

Farmersville church vandalized; members respond by 'tagging' for God

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By Gregory Tomlin

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FARMERSVILLE (BP)—Members of First Baptist Church in Farmersville arrived for Sunday morning worship Aug. 13 to find anti-Christian and communist slogans scrawled across their church's property.

But instead of merely scrubbing the messages off the building and walkways, church members responded by writing messages of their own about God's love for sinners.

"After the service, the whole church went out with chalk from the children's area and wrote scriptural responses," said Pastor Bart Barber. "The congregation wrote everything from 'Jesus loves you' to 'God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.' We were trying to respond in the way Christ would have us respond."

This was not the first time someone had "tagged" the 350-member church with graffiti, Barber said, but never before had the messages been so

extensive or anti-Christian.

“When the chairman of the deacons called me, he began describing the content of the messages and I knew we had to call the police,” Barber said. “When I got to the church, I was upset and at a loss for words. ... Many of the comments implied that Christians and the church were worthless and even dangerous to society.”

Police arrived to inspect the graffiti left by “Val” and “Sal,” as one inscription read. The vandals were apparently well-educated. Barber said many of the messages—fortunately written in chalk rather than paint—included phrases borrowed from well-known authors and Karl Marx, the father of communism.

“Some of the sayings included things like, ‘Sunday is a fit conclusion to an ill-spent week,’ ‘Religion is the opiate of the masses’ and ‘Two great narcotics: Alcohol and Christianity,’” Barber said. “Another read, ‘The masses of men lead lives of quiet desperation,’ a line from Thoreau.”

Some of the most troubling comments were ones that referenced the failure of Christians and the church, Barber said. He and his congregation, he said, were both “puzzled and hurt” by them.

Barber said his initial impulse was to remove the graffiti before church members arrived, but he later thought that the experience of seeing the vandalism could be a “teaching moment” for his congregation.

“We had the opportunity to ignore it, but I wanted to give the church the opportunity to affirm each other and affirm the words of Jesus,” Barber said.

“This does not arrive at anywhere near what other people experience when they are persecuted for their Christian faith. It is nowhere close to people around the world who are physically abused for following Christ—as to the

intensity of it—but the sentiment behind it is the same.”

Police said the vandalism only warranted a charge of criminal mischief since the messages were written in chalk. But those charges could be enhanced since the property is a house of worship, Barber said. “That’s really a matter for the district attorney.”

The messages written by the First Baptist members were slated to remain on the property for several days, Barber said. He said the congregation hopes that the persons responsible for the vandalism will drive by the church and read the messages of God’s love and forgiveness and the hope of salvation in Jesus Christ. He said the vandals also would find the church forgiving.

“If I could get on a loudspeaker and speak to Farmersville, I would tell them that we are aware that Christians and churches are not perfect,” Barber said. “We are the first to acknowledge mistakes in history perpetrated in the name of Christ. Their deeper questions, however, were not bad questions. Unfortunately, they were posed in such a way that there was no opportunity for us to answer. ... But I would like to sit across the table from them and talk about their ideas.”

The 106-year-old sanctuary at First Baptist Church was not affected by the vandalism, Barber said.