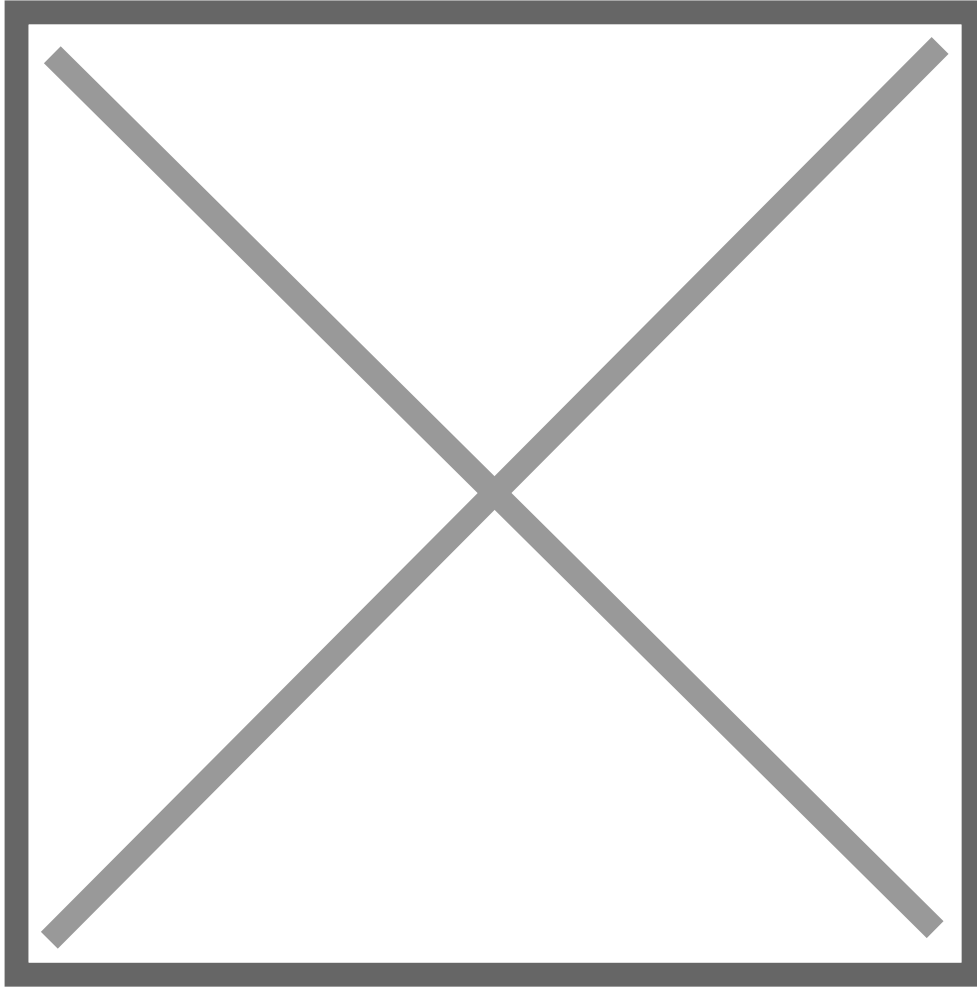


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A vandalized statue of Virgin Mary — with areas of the statue covered in black spray paint, along with various blasphemous writings against Mary — is seen in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, July 28, 2026. (OSV News/Courtesy of The Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina)

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Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina — July 28, 2026

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Police are investigating several acts of vandalism and desecration at the famed village of Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Marian apparitions are alleged to have occurred since 1981.

In a statement published July 28, the town's parish church of St. James said it received the news of the vandalism "with great sadness," and said it was working to clean and repair the damage "so that all areas would be properly prepared for the prayer again."

"We pray for the conversion of the hearts of those who committed this act, that the Lord may touch them with His grace and lead them on the path of goodness," the parish said.

"We also pray for peace in the hearts of all people. Our Lady constantly invites us to be carriers of peace. May this event encourage us to take her invitation even more seriously: not to return evil for evil, but to witness love, forgiveness, and hope with our lives."

St. James Church, the parish said, would remain open to pilgrims.

According to local media reports, police in the neighboring town of Citluk received a report at 4:30 a.m. July 28 that several statues of Mary, referred to as "Gospa," or "Our Lady" in Croatian, were vandalized.

In photos posted by Bosnian online news portal bljesak.info, the vandal covered areas of the statue in black spray paint, along with various blasphemous writings against Mary.

Other inscriptions by the vandal included "Medjugorje is a deception," "devil" and "Jesus only" spray-painted across several areas.

Police also found a banner with the first names of the six alleged visionaries: Vicka Ivankovic-Mijatovic, Mirjana Dragicevic-Soldo, Marija Pavlovic-Lunetti, Ivan

Dragicevic, Ivanka Ivankovic-Elez and Jakov Colic.

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Underneath their names was a message written in Polish that read: "To oszusci, mam dowody" ("They are fraudsters, I have evidence").

About 30 minutes after police were informed of the vandalism, a fire broke out at the altar of St. James Church. A security camera video posted on X showed a man pouring a flammable liquid around the altar and igniting a fire.

The Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina said the acts of vandalism were "a profound insult" to Catholics and "an attack on the peace, mutual respect and dignity of all people in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

"Sacred sites, regardless of which church or religious community they belong to, must be protected and respected," the council said in a statement posted on its Facebook page.

The council also praised the response by St. James Church, saying that its call for pilgrims to respond to evil with prayer and fasting was "a testimony of faith, responsibility and true commitment to peace."

"However, forgiveness does not exclude the responsibility of the perpetrator, nor the obligation of the competent institutions to fully shed light on this case," it said. "We must respond to the desecration of sacred places with a common condemnation, protection of the right of every person to freely profess their faith and an even stronger commitment to a society of peace, mutual respect and forgiveness."

Millions of pilgrims visit the site where six young people claimed that Mary had appeared to them in 1981. Some of the six say Mary still appears to them and gives them messages each day, while others say they see her only once a year now.

Three separate diocesan commissions between 1982 and 1990 studied the alleged apparitions, and all concluded that they could not confirm if a supernatural event had occurred.

In 2010, a papal commission was established by Pope Benedict XVI and led by Cardinal Camillo Ruini. While the commission's report was never officially made

public, it was leaked by several journalists and Italian media.

Although the commission voted overwhelmingly to recognize the first seven apparitions of Mary in 1981, it expressed doubts over the thousands of Marian apparitions that have allegedly occurred since July 4, 1981, and supposedly continue to this day.

Some of the report's conclusions were also revealed by Pope Francis during his flight to Rome from Fatima, Portugal, in May 2017, when he spoke about the commission's work.

Although the pope acknowledged that pilgrims who visit Medjugorje deserve spiritual care and support, he expressed doubts about claims of the continuing apparitions of Mary.

"On the apparitions, the presumed current apparitions: the report has its doubts. I personally am meaner," the pope said, according to the English translation posted on the Vatican website.

"I prefer the Madonna as Mother, our Mother, and not a woman who's the head of a telegraphic office, who sends a message every day at a certain time. This is not the Mother of Jesus. And these presumed apparitions do not have much value. This I say as a personal opinion," he said.

Nevertheless, in 2024, Francis approved devotions at Medjugorje without officially weighing in on the alleged apparitions.