News



Hundreds of people join Pope Leo XIV and representatives of Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches and communities to commemorate "new martyrs and witnesses of the faith," killed in the past 25 years, during an ecumenical prayer service at Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls Sept. 14, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Vatican City — December 30, 2025

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Seventeen Catholic priests, sisters, seminarians and lay workers were murdered in 2025, according to Fides, the Vatican's missionary news agency.

Five of the victims were killed in Nigeria where kidnapping priests, seminarians and school students for ransom has plagued the Christian community, Fides reported Dec. 30.

Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, a Nigerian and secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelization's missionary section, told Fides, "All of this is a cause of great sadness and also some shame because Nigeria is one of the countries with the most religious populations in the world — a people of believers, Christians and Muslims."

"We all say that we are people of peace," the archbishop said. "We must all reject any justification for using religion to commit violent acts, including killing people."

In a situation of "generalized violence," particularly in areas where farmers and nomadic shepherds were engaged in violent clashes, Nwachukwu said, it appears that anti-Christian groups have infiltrated the nomadic groups and are targeting Christians.

Asked about the U.S. airstrikes on northwestern Nigeria Dec. 25, which U.S. President Donald Trump said targeted Islamic State terrorists who were persecuting Christians, the archbishop responded that the Nigerian "government's paralysis is evident. In this situation, an indirect intervention from outside, to support the state and the government against extremist groups and to help the country remove the causes of widespread violence, might not be entirely unjustified or inappropriate."

Two catechists were killed in Burkina Faso in January, and Kenya, Sierra Leone and Sudan each suffered the murder of a priest in 2025, bringing to 10 the number of church personnel killed in Africa during the year.

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The Fides' annual list included one priest murdered in Europe — Fr. Grzegorz Dymek, 58, who was found strangled in the rectory of Our Lady of Fatima parish in Klobuck, Poland, in February; and one in North America — Fr. "Arul" Raj Balaswamy Carasala, 57, a naturalized U.S. citizen from India, who was shot outside Sts. Peter and

Paul Catholic Church in Seneca, Kansas, in April. The man who confessed to killing him is undergoing a court-ordered mental health evaluation.

The other missionaries cited in the Fides report were:

— Sr. Evanette Onezaire and Sr. Jeanne Voltaire of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus who were murdered by members of an armed militia in Mirebalais, Haiti, in late March, Fides reported.

— Fr. Bertoldo Pantaleón Estrada, whose body was discovered Oct. 6 in the municipality of Mezcal in Mexico's Guerrero state two days after he was reported missing.

— Fr. Donald Martin Ye Naing Win, who was the first priest to die in Myanmar's ongoing armed conflict, Fides said. He was found stabbed to death and mutilated Feb. 14 on the grounds of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Kan Gyi Taw, a small village in central Myanmar.

— Mark Christian Malaca, a 39-year-old lay teacher at St. Stephen Academy in Laur, Philippines, was shot and killed in early November, reportedly by two men on a motorcycle who wore helmets, facemasks and black jackets.