** – A Mississippi State Fire Marshal investigation of a fire at Hillside Baptist Church in Gulfport has led to the arrest of a Gulf Coast arsonist responsible for string of previously unsolved arson cases Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney announced today.

Deputy State Fire Marshal Ben Brown was called to assist in the investigation of the church fire which occurred on December 10, 2016. That investigation resulted in the arrest of Caleb Deandra Bell for arson. Deputy Brown had previously interviewed Bell as a person of interest in regards to a string of unsolved arsons in the area a few months ago.

In a subsequent interview, Deputy Brown was able to obtain a confession from Bell on four (4) additional unsolved arson cases. Gulfport Fire Department investigators and the Gulfport Police Department Criminal Investigative Division assisted in this investigation.

“Deputy Brown’s commitment to unsolved cases and his work on this case is to be commended, and is indicative of the State Fire Marshal’s commitment to solving arson cases,” said Chaney.

The State Fire Marshal's Office has made 50 arson arrests during 2016. The State Fire Marshal's Office also offers an up to \$5000 Reward through its Cash for Tips Arson Reward Program. Anyone providing information that leads to the arrest and arson conviction of any person responsible for the willful destruction by fire or explosion of any real or personal property within the state is eligible for the reward. If you have information regarding an arson, contact the State Fire Marshal's Office at 601-359-1061; 1-800-648-0877 or contact your local authorities.