

Thieves Busted for Stealing \$1.5 Million from Churches in 14 States

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It is common for Christians to think that when a church is under attack, it often means spiritually.

A crime ring based out of Houston, Texas, decided to take the fight to the church in a different manner: financially.

In Fayette County, Georgia, the sheriff's office announced the arrest of three members of a larger crime group they believe totals upward of 17 members. Sheriff Barry Babb said that churches in Fayette County alone had \$154,000 stolen from their mailboxes and drop-box locations.

Investigators who have been following the crime spree since the COVID lockdowns have said \$1.5 million has been taken from various tithing drop-boxes across 14 states.

The thieves would create fake bank accounts and then deposit the checks via ATMs.

Sheriff Babb explained the situation in an interview with Fox 5 Atlanta:

"Probably some of these churches might not have even been open during that time and these checks were piling up," he explained. "So, they knew that when they hit a mailbox, which most of these cases these mailboxes were not secure mailboxes, they were able to take the mail."

Authorities have seen an increase in this style of theft. With many elderly congregants unable to give their tithes or offerings in person, they resort to sending their checks by

mail.

Sheriff Babb encouraged churches and other religious organizations to try and encourage their congregations to move toward online giving as it is a safer option than mailing in tithes.

Earlier this year, the Willowbrook Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama, encountered the same situation of having their mailbox raided by thieves.

Pastor Mark McClelland spoke on the matter to WBRC 6:

"They are not just robbing from the church, they are robbing from God," McClelland says. "Our prayer is that the thieves not only get caught, but they get captured by Christ and they trust Him."

Mail theft is no small crime either.

According to U.S. Postal Inspector Tony Robinson, if caught, the perpetrators could face up to five years in federal prison.

"Additional charges can be levied against the criminals based on what they do with the mail," Robinson said. "They can steal the mail and never do anything with it but still be charged and sentenced to jail time."

This increase in mailbox crime has led several churches to put locks over their mailbox, or install a letter-sized slot that allows mail to be delivered directly into the church. {eo}

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James Lasher is a Copy Editor for Charisma Media.