

Cecilio Perez Cruz, Salvadoran priest, shot to death

## **Several colleagues believe he was murdered for being outspoken about deforestation near his parish.**

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [June 19, 2019](#) issue

Cecilio Perez Cruz, a Catholic priest, was found shot to death in bed on May 18 in San Jose La Majada parish, El Salvador. He was in his late thirties.

Authorities said there was a note near his body saying that he had not paid rent to the Mara Salvatrucha, understood to be referring to money the gang was seeking to extort.

Yet San Salvador archbishop Jose Luis Escobar Alas questioned whether the note existed, especially since Perez had not been threatened beforehand. Several colleagues believe he was murdered for being outspoken about deforestation near his parish, [Catholic News Service wrote](#).

“He strongly denounced the cutting of trees in his area, and that touches the interests of high-ranking businesspeople,” wrote Edwin Baños, a priest and a longtime friend of Perez.

Another priest in El Salvador, Antonio Rodriguez, who also studies public policy and urban violence, [wrote on social media](#) about the fear caused by assassination of those “defending creation” while “avaricious business owners” are protected by politicians.

Constantino Barrera Morales, bishop of the Diocese of Sonsonate, remembered Perez as a highly engaged pastor who was especially concerned about justice and the rights of all.

“The blood of our selfless pastor is now together with that of the thousands of Salvadorans that each year become victims of this terrible violence,” the bishop

wrote in a statement.

In 2018 a Salvadoran priest was killed on his way to mass during Holy Week by masked men, CNS noted. "Authorities also blamed gangs in the killing but have not arrested anyone in the crime."

*A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "People: Cecilio Perez Cruz."*