

Hate messages spray-painted at churches, buildings

Authorities find racial epithets, death threats scrawled in several cities.

Hateful graffiti and racial slurs have been spray-painted at two Catholic churches and several buildings across Orange County.

The messages threaten Catholics and ethnic groups including Asians, Mexicans and African Americans.



DENISSE SALAZAR
REGISTER WRITER

"When we saw these incidents come out, it was pretty alarming and unprecedented,"

said Rusty

Kennedy, executive director of the Orange County Human Relations Commission. "You look at these hate crimes and worry about them as reactions to the lack of civility in public discourse."

The latest hate-filled messages were discovered Friday morning on the sidewalk in front of Pier 1 Imports and on the walls of the Sears Outlet at the Brea Union Plaza on Imperial Highway. The graffiti scrawled in black paint at the businesses made death threats to African Americans and Asians.

"I think it's horrible and disgusting, and it makes me angry," said Traci Ybarra, an employee at Pier 1 Imports. "If you are going to stand up for something you believe in, there are other ways of showing it other than defacing property."

The racial epithets are being investigated as vandalism because they were not tagged on a place of worship or a business associated with any of the ethnicities, Brea police Sgt. Bill Smyser said. Similar racially charged messages were

Churches and businesses tagged



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left at locations in Irvine, Anaheim and Santa Ana.

"It sounds like there is a group of hatemongers who have traveled around the county doing this stuff," Kennedy said. "We are horrified that there are these groups out there and whenever they raise their heads and spew their hate, it sets off alarms."

At St. Thomas More Catholic Parish in Irvine, the words "Kill CATH-LICK's" were discovered the morning of Jan. 11. The misspelled graffiti was spray-painted in black 12-inch letters on a walkway next to the parking lot, Irvine police Sgt. Julia Engen said.

"This is an unusual and very unfortunate incident. We pray that this was an isolated act and hope to put this troubling event behind us," Ryan Lilyengren, spokesman for the Diocese of Orange said.

In Anaheim, police responded to three graffiti-

related incidents on Jan. 11. The first incident was at St. Boniface Catholic Church, where "Kill THE CATH-LICKS!" was discovered on a wall near the entrance, police said.

A short time later, officers were called to Chase Bank in the 500 block of North Euclid Street regarding graffiti that made a reference to "kill and two specific ethnicities," Anaheim police Sgt. Rick Martinez said.

Another message was discovered on a wall between a pet clinic and a furniture store in the 5700 block of East La Palma Avenue.

"I was shocked that people are still out there who have the ignorance to do that kind of hate crime," said Horacio Barberena, a manager at Furnish 123. "There are other ways for people to express their mind, their opinion, instead of doing it that way, because

it can affect a lot of people."

Martinez said it was unclear why the locations in Anaheim were targeted, but the incidents are being investigated as hate crimes.

In Santa Ana, the Orange County Housing Authority offices were tagged with racial graffiti in what authorities are investigating as a hate crime, police said.

Racial slurs against Asians and African Americans, as well as threats of physical violence, were found painted in the 1700 block of North Broadway, police said.

"Because they deal with a lot of low-income housing issues, they have a lot of upset clientele," Santa Ana police Cpl. Anthony Bertagna said, noting that the majority of the employees at the office are Asian or African American.

"We empathize with the targets of that hate and bigotry," Kennedy said. "The African Americans who feel embattled, the Asians who feel belittled and the Mexicans who are made to feel as strangers in their own home."

Authorities have not identified any suspects in any of the incidents.

Anaheim police are working with Santa Ana, Irvine and Brea to determine who is leaving the hateful messages throughout the county.

Anyone with information about the incidents is asked to call Anaheim police at 714-765-1900, Santa Ana police at 714-245-8400, Brea police at 714-990-7625 or Irvine police at 949-724-7000.

Register staff writer Sean Emery contributed to this report.