

Malicious vandalism is increasing against U.S. churches

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5623>

It appears that churches are bearing the brunt of a rising tide of hate crimes as the number and severity of vandalism attacks against churches is increasing.

Thefts from churches are common, especially in the last year as copper prices have risen and the economy continues to decline. Audio and video equipment in churches have been the targets of thieves for many years, but in the last few months the crimes against churches have taken a sinister turn.

In mid-November, eight churches were vandalized in Anson and Stanly counties in North Carolina. Most of them were spray painted with graffiti, but Cedar Hill AME Zion Church was hit especially hard as vandals committed what local officials are investigating as a “hate crime.” Every stained glass window in the church was broken, a child’s tombstone was thrown through a window, someone defecated on the pulpit, and a crucifix was torn out and set afire in front of the church.

The vandals also spray painted the church with “God is a Lie” and “House of the devil,” as well as racial slurs, swastikas, and images of male genitalia. Chairs were thrown through the stained glass windows, tables were overturned, and the sanctuary had been sprayed with a fire extinguisher.

In Salisbury, North Carolina, Organ Lutheran Church was vandalized twice. The second time vandals spray painted the front door with “666” and satanic symbols.

In San Luis Obispo, California, a Catholic church was vandalized, allegedly by a transient who tried to burn a statue of the Virgin Mary and destroyed paintings. Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa was founded in California in 1772.

In Mipitas, California, the Mount Olive Lutheran Church was spray painted with graffiti that included obscenities, the number 666 and a pentagram.

In Pickens, South Carolina, three churches were spray painted with pentagrams, profanity and “I am Satan.” Mount Tabor United Methodist, Glassy Mountain View Baptist and New Life Church of God were all hit about the same time.

In Toledo, Ohio, seven churches reported attempted break-ins, vandalism and thefts that included copper from air conditioning units. Several years earlier, one of the churches lost nine large flat-screen televisions to thieves.

In Madison, South Dakota, two churches were vandalized. At one church, windows were broken, a candleholder was thrown in the sanctuary causing damage, a gold cross was bent, and

communion emblems were destroyed. At the other church, someone had driven through a chain-link fence.

The Crossway Fellowship Church in Mannassas, Virginia, has been vandalized five times in the last six months. Sixteen stained glass windows were broken, and a rock was thrown through a children's classroom window while children were present.

Closer to home, two churches in Pawhuska were damaged by vandals in September of this year, apparently by someone with a grudge against DHS (Department of Human Services) and an Osage County judge. The First Baptist Church was spray painted with "DHS are child killers but who cares?" and the Immaculate Conception Church was spray painted with "Judge Tate is a DHS front for being a child killer. Bad DHS but who cares?"

In Belmont, North Carolina, Holy Comforter Lutheran Church sustained about \$50,000 in damage when stained glass windows were broken and computers stolen.

In Meridian, Mississippi, three stained glass windows in St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and in La Marque, Texas, the Queen of Peace Catholic Church was targeted twice as vandals defaced symbols in the church.

In DeKalb County, Georgia, the Increasing Faith Ministries International Church was virtually demolished as vandals ransacked the sanctuary, destroying instruments, furniture, computers and interior walls.

Vandalism of churches is disturbing because it indicates that individuals have a hatred or disregard for God, and because it may become a bridge to more destructive attacks later. It is particularly disturbing when the attacks are on symbols in the churches, because this means that the crime is not petty or impersonal. However, it should not come as a surprise to Christians that these kinds of attacks are increasing, since it is indicative of the direction that society is headed.

While the American freedom of religion includes being free not be religious at all, the actions of those who are trying to legally erase Christianity from societal view simply encourage others to take the attacks to a higher and more violent level by breeding an atmosphere of fear and contempt. A shame, since it is America's Christians that have historically made America free and tolerant of all beliefs.

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