

## **Catholic Churches Across U.S. Suffer Week of Vandalism & Arson**

A week of vandalism and arson has left statues spray painted and beheaded, church doors covered with graffiti and churches burned. The incidents this week alone included:

**Queens, New York**, on July 10, the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Cathedral Prep School was spray painted and vandalized.

**Ocala, Florida**, a minivan crashed into Queen of Peace Church, an individual got out of the vehicle, spread gasoline around the lobby and then lit it on fire while parishioners were in church.

**Los Angeles, CA**, a suspicious fire broke out on July 11<sup>th</sup> at the Mission San Gabriel. Most of the church was destroyed.

**Chattanooga, TN**, the statue of the Virgin Mary at St. Stephen church was decapitated.

**New Haven, CT**, on July 15th, the church doors of Saint Joseph Parish were painted with satanic symbols.

**Boston, MA**, at Saint Peter's Parish, the statue of the Virgin Mary was set ablaze. The MA Civil rights unit is investigating.

Over the past few weeks there has been an increase of similar incidents around the country.

American history is no stranger to anti-Catholic sentiment. As recently as the 1920s, Catholics in Leominster, MA at Saint

Cecilia Parish had to band together, forming a human chain, to protect their church, from the assaults of the local KKK. Sadly, we seem to be experiencing a revival of anti-Catholic attacks.

Other religious groups are not immune. The Anti-Defamation League reports that hate crimes against Jewish people in the U.S. in 2019 were at their *highest* since the A.D.L. began tallying hate crimes in 1979.

According to the F.B.I., there has been a 200 percent increase in hate crimes targeting the Sikh religious community over the past year.

The struggle to eradicate hatred and promote harmony is one that must be taken up anew by every generation. The task is never complete.

During these extraordinary times, let us work and pray for a society that is just and humane; a nation where woman and men of every race and faith live in peace and mutual respect.

Every step forward begins with us.

*Fr. Steven Labaire*