

# Report: Crimes Against U.S. Churches Rising

We read a lot about persecution against Christians through arrests and beatings. But church facilities themselves are also under attack, as highlighted in the New Year's Eve church bombing in Egypt.

But the problem goes well beyond Egypt—for the past two years, arsonists have attacked an average of 100 churches—and well beyond facility and personal attacks. For example, Internal theft has cost congregations an average of more than \$250,000 per incident, and almost every area of crime against Christians and their places of worship is rising.

So says a report from the Christian Security Network (CSN). "Crimes against Christian Organizations in the United States-2010" contains findings that Jeffrey Hawkins, CSN executive director, describes as "the tip of the iceberg."

"By all indications, crime is far higher against Christian organizations than is being reported," says Hawkins, a church security expert with almost 30 years of experience in police and security work.

In the two years that CSN has compiled statistics, only three categories—robberies, violence and bomb threats—have fallen from 2009 to 2010, and those only marginally. Burglary, thefts, arson, vandalism, internal theft, sex offenses and miscellaneous crime all increased, the report reveals.

Hawkins explains that hate crimes are reported by local police to the FBI and are inconsistent with what Christian churches have experienced, compared with other religions: "If people just look at the FBI Hate Crime reports, which average 100 crimes a year against Christian institutions, they are missing the thousands of others we are documenting."

Aside from hate crimes, incidents like internal thefts are devastating to churches in the U.S., costing more than \$15 million a year and forcing some to close their doors. Only a small percentage is ever discovered, and sometimes not until years later, the report concludes.

The good news is many of these crimes could be prevented.

“There are relatively simple checks and balances churches can implement to reduce or prevent many of these crimes, potentially averting financial disaster for a congregation,” Hawkins says. “Becoming security-savvy is wise stewardship of God’s resources.”

*Has your church ever been robbed, vandalized or otherwise attacked? Have you been robbed from during a church service?*