

Vatican agency says at least 37 church workers killed in 2009

VATICAN CITY - An uptick of violence against Catholic Church workers in the Americas contributed to almost doubling the number of missionaries who were murdered in 2009 compared to the previous year, the Vatican's Fides agency said.

The agency said 37 people working for the church were killed in 2009, up from 20 people in 2008. It is also the highest number of deaths in the last 10 years, it added.

Each year, Fides, the news agency of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, publishes a list of pastoral workers who died violently. The 2009 list was released Dec. 30.

The list included two priests and one nun from the United States:

- Oblate Father Lawrence Rosebaugh, a 74-year-old U.S. priest, was killed in a highway robbery in Guatemala in May.
- Father Edward Hinds was stabbed 32 times in a brutal murder in the rectory of St. Patrick Church, in Chatham, N.J., in October. Prosecutors said the parish janitor confessed to the crime.
- Blessed Sacrament Sister Marguerite Bartz was found dead in her Navajo, N.M., home in November. An 18-year-old man found driving the car the nun used was charged in connection with her death.

Fides also highlighted the case of a Mexican priest and two seminarians who were killed in the southern state of Guerrero as they were traveling to a religious retreat.

Father Habacuc Hernandez, Eduardo Oregon Benitez and Silvestre Gonzalez were shot dead by gunmen while they traveled through a violence-plagued area where drug-cartel activities have been on the increase.

Of those killed in 2009, 30 were priests, two were religious sisters, two were seminarians and three were lay volunteers.

Twenty-three of them were killed in the Americas: six in Brazil, six in Columbia, three in Mexico, two in Cuba, two in El Salvador, two in the United States, and one each in Honduras and Guatemala.

Four pastoral workers were killed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, another four in South Africa, two in Kenya, and one each in Burundi, India, the Philippines, and France.

Many of the deaths were the result of a robbery ending in murder.