



VIOLENCE AGAINST PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS & INSTITUTIONS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN MEXICO

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

UNIT OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS
OF CATHOLIC CENTER MULTIMEDIA (CCM)



Violence against Priests, Religious & Institutions of the Catholic Church in Mexico

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT OF THE CCM

Guillermo Gazanini Espinoza
Chief of Information CCM

Sergio Omar Sotelo Aguilar, SSP
Director CCM

Table of Content

3. Prologue
4. Priests, Religious, Seminarists & Agents of Evangelization murdered or violently attacked
5. Notable Cases
6. Chronology of Priests Murdered Between 2018 and 2024
7. Chronology of Attacks on Bishops (2018–2024)
8. Assaulted Priests (2018-2024)
9. Laypeople Killed
9. Decline in Homicides, Rise in Extortions
9. Churches and Places of Worship, Targets of Offenses and Attacks
11. Missing Persons
12. Historical Overview 1990–2024
13. Chronology of Events 1990-2024
23. States with the Highest Number of Attacks on Priests and Religious Individuals (1990–2024)
24. Recommendations

Prologue

Annual Report 2024: Violence against Priests, Religious & Institutions of the Catholic Church in Mexico

Like never before in the history of Mexico, violence has reached alarming levels, affecting all sectors of society. In one way or another, we have witnessed—and in many cases, been directly impacted by—the horrors of violence. In certain regions and cities, it has escalated to the point of destabilizing key aspects of the country's economic, social, political, and even religious life.

In October of last year, as the global Sunday of Missions was being observed, the Catholic Church in Mexico was deeply shaken by the violent death of **Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez**, a human rights activist from the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. His murder was neither incidental nor “collateral damage”; rather, it was a treacherous act that starkly highlighted how his pastoral work and advocacy for human rights had become a threat to those responsible for his death.


This assassination, along with the long and tragic list of murdered priests in Mexico, underscores a painful reality. In Mexico, pastoral agents, laypeople, priests, and ministers from various churches have stepped into roles that authorities have neglected. The power vacuum and the erosion of the rule of law have created a void: someone must fill the gap left by the state's failure to act, whether due to incompetence or, even more troubling, complicity with those who perpetrate evil and crime. This has given rise to a destructive combination: corruption and impunity.

In this report, the Catholic Multimedia Center presents data and insights on over 80 crimes that have caused immense grief to the Church in Mexico. Through its estimates and analysis, the report identifies key trends in attacks on religious sites:

- 21% of the attacks are perpetrated by criminals engaged in petty theft of low-value religious items.
- The second category, accounting for 42%, involves organized criminal groups specializing in the theft of sacred art.
- The final category, comprising 37%, consists of groups carrying out attacks driven by intolerance and religious discrimination.

Notably, there has been a troubling “escalation” of attacks that reflects an increasing desecration and disregard for the sacred. Unfortunately, many incidents remain unreported, contributing to a “hidden” number of physical assaults with no fatal outcomes, as well as verbal, written, or social media-based attacks designed to slander, defame, discredit, or discriminate





against priests, nuns, religious figures, and other ministers. The Catholic Multimedia Center has received alarming reports of assaults on priests, including one involving the Archbishop of Durango, who narrowly escaped injury from a bladed weapon. Disturbingly, this type of aggression is becoming more frequent and must be recognized as a serious warning.

Another important point to highlight is that Catholic priests in Mexico continue to be treated as second-class citizens, while ministers of other religious groups or ideological movements enjoy the freedom to express their civic opinions without facing any consequences.

This is an affront to the rights of freedom of conscience and democratic participation, both guaranteed by our Constitution.

Another often overlooked aspect that has not been fully explored is the case of nuns and consecrated women, who also engage in social activism and pastoral work in some of the most challenging areas of the country. While there are no official records of assaults or attacks, it is highly likely that they, too, have endured violence.

The 2024 report offers a series of recommendations as contributions from the Catholic Multimedia Center. As the saying goes: “If it isn’t named, it doesn’t exist.” This document aims to ensure that the memory of the 80 priests, religious figures, and laypeople—many of whom remain in a legal limbo without justice or reparations—persists. However, in the justice of heaven, many of them may already be enjoying the assembly of saints and righteous ones before the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

The 2024 report presents a series of recommendations from the Catholic Multimedia Center. As the saying goes, “What is not named does not exist.” This document seeks to ensure that the memory of the 80 priests, religious figures, and laypeople—many of whom remain in legal limbo without justice or reparations—endures. However, in the justice of Heaven, many of them may already be rejoicing in the company of saints and the righteous before the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

2018-2024 PRESIDENTIAL TERM PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS FIGURES, SEMINARIANS, AND EVANGELIZATION AGENTS KILLED OR VIOLENTLY ATTACKED

- 10 priests killed.
- 10 priests and religious figures violently attacked.
- 26 churches attacked, desecrated, or robbed per week.
- Two priests missing for over 10 years.
- Nearly 900 cases of extortion and death threats against members of the Catholic Church in Mexico.

During Andrés Manuel López Obrador's six-year term, the murders of priests decreased compared to previous administrations; however, it is important to note that during the same period, ten priests and religious figures were attacked. Fortunately, many of them lived to tell the tale.

Approximately 26 temples, religious sites, and places of worship have been targeted by various illicit activities. Regarding extortion, the number of reported cases has not increased significantly but remains steady.

NOTABLE CASES

During Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration, unprecedented cases of assault, violence, and arbitrary detentions against several bishops were recorded.

Bishop of Orizaba, Eduardo Cervantes Merino

On the Puebla-Orizaba highway, the Bishop of Orizaba, Eduardo Cervantes Merino, along with two priests, was a victim of a mass robbery, during which his episcopal ring was taken. Testimonies on social media shared images and videos of the incident, which, according to reports, was carried out by at least eight armed individuals on Wednesday, April 3, 2024.

Bishop Emeritus of Chilpancingo-Chilapa, Salvador Rangel Mendoza

He was the victim of an express kidnapping that put his health and life at risk.

Bishop of Tehuacán, Gonzalo Alonso Calzada Guerrero

Around 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, July 23, 2024, Bishop Gonzalo Alonso Calzada Guerrero of Tehuacán was attacked by an armed group that stole his belongings and vehicle, leaving him stranded in a remote area. He was en route to Magdalena Alquizapam, a community within the parish of Santa Isabel Atenayuca.

Bishop of Cancún-Chetumal, Pedro Pablo Elizondo Cárdenas

On September 2, 2024, Bishop Pedro Pablo Elizondo Cárdenas of Cancún-Chetumal reported the robbery of the diocesan priests' residence. The bishop shared with the media the violent nature of the assault, during which several clergy members, many of them elderly, were victimized. "They broke in; it was a frightening experience," said the prelate.

Archbishop of Durango, Faustino Armendáriz Jiménez

On Sunday, May 21, 2023, after the midday Mass, Archbishop Faustino Armendáriz Jiménez was attacked by a man with a knife. The Archdiocese of Durango confirmed that the prelate was not seriously harmed.





Father Abraham Hernández

Father Abraham Hernández, an Oblate Missionary of the Immaculate and pastor of Christ the Savior Parish in Mexico City, was targeted by multiple death threats through phone calls and intimidation. Unknown individuals even sent pig heads to coerce him into paying extortion fees.

CHRONOLOGY OF PRIESTS MURDERED DURING THE 2018-2024 TERM

2018

1. **Father Ícmar Arturo Orta Lllamar**, 49, was found dead in October with gunshot wounds inside his vehicle in Tijuana, Baja California.

2019

1. **Father José Martín Guzmán Vega**, 55, was murdered in August in the community of Cristo Rey de la Paz, Santa Adelaida ejido, Diocese of Matamoros. His criticisms of the state government were harsh and severe.

2021

1. **Father José Guadalupe Popoca Soto**, 42, pastor of San Nicolás de Bari in Galeana, Zacatepec, Diocese of Cuernavaca, Morelos, was murdered in August 2021.

2. **Father Gumersindo Cortés González**, 63, of the Diocese of Celaya, was found dead on March 28, 2021. His body showed signs of violence, and he had been missing since the morning of Saturday, March 27.

3. **Friar Juan Antonio Orozco Alvarado, OFM**, 33, was caught in a crossfire and killed on June 12, 2021. He was heading to celebrate mass in the Tepahuana community of Pajaritos and Mezquital, Durango, when he and his companions were trapped in a conflict between rival cartels.

2022

1. **Father José Guadalupe Rivas**, 58, disappeared on the afternoon of Sunday, May 15, 2022, and was found dead on a ranch near Hacienda Santa Verónica in Tecate, Diocese of Tijuana. He was the president of Casa del Migrante, an organization he joined in 2021.

2 and 3. **Fathers Javier Campos Morales, SJ**, 78, and **Joaquín César Mora Salazar, SJ**, 81, were murdered inside a mission on June 20, 2022, in Cero-cahui, Chihuahua.

2023

1. **Father José Angulo Fonseca** was shot and killed by an individual wielding a shotgun on Friday, February 10, in the municipality of Tepatitlán de Morelos, Jalisco. The perpetrator was reportedly Angulo Fonseca's brother.
2. **Father Javier García Villafaña**, 60, was shot and killed while driving near the town of Cuitzeo, Michoacán, on May 22, 2023.

2024

Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez, 51, from the Church of Guadalupe and former pastor of Simojovel, was murdered on October 22, 2024. He was known for his pastoral work and involvement during the uprising of the paramilitary group El Machete in Pantelhó. His murder is the first during Claudia Sheinbaum's presidency.

CHRONOLOGY OF ATTACKS ON BISHOPS DURING 2018-2024

- **June 26, 2022:** Cardinal Francisco Robles Ortega, Archbishop of Guadalajara, reported criminal checkpoints between Jalisco and Zacatecas.
- **June 27, 2022:** Sigifredo Noriega, Bishop of Zacatecas, informed that he was intercepted by an armed group while on a pastoral visit in Jalisco.
- **July 8, 2022:** Rafael Sandoval Sandoval, Bishop of Autlán, was intercepted and robbed by organized crime while traveling from Jalisco to Aguascalientes.
- **May 21, 2023:** Archbishop Faustino Armendáriz Jiménez of Durango was attacked by a man with a knife after midday mass.
- **April 27, 2024:** The emeritus bishop of Chilpancingo-Chilapa, Salvador Rangel Mendoza, left his residence in the municipality of Jiutepec, Morelos, around 7:42 a.m. in a 2024 Volkswagen truck. On Monday, April 29, the parish priest Juan Ricardo Negrete went to the State Attorney General's Office to report the disappearance of the bishop. The Mexican Episcopal Conference (CEM) issued an alert for the disappearance of the bishop, who was found hours later in the emergency room of the José G. Parres General Hospital in Cuernavaca, where he was taken by an ambulance from the Medical Emergency Regulatory Center and was admitted on Sunday, April 28, at 1:21 p.m. as "unknown," as he did not provide his name. According to paramedics, he had been found unconscious, drugged, and naked in a room at the Real de Ocoatepec hotel, north of Cuernavaca. After his health improved, Bishop Salvador Rangel Mendoza, through a statement, informed that he would not take legal action over his disappearance and reiterated his forgiveness to those who harmed him.



- **July 23, 2024:** The bishop of Tehuacán, Gonzalo Alonso Calzada Guerrero, suffered an assault perpetrated by an armed group that stripped him of his belongings and vehicle, abandoning him in a remote area.

ASSAULTED PRIESTS 2018-2024.

December 22, 2018. **Father Eulogio Espinoza Nájera**, parochial vicar of The Resurrection of the Lord Church in the Las Quintas neighborhood of Hermosillo, Sonora, was shot by another individual. The Archbishop of Hermosillo, Ruy Rendón Leal, reported that the events occurred in a kitchen-room adjacent to the temple.

April 2019. **Father Ambrosio Arellano Espinoza**, 78, was the victim of an attack and torture in an apparent robbery. In a statement dated April 11, the Archdiocese of Puebla reported that Arellano Espinoza was “hospitalized in emergency” with “second-degree burns on his hands and feet.”

December 13, 2019. **Jesuit priest Raúl Cervera Milán** was ambushed and shot by unknown assailants in Huayacocotla, in the northern mountains of the state of Veracruz. The priest managed to escape and sought help from the authorities to reach his home safely.

January 8, 2020. **Father Roly Candelario Piña Camacho** was kidnapped, shot, and abandoned on the Mexico-Puebla highway near the town of Santa Rita Tlahuapan, Puebla.

July 10, 2020: **Father Osvaldo Ávalos** was celebrating Mass at the Santiago Apóstol Parish in the town of Ario de Rosales, Michoacán, when he was attacked by a man. The Bishop of Tacámbaro, Gerardo Díaz Vázquez, stated in a communiqué that the aggressor was “a person who is not well.”

July 24, 2024: **Father Abraham**, from Christ the Savior and Lord Parish in Mexico City, received several death threats in 2024, either through phone calls or by having pig heads sent to him, demanding that he pay the so-called “protection fee.”

October 18, 2024. **Father José Filiberto Velázquez Florencio** announced that on Saturday, October 18, he was the victim of an armed attack while inside his vehicle, which was hit by at least two bullets: one in the windshield (on the driver’s side) and another in one of the tires.

LAYPEOPLE KILLED

Seminarian José Dorian Piña, from the parish of Noria de Ángeles in Zacatecas, was tragically killed by an armed group on the night of December 27, 2022. The Diocese of Zacatecas mourned his death, condemning the violence that erupted when criminals attempted to steal the family's car, leaving two dead and two others seriously injured.

DECLINE IN HOMICIDES, RISE IN EXTORTIONS

Extortion and fraud targeting Catholic ministers are on the rise, with media reports and bishops' warnings highlighting the evolving tactics criminals use to meet their illicit financial demands. However, the true scope of the problem remains largely unknown, as the number of unreported cases far exceed those officially documented.

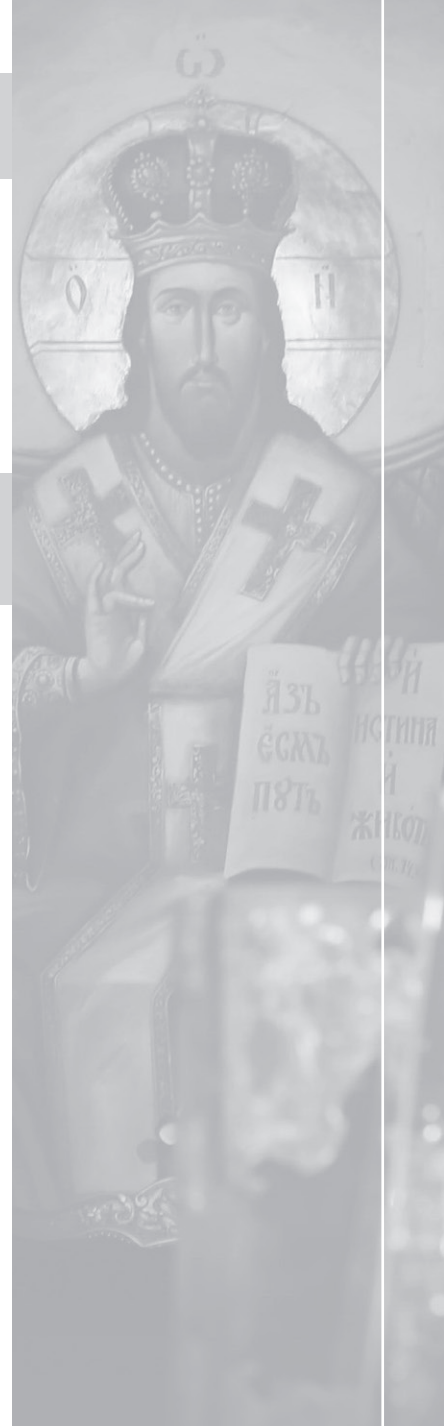
A key challenge is how dioceses have responded—primarily through warnings rather than implementing prevention and reporting mechanisms. This lack of structured response makes it difficult to assess the prevalence of these crimes and identify the most affected dioceses. Additionally, there is no comprehensive data on the financial losses incurred or whether the perpetrators are linked to organized crime. Similarly, no records exist on the number of parishes that have been forced to pay protection fees to criminal groups.


Given this growing threat, it is urgent for the Mexican Episcopal Conference (CEM) to lead efforts in systematically recording these crimes, gathering concrete data on their nature and frequency, and developing a coordinated response to address them effectively.

CHURCHES AND PLACES OF WORSHIP, TARGETS OF OFFENSES AND ATTACKS

In Mexico, approximately 26 sacred sites, ranging from chapels and oratories to large temples and church facilities, are desecrated every week due to serious crimes, minor offenses, sacrileges, or other forms of desecration. Analysis reveals that this trend affects around 12 percent of the country's 11,000 churches across its 19 ecclesiastical provinces each year.

Between 1993 and 1999, the desecration of sacred sites accounted for 2 percent annually, averaging four sites per week. From 2000 to 2006, this figure doubled to 4 percent, with eight temples desecrated weekly. The





trend escalated further between 2007 and 2024, reaching 12 percent, with approximately 26 churches desecrated each week—a staggering 600% increase over nearly two decades.

Another critical issue is the theft of sacred art. Authorities responsible for safeguarding Mexico's cultural heritage estimate that the country is home to more than four million religious pieces, making it a lucrative target for criminal networks. Unfortunately, this type of crime is rarely solved and continues to rise.

According to the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), 230 robberies occurred in churches during Vicente Fox's presidency, leading to the theft of 493 religious art pieces. International law enforcement figures suggest that during the administrations of Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto, at least 957 pieces were stolen.

Meanwhile, journalistic investigations based on transparency requests reveal that between 2015 and 2013, 29 cases of sacred art theft were reported in Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Tlaxcala, Guanajuato, Mexico State, Zacatecas, and Michoacán.

According to the Faculty of Architecture at UNAM, between 2010 and 2020, approximately 200 cases of art theft were reported in Mexico. However, experts acknowledge that this figure significantly underrepresents the true scale of the crime, as many incidents go unreported or are misclassified by authorities. Additionally, the financial gains from these thefts remain unknown due to the lack of proper documentation.

Similarly, the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla recorded 461 cases of art theft from churches in Mexico between 2007 and 2016, with 172 of those occurring in Puebla alone.

Mexico ranks as the Latin American country with the highest number of violent attacks on sacred sites, followed by Colombia, Brazil, Guatemala, Venezuela, El Salvador, and Argentina. This growing crisis is driven by factors such as intolerant secularism, a diminishing sense of the sacred, and a lack of respect for others' rights and cultural heritage.

As a result, religious communities face escalating threats, including assaults on worshippers, acts of vandalism, theft of sacred art, arson attacks on churches, terrorism targeting monasteries, intimidation, and even the murder of religious ministers and evangelizers.

According to analysis from Fides News Agency, part of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the true scale of this issue is far greater, as only 6 percent of cases in Mexico are officially reported. However, underreporting is just one aspect of the problem. Attacks on Catholic churches lead to two major consequences.

First, they fuel the lucrative trafficking of sacred art, targeting religious sites to plunder Mexico's historical, cultural, and spiritual heritage. Second, these attacks often serve as statements driven by anti-religious sentiment, political motives, extortion attempts, or, in some cases, as a means for perpetrators to signal ties to sects or satanic cults. Given this, the degree of responsibility in acts of vandalism or desecration can be analyzed through three distinct approaches:

- 21% involves petty criminals who steal religious objects of minor value.
- 42% consists of organized crime networks specializing in the theft and trafficking of sacred art.
- 37% includes groups that attack religious sites due to intolerance, religious discrimination, or ideological motives.

Criminals often target easily accessible items such as collection baskets, Bibles, prayer books, and sacramental records—including baptism, confirmation, and marriage registers—that form part of the parish archives.

They also steal valuable equipment like sound systems, computers, and religious artifacts, including chalices, monstrances, ciboria, censers, pyxes, altar sets, candlesticks, vases, and cash. A specific group of thieves, known as "metal workers," steals approximately fifty church bells each year, melting them down for sale on the black market.

Many of these bells contain high-value metals such as gold, silver, or bronze, making them especially lucrative targets. Other commonly stolen items include metal crosses, candlesticks, and railings.

The choice of stolen goods often depends on local economic conditions and the cultural significance of these liturgical objects.

MISSING PERSONS

As of today, there is still no information on the whereabouts of **Father Santiago Álvarez Figueroa from the Diocese of Zamora**, who has been missing since December 29, 2012. Nuncio Christoph Pierre expressed his deep sympathy for the families of kidnapping victims and shared his sorrow over the priest's disappearance.

Father Carlos Órnelas Puga went missing on November 3, 2013, and remains unaccounted for. His case was investigated by the Anti-Kidnapping Group of Tamaulipas, whose members were attacked by unidentified individuals in the municipality of Padilla during the early stages of the investigation. However, the exact timing of the attack was not disclosed.



MURDERED PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS IN MEXICO FROM 1990 TO 2024

One cardinal, 59 priests, 1 deacon, 4 religious members, 9 laypeople, and one Catholic journalist were murdered, along with 2 missing priests. These incidents are part of nearly 95 violent events against members and establishments of the Catholic Church in recent years.

Carlos Salinas de Gortari Administration (1988-1994)

Four cases:
3 priests.
1 cardinal.

Locations: Chihuahua, Jalisco, Michoacán, Mexico City.

Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León Administration (1994-2000)

Three cases:
3 priests.

Locations: Michoacán, Oaxaca, Coahuila.

Vicente Fox Quesada Administration (2000-2006)

Five cases:
4 priests.
1 deacon.

Locations: Chihuahua, Jalisco, Baja California, Mexico City.

Felipe Calderón Hinojosa Administration (2006-2012)

25 cases:
17 priests.
3 religious members.
5 laypeople, including one Catholic journalist.

Locations: Mexico City, Hidalgo, Aguascalientes, Michoacán, Guerrero, Puebla, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Baja California, Sinaloa, State of Mexico, and Durango.

Enrique Peña Nieto Administration (2012-2018)

33 cases:
19 priests.
2 missing priests.
1 seminarian.
5 laypeople.
2 failed kidnappings.
2 attempted attacks on priests who survived.
2 attacks on ecclesiastical sites: Metropolitan Cathedral and CEM offices.

Locations: Colima, Baja California, Veracruz, Guerrero, State of Mexico, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Puebla, and Nayarit.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador Administration (2018-2024)

25 cases:

10 murdered priests.

1 seminarian.

7 bishops assaulted.

7 priests assaulted.

Locations: Baja California, Tijuana, Matamoros, Cuernavaca Morelos, Guajalajara, Durango, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Michoacán and Chiapas.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS 1990-2024

1990

Father Guillermo Madrigal Arias, 46 years old, was murdered on the morning of December 10, 1990, along with a married couple, Rigoberto Betancourt Bejarano and Lilia Sánchez de Betancourt, aged 26 and 25, in Ciudad Juárez, according to the State Judicial Police. The police report provided no further details about the location of the multiple homicides.

1993

Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo was murdered at Guadalajara Airport on May 24, 1993. The official explanation suggested that he was "mistaken" for a high-ranking member of organized crime. However, some sources indicate that recent investigations support Cardinal Sandoval Íñiguez's claims that it was a "state-sponsored murder." The case remains unsolved.

Father Abelardo Espinoza Aguilera, from the Diocese of Apatzingán, Michoacán, died under unknown circumstances. The cause of his death has not been determined.

1994

Brother Abdías Díaz, from the Order of the Missionaries of Guadalupe, was violently attacked and killed on December 2, 1994, in southern Mexico City. The motive for the murder remains unknown.

1995

Father Miguel Marzán Arriola, from the Diocese of Apatzingán, Michoacán, died under unknown circumstances.

1998

Father Mauro Andrés Ortiz Carreño was brutally murdered on the night of Wednesday, May 6, 1998, in the community of the Church of Our Lady of the Snows, in Antequera, Oaxaca.

2000

Father José Ignacio Flores Gaytán was murdered on January 17, 2000, in Torreón, Coahuila. Local authorities reported that the motive was robbery.





2004

Father Ramón Navarrete Islas, 56, was murdered with a bladed weapon on July 7 in the Diocese of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Local authorities identified robbery as the likely motive.

Father Macrino Nájera Cisneros, 42, was killed on October 25 in Jilotlán, Jalisco, while defending a young girl at a quinceañera. The attacker also took the lives of two other individuals.

2005

Father Manuel Delgado, 42, was murdered on February 6. He served as the vicar of the Church of Christ of Burgos in Ciudad Jiménez, Chihuahua. His body was found with signs of torture.

Father Luis Velázquez Romero, 51, was murdered on October 25. His body was discovered in the trunk of a car, hands bound. He served as a judge in the diocesan ecclesiastical tribunal in Tijuana, Baja California.

2006

Deacon Juan Francisco Castrejón Aguado, 34, from Mexico City, was murdered on February 27 while sitting in his car. He was shot twice by the assailant. The motive for the killing remains unknown.

2007

Missionary Ricardo Junious Sanders, 76, was murdered on July 28 at the Parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe in San Rafael, Mexico City. He dedicated his work to helping drug addicts and alcoholics. Sources close to the Knights of Columbus reported that he had denounced several illegal businesses in the area.

Father Fernando Sánchez Durán, 68, was kidnapped and murdered in July in Santiago Tlatepoxco, Tepeji del Río, Hidalgo.

Father Humberto Macías Rosales, 52, was murdered on May 1 inside his car. He served as the parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Light in Aguascalientes.

2008

Father Julio César Mendoza Acuña, 33, was attacked by two individuals and murdered on May 2. He served as the parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Venustiano Carranza, Mexico City.

Father Gerardo Manuel Miranda Ávalos was murdered on September 2, allegedly by hitmen from La Familia Michoacana. He was the director of the Fray Juan de San Miguel Institute in Los Reyes, Michoacán.

2009

Father Eduardo Oidor Hernández, 42, was murdered with a bladed weapon on February 6, 2009, on the border between Puebla and Tlaxcala. The attack occurred on the Atlixco highway.

Father Habacuc Hernández Benítez was shot and killed on June 13 in Arcelia, Guerrero.

Seminarians Eduardo Oregón and Silvestre González were also killed while traveling with Father Habacuc.

2010

Brother Francisco Escamilla Sánchez, 42, director of the Marista Mexico Institute, was murdered on February 2. Sources close to the victim claimed he confronted a mafia group that forced private schools in Mexico City to hire mandatory bus services. The motive for the murder remains unclear, but some evidence suggests it was related to a fraud complaint involving 10 million pesos.

Father José Luis Parra Puerto, 50, was murdered on April 27 by two individuals who intercepted him after a meeting. His body was found inside a van in Nezahualcóyotl, State of Mexico. He served as the vicar of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City.

Father Florentino Carmona Méndez, 67, was murdered on April 27 with multiple blows. According to local authorities, the motive was robbery at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Xalapa, Veracruz.

Father Carlos Salvador Wotto, 83, was tortured and suffocated to death. The murderers looted the parish house on the night of July 29. He was the parish priest of the Church of Our Lady of the Snows in Antequera, Oaxaca.

Layman sacristan Víctor Cardoza Gómez, 43, from the Church of Santa Cecilia in the San Felipe del Real neighborhood of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, was murdered on January 24, 2010.

2011


Father Santos Sánchez Hernández, 43, was murdered on February 22 inside the parish house in Mecapala, Puebla. Local authorities reported robbery as the motive.

Father Marco Antonio Durán, 48, died from a "stray bullet" during a confrontation between police and a criminal group on July 2. The priest served as the parish priest of the Church of San Roberto Bellarmino in Matamoros, Tamaulipas.

Father Salvador Ruíz Enciso, 55, was murdered on May 22. Sources close to the case said that the priest had filed multiple complaints against criminals operating near the Divine Face of Jesus Parish in La Mesa community, Baja California.

Father José Francisco Sánchez Durán, 60, was murdered on April 26. According to local authorities, the motive was robbery with a bladed weapon. He was in charge of the Church of the Patronage of St. Joseph in the Educación neighborhood, Coyoacán, Mexico City.





Catholic journalist María Elizabeth Macías Castro, 39, from the Scalabrinian movement in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, was kidnapped, brutally mutilated, and murdered. The journalist was providing social services through social media for the benefit of the Nuevo Laredo community, which led a criminal group to end her life.

Layman sacristan Luis Miguel Islas, 54, served in the Church of La Conchita, Zapotitlán, Tláhuac delegation, Mexico City. He was shot five times in the head by an individual attempting to steal the vehicle in which he was transporting religious items. The ministerial police confirmed, in the initial investigation, that the attack was a direct and calculated attempt to steal the vehicle.

2012

Father Teodoro Mariscal Rivas, 45, originally from Tala, Jalisco, was murdered between September 18 and 19. His body showed signs of torture and asphyxiation. He was in charge of the Church of Santa Cecilia in Mochichahui, Sinaloa.

Father Gerardo Ávila, 64, was murdered on January 28. He served as the parish priest of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Villas de la Hacienda, Atizapán. His body showed signs of torture, and local authorities reported robbery as the motive.

Father Víctor Manuel Diosdado Ríos from the Diocese of Apatzingán lost his life in June after his pastoral work angered local criminals. His death was initially presented as a car accident, but there are claims that he was beaten to death by multiple assailants. Diosdado had received threats on his life and was known for openly denouncing organized crime in the Tierra Caliente region. His murder remains unsolved, and the investigation yielded no results.

Layman and sacristan Miguel Ángel López, 45, was murdered with a bladed weapon inside the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes on January 23. The tragic incident occurred in the Tierra Blanca neighborhood of the Archdiocese of Durango. Investigations revealed that López was caught by surprise and attacked from behind by his assailant.

2013

Father José Flores Preciado, 83, was murdered on February 5 at the Church of Christ the King in Colima. Criminals entered the church around 11 p.m. on a Tuesday, presumably to rob the premises. The priest was subdued, beaten, and suffered severe head trauma. He remained injured until several seminarians arrived an hour later and called for help. Father Flores Preciado later died at the Regional University Hospital. Sources confirmed that the priest had received extortion calls before his death. Ricardo González Vázquez, 25, from Tecomán, was arrested for the crime, but his statements were ambiguous, leaving many gaps in the investigation.

Father Ignacio Cortez Álvarez, 56, was the parish priest of Mary Help of Christians Church in Ensenada. He was murdered on July 21. The Attorney General's Office of Baja California reported that the likely motive was robbery with violence. The presumed killer, Marcos Cisneros Melo, was a person known to the priest. After drinking together, a dispute erupted, which led to the priest's death. Cisneros Melo stole several of the priest's belongings. Baja California's Attorney General, Rommel Moreno Manjarrez, revealed the results of the investigation, confirming that Father Cortez Álvarez died from multiple stab wounds.

Father Hipólito Villalobos Lima, 45, and his vicar, Father Nicolás De la Cruz Martínez, 31, were found dead in the Church of San Cristóbal in Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz, on November 29. Reports indicated that Father Villalobos was restrained, beaten, and suffocated to death. Father De la Cruz received multiple stab wounds, causing his death. The Attorney General's Office of the State of Veracruz (PGJ), in coordination with the Public Security Secretariat (SSP), presented Gabriel Cruz González, Alberto Cayetano Miguel, and Heracleo Feliciano Anastasio Jaime as suspects in the priests' murders, alleging that the crime was motivated by robbery. However, sources confirmed that no items were missing from the scene. The Diocese of Tuxpan reported that the area was under the control of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and Los Zetas.


Father Joel Román Salazar from the Diocese of Ciudad Altamirano, Guerrero, died under unclear circumstances on December 10. His death was officially described as a car accident. However, local sources confirmed that the priest's car was deliberately driven off a cliff. Although there were indications that Father Román had been previously attacked and threatened, the investigation yielded no results, and his death remains unsolved.

2014

Father John Ssenyondo, a missionary priest and native of Uganda, worked in the Diocese of Chilpancingo-Chilapa, Guerrero. He was abducted by a group of armed men in the town of Nejapa, Guerrero, on April 30. His remains were accidentally found during the search for the missing students from the Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College in Ayotzinapa, in a mass grave along with 13 other bodies, on October 28 in Cocula, Guerrero. The investigation into his murder has stalled, and no one has been held responsible for his death.

Father José Ascencio Acuña Osorio, 37, was abducted on September 21. His body, with fatal stab wounds, was found in the Balsas River on September 23, near the town of Santa Cruz de Las Tinajas in the municipality of San Miguel Totolapan, in the Tierra Caliente region of Guerrero. According to his brother, also a priest, Santiago Acuña, Father Ascencio Acuña had been taken captive. After a sum of money was paid, it was promised that he would be freed. Sources close to the case claimed that his death was carried out by organized crime members in collusion with municipal government officials from Totolapan. To date, investigations have confirmed this information, but the case remains unsolved, with no one held accountable for his murder.





Father Rolando Martínez Lara, 45, parish priest of the Santa María de Guadalupe Church in Canalejas, Jilotepec, State of Mexico, was attacked in the early hours of February 19. Several individuals broke into the parish. According to some accounts, Father Martínez surprised the intruders, which led to the attack. Although investigations confirmed robbery as the motive, the findings were unclear, as the priest was found on the Buena Vista highway, just outside the town, with multiple stab wounds. Although some suspects have been arrested, the robbery was not the only theory, and other investigations related to political and economic interests were opened.

Father Gregorio López Gorostieta, 39, was found on December 25 with a gunshot wound to the head. He did not die immediately but was suffocated. According to nearby witnesses, armed men stormed the Major Seminary of La Asunción on the outskirts of Ciudad Altamirano at 11:30 p.m. on December 22 and forcibly took him. Relevant evidence indicated that a possible motive for the murder was Father Gregorio's comments about the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students in Iguala, Guerrero. To date, no one has been held responsible for his murder, and the investigation has stalled.

Layperson Nicolás Carrillo Vargas accompanied Father José Damián Hernández Veloz, the parish priest of Villa Nicolás in the Diocese of Ciudad Altamirano, Guerrero. Hernández Veloz survived a shooting following a failed kidnapping attempt on February 20 near San Antonio de los Libres, in the municipality of Ajuchitlán del Progreso, Guerrero.

Seminarian Samuel Gustavo Gómez Veleta, from the Archdiocese of Chihuahua, was kidnapped and murdered during a robbery over Holy Week in 2014.

2015

Father Francisco Javier Gutiérrez Díaz was kidnapped and murdered on April 6. The Cardinal and Archbishop of Morelia, Mons. Alberto Suárez Inda, confirmed the priest's death and expressed sorrow: "With deep pain, I inform of the death of Father Francisco Javier Gutiérrez Díaz from the Fraternity of the Workers of the Kingdom of Christ." Father Francisco was found on Tuesday night with gunshot wounds to the head, abandoned by his attackers on a dirt road near the towns of Ojo de Agua de Ballesteros and San Nicolás de la Condesa in Salvatierra, Guanajuato.

The Criminal Investigation Agency of the Attorney General of the State of Querétaro arrested Héctor Abel García Sánchez, also known as 'El Rancharo,' an agricultural engineer by profession, as the likely perpetrator of the priest's murder. Investigations indicated that Father Francisco and the suspect were friends with business dealings together. The meeting was intended to deliver a sum of money related to their joint business ventures, but the payment was never made because the accused allegedly killed the priest and left his body in a deserted area. Father Francisco's vehicle was found in the community of Urireo, Salvatierra municipality. On October 6, 2016, Héctor Abel García Sánchez was released after appealing the case. He is also linked to one of the daughters of local PAN deputy Antonio Zapata Guerrero from Querétaro.

Father Erasto Pliego de Jesús was kidnapped on Friday, November 13, and found dead two days later in a field in the La Granja neighborhood near the municipality of Nopalucan, Puebla. His body showed signs of torture and had been partially incinerated.

The Archdiocese of Puebla expressed deep sorrow over the murder of the priest, who was the parish priest of the Nativity Church in the community of Cuyoaco. It was reported that the priest had encountered issues with a disgruntled group upon his arrival as the new parish priest in December 2011.

According to the PGJ of Puebla, the murder was planned and executed by Yahir Esquivel in collusion with Rogelio Reyes. The suspects allegedly killed and incinerated the priest because Yahir did not want to repay a debt. The case is recorded under preliminary investigation 2948/2015/Tepeaca, which remains open as investigations continue to determine if more individuals were involved.

Father Israel Garrido Omaña, 44, from the San Antonio Abad community in Bosque del Lago, was shot five times on November 13 in Cuautitlán Izcalli, State of Mexico. No one has been held responsible for Father Israel Garrido's murder.

2016

Father Alejo Nabor Jiménez Juárez and Father José Alfredo Juárez de la Cruz were kidnapped and murdered between September 18 and 19 in Poza Rica, Veracruz. The bodies of the two priests were found bound with religious ornaments, showing signs of torture, and killed with firearms. Both had wounds consistent with execution-style gunshots.


In a rushed and improvised statement, the Attorney General of the state, Luis Ángel Bravo Contreras, claimed that the priests knew their attackers and even socialized and drank alcohol with them. He denied that the crime was committed by organized crime, instead suggesting it was a dispute that escalated into robbery and subsequent murder.

According to initial investigations, the stolen items amounted to 5,000 pesos, a vehicle owned by one of the priests, and a second vehicle lent to them by an employee of the Poza Rica City Council.

The Veracruz State Attorney General's Office obtained a 120-year prison sentence for Óscar Bonifacio "N", one of the perpetrators who killed Father Alejo Nabor Jiménez Juárez and Father José Alfredo Juárez, both belonging to the Diocese of Papantla.

The motive for the double homicide was recorded as a simple robbery. Other possible suspects include Luis Alberto N, 33, and Carlos Alberto Lugo Zamora, 20, both of whom had open investigations linking them to the crimes. So far, only Óscar Bonifacio has been sentenced.





Father José Alfredo López Guillén was violently taken from his parish on September 19 and found dead five days later in a remote area along the Puruándiro-Zináparo highway in Michoacán, becoming the third priest murdered in a week. The Michoacán State Attorney General, José Martín Godoy Castro, reported that the murder of Father José Alfredo was carried out by two soldiers, who were remanded to Zamora prison. The crime occurred at the priest's home, where, according to José Martín Godoy Castro, he knew and socialized with his killers. At one point, Vicente and Francisco, both soldiers, shot him four times, killing him. They then wrapped his body in a blanket, placed it in the victim's car, stole some belongings, and fled to dispose of the body.

2017

Father Felipe Altamirano Carrillo, 54, an indigenous priest from the Prelature of Nayar, Nayarit, was murdered in March. Some testimonies suggest that he and others were victims of a robbery, but Father Altamirano was the only fatality. The investigation remains open.

Father Joaquín Hernández Sifuentes was murdered in January by two individuals who are now under trial. Although it is alleged that the events were provoked by supposed sexual abuse by the priest, the statements of the accused are contradictory. The criminal case remains open in Saltillo, Coahuila.

Father Luis López Villa, 73, was murdered on the night of July 5. The alleged perpetrator has been arrested, accused of killing the priest during a robbery. However, there is no evidence of robbery at the crime scene, only a brutal and premeditated murder. The incident occurred in Reyes la Paz, State of Mexico.

Father José Miguel Machorro Alcalá was brutally attacked with a knife after celebrating Mass at the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Mexico on May 15. He died on August 3. The perpetrator is in custody, and the case remains open, with the presumption of the aggressor's mental incapacity due to "inability to distinguish reality from fantasy."

2018

Father Germán Muñiz García and Father Iván Añorve Jiménez were shot and killed on the Iguala-Taxco highway in the early hours of February 4. Initially, the Guerrero prosecutor's office suggested that the priests had ties to organized crime, which could have been the motive for the murder. Days later, the same office retracted the statement. The Governor of Guerrero, Héctor Astudillo, after meeting with the Bishop of Chilpancingo, Salvador Rangel, promised to investigate the homicides. To date, no one has been held responsible, and the case remains open.

Father Rubén Alcántara Díaz, 50, who served as the Judicial Vicar of the Diocese of Izcalli and Rector of the Church of Our Lady of Carmen in Cuautitlán Izcalli, State of Mexico, was stabbed to death inside his parish by two individuals on April 18. The case remains open, with no suspects identified.

Father Juan Miguel Contreras García, 33, was the parish vicar of San Pío de Pietrelcina in Haciendas Santa Fe, Tlajomulco de Zúñiga, Jalisco. He was killed by two individuals who shot him on Friday, April 20. The Secretary General of the Government of Jalisco, Roberto López Lara, confirmed that initial investigations identified one of the suspects as Cristian Octavio. Another person was arrested but released due to insufficient evidence. The motive remains unclear, with conflicting and unsupported versions ranging from personal issues to involvement with organized crime.

Father José Moisés Fabila Reyes, 83, from the clergy of the Archdiocese of Mexico, who served at the National Basilica of Guadalupe, was kidnapped on April 3 in Cuernavaca, Morelos, while resting due to health issues. Despite a ransom being paid, Father José Moisés did not survive his captivity and was found dead on April 5. The investigation remains open.

Father Miguel Gerardo Flores Hernández, 49, went missing on August 18. On Saturday, August 25, the search for him ended when his body was found on a property in the municipality of Múgica, Michoacán. The Michoacán prosecutor's office arrested Abel "N", who, according to the investigation, shot and killed Father Flores Hernández during an argument while socializing with others near Nueva Italia. His body was found in an advanced state of decomposition, far from the possible murder site.

While the initial motive points to personal issues, it is known that Father Miguel, who founded a shelter for underprivileged youth, managed significant financial resources. The investigation continues.

Father Ícmar Arturo Orta was found dead on Saturday, October 13, with multiple gunshot wounds in Tijuana, Baja California. According to the prosecutor's office, his body was found in a crashed vehicle on Circuito Alegre and Rosarito streets in the Rancho Chula Vista neighborhood. Father Ícmar Arturo, pastor of the San Luis Rey de Francia church, had been missing for three days. The investigation continues with no suspects identified.

2019


Father José Martín Guzmán Vega, 55, was murdered in August in the community of Cristo Rey de la Paz, Santa Adelaida ejido, within the Diocese of Matamoros. He had previously made harsh and severe denunciations against the state government.

2021

Father José Guadalupe Popoca Soto, 42, pastor of San Nicolás de Bari in Galeana, Zacatepec, Diocese of Cuernavaca, Morelos, was murdered in August 2021.

Father Gumersindo Cortés González, 63, from the Diocese of Celaya, was found dead on March 28, 2021, with signs of violence. The priest had been missing since the morning of March 27, 2021.





Friar Juan Antonio Orozco Alvarado, OFM, 33, was caught in crossfire on June 12, 2021. According to the Franciscan province to which he belonged, the friar and parish priest, along with other laypeople, were trapped in a shootout between rival cartels while traveling to celebrate Mass in the Tepehuana community of Pajaritos and Mezquital, Durango. The incident occurred on the highway at the border of Durango and Zacatecas.

2022

Father José Guadalupe Rivas, 58, disappeared on the afternoon of Sunday, May 15, 2022, and was found on a ranch near Hacienda Santa Verónica in Tecate, Archdiocese of Tijuana. He was the president of the Casa del Migrante in El Descanso, Tecate, where he had been serving since 2021.

Fathers Javier Campos Morales, SJ, 43, and **Joaquín César Mora Salazar**, SJ, 81, were murdered inside their mission on June 20, 2022, in Cerocahui, Chihuahua.

2023

Father José Angulo Fonseca was shot and killed by an individual using a shotgun on Friday, February 10, in Jalisco. The perpetrator is believed to be the victim's brother.

Father Javier García Villafaña, pastor of Capacho in Huandacareo, Michoacán, was shot and killed while driving his car near the town on May 23.

2024

Father Marcelo Pérez Pérez, 51, from the Church of Guadalupe and former pastor of Simojovel in San Cristóbal de las Casas, was murdered on October 20. He was traveling alone and without an escort when assailants shot through the driver's window of his vehicle, killing him instantly. On October 22, 2024, the Chiapas State Prosecutor's Office announced the arrest of a man suspected of being the material author of the homicide. Father Marcelo was known for his pastoral work and his role during the uprising of the paramilitary group El Machete in Pantelhó. His murder is the first in the term of President Claudia Sheinbaum.

STATES WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS PERSONNEL ATTACKED FROM 1990 TO 2024

STATES	EVENTS
GUERRERO	11
MEXICO CITY	8
CHIHUAHUA	7
MICHOACAN	7
JALISCO	6
STATE OF MEXICO	6
VERACRUZ	5
BAJA CALIFORNIA	5
PUEBLA	4
TAMAULIPAS	3
DURANGO	3
OAXACA	2
COAHUILA	2
GUANAJUATO	2
MORELOS	2
NAYARIT	1
HIDALGO	1
AGUASCALIENTES	1
SINALOA	1
COLIMA	1
CHIAPAS	1
ZACATECAS	1
TOTAL	80

Graph 1990-2024
 The data represents the total number of confirmed crimes against priests, religious figures, and laypeople across the Mexican Republic.
 Source: CCM





RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of cases and the ongoing monitoring of attacks and murders targeting clergy and evangelization agents, the following recommendations are put forward.

These focus on ensuring justice through the proper legal channels, addressing the underlying issues of these crimes, and offering support to the victims and their families:

FIRST: Implement mechanisms in the affected archdioceses and dioceses to closely monitor each case from the initiation of investigations through to sentencing.

Understanding the status of judicial and administrative processes in which the Church is an intervener is a fundamental right that must be upheld.

SECOND: Foster collaboration with human rights organizations to present and analyze the situation regarding the fundamental rights of priests and evangelization agents within the secular state.

THIRD: Continue training on the knowledge and application of the Basic Protocols for Ecclesiastical Security: Personal and Religious Premises, issued by the Mexican Episcopal Conference.

Regularly review and assess the effectiveness of these protocols, making adjustments as needed based on the experiences of pastors and communities.

FOURTH: Develop a strategic plan to collect information on attacks and aggressions committed against national and ecclesiastical heritage.

In coordination with the Presidency Council of the CEM (Mexican Episcopal Conference), archbishops, bishops, and legal representatives of religious associations could provide information on both minor and high-impact crimes against national and ecclesiastical heritage.

This effort would help create an accurate registry, offering objective insights into specific issues in each temple and parish across Mexico's ecclesiastical provinces.

FIFTH: Analyze the progress made in inventorying sacred art and assets in places of worship and monuments under the care of the Catholic Church that are considered national property.

SIXTH: Ensure pastoral care for the families of murdered priests through active listening and spiritual accompaniment.

The Church has not only lost a priest; a family also suffers the absence of a son taken by violence.

SEVENTH: Evaluate the relevance of building collaborative ties with other churches that have faced similar situations, such as the murders of evangelical pastors and ministers.

One objective is to gather real, objective information on the scope of the problem of aggression against priests, evangelization agents, pastors, and ministers of worship.

EIGHTH: Hold an annual memorial for bishops, priests, and evangelization agents who have been killed due to violent causes.

Remembering them ensures their memory endures and helps heal the damage done to the communities affected.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT OF THE CCM
ccmprensa@gmail.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED©
CENTRO CATÓLICO MULTIMEDIAL
MÉXICO, 2024

