



OBSERVATORY OF
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
IN LATIN AMERICA



Biannual Report

Period: July - December 2020



About

OLIRE is a research, training and advocacy program that monitors and documents the state of religious freedom in Latin America. We offer to be a space that allows the understanding and promotion of religious freedom from an academic, non-confessional and non-partisan perspective, which enables the strengthening of research on religious freedom and violations of this right in the region.

Areas of work

- **Monitor:** We document, investigate, and analyze the state of religious freedom and its possible limitations in the different countries of the region. Especially the position of vulnerable religious minorities whose rights are being infringed.
- **Empower:** We train the public, political actors, and international institutions on the right to religious freedom and the range of hostilities and violations of this right in Latin America.
- **Influence:** We aim to participate and actively influence the social and public sphere, at the national and multilateral level to improve the protection of the right to religious freedom.

Social and political context: a brief regional description

In the second half of the year, the economic, political, and social crisis exacerbated in almost all the countries in the region.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), amid the health and economic crisis unleashed by COVID-19, Latin America and the Caribbean was the [hardest hit](#) region in the emerging world. At the end of the year 2020, the continuing impact and challenges of the pandemic further accentuated inequality and placed already vulnerable people in the worst scenario.

Distrust in political parties and the government led to violent social protests. In Peru these protests led to the [resignation](#) of a president, in Guatemala to the [suspension](#) of a budget project and in Bolivia, the population [pushed](#) for a date for presidential elections to be set. Despite the more or less flexible confinement measures, the last semester of 2020 was also marked by an important electoral agenda. Chile carried out the plebiscite that [approved](#) the elaboration of a new constitution, an opportunity to abandon the Pinochet-era Constitution. In Bolivia, the Movement to Socialism Party [returned](#) to power led by Luis Arce and in Venezuela, as a result of an [irregular](#) electoral process, the National Assembly renewed its deputies with a pro-government majority, displacing the opposition of this important branch of the government.

The results of these political dynamics will definitely influence the degree of protection of the fundamental rights of the population, especially now that the pandemic has been the ideal scenario for the weakening of democracy in the region, with the consequent increase in [corruption](#), impunity and, human rights violations, further restricting fundamental freedoms and civic space especially in countries with authoritarian tendencies like Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

In the last half of the year, organized crime groups also [reinforced](#) their control in countries like Colombia, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras or Brazil, by imposing their own rules to control the pandemic and threatening to resort to violence to demand compliance. This situation of violence worsened the conditions of many in the country, which also aggravated the situation of the displaced population and immigrants. In this context, communities/religious groups, consistent with their ministry, have acted as the voice of those most in need, denouncing criminal actions or corrupt alliances with authorities. Unfortunately, as a result of this exposure, incidents of physical and symbolic violence against religious leaders were identified, particularly those who openly oppose the interests of the de facto powers, whether they come from state or non-state agents.

In this context, the role played by religious communities and faith-based organizations in society [intensified](#) and not only in Latin America. Despite the multiple restrictions imposed on religious services, religious leaders used the means available to them - including technological ones - to continue to provide spiritual support. They helped communities build their resilience and preparedness. But also, either alone or alongside civil society groups, filled the COVID-19 aid void for the most neglected communities in different countries in the region. The humanitarian

efforts were unprecedented and confirmed an indisputable fact: religious groups are still social actors of the utmost importance in society.

Despite the aforementioned, radical secular groups, with the support of government authorities, are still making efforts to diminish or completely ignore the importance of the religious sector in the public sphere. As part of these efforts, we can also mention violations of the right to freedom of expression of confessional actors, sanctions under discrimination provisions, and even the prohibition of confessional schools to educate following their ethos. All of this has contributed to the discrimination of those who identify and try to live by the guidelines of their faith.

Religious minorities in the region still suffer discrimination and intolerance. In Brasil, adherents of Afro-Brazilian religions like Umbandá and Candomblé have repeatedly denounced cases of discrimination and religious intolerance by some Protestant Christian groups, especially by neo-Pentecostal groups. Historically, in Venezuela, there have been cases of anti-Semitism. Although the majority of the Jewish population has emigrated from the country, the official and government-controlled media have become a tool for disseminating antisemitic propaganda.

At the end of 2020, we still find a difficult scenario for religious communities, and with many challenges to overcome for the full exercise of the right to religious freedom in Latin America.

In this semi-annual report, we will briefly describe the ranges of hostilities to which religious groups were exposed during July-December 2020.

Latin America: State of religious freedom

In this report, we will present the different challenges for the full exercise of the right to religious freedom in the region. For this purpose, we use the following categories:

1. The regulation of religión by organized crime

During the second half of the year, criminal groups reinforced the new dynamics they developed at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition to crimes related to extortion, kidnapping, or drug trafficking, they also specialized in the trafficking of medical and clinical supplies, cybercrime and there is even suspicion about the possibility that they will infiltrate vaccine supply chains.

Even before the pandemic, government authorities across the region have failed to implement effective containment or prevention measures against criminal networks. Nonetheless, by having acquired greater knowledge and experience on the strategies assumed by governments to control the health emergency, over the months criminal groups managed to expand their control over entire populations and territories particularly in Mexico Colombia, Brazil, Honduras, and El Salvador. This control is the result, in part, of the "aid/donations" provided by these groups to the inhabitants of the most neglected communities at the beginning of the pandemic.

Failed states or territories are totally dependent on the de facto power of these groups. All sectors and activities are subject to their authority and involved in spirals of violence, including the activities of religious groups.

Religious communities, as well as religious leaders with greater influence and political or social participation, who act as social leaders in defense of human rights, justice, the environment, land rights, among others, have been threatened, kidnapped, or killed for their critical voice, for having denounced corruption or tried to stop the criminal activities of these groups. Even the work of religious groups focused on humanitarian assistance addressed to alleviate the ravages of the pandemic is at constant risk of criminal responses such as robberies or armed attacks, not to mention that in many cases religious leaders require permission from cartel leaders, gangs, or guerrillas to continue their activities in certain areas.

The economic crisis and the increase in the population in extreme poverty have also influenced a greater number of young people enlisted in the ranks of criminal groups. This also means that educational or rehabilitation programs run by religious groups are at risk of being dismantled.

In the last semester of the year, criminal groups continue to vandalize and rob churches of worship, especially Christians, as yet another form of economic income, also taking advantage of the absence of attendees due to the pandemic. Likewise, churches and mostly Christian religious

leaders continue to be the target of extortion, kidnapping, and death threats. In many cases, these incidents lead to the cancellation of worship activities, sometimes even online activities, to protect the integrity of the few people authorized to attend and broadcast the religious service.



Source: “Apuñalan hasta en quince ocasiones al párroco del Refugio en Briseñas (Michoacán)” *Aleteia*



Source: “El Salvador: asesinan al rector del seminario Romero”, *Vatican News*

2. Religious restrictions motivated by an anti-religious political ideology (communism) and totalitarian control of the government

At the end of 2020, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela managed to consolidate their dictatorships by undermining the rule of law and co-opting the different branches of the government. The COVID-19 health crisis allowed an excessive concentration of power and the near disappearance of democratic controls, at the cost of the fundamental freedoms of its citizens.

This panorama of violations of fundamental rights also affects the right to religious freedom both in its personal and collective dimensions. While freedom of worship was generally respected, other intrinsic dimensions of the right to religious freedom, such as the right to express or manifest one's faith, live according to one's faith, especially in the community or public spaces, as well such as the right to educate and receive education on one's own faith or the right of parents to educate their children under their own convictions, were widely restricted.

Religious leaders have faced scrutiny and vigilance, especially Christians since they have been the most outspoken critics of these totalitarian regimes. In the second half of the year, pastors and their families in Cuba were arbitrarily arrested and fined exorbitant amounts. Temples, especially unregistered churches, were vandalized and besieged by the government and groups linked to the communist party. The entry of humanitarian aid managed by religious groups was also restricted or prohibited in its entirety.

In Nicaragua, religious services were monitored and houses of religious leaders were besieged. Sandinista collectives, with the acquiescence of the regime, violently vandalize temples, especially those of the Catholic Church. The siege was such that several churches decided to preventively remove objects of material and symbolic value, in addition to organizing surveillance days to alert in case of any disturbance. New regulations require entities that operate in Nicaragua under the order or supervision of an external body, to register as foreign agents with the Ministry of the Interior and to report their financial movements on a monthly basis, a situation that could limit foreign funding of religious organizations/activities in the country.

In Venezuela, even though not many violent incidents against religious leaders have been reported, pressure against them persists. Talking negatively about the regime puts them at risk of being monitored and can jeopardize their religious activities.

Both in Cuba and Nicaragua, Covid-19 education, delivery of food, medicine, or the management of foreign donations by religious leaders or faith-based organizations aligned or related to the opposition were prohibited or sanctioned. Even the versions given by religious leaders about the state of the pandemic in the country was considered subversive speech and punishable as it contradicted official government versions. In Nicaragua, a country where confinement measures were never adopted, the authorities promoted massive religious festivities in the streets, in open contradiction to the Catholic Church's call for voluntary confinement.

Schools still indoctrinate children and adolescents under the ideological guidelines of the political party in power. Parents who express their disagreement or report cases of discrimination against

their children because of the faith they profess, either by teachers or fellow students, are threatened and silenced.

On the other hand, the political use of religion remains as a political strategy to achieve legitimacy among citizens. The approach to some evangelical Christian groups (not representative of the entire evangelical community) depends on the affiliation of these groups or their leaders to the regime and to the interests of the party. This has meant for them greater benefits or at least the freedom to carry out their activities without major obstacles.



Source: “Un atentado con bomba molotov incendia la capilla de la Catedral Metropolitana de Managua”, *El País*



Source: “La Seguridad del Estado desmantela una iglesia en Santiago de Cuba”, *14 y medio*

3. Hostility to religious expressions by state and non-state actors

Although there is a normative framework that recognizes the right to religious freedom and the right to freedom of expression; across Latin America attempts have been made to limit or censor the manifestations of religious leaders in the public sphere - especially of Christians - under the principle of church-state separation, anti-discrimination provisions or “hate speech” regulations. Even government authorities seek to censor all types of religious manifestations in state entities under a radical understanding of the principle of neutrality.

In the context of International Women's Day, radical feminist groups used vandalism and attacks on houses of worship as a slogan for their demands and as a rejection of the Church and its stance against abortion. Sexual minorities seek the defense of their interests through laws and public policies even when this implies censorship or restriction of the right to freedom of expression of religious leaders when they express their faith-based opinions on issues related to life, marriage and the family. The participation and influence of the religious sector in the public space is accepted to a certain extent when it is involved in peace processes or humanitarian assistance, but not in other settings, especially those related to regulations in the education or health sector.

Ordinary citizens, without necessarily being affiliated with ideological groups, have also lashed out at temples. Acts of vandalism, desecration and attacks on churches have been a way of demonstrating social discontent and the rejection of religious doctrines, especially Christian, which content is understood by some sectors, as the cause of structural inequalities in society.

In the last half of the year, there have also been risks regarding the right of parents to educate their children. In Mexico, it is sought to impose a comprehensive sexual education even against the parents' decision to reserve certain contents on sexuality according to their convictions. In Argentina, Catholic confessional educational networks are accused of homophobia, discrimination, and violence for teaching content related to family and marriage according to the Christian ethos of the institution.

During the COVID-19 context, although the most radical containment measures were identified in the first months of the pandemic; from July to December 2020, the return to quarantine, immobilization, or limitation of the capacity for certain activities depended on the degree/increase of infections in each country or state and affected once again the development of religious services. Religious celebrations continued to be one of the first activities to be limited or completely prohibited to prevent the spread of COVID-19, despite the implementation of the corresponding security protocols by each religious group.



Source: “Dejan en libertad a tres imputados de atacar iglesia en Argentina”, *Aciprensa*



Source: “Chile: manifestantes dañan dos iglesias durante masiva protesta”, *DW*

4. Hostility towards religious conversion in indigenous communities

Indigenous communities are governed by a special shared worldview. It is according to this worldview – which is different for each indigenous community – that aspects important to indigenous life in society can be understood. This includes political, economic, and cultural aspects, even the relationship with the environment and religion. Because the religious aspect within indigenous communities largely shapes their lives in society, those who decide not to continue with the population’s syncretic practices due to religious conversion may become a victim of hostilities.

In the second half of the year, members of reservations or indigenous peoples who have decided not to continue with syncretic practices or the uses and customs of the place, are seen as destabilizing elements. This phenomenon is visible in Mexico and Colombia. Converts to a non-syncretic or non-majority religion on the reservation are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations. They face various forms of harassment and discrimination, including exclusion from basic services, arbitrary arrests, threats, forced labor, sexual harassment and even violence. Religious freedom is also severely restricted, as any religious activity contrary to village rites is prohibited. This can even lead to the forced displacement of entire families, destruction of their property, or pressure to leave the community.

Syncretic practices in these indigenous communities are usually related to the Catholic religion. In other words, self-styled Catholic tribal leaders are the ones who often harass indigenous members converted to another Christian denomination, usually evangelicals. However, these attitudes of intolerance are typical of traditional indigenous leaders not representative of the entire Catholic Church. Many times, the Catholic Church itself has condemned this type of behavior against religious minorities within indigenous communities.



Source: “Evangelical families expelled and homes demolished in Chiapas”, *Evangelical Focus*



News Monitoring

The data presented in this section have been obtained with the collaboration of the Latin American Research Unit of Open Doors International.

OLIRE's main activity is monitoring the state of religious freedom in the region, our research encompass two areas:

A. The first corresponds to violations of religious freedom through physical violence. The tool used by OLIRE to document these incidents is the [Violent Incidents Database-VID](#) following specific [benchmarks](#).¹

Figure 1: Incidents of violence in Latin America (July - December 2020)

Countries	Killings	(Attempts) to destroy, vandalize or desecrate places of worship or religious buildings	Closed places of worship or religious buildings	Arrests/ detentions	Abductions	Other forms of attack (physical or mental abuse)	Attacked houses/ property of faith adherents	Forced to leave home or to leave country
Argentina	2	6	1	0	0	4	1	0
Brasil	1	4	0	0	0	5	0	0
Chile	0	6	0	0	0	10	0	0
Colombia	1	1	15	1	1	33	0	104
Cuba	0	3	1	4	0	0	1	0
Guatemala	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mexico	2	13	0	1	3	20	1	0
Nicaragua	1	15	0	0	0	1	0	0
Venezuela	2	6	0	0	0	0	1	0

Source: OLIRE, Violent Incidents Database – VID.

The updating of this database is continuous, so the total number of incidents may vary as new cases are registered / identified. Updated data can be found [here](#).

¹ It is important to note that the Observatory team does not have the resources to validate each reported incident. If after uploading an incident, users or our collaborators detect that the information provided is not entirely correct or is incomplete, it may be eliminated and/or modified.

B. The second area of research corresponds to the monitoring and subsequent analysis of other forms of violence, such as discrimination, social exclusion and various forms of pressure.

Below we present a limited list of the most outstanding news reported and/or identified by OLIRE in the period July-December 2020:

Argentina

- Prior to an anti-abortion march in Moreno, in the west of the Conurbano bonaerense, the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Rosary was [vandalized](#). Radical feminist groups protestors covered the cathedral in green paint as a protest against the church.
- A group of people identified as part of the Mapuche community [entered](#) the parish of Our Lady of Luján, in El Bolsón. Approximately 12 Mapuche members entered the church by force, beat the priest, and took another member of the congregation hostage for a short period of time. The group also vandalized religious images.
- Father Jorge Vaudagna (58), the parish priest of Vicuña Mackenna, a town in the department of Río Cuarto, province of Córdoba, Argentina, was [shot](#) in his parish during an attempted robbery.
- On his way to his parish in Matanza, Father Angelotti was [intercepted](#) by 8 individuals on 4 motorbikes. These individuals robbed the father of his car and phone and beat him. As a warning, the thieves shot on the ground 6 times.
- The National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism filed a complaint with the Public Ministry of the City of Buenos Aires to [investigate](#) the authorities of the Santo Tomás de Aquino

Fraternity of Agrupations (FASTA). According to the authorities, the teachings according to the ideology of the group have homophobic and hateful connotations against sexual minorities and the feminist movement.

- Pastor Eduardo Trasante was [shot](#) in the head in front of his family at his home. The pastor's children were murdered in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Since then, the pastor has actively worked to eradicate insecurity. He even became a councilor for the city of Rosario.
- The Argentine Council for Religious Freedom (Calir) expressed its [rejection](#) of the recent attacks on places of worship and demanded that the authorities give criminal regulations that sanction these intolerant behaviors.

Bolivia

- The parish priest Andrés Pestas, was [intercepted](#) by peasant leaders and people related to the Movement for Socialism (MAS). They blocked the area in protest to the postponement of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of the election date. The blockers tried to hit the priest and smashed the windows of his vehicle.

Brasil

- Priest Adriano da Silva Barros of the Parish of Sao Simcao in Simonésia had [disappeared](#) in the early afternoon of October 13. The Priest has allegedly become a victim of a robbery. A first police report stated that he was killed with a knife, but also that the body was set on fire.
- An image of the Virgin Mary was [vandalized](#) in the center of the municipality of Paulista, in Sertão da Paraíba. In a video posted on social networks, four



people appear around the burning image, people could be heard reciting songs.

- The São José Operário parish in São Leopoldo (Brazil), was [robbed](#) when the priest celebrated and broadcast the Holy Mass live.
- A man entered a church in Brazil, dedicated to the Virgin of Fatima, and [destroyed](#) the altar with a mallet. Two days earlier, the same man tried to interrupt the celebration of a mass.

Colombia

- The organization Voice of the Martyrs has been inundated with [reports](#) of paramilitary groups closing churches. They began compiling a list, which has grown to 60 churches. Many of these churches and pastors' homes were marked with the initials of the paramilitary group called Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC), which is Colombia's largest drug trafficking organization. Many of the congregations also received official letters from the AGC, threatening them and ordering them to close.
- Pastor Silvio Enrique Ochoa, 69, a member of the Christian church El Perdón, located in Cali, was [murdered](#) by a gunman.
- Certain ethnic groups in the north of the country directly [blamed](#) Christians for breaking the concept of "harmony". In recent weeks, incidents of persecution against Christians in rural areas of the country have increased.
- More than 10,000 churches throughout the country and around 2,000 in Bogotá signed a letter that was sent to Mayor Claudia López, through which they reject the

[criticism](#) that she has been making of the reopening of religious centers.

- Since the arrival of the new coronavirus in Colombia, various [armed groups](#) in many parts of the country have imposed curfews, quarantines and other measures to prevent the virus from spreading. In order to enforce its rules, armed groups have threatened, murdered and attacked those they believe are not complying with the rules.
- Colombian President Iván Duque published a tweet from his personal account in which he expressed his personal devotion to the Virgin of Chiquinquirá. The Legal Secretariat of the Presidency decided to file a [challenge](#) to the Cali Court ruling in order to maintain the President's tweet and show that this action did not violate religious freedoms in the country.
- Senator Roy Barreras filed a [complaint](#) against the Tenth Municipal Civil Judge of Cartagena, Ramiro Eliseo Flórez Torres, for his refusal to marry two women in the capital of Bolívar, arguing that doing so would go against his "Christian morality".
- A citizen of the municipality of Caldas asked that the bell tower and the clock of the Nuestra Señora de Los Dolores parish be [silenced](#), as she cannot sleep and the sound causes her stress. The court ruled in her favor.
- A group of unidentified [vandals entered](#) the Church of Our Lady of Valvanera, in the city of Pitalito, in the southeastern part of Colombia. They broke open the Tabernacle, and stole the ciborium and monstrance, along with several other religious objects. The thieves also threw the consecrated hosts on the floor. The Bishop mentioned that the event represented a "serious violation of the people's religious rights".



Cuba

- The automotive workshop of the Assemblies of God Church in Holguín was [raided](#) without explanation by 3 police officers, they took 1 person into custody. The police confiscated 244 tiles meant for building a new prayer house along with their beams and screws and 14,000 Cuban pesos.
- The Cuban authorities have instructed to [close](#) the Church of Jehovah Shalom, belonging to the Assemblies of God denomination. The authorities ordered that the building they use as a church can no longer be used.
- Several members of the Asociación de Yorubas Libres de Cuba, including a minor child, were [released](#) from police custody after being summoned separately to the police station in Placetas, Villa Clara. According to the Global Liberty Alliance (GLA), they were in police custody for three hours.
- The Council of Churches of Cuba [disqualified](#) the sending of humanitarian aid from Miami to Cubans and said that it is a "new and offensive campaign by the Cuba Decide platform and its leader, Rosa María Payá."
- The Cuban Observatory for Human Rights reported that at least 65% of Cubans recognize that there is some degree of [indoctrination](#) in schools. In the books that are used in Cuban schools, fragments are read that place the dictator of Fidel Castro as "the savior of Cuba".
- The independent journalist Henry Constantín denounced a wave of [interrogations](#) against 70 Catholics who signed the letter that is addressed to Cardinal Juan de la Caridad García and the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba, asking religious leaders to pronounce on humanitarian aid sent from Miami and held by the Government.

- The Cuban pastor from Las Tunas, Yoel Demetrio, has denounced [harassment](#) by the Castro authorities as a reprimand for his fight in favor of religious freedom on the island.
- The Eternal Rock Full Gospel Church receives constant [attacks](#) with stones that have damaged the roof. According to the religious leader in charge, the attacks have been sustained and have been going on for several months.
- Despite the continuous [efforts](#) of Bishop Ismael Laborde Figueras, of the Lutheran Church of the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba, for the bank to give him a magnetic card or allow him to access church funds in cash, the Government does not want to authorize it.

Chile

- During the International Day of the Elimination of Violence against Women, a group of hooded people attacked the Cathedral of Antofagasta. They set their protest signs on fire and laid them in front of the door of the church. The fire was controlled but [damaged](#) the structure nevertheless.
- An Evangelical church was set on [fire](#) by radical Mapuche groups in Victoria. The Mapuche protested violently to demand the return of ancestral lands.
- Violent groups entered the Church of Francisco de Borja, and removed and destroyed religious figures. [Similarly](#), a mob attacked the Church of the Assumption, taking out religious figures and setting the temple on fire. Furthermore, it was [reported](#) that "the temple of San Francisco in La Serena was desecrated by a group of protesters causing damage inside the temple." Other media reported that in the El Tabo district of Valparaíso,



protestors threw [paint](#) at the Nuestra Señora del Rosario parish.

- The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights summoned various representatives of the political and academic field to begin a round of dialogue that aims to develop a proposal that seeks to review [prison regulations](#) on intercultural and religious matters.
- Judgment declares that administrative authority is [not empowered](#) to prohibit religious activities during a state of emergency.

El Salvador

- The priest Ricardo Cortez was intercepted and [shot and killed](#) while being on his way to the city of Santiago de María, in the department of Usulután. He was rector of the San Óscar Arnulfo Romero seminary and parish priest of the town of San Francisco Chinamequita.
- The president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, [decreed](#) a National Day of Prayer before hurricane Iota's arrival in Central America.
- Members of the Diocese of Chalatenango, El Salvador, gather at a news conference Oct. 26, 2020, to [speak](#) in favor of farmers and families affected by increased government militarization in their region, which borders with Honduras.

Guatemala

- Apolinario Galán Sierra, an evangelical pastor was [shot and killed](#) inside a temple in Puerto San Jose, Escuintla. The pastor, in addition to presiding over the church, lived on the same property.

Honduras

- Pastor Raymon Urbina (25 years) led a church in the community of "El Carril" in Olanchito. He was [killed](#) by a gunshot, the body was found on the side of the road, next to the motorcycle which he was riding.
- The granting of an economic [benefit](#) to a religious sector has divided even the Evangelical Church in the country. The Catholic Church was the first to reject it. In a statement, the Apostolic Council of Honduras and the Coalition of Apostolic Ministries of Honduras (Cmiah) reported that more than 3,000 members are not willing to accept the bonus.
- Radio Progreso, a media outlet of the Social Apostolate of the Society of Jesus in Central America, denounced the [attempted kidnapping](#) of the journalist Sandra Maribel Sánchez, assigned to Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital.
- Members of the Agape Christian Church denounced that JOH activists (Juan Orlando Hernández), alleged shelter managers, had [prevented](#) them from directly give donations to people affected by the tropical depression Eta. Corrupt political activists divert aid to the victims.

Mexico

- The priest Agustín Patiño of the Parroquia del Refugio was [stabbed](#) at least fifteen times by criminals who entered to rob the temple. The criminals stole the alms, as well as various religious objects. The priest was heavily wounded.
- Pastor Teresa Martinez, of the Odra Nuevo congregation was [murdered](#). It is presumed that the attackers assumed



that the pastor had the church's money at her home. The husband and the children of the pastor were wounded.

- On the 28th of September, a group of radical feminists organized a march in Xalapa to protest for the legalization of abortion. During this march, they [vandalized](#) the Metropolitan Cathedral and wrote texts on the wall such as: "It will be law", "legal abortion", "justice", "pedophiles", "rapists", "corrupt church".
- On the 18th of November, a humanitarian aid brigade was [attacked](#) by members of a paramilitary group in the community of Tabak, Aldama, Chiapas, Mexico. As a result, María Isabel Hernández Rea, a nun, was shot in her right leg and needed to be treated in the hospital. Cáritas San Cristóbal de Las Casas and the Mexican Trust for the Health of Indigenous Children (FISANIM) were delivering food and aid to displaced families when a paramilitary group opened fire and attacked the air brigade.
- It is, above all, evangelical Christians who [suffer](#) a lot of pressure in regions like Oaxaca or Chiapas, when they abandon the religious practices of their ethnic group.
- In Mexico City the ruling of the so-called "[Gag Law](#)" was approved, which would prevent any type of therapy for people with doubts about their sexual identity, limiting any help or counseling even from their parents, therapists and ministers of worship who could be sanctioned with jail.
- Mexico's National Supreme Court of Justice (SCJN) [granted](#) reintegration and protection to a group of Jehovah's Witnesses who were expelled from their homes in the state of Jalisco on account of their religious beliefs.

- The diocese of Chilpancingo denounced that at gunpoint some priests have been [forced](#) to officiate masses despite the fact that they are prohibited due to the covid-19 pandemic.
- A doctor in Mexico saved a woman from dying who suffered heavy bleeding after undergoing an abortion at home and, after spreading the anonymous testimony of the mother to help others, feminist groups have [attacked](#) the gynecologist on social networks.
- After publishing a biblical passage on homosexuality, the secretary of the Colima City Council was [criticized](#) and accused of promoting hate speech.

Nicaragua

- A 17 year old member of the Youth Ministry of the Matagalpa Catholic Church was found [dead](#), bearing signs of a violent attack. Days before his death, he had spoken out against recent criminal acts in the country through his Facebook account.
- A man dropped a [handcrafted bomb](#) into the chapel of Managua Cathedral, which caused a fire that was controlled by firefighters.
- Nicaragua passes [foreign agent law](#), which requires entities that operate in Nicaragua under the order or supervision of an external agency to register as foreign agents with the Ministry of the Interior and report their financial movements on a monthly basis. The norm excludes religious organizations that are duly registered with the Ministry of the Interior; however, the same law specifies that this exception is not valid as long as the activities carried out interfere with the internal and external affairs of Nicaragua.



- Thieves entered the San José de Cusmapa Catholic church [forcing](#) doors and windows. Valuable items were stolen.
- Police [besiege](#) the Cathedral of Managua one day after the attack on the Sangre de Cristo chapel.
- A man broke into the parish of Santa Rosa del Peñón in the Diocese of León and [threw](#) stones at the urn.
- Hundreds of people [challenged](#) the Catholic Church and the pandemic in Nicaragua by holding a pagan festival to replace the popular celebration in honor of Santo Domingo de Guzmán, the most revered in Managua, which was suspended by the Episcopate to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- After the events of the last days in different chapels and the Santa Iglesia Catedral de Managua, [surveillance](#) days have been organized during the night.
- The released political prisoner Gonzalo Cáceres released images of children dressed as police officers at the beginning of school parades in some parts of the country, denouncing the manipulation and [indoctrination](#) of children.
- The Catholic Church in Nicaragua joined various social sectors in the country expressing [concern](#) over the eventual approval of two bills promoted by Sandinismo in the National Assembly, arguing that they “overshadow and threaten the freedom and physical integrity of the people”.
- Monsignor Juan Abelardo Mata, bishop of the Estelí Diocese, reported that the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners had [canceled](#) the permanent residence of priests Luis Alirio Carrillo and Julio Melgar, the latter of Salvadoran nationality. Monsignor considered the decision as politically motivated.

- After the passage of the cyclones, complaints circulated about alleged [threats](#) from the Police towards those who were collecting aid for the thousands of victims. The Catholic Church of Nicaragua collected aid for victims of hurricanes Iota and Eta, which was delivered "in secret" by donors, on the recommendation of Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes, and out of prudence, apparently to avoid reprisals by the Police.

Peru

- Citizens [reported](#) that the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, Cercado de Lima, was damaged and vandalized with graffiti. The attack was carried out during the demonstrations against the government of Manuel Merino.
- After 7 months of closure, the Bishops [remind](#) the authorities that "they must understand that the Eucharist, even on Sunday, cannot be cataloged as a simple meeting, nor compared to other social, commercial or recreational activities".

Venezuela

- The San Rafael Arcángel in Palo Verde (Petare) was desecrated and [vandalized](#). Two men entered through the roof of the temple. No valuables were taken, however, the men did demolish many holy symbols inside the church.
- The Episcopal Conference of Venezuela [affirmed](#) that the end of the regime of Nicolás Maduro is necessary, as well as the holding of "clean presidential elections", in conditions of "transparency and equity" to solve the



serious crisis that the South American country is going through, aggravated for the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The Archdiocese of Ciudad Bolívar reported the [theft](#) of equipment, supplies and medicines from the “Virgen del Valle” medical office, which treat low-income people free of charge.
- Religious temples continue to be [targeted](#) by unknown people who take advantage of the night and early morning hours to damage structures. Father Alain Mendoza, from the San Pedro Apóstol parish in Turmero, reported that the structure, the decorative bases, among other parts, were damaged.
- Prensa Sin Mordaza reported that Nicolás Maduro's regime has created "revolutionary youth camps" in order to [indoctrinate](#) children in the communist and military political thought of the late former president Hugo Chávez.
- The regime of Nicolás Maduro announced that the Christmas party will be brought forward two months in the country in 2020. "We promote food sovereignty," says the slogan of Chavismo as the basis of the [decree](#) of the "beginning of Christmas 2020".
- Venezuelan priest Father José Manuel de Jesús Ferreira, parish priest of the San Juan Bautista Diocesan Eucharistic Shrine of San Carlos de Cojedes and a partner in ACN projects, was [murdered](#) when he tried to help one of his parishioners who was being robbed.
- Representatives of different churches and cults [prepared](#) the draft of the Law of Religions, Cults and Creeds of Faith. Monsignor, Gabriel Henríquez, Commissioner of Cults and Religions in Carabobo, reported that the representatives of all religions participated during the

discussions for the drafting of the draft, in order to promote respect and religious equity.

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