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## **Catholic Church in Spain sees funds reach record highs**

***Bishops say the 300 million euros the Church received last year just through voluntary tax contributions is a sign that Spaniards appreciate Catholicism's services to the poor***

By Xavier Le Normand | Spain

La Croix Int'l (05.03.3031) - <https://bit.ly/3eeM9ng> - The Spanish Episcopal Conference (SEC) on March 2 announced that more Catholics donated part of their state taxes to their Church in 2020 than ever before.

Spaniards have the option of allocating 0.7% of their taxes to certain causes, including the Church.

And in 2020 some 8.5 million people -- about a third of all taxpayers -- ticked the box for the Catholic Church.

That's significantly higher than the 7.3 million that did so a year earlier.

### ***Global growth***

It is also noteworthy that in comparison to the previous year, 106,000 additional contributions were made to the Church.

"With all its heart, the Church gives thanks for the trust that this implies," the bishops said.

But the situation varies from one territory to another.

In Andalusia, Rioja and Castilla-La Mancha, for example, four out of every 10 taxpayers gave to the Church.

But only one in four did so in the Canary Islands and Galicia, while less than 17% of those in Catalonia gave to the Church.

All in all, these returns have added up to 301 million euros that are distributed to Spain's 72 dioceses.

Never before has the total amount been so high.

It has increased by 5.9% in the past year and by more than 20% in the past decade. Compared to 2010, the dioceses have thus collected over 50 million more euros.

This growth is reflected in all regions of the country.

### **Expected decline in 2021**

Spain's bishops believe the positive figures can be explained, in particular, by the situation that the country was in at the time taxes were filed -- namely, in the first half of 2020.

This was during "the hardest months of the first wave of the pandemic" of COVID-19, when the Church "increased its presence and attention to the most affected groups".

The bishops believe the voluntary increase in funding is a sign of "social and personal support for the work of the Church at that time".

The bishops said the increase in funds will allow for "more effective aid to those most in need".

But they fear that 2021 will not be another record year.

"The figures do not yet show the economic consequences of the pandemic situation in Spain since then," they warned.

The sums obtained each year through the tax return are one of the main resources for the Church in Spain. They usually represent about a quarter of its income.

Other donations from the faithful make up a further third of the income, while patrimonial income makes up a little more than 10% of the total.

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## **Spanish lawyers act to prevent removal of crosses by local officials**

The Catholic Universe (15.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3ueG5Rq> - A group of Spanish lawyers has launched petitions and lawsuits to prevent the removal of crosses by local officials, after claims that Christian symbols are linked with the country's former dictatorship.

"Many towns are being pressured to get rid of public crosses, which local people have spent weeks and months defending," said Maria Riesco, spokeswoman for the Association of Christian Lawyers.

"We are checking the documentation and investigating each case, as well as maintaining a dialogue with regional governments in hopes of having them restored."

Riesco, a Catholic, spoke as the Valladolid-based association announced legal proceedings against the mayor of Aguilar de la Frontera, near Cordoba, for ordering the demolition of a cross outside the town's Carmelite convent.

She told Catholic News Service the 20-foot concrete cross had been taken down illegally amid Catholic protests, in violation of religious freedom.

The press office of the Spanish bishops' conference said the Association of Christian Lawyers was acting independently of the Church. It said the conference would not comment on the removal of public crosses.

Meanwhile, Polonia Castellanos, lawyers association president, said action was also underway to protect crosses in Spain's western Extremadura region, after at least 34 municipalities were ordered to remove them from streets and parks.

"The decision to demolish these monuments is purely ideological; if carried out, it would cause irreparable damage," Castellanos said in a website statement, which noted at least 25,000 Spaniards had signed a protest petition. "Every time a cross is knocked down, we will bring the person responsible to justice."

The cross in Aguilar de la Frontera, installed in 1938, was trucked to a landfill on 19<sup>th</sup> January, after the mayor, Carmen Flores, argued it violated Spain's 2007 Law on Historical Memory, which prohibits symbols deemed to praise the 1939-1975 rule of Gen. Francisco Franco.

Catholic protesters, who chanted "Viva Christo Rey" ("Long live Christ the King") during the action, placed flowers and wooden crosses at the site outside the convent's main door. City council contractors later removed the flowers and crosses.

In a 17<sup>th</sup> January homily, Bishop Demetrio Fernández González of Cordoba warned officials Christians would take note of their actions at election time.

Meanwhile, the town's parish priest, Fr Pablo Lora Blasco, told parishioners in a 20<sup>th</sup> January Facebook message the cross had been stripped of any political connotations in the 1980s, adding that he had tried unsuccessfully to explain its importance.

"A whole generation has grown up around the cross as a sign of love and commitment, forgiveness and mercy – I deeply regret the next generations will be deprived of this," the priest said.

"I also express the pain of the Carmelite sisters and our parish community, who could have found another private site for the cross, so as to extol its deep meaning for Christians."

Spain's Law on Historical Memory is expected to be replaced this year by a 16-article Law on Democratic Memory, which will promote awareness of the country's democratic history and push forward the exhumation of mass graves from the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War.

The law also will facilitate sentence annulments and reparations for victims of repression, as well as for members of ethnic minorities and LGBT groups who suffered under Franco's dictatorship.

Riesco told CNS that the Association of Christian Lawyers was particularly concerned about regulations at local and regional levels, which often were "much harsher" toward Christian symbols than national laws.

"Some state that any cross in a public place, whatever its inscription, exalts Franco's regime and must be taken down," she said.

## **Catholics and politicians condemn Christmas attack against evangelical church in Spain**

***"Christ, Mary and Spain – Get out, Protestant and Lutheran rats", read one of the signs hanging on the windows of an evangelical church in Santander. The bishop of Cantabria and several parties expressed their condemnation.***

Protestante Digital (11.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3qz6BIQ> - On 25 December, four bags with dead rats and three paper sheets with extremist Catholic messages appeared hanging on the façade of an evangelical church in the northern region of Cantabria (Spain).

The messages found early on Christmas day by members of the Iglesia Nueva Vida (New Life Church) of the city of Santander were: "Christ, Mary and Spain – Get out, Lutheran rats", "God did not die on a cross to feed traitors like you", "Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Spain: out Protestant and Lutheran rats".

Pastor Julio García Celorio denounced what he described as a "hate crime" and shared images of the action on his social media. He also told Spanish news website Protestante Digital that there were no recent situations that could make the church think who or why this incident would have happened.

García Celorio is a well-known evangelical leader in the region of Cantabria who has been involved with prison ministries and is founder of an NGO that helps the re-integration of people at risk of social marginalisation. The church often works alongside public and private initiatives in the area of social justice. García is also the current President of the Evangelical Council of Cantabria.

### ***Catholic bishop expresses "clearest condemnation"***

Hours after the church reported the attack, the Spanish Evangelical Alliance condemned the attack, calling for religious freedom to be respected, and adding: "We will not respond to hate with hate. But to help a coexistence shaped by respect and dignity, it is needed that these incidents are condemned by those who have social, political and religious representation. We will personally contact those groups".

The Bishop of Santander was one of the first to react to the incident, "our clearest rejection and condemnation to these actions which in no way can have place in a believer in Jesus Christ". The statement, signed by Bishop Manuel Sánchez Monge, added that such actions "open wounds" between Christians and offered "all our support to all members of the Iglesia Nueva Vida and to its pastor (...) wishing that this time of Christmas brings us back to the essence of the gospel"

### ***Unusual political support for the evangelical church***

Three days after the incident, the President of the Cantabrian Parliament, Joaquín Gómez, received the pastor of New Life Church to express him the support of the Spanish authorities in the region.

Earlier, the national spokesperson of the People's Party (Conservatives) in the Spanish Congress, Cuca Gamarra, wrote to the Spanish Evangelical Alliance condemning the "attack of heartless people against the temple of this evangelical church. Such incidents

have no place in our society. Coexistence, tolerance and respect to plurality are common values through which we can find each other. Every aggression is a direct threat for our democratic values”.

The leader in Madrid of right-wing nationalist party Vox said on her Twitter profile that “religious freedom in Spain is threatened. These are the consequences of the silence of many in the face of the attacks by totalitarians against the fundamental rights”.

Members of Socialist Christians (a movement inside the ruling Social Democrat party) also reacted to the events, saying that “such events are the tip of an iceberg (...) The emergence of movements in the extremes is dominating the discourse in our country”, they lamented, a reality that “threatens our democracy”.

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