

United States Senate

August 11, 2020

COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
CHAIRMAN OF
FINANCIAL SERVICES
GENERAL GOVERNMENT
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
BUDGET
JUDICIARY
SMALL BUSINESS AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Barr:

Catholics are under attack in America. That is a sentence I hoped I would never have to write, but it is the reality we are facing. Since the start of the street protests beginning in May, too many accompanied by riots, there have been at least nineteen attacks on Catholic churches, statues, businesses, cemeteries, parishioners, and personnel. These acts are hostile to the nation's founding principles, the fiber of what makes America great, and must end.

These crimes span from coast to coast and show no sign of ending. Arson seems to be a popular crime of choice. On July 11, one man set fire to a church in Florida while parishioners were still inside. On the same day in Boston, a fire destroyed a statue of the Virgin Mary put up outside a Catholic church in memory of World War II veterans. St. Mary's Basilica in Minneapolis—the first basilica in the U.S.—was damaged when a pew was lit on fire.

These senseless acts of violence and destruction also target minority groups. A Catholic church, founded in 1923 by Middle Eastern immigrants, was spray-painted with anti-police messages. Middle Eastern Christians represent a minority community in America. Many are first-generation Americans who moved to the United States to escape persecution. In June, rioters targeted a Chicago bookstore run by nuns who sheltered upstairs during the attack. When asked about the incident, the nuns said their focus was on praying for the vandals. Their response is truly a reflection of the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Christians have historically been and continue to be one of the most persecuted religious groups in the world. To escape religious oppression, the pilgrims took a treacherous journey across the Atlantic to America, setting the stage for the eventual creation of the United States. The Founding Fathers considered freedom of religion so integral to the fabric of the nation that they codified it in the First Amendment to the Constitution. We cannot let a handful of people destroy this fundamental right.

The trend of desecrating Catholic spaces and property must stop. I trust you are actively working to identify and prosecute those who have committed these destructive acts. I ask that you also focus your efforts on preventing such violence to both Catholic people and property. Thank you for your service to our country and your commitment to protecting our communities during this difficult time. I am confident you will act swiftly and carefully in bringing an end to this injustice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Kennedy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John Kennedy
United States Senator