

United States Senate

March 2, 2022

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BANKING, HOUSING, AND
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SMALL BUSINESS AND
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The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Merrick Garland:

In August 2020, I wrote a letter to the Department of Justice (DOJ) expressing alarm over the violence in the United States aimed at Catholics and their institutions and property. In that correspondence, I highlighted examples of the senseless acts of destruction that had taken place: For example, rioters attacked a bookstore run by nuns, vandals demolished reverent statues, and arsonists set churches on fire. In one case, criminals targeted a church while worshippers were still inside. I concluded by asking that the department, which you now head, act swiftly and carefully to bring an end to these heinous crimes.

I never received a response to my letter, and the violence against Catholicism has continued.


Data compiled by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops shows that almost 80 additional attacks have occurred in America since August 2020. While arson still seems to be a popular offense, graffiti and the beheading of holy statues have also become crimes of choice. Vandals decapitated statues of the infant Jesus in Texas and New York, and an entire holy family statue was beheaded in Massachusetts. Criminals painted churches with hateful messages in Illinois, Seattle, Colorado, and California. In Chicago, vandals tattooed anti-Catholic graffiti on the exterior of a century-old church—a church that the surrounding immigrant community cherishes deeply. In my state of Louisiana, a delinquent broke the heads off statues of Jesus and the Virgin Mary and threw planters and statues at the church's stained-glass windows. In March, Missouri nuns woke up to bullets coming through their walls, only feet from where they were sleeping.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Yet during the COVID-19 pandemic, people of faith experienced significant interference with the practice of their religion. If the government continues to let these crimes go unpunished, it will further inhibit the people's practice and enjoyment of their fundamental, constitutional right. Thus, I again ask that the DOJ increase efforts to identify and prosecute criminals targeting Catholic people and property so that the tens of millions of Catholics in our country can continue to practice their faith safely.

In addition, I also request a written update from your department within 30 days of this letter regarding the specific steps being taken to bring these injustices to an end.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you very soon.

Sincerely,



John Kennedy
United States Senator