Arson, Vandalism, and Other Destruction at Catholic Churches in the United States

Summary: At least 126 incidents have occurred across 35 states and the District of Columbia since May 2020. Incidents include arson, statues beheaded, limbs cut, smashed, and painted, gravestones defaced with swastikas and anti-Catholic language and American flags next to them burned, and other destruction and vandalism.

Statements, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:
U.S. Bishops’ Religious Liberty Committee Chairman Offers Reflection for Religious Freedom Day 2022, January 14, 2022

One Hundred Incidents of Vandalism Reported at Catholic Sites in U.S. Since May 2020, October 14, 2021
https://www.usccb.org/news/2021/one-hundred-incidents-vandalism-reported-catholic-sites-us-may-2020

Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, chairman, Committee on Religious Liberty, and Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, statement, “Bishop Chairmen Condemn Acts of Vandalism, Destruction at Catholic Site,” July 22, 2020

Op-eds:
“We Preach Love! Why Do Some Hate Us?” by Cardinal Timothy Dolan
Catholic New York, 2 June 2021

New York Post, 5 January 2021
https://nypost.com/2021/01/05/the-radicals-who-defaced-st-patricks-cathedral-are-pure-bigots/

National overviews:
“Bishops Seek Answers in Vandalism of Churches and Catholic Symbols,” by Alejandra Molina
Religion News Service, 8 November 2021

“Religious Freedom Week Shines Light on Anti-Catholic Vandalism,” by Nicholas Wolfram Smith
National Catholic Register, 1 July 2021
“Desecration of Catholic Churches Across U.S. Leaves Congregations Shaken,” by Francis X. Rocca
Wall Street Journal, 22 July 2020

Advocacy:
Letter from Cardinal Timothy Dolan and Archbishop Paul Coakley in Support of Increased Funding to the Nonprofit Security Grant Program
January 14, 2022

Interfaith Letter in Support of Increased Funding to the Nonprofit Security Grant Program
June 1, 2021

USCCB Letter to Congress Requesting Funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program
May 7, 2021

Interfaith Letter Supporting Increased Funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program
October 5, 2020

Beauty Heals: The vandalism of churches and their sacred art gives us the opportunity to bear witness to our hope in the Lord whose beauty is revealed on the Cross. Beauty Heals invites us to learn about works of devotional art significant to local churches and how they inspire Catholics to live beautifully.

- Videos: www.usccb.org/BeautyHeals
- Podcast Episode: Beauty Heals, with Bishop Robert Barron

Events:
March 2022
March 8: Interior and exterior of church vandalized, statue damaged (St. Mary’s Catholic Church, Royal Oak, MI)


March 1: Statue of the Holy Family defaced with blasphemous words and imagery (Holy Family Catholic Church, Jacksonville, FL)


February 2022
February 28: Tombstones at Ukrainian Catholic cemetary defaced (St. Michael the Archangel Ukrainian Catholic Church, Baltimore, MD)

**February 23:** Statue of the Holy Family stolen from parking lot (St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church, San Antonio, TX)

https://aleteia.org/2022/02/23/statue-of-the-holy-family-vanishes-from-parish-parking-lot/

**February 17:** Two statues of angels knocked down (Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Milledgeville, GA)


**February 14:** Stained glass windows smashed (St. Therese of the Infant Jesus Catholic Church’s Shrine of the Little Flower, Albuquerque, NM)


**January 2022**

**January 27:** Interior of church vandalized (Greenwood Catholic Church, Greenwood, MS)

https://www.gwcommonwealth.com/top-stories-local-content-crime/downtown-greenwood-church-vandalized#sthash.t7W5zGLB.dpbs

**January 26:** Statues of Our Lady of Fatima and children who witnessed apparitions decapitated (Church of the Nativity, Burke, VA)

https://www.catholicherald.com/News/Local_News/Marian_grotto_vandalized_at_Nativity_church/

**January 14:** Tabernacle vandalized, money stolen (St. Alphonsus Catholic Church, Fresno, CA)


**December 2021**

**December 29:** Christmas decorations damaged and stolen (Mary Mother of God Catholic Church, Hillsborough, NJ)


**December 23:** Christmas decorations damaged and stolen (Mary Mother of God Catholic Church, Hillsborough, NJ)

December 12: Christmas decorations damaged and stolen (Mary Mother of God Catholic Church, Hillsborough, NJ)


December 7: Statue of Our Lady of Fatima vandalized (Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC)


November 2021

November 28: Fire at Catholic Charities, causing destruction of roof and one fifth of the building (Catholic Charities, Knoxville, TN)


November 25-29: Windows smashed and statues toppled (St. Peter’s Catholic Church, DeLand, FL)


November 9: Graffiti painted on exterior walls (St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral, Chicago, IL)


November 5: Graffiti spray-painted on exterior of Catholic mission (Mission San Jose, Fremont, CA)


November 1: Statue of St. Anthony of Padua decapitated (St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Fargo, ND)


October 2021

October 24: Fire set to parish office (St. Charles Borromeo, Tacoma, WA)

October 22: Swastika painted on a pillar in church parking lot (Annunciation Catholic Church, Washington, DC)

https://cathstan.org/news/us-world/updated-vandalism-reported-outside-local-catholic-church-is-among-many-such-incidents-nationwide

October 21: Hateful messages spray-painted on exterior wall of church (American Martyrs Catholic Church, Manhattan Beach, CA)


October 11: Graffiti painted on exterior wall of residence (Arrupe Jesuit Residence, Seattle University, Seattle, WA)

https://seattlespectator.com/2021/11/05/vandal-defaces-arupe-jesuit-residence/

October 11: Paint splattered over the exterior of the church (Los Angeles, CA, St. Peter Italian Catholic Church)


October 10: Windows broken and exterior vandalized with spray paint (St. Edward Church, Seattle, WA)


October 10: Hateful messages and other graffiti found spray painted on exterior wall and door (Denver, CO, Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception)


September 2021
September 29 and August 29: Statues of Jesus vandalized (Miami Shores, FL, St. Martha Catholic Church)


September 29: Windows broken and exterior spray painted with pro-abortion messages (Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic Church, Boulder, CO)


September 23: Stained glass windows smashed (St. Peter Armenian Apostolic Church, Van Nuys, CA)
September 5: Graffiti found on church’s door, sign, and garden sign (St. Louis Catholic Church, Louisville, CO)


September 2: Exterior of church and parish hall vandalized with white paint (St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Jay, ME)


August 2021

August 17: Statue of the St. Bernadette knocked down (St. Michael’s Church, Flushing, NY)


August 9: Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary vandalized (Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mary, Bronx, NY)

https://thetablet.org/another-statue-vandalized-outside-a-catholic-church-in-nyc/

August 6: Doors vandalized with black paint (St. Benedict Catholic Church, Seattle, WA)


July 2021

July 17: Woman seen on camera smashing statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Thérèse of Lisieux (Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church, Forest Hills, NY)


July 11 or 12, and June 26: Three churches vandalized by fire and graffiti (St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Parish, St. Patrick Catholic Church, St. Andrew Catholic Church, Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, Portland, OR)

https://catholicsentinel.org/Content/News/Local/Article/Three-Portland-parishes-vandalized/2/35/43825

July 8: Fire set in bell tower (St. Mary’s Catholic Church, Los Angeles, CA)

July 7: Statue of Jesus covered in red paint (Basilica of St. Lawrence, Asheville, NC)


July 4: Man seen on camera using red paint to vandalize church buildings and statues (St. Patricks’ Catholic Church, Merced, CA)


July 2: Front doors of church vandalized with red paint (St. James Cathedral, Seattle, WA)

https://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2021/07/they-were-children-seattles-st-james-cathedral-vandalized-in-protest-over-residential-school-graves/

July 1: Statue of Blessed Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus vandalized and stolen (Holy Rosary Church, Jersey City, NJ)


June 2021

June 30: Graffiti painted on exterior of church (Holy Ghost Catholic Church, Denver, CO)


June 19: Fire started at front door of church (St. Veronica’s Catholic Church, Philadelphia, PA)


June 8: Graffiti spray-painted on exterior of church (Immaculate Conception Church, Queens, NY)

https://thetablet.org/graffiti-found-on-queens-church-investigation-ongoing/

June 4: Man caught on camera vandalizing doors and stained glass (St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Port Charlotte, FL)

https://www.mysuncoast.com/2021/06/04/charlotte-deputies-looking-school-vandal/

May 2021

May 27: Audio equipment stolen and multiple fire extinguishers deployed inside the church (Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church, Leavenworth, WA)

https://www.kpq.com/ccso-deputies-looking-for-info-on-church-vandal/
May 17: Statue of baby Jesus decapitated (Diocese of Brooklyn, Brooklyn, NY)


May 15: Statues of Our Lady of Carmel and the Sacred Heart of Jesus vandalized (Our Lady of Mount Carmel-St. Benedicta-St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Staten Island, NY)


May 14: Large crucifix toppled and smashed, American flag burned (St. Athanasius Catholic Church, Brooklyn, NY)

https://abc7ny.com/brooklyn-church-vandalize-bensonhurst-vandalized/10635147/

May 8-9: Statue of Jesus Christ vandalized (St. Thomas More Catholic Church, Narragansett, RI)


May 8: Rocks thrown through stained glass windows (Our Lady of Grace, Everett, MA)

http://reverejournal.com/2021/05/19/our-lady-of-grace-church-vandalized/

May 6: Stained glass windows broken, statue of San Juan Diego vandalized (Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Riverside, CA)

https://www.pe.com/2021/05/07/church-windows-statue-vandalized-in-jurupa-valley/

May 5: Statue of Polish priest vandalized (McCarren Park, Brooklyn, NY)


May 4: Update on fire at Mission San Gabriel Arcángel in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles - “Man Charged with Arson in San Gabriel Mission Fire”


May 2-3: Statue of Jesus Christ decapitated (St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Waltham, MA)


April 2021
April 26: Man smashed face of Our Lady of Guadalupe with a sledgehammer (St. Elisabeth Catholic Church, Van Nuys, CA)


April 17 or 18: Statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Mary Magdalene, and St. John, spray painted (Holy Rosary Catholic Church, Woodland, CA)


April 17 or 18: Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary spray painted (St. John Vianney, Rancho Cordova, CA)


April 16 or 17: Face of statue of Jesus vandalized (St. Mary’s Cathedral, Fargo, ND)

https://www.twincities.com/2021/04/19/vandals-jesus-statue-fargo-cathedral-catholic/

April 15: Statues of three female saints vandalized (Holy Rosary Church, Woodland, CA)


April 1: Gunshots fired at abbey of Benedictines of Mary, Queen of the Apostles (Abbey of Our Lady of Ephesus, Gower, MO)


March 2021

March 22: Fire at St. Charles Catholic School is being investigated as possible arson (St. Charles Catholic Church, Spokane, WA)


March 12: Unknown substance inserted into locks, statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary knocked down (St. Teresa of Calcutta Church, St. John Paul II Academy, and St. Monica-St. Augustine Catholic Church, Boston, MA)

https://www.bostonherald.com/2021/03/14/two-boston-churches-vandalized-again-its-unsettling/

March 2: Vandals damaged statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Thomas the Apostle (St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church, Ft. Worth, TX)


February 2021
**February 27:** Several statues vandalized (Basilica of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Youngstown, OH)

**February 25:** Chapel doors and statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary vandalized (St. Mary of the Knobs Catholic Church, Floyds Knobs, IN)

**February 16:** Statue and flower pots around altar damaged (St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Denver, CO)

**February 10:** Three angel statues toppled and broken (St. Pius X, El Paso, TX)

**January 2021**

**January 29:** Statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe shot six times (Queen of Peace Catholic Church, Houston, TX)

**January 19:** Graffiti and arson at Cathedral (Rosary Cathedral, Toledo, OH)
https://www.13abc.com/2021/01/18/officials-investigating-arson-case-at-rosary-cathedral/

**January 1:** Cathedral tagged with anti-police graffiti (St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York, NY)


**December 2020**

**December 28:** Stained glass windows vandalized (Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, Fall River, MA)
December 25: Nativity scene vandalized on Christmas morning (St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Indianapolis, IN)


December 11: Front entrance to site graffitied (Mission San Juan Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, CA)


December 6: Church buildings and bathroom spray-painted (St. Louis Catholic Church, Houma, LA)


December 2: Multiple incidents of vandalism including topping of statues, tearing down stations of the cross (St. Joseph Catholic Church, Derry, PA)


November 2020

November 23: Statue of Jesus smashed with rock, two other statues decapitated and pushed into sewer drain, garden set on fire with accelerant (St. Bernard Catholic Church, FL)


November 15: Apparent arson attack (Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Brewster, WA)


November 10: Portrait of St. Pope John Paul II defaced (St. Gabriel Elementary School, Milford, CT)


November 9: Statue of Mary graffitied, “God is dead” spray-painted on church exterior (St. Mary’s Catholic Church, Chicago, IL)

https://abc7chicago.com/saint-marys-catholic-church-south-side-vandalized-vandals/7786481/
November 8: Head of Jesus stolen from crucifix (Mother Cabrini Catholic Church, Shamokin, PA)


October 2020

October 25: Altar vandalized (St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church, Louisville, KY)


October 22: Statue of Mary toppled (St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Scranton, PA)


October 21: Statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ found toppled; gardens surrounding the statues were also damaged. (St. Germaine Catholic Church, Prescott Valley, AZ)

https://gcmaz.com/prescott-valley-police-looking-for-information-into-recent-church-vandalism/

October 20: Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary found vandalized; left hand was cut off, and there was a crack along her head. (Resurrection Roman Catholic Church, Brooklyn, NY)

https://brooklynreporter.com/2020/10/virgin-mary-statue-vandalized-outside-church/

October 19: Pro-life display vandalized. The display consists of 150 small white crosses and a banner, which were knocked down. (Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church, Magnolia, AR)


October 12: Statue of Junipero Serra defaced and pulled down ((Mission San Rafael Arcángel, San Rafael, CA)


September 2020

September 29: Statues of Joseph, Mary, and infant Jesus decapitated, heads carried away (St. Joseph Cupertino Catholic Church, Fall River, MA); rocks, cinderblocks thrown through windows of Catholic church, decapitated heads of holy family statues found on site (Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, Fall River, MA)
September 26: Churches graffitied with swastikas, “White Power,” upside down crosses, “BLM,” and “Biden 2020” (St. Peter’s Chaldean Catholic Cathedral and Our Mother of Perpetual Help Catholic Church, El Cajon, CA)

September 24: Man with baseball bat damages crucifix, doors at Catholic seminary (Assumption Seminary, San Antonio, TX)

September 23: Man breaks church windows, sets pews on fire (Incarnation Catholic Church, Town ‘n’ Country, FL)

September 15: Statue of Jesus topped, beheaded (St. Patrick Cathedral, El Paso, TX)

September 13-14: Statue of St. Therese toppled, beheaded; parish office burglarized (St. Therese of the Child Jesus Catholic Church, Midvale, UT)

September 11: Statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe toppled (Shrine Church of Our Lady of Solace, Brooklyn, NY)

September 9: Statues damaged and beheaded, windows broken (Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Tioga, LA)

August 2020
August 25: Anti-religious graffiti spray-painted on Catholic Church site during protests over police shooting of Jacob Blake (St. James Church, Kenosha, WI)


August 24 (approximately): Attempted beheading of statue of Mary (Our Lady Help of Christians Church, Allentown, PA)


August 17: Statue of Mary beheaded, swastika spray-painted on Ten Commandments (Holy Family Parish, Citrus Heights, CA)


August 9: Statue of St. Jude beheaded (Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine, Denver, CO)


August 8: Deconsecrated church destroyed in suspected arson (Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Wounded Knee, SD)


August 3: Fires set at church entrance (Sacred Heart Church, Weymouth, MA)

https://whdh.com/news/firefighters-believe-molotov-cocktail-was-thrown-at-weymouth-church/

July 2020

July 18-19: Abortion monument toppled (Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church, Bloomingburg, NY)


July 15: Satanic and anarchist symbols painted on the front door of the church (St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, New Haven, CT)


- **Statement, Archdiocese of Hartford**: (“This follows an apparent trend of desecrating Catholic spaces throughout the nation, as evidenced by incidents in Chattanooga, Queens, Boston, Sacramento, and Ocala.”)
  

**July 14-15**: Outdoor statue of Jesus knocked over and beheaded (Good Shepherd Catholic Church, Miami, FL)


[https://apnews.com/c6f626d09dbf183d6bed915314e333c5](https://apnews.com/c6f626d09dbf183d6bed915314e333c5)


- **Statement, Archdiocese of Miami**: “Archbishop Thomas Wenski is requesting that police investigate this incident as a hate crime.”
  

**July 14**: Statue of St. Mary painted red (St. Mary’s Cathedral, Colorado Springs, CO)


**July 13**: Statue of St. Mary beheaded (St. Stephen Catholic Church, Chattanooga, TN)


**July 11-12**: Outdoor statue of St. Mary burned (St. Peter’s Parish, Dorchester, MA)


**July 11:** Man crashed minivan through church door, poured gasoline on the foyer and lit it on fire. People were inside the church, preparing for Mass. (Queen of Peace Catholic Church, Ocala, FL)


**July 11:** Fire at 249-year-old church destroyed the roof, pews, and more (Mission San Gabriel Arcángel, San Gabriel, CA)


- “Firefighters have not determined what caused the fire which started in the choir loft spread to ceiling then the roof” [https://www.sgvtribune.com/2020/07/21/probe-continues-into-fire-that-gutted-mission-san-gabriel-archangel-church](https://www.sgvtribune.com/2020/07/21/probe-continues-into-fire-that-gutted-mission-san-gabriel-archangel-church)


**July 10:** Outdoor statue of St. Mary spray painted with word “IDOL” (Cathedral Prep School and Seminary, Elmhurst, NY)


**July 5-6:** Crucifix at roadside shrine smashed (St. Bernadette Catholic Church, Rockford, IL)


[http://observer.rockforddiocese.org/article?id=1808](http://observer.rockforddiocese.org/article?id=1808)
July 3: Outdoor statue of St. Mary beheaded and hands severed (St. Ann Catholic Parish, Gary, IN)


June 2020

June 22: At a Catholic college’s on-campus cemetery for deceased priests who taught at the school, a man defaced gravestones by painting swastikas and anti-Catholic language, burned some American flags that were next to the graves, and assaulted a college security guard (Providence College, Providence, RI)

“A man who believes he encountered Gomera [the suspect who was arrested and ‘charged with vandalism and assault with intent to commit a felony’] before the assault told local NBC affiliate WJAR that Gomera was carrying a bucket of paint and accused Providence College of “being part of the slave plantations” and said he was going to light an American flag on fire. Providence College was founded in 1917, several decades after the Emancipation Proclamation, and nearly a century after the abolition of slavery in Rhode Island.”


http://www.thericatholic.com/stories/providence-college-cemetery-reconsecrated-following-vandalism,11740?


- **Statement by Providence College President, Rev. Brian J. Shanley, OP, and President-elect, Rev. Kenneth R. Sicard, OP:** “…we condemn this action in support and solidarity with the Jewish members of our community, many of whom enjoyed the friendship of those late Dominican friars. PC has a long and proud history of collaboration with the Jewish community in Rhode Island. Our Jewish-Catholic Theological Exchange is a significant part of campus life, and has promoted interreligious learning, understanding, and friendship between Christians and Jews for decades.”
  https://news.providence.edu/statement-on-vandalism-at-dominican-cemetery

- **Comment, Bishop of Providence, Thomas Tobin**
  https://twitter.com/ThomasJTobin1/status/1275518695297748998

May 2020

May 30-31: Church exterior damaged over multiple nights, including smashed gates, graffitti with messages such as “God is dead” and “There is no God,” and windows shattered by rocks (Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Denver, CO)
May 30: Church exterior graffitied with “prosecute killer cops,” “ACAB” [All Cops Are Bastards], “Kill all cops,” and “Make America pay for its crimes against Black lives” (Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon-St. Peter Cathedral, Los Angeles, CA)

https://www.the961.com/lebanese-church-los-angeles-vandalized

May 29: Thrown rocks shattered rectory windows (Cathedral of the Assumption, Louisville, KY)

https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/06/01/louisville-cathedral-damaged-protests-over-floyd-death-turn-violent

May 29: Exterior damaged, including thrown rocks shattering windows (St. Jude Chapel, Dallas, TX)


May 28: Someone broke into the church and poured flammable liquid under the pews, lighting a fire that damaged pews and the floor (Basilica of St. Mary, Minneapolis, MN)


May 6: Pulpit, altar, and statue damaged (St. Anthony’s Catholic Church, Casper, WY)

https://oilcity.news/crime/2020/05/08/suspect-arrested-in-25000-casper-church-vandalism/