



# PROTECTING HOUSES OF WORSHIP



**The more I think about it,**  
the more sense it makes to me. It doesn't make me any  
less sad or any less angry, but it certainly makes more sense.

***Of course houses of worship are targets for evil.  
Why wouldn't they be?***

Houses of worship have been targets of violent attacks since time immemorial. Evil — be it in the guise of a simple misanthrope who can't stand to see anyone happier than he or a misguided zealot who believes his attack is in service to his god — will target good. Evil will target our churches and synagogues, and it is our duty to stay as ready as we can be to defend our congregations, our loved ones and ourselves.

We here at the USCCA understand the challenges our nation's houses of worship face. We strive to help prepare those responsibly armed Americans who understand the unfortunate truth that when seconds count, the police are usually minutes — if not more — away.

We understand that no matter how much we wish otherwise, wishing isn't going to stop evil, even in the places we hold most dear.

**Stay alert, stay focused and stay safe.**

**Ed Combs**  
Senior Editor  
*Concealed Carry Magazine*

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PROTECTING *Houses of* WORSHIP

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# IS THERE NO SAFE PLACE?

PROTECTING THE FLOCK

■ BY RICK SAPP



**W**here is the safe place? Is it our home, our neighborhood, our school, our church, synagogue or temple? Perhaps in this post-electronic age, there is no safe place. And that is not the world we imagined passing to our children.

Still, we must address the danger...

**2012** - Rutherford, New Jersey: At 4:30 a.m., the Congregation Beth El synagogue is firebombed. Rabbi Nosson Schuman is in the upstairs residence with his wife and five children.

**2012** - Goose Creek, South Carolina: As the choir of St. James United Methodist Church rehearses, a man walks in the unlocked door. He has a gun and yells at choir members to get on the floor. He robs the choir and escapes with cellphones, billfolds and purses.

Singing and praying, church members did not know they were being stalked by a killer. Matthew Murray, one of two sons of a Colorado neurologist, had already murdered two people and wounded two others that morning at the Youth with a Mission Center, a Christian training program 60 miles north in Arvada, a suburb of Denver. The 24-year-old had also written his last angry letter to God: "All I want to do is kill and injure as many of you ... as I can, especially Christians, who are to blame for most of the problems in the world."

Boiling with petty grudges and hatreds, tormented by countless slights in a world that refused to acknowledge his sincerity and genius, Murray had legally purchased, and now carried, a .223-caliber Bushmaster XM-15 rifle and two

parking lot ... and Murray began shooting. His first victims were two teenage girls and their father. In the next few minutes, he would fire as many as 30 times, wounding two more people.

### FORCE-ON-FORCE: THE ENCOUNTER

The facts of Assam's encounter with Murray have been examined and debated, but this much seems to be true:

- At about 1 p.m., Murray shot four people in the east parking lot. He walked into the church vestibule and shot another member of the congregation.
- Assam, who had attended an early morning service and was then on duty with the security team, heard screaming and shooting. People were running, grabbing their children. Doors were slamming. It was chaos inside the church.

*"But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night"*

*Nehemiah 4:9*

**2012** - Jacksonville, Florida: Fired from his job teaching Spanish at the Episcopal School, Shane Schumerth returns with a guitar case. He opens the case, pulls out an AK-47 and kills Dale Regan, the head of the school.

**2013** - Ashtabula, Ohio: Shouting Islamic quotes, Reshad Riddle walks into the Easter morning service at the Hiawatha Church of God in Christ with a handgun. He shoots and kills his father, Richard.

**2013** - Albuquerque, New Mexico: During the funeral for his sister at New Beginnings Church, William Chavez walks into the service and begins arguing with a former son-in-law. Security escorts the men outside, where Chavez pulls a gun, shoots the son and then shoots at security before running away.

### AN UNFOLDING DRAMA

On December 9, 2007, Jeanne Assam had volunteered to serve as one of the security guards for the New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Located barely a mile east of the U.S. Air Force Academy across Interstate 25, New Life is a "charismatic evangelical Christian non-denominational mega-church." Jeanne, a blonde, green-eyed former police officer, was one of its 10,000 members.

loaded handguns: a .40-caliber Beretta and a 9mm Springfield. He also stashed an AK-47 in the trunk of his car (along with 1,000 rounds of ammunition).

Jeanne Assam, meanwhile, was on duty with the New Life security team, which numbered 15 to 20 individuals that day. Although not employed as a law enforcement professional at the time, she was the only professionally trained team member — and she had a license to carry her 9mm Beretta. (New Life Senior Pastor Brady Boyd later recalled that it was Assam who, hearing news reports about the Arvada murders, had suggested increasing security for the 7,000 or so people attending church that day.)

During the 11 a.m. Sunday service, Murray — now a wanted murderer — drove his 1992 Toyota Camry to the 42-acre campus of the Colorado Springs church. He pulled into the snow-covered parking lot wearing blue earplugs, a weight-bearing vest and kneepads. His first action was to slip on a backpack filled with ammo and spare magazines. Then he ignited smoke canisters at the north and south entrances to the worship center.

When the service ended, members began flooding into the church's east

• Murray shot out double-paned glass doors and entered the church through the east entrance, firing as he walked down the corridor.

• In her second month as a security volunteer, Assam was 100 yards from the shattered doors. A team member screamed, "Jeanne! He's coming through the doors!" To stop the gunman, she had to first negotiate a maze of hallways and classrooms, all filling with terrified people.

• Assam drew her Beretta, ensured that a round was chambered and worked her way toward the sound of gunfire.

• Within a minute of Murray's entering the building, Assam stepped away from a side wall and ordered him to drop his weapon. Instead, he began shooting at her. It was not a training scenario, and there was no cover in the hallway. Assam advanced, firing: two, three, four, five times. Murray fell but swung his rifle up, so Assam continued to fire.

• Assam's courage and direct force-on-force action saved dozens of lives.

Afterward, New Life Pastor Boyd called Assam "a real hero." Murray, he said, "had enough ammunition on him to cause a lot of damage."

A month later, U.S. President George W. Bush flew to Colorado for a fundraising



event and met several of that state's volunteers. Assam was among them. Asked later what the president told her, she recalled, "He said, 'Well done, good job.' He was proud of me."

## THE PERILS OF CELEBRITY

After shooting Murray and meeting the president, Assam's life spiraled out of control. She and her actions that Sunday morning have been investigated, written about and debated in detail. She might say her life has been torn, stapled and mutilated. For a hero, such results were unexpected.

The bones of Assam's 50-year life have been laid bare for public scrutiny — work and family history; neighbors, friends and lovers; personal integrity; finances; even her pets — and, like most lives, hers has had its successes and failures, its joys and tears. As a result of her loss of privacy and control, she now refuses most requests for interviews.

Assam's story is a cautionary tale, not only about concealed carry and our search for a safe place but also for anyone who suddenly finds herself (or himself) projected into the spotlight.

In an email exchange with the author on Feb. 25 and 26, 2014, she wrote that her "name and picture have been used inappropriately."

"I appreciate the offer [of the interview], but after so many people who have written books and magazine articles refuse[d] to print the truth, I don't want to do any more articles. I have been betrayed and lied about enough. Promises made and broken without a conscience. Quite ugly. I'm sorry — you're a nice man and I appreciate that — but I won't do another interview."

Seven years after her heroic Sunday actions, Assam blames writers and commentators for betraying her and for exhibiting an "incredible lack of integrity."

## QUIBBLING WITH THE CORONER

Assam began swimming against the public current as soon as the coroner's report detailing Murray's death was released. "The death of Matthew Murray has been ruled a suicide," said the El Paso County Coroner's Office. "It should be noted that he was struck multiple times by the security officer [Assam], which put him down. He then fired a single round,

killing himself." Police Sergeant Skip Arms told the Associated Press that Murray shot himself in the head.

Assam is no longer a member of New Life Church, but she remains studiously — almost aggressively — religious. She believes absolutely, unquestionably, that her bullets killed Murray. It was not a suicide, she says, because God personally directed her that Sunday morning. For Assam, this is a point of honor from which she cannot walk away.

An average person might feel relief knowing there was doubt whether she or he had fired the bullet that killed someone, even someone committing an evil act. Thus, the coroner's report was a "pass," similar to the "blank" given to one unknown member of a firing squad so that each member might reasonably claim that he or she had not fired the fatal bullet.

But Assam sees her encounter with the gunman in the Christian sanctuary as a battle in the war between "good and evil," a battle that, she has said, "means very little to reporters." Thus her point of departure from the average licensed carrier of a concealed weapon. Assam's shootout with Murray might have only lasted 15 seconds, yet it still defines and even consumes her life. The idea of killing Murray was a redemptive act in a difficult life; it is an act to which she desperately clings.

On Dec. 9, 2007, Jeanne Assam acted heroically and saved countless lives. Nevertheless, she quibbles with and renounces every story written — every interview taped — about those events, even though no misinterpretation or small error of fact is worth the emotional resources she invests disputing and correcting them.

Happiness means moving on, unless one is a warrior in a great conflagration pitting good against evil. Then the act of "moving on" might be seen as surrender rather than renunciation or acquiescence. And so, Assam is trapped in her own narrative.

Assam argues about the usefulness of urging civilians to take lessons from her story. She believes she was the only member of the New Life security team capable of stopping the shooter, even though four other team members were armed. Other team members just did not know what to do, she says. They did not know how to

react because they did not have her level of police training. She only credits other team members with helping churchgoers get out of her way.

Just because a civilian is armed, she has said, doesn't mean he or she can successfully take on a gunman, which is true enough and puts the period to training.

## THE TAKEAWAY

Perhaps the takeaway is that after you become a public figure, whether you choose that path or it chooses you, your life — your history, your privacy, your beliefs — will acquire an unexpected, and maybe even an undesirable, trajectory. Neither you nor your life story will ever be the same. Just ask Jeanne Assam.

Assam has attempted to correct what she considers the continuous twisting and reinterpretation of her story. In 2010, she wrote a book about her life and her experience that Sunday morning at the New Life Church — *God, the Gunman and Me* — available through Amazon.

## GATEKEEPERS

An astonishing number of confrontations occur at American places of worship. Murder, arson, kidnapping, assault and robbery do not respect religious barriers. Carl Chinn, author of *Evil Invades Sanctuary*, catalogs them at CarlChinn.com.

Chinn says that, in 2005, he helped develop the security protocol for New Life Church and was "one of the team of responders directly involved with the active shooter" in December 2007. He now serves New Life security, he notes, as threat investigator and a liaison between law enforcement and ministry security operations.

Chinn calls the Gatekeepers Model "the most thorough program I have ever seen and am now involved with." This model is a security program that focuses on faith-based volunteer teams, and more information is available at GatekeepersSecurity.com.

"The training keeps in mind the reality that most who serve on church teams are volunteers, so it doesn't send them through roll-in-the dirt 100-hour courses. It does end with them needing to qualify and re-qualify annually, consistent with law-enforcement P.O.S.T. courses applicable in their state."



# HOUSES OF WORSHIP

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

■ BY MICHAEL MARTIN



**T**hey say that the first step toward recovery is admitting that you have a problem. But in cities, towns and villages across America, we're having a difficult time admitting that we have a problem with church security. That has to change.

We talk of our churches, synagogues, mosques and other places of worship as being "places of sanctuary," and we act surprised whenever a violent attack is perpetuated against one of these locations, as though the fact that we go there to pray and commune with God will also create some kind of magical force field to keep bad things and bad people away. I apologize in advance if my next statement sounds blasphemous, but if an armed attacker enters your place of worship, God is not going to stop him. But an armed volunteer just might. Or a locked security door, or an escape plan that has been practiced repeatedly by your parishioners. The reality is, it might take all three of those countermeasures to prevent or end an attack.

But houses of worship do face different security issues when compared to schools and private businesses (businesses not open to the public). The same "open-door" policies that make houses of worship welcoming for parishioners and visitors are the types of environments that are attractive to a potential mass shooter selecting a target.

Regardless of their religious affiliations and regardless of their missions, houses of worship will always breed a special kind of hatred that is rarely matched. If you are a member of a synagogue or a Christian church, there are, at this very moment, any number of Islamic radicals in the U.S. and around the world who dream of burning your house of worship to the ground and killing everyone in it. If you are a member of a mosque, there are demented individuals who could, at this very moment, be planning the murder of your members. If you are a member of a church of color, regardless of your faith, there are individuals who harbor the most vile, disgusting and hateful racial views that would allow them to plan and carry out murder in the very place that you consider to be your safe sanctuary, as was the case with Dylann Roof, who murdered nine pa-

rishioners at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston simply because the parishioners were African American.

## UNIQUE SECURITY CHALLENGES

Security challenges faced by houses of worship include:

- Main doors and other doors are usually unlocked to maintain a welcoming atmosphere for parishioners and visitors.
- An "open-door" policy means that strangers unknown to parishioners and staff will be common.
- Most roles, including greeters, ushers, counselors, teachers and other lay people, are staffed by part-time volunteers.
- The attitude of a house of worship, being "God's house," can affect strategic thinking when compared to a private business or school. For example, the idea of arming security volunteers might just feel wrong to those on an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) planning committee.
- Because houses of worship consider at least one of their missions to be peace, it might be difficult to convince the planning committee or religious leaders that "fight" should be included in the "Run, Hide, Fight" program, particularly if armed responders are being considered as part of the plan.

## A HOUSE OF WORSHIP SECURITY CHECKLIST

Let's take a look at a security checklist that should be discussed and considered when developing an EOP for your house of worship. The following security checklist should be used to evaluate your house of worship's current security and used to develop what courses of action should be selected for your EOP.

### Outer Doors

While schools can justify treating their entire interiors as "sterile zones," where only approved and authorized individuals can make entry, the missions of houses of worship make that approach much more difficult. However, it is possible to implement the following security to outer doors:

- Visitors should be funneled through a single door or set of doors, with all

other doors considered to be "fire doors," which can be opened from the inside if the building must be evacuated but which are locked from the outside.

- Even if you choose to leave the main doors unsecured, a video security system should still be installed.
- Video cameras could also be installed at other entrances. In many cases, the appearance of monitored security is enough to deter attackers (or burglars) from attempting to make entry.

### Inner Doors

Because of the "open-door" policies of most houses of worship, the security of inner doors of offices, conference rooms, classrooms and interior doors to worship areas take on additional importance. As with schools, all inner doors should have the following security capabilities:

- All doors must have a deadbolt or auto-locking mechanism that can be secured quickly, with no key.
- Doors should have a backup lock, such as a hotel-style throw-over lock, Door Jammer or similar security door-stop.
- All doors, windows and hinges must be ballistically protected.
- Doors must be rated to withstand at least 10 minutes of forced entry.
- Shades or curtains must be pre-installed to quickly and completely block door viewpoints.

### Lockdown Procedures

• As with schools, a decentralized ability to initiate lockdown must be implemented, such as providing security key fobs to staff members or volunteers, which, when pressed, will initiate the lockdown.

- When a lockdown is called, the system must automatically call law enforcement rather than requiring any individual to call 911.

• Advanced systems should provide law enforcement with a picture of what's occurring within the house of worship through video access to the interior and exterior of the facility.

- All rooms designated as safe rooms (including classrooms, conference rooms and offices) should have a taped line marked on the floor, indicating which

areas are inside or outside of the field of view from the door's viewpoint.

- All safe rooms should have an intercom tied into law enforcement channels to indicate the status of the room's occupants (all safe, under attack or medical assistance needed).
- All safe rooms must have emergency first-aid supplies, and volunteers and staff must be trained in their use.

### Active Countermeasures

Unlike school classrooms and staff rooms, houses of worship tend to have more people congregating in larger areas, which means that the most effective countermeasure could be an armed countermeasure. Unlike most public (and even private) schools across the country, houses of worship are typically not bound by state law or school board

of establishing your own armed staff or armed volunteer program. It's my belief that if you've fairly included appropriate expertise on this subcommittee, your list of pros will significantly outweigh your list of cons. In fact, it's likely that your only cons will center around the emotional response to staff members or volunteers carrying firearms rather than any practical objections.

Even if an armed staff member and/or armed volunteer program does become part of your plan, your discussion of an armed response shouldn't end there.

### Armed Parishioners

While there are a number of states that ban the carrying of firearms in houses of worship by state statute, the vast majority of states have no such ban. What that means is that individuals

• Making them aware that there is a formal program for designated staff members and volunteers to carry a firearm during services or during other events. This is an incredibly important step to take to avoid having a well-meaning concealed carry permit holder make an incorrect assumption about who the bad guy is (if a mass shooting were to occur).

• Include these individuals as part of the team responsible for directing congregants during a lockdown. Those procedures might include directing them to guide congregants to a safe room or through an exterior door. By giving these individuals formal roles, they will be more attuned to the status of a shooter and the status of other armed personnel, which will help in their own decision-making processes as to whether an evacuation is working or if concealed carry permit hold-

*"I apologize in advance if my next statement sounds blasphemous, but if an armed attacker enters your place of worship, God is not going to stop him."*

Michael Martin

policy on whether armed personnel can be included as part of the EOP.

My recommendation is that as you consider whether an armed staff or armed volunteer program should be included in your house of worship's EOP (and you must at least consider this as part of your plan), you follow these steps.

Through a formal or informal poll of your house of worship, determine how many of your congregants fall into the following groups:

- Sworn active-duty law enforcement officers
- Retired law enforcement officers eligible to carry a firearm under HR218
- Reserve or other law enforcement officers
- Active, reserve and retired military personnel
- Civilian firearms instructors
- Congregants licensed to carry a firearm under your state's concealed carry laws

After understanding the experience and expertise within your congregation, my recommendation is that you form a subcommittee to the EOP planning committee to evaluate the pros and cons

licensed to carry a firearm in your state might be legally packing a firearm at the same moment they are taking Communion. Does that alarm you in any way? It shouldn't. With more than 12 million permit holders in the United States, concealed carry permit holders should be considered among the good guys and gals. They have passed a background check, and the vast majority have received training on the legal and practical aspects of carrying a firearm.

So in addition to polling your congregation to find those individuals experienced with firearms, I'd also suggest that you conduct another anonymous poll (using something like Survey Monkey) to find out exactly what percentage of your congregation is already carrying a firearm during services at your house of worship. You might be surprised to find out just how many there are.

While you could end this step after simply conducting the survey, my recommendation is that you hold a separate training course for those individuals so that they understand exactly how they might fit into an overall security plan. Your training for them should include:

er(s) should join in on an armed response.

• While concealed carry permit holders can choose to remain anonymous, having them known to staff members can avoid the same problem described earlier (making an incorrect assumption about who the bad guys is), and it will also lead to more collaboration and a larger feeling of a team.

### Public Acknowledgment

In addition to having a "Welcome to our Church/Temple/Mosque" sign on your front door, I'd also recommend that you include a sign that states "Multiple Armed Personnel on the Premises Will Use Deadly Force to Protect our Congregation."

While some in your congregation might feel that the second sign is counter to your house of worship's mission of peace, you can take comfort in the fact that by creating and publicizing an armed staff member program, you'll very likely never have to use it.

Peace and deterrence are two missions that everyone at your house of worship should be able to get behind.





# PREDATORS & PRAY

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT CHURCH SHOOTINGS?

■ BY DAVID BURNETT

On June 17, 2015, one criminal's lone-wolf attack on a prayer service in South Carolina became the latest killing spree to attract headlines (and fundraising pleas from gun-control advocates).

Although disturbed journals of the suspect were found, detailing how alone the man felt in his prejudice, the attacks were still hailed not only as emblematic of systemic racism but also a springboard to demand tighter restrictions on the guns in your home. Almost automatically, politicians began musing that new laws could stop future violence. Of course, since South Carolina churches are gun-free zones by law (pending clergy exemption) and since the suspect was not legally permitted to purchase, own or carry a gun, it requires intense imagination to suppose added laws would have deterred him.

Every mass shooting sparks discussions of what went wrong and how to further secure target locations — in this case, churches. Spree killings can (and do) happen anywhere, but records indicate church shootings are on the rise.

In May 2015, a Connecticut pastor setting up Memorial Day flags outside his Nazarene church was wounded in a drive-by shooting. In 2008, a Maryville, Illinois, pastor was gunned down in the middle of his sermon, with witnesses reporting the man unsuccessfully tried to use his Bible as a shield from the gunfire. In 2012, a Wisconsin Sikh temple fell under siege from a lone gunman, who killed six and wounded four. Two Catholic priests were shot in a Phoenix parish in 2014. A 2008 Universalist church shooting left two dead and seven wounded, while a 2007 Missouri church shooting left a pastor and two deacons dead. In 2006, a Louisiana service was halted when five people were shot, four fatally, before the shooter abducted and murdered his wife.

In February 2016, officials announced the arrest of Khalil Abu-Rayyan, an Islamic State sympathizer in Dearborn, Michigan, who intended to target an unidentified Detroit megachurch for mass murder.

"It's easy, and a lot of people go there," the complaint quotes Abu-Rayyan. "Plus people are not allowed to carry guns in church."

The circumstances surrounding each were different, but the lessons are the same: Murderers have no respect for the church, and it takes more than a Bible to stop a bullet.

Mass murders always leave difficult questions in their wake, but we as gun owners shouldn't try to avoid those questions. Although ensuing discussions inevitably assume a political bent, it's our humanity — not politics — that obligates us to reject further obstruction of lawfully armed resistance. After all, history is indisputable on two points: Rapid mass murders occur almost exclusively in gun-free zones and increasing access to lawful self-defense can increase the odds of surviving them.

On an individual level, houses of worship are still grappling with how to respond. Large churches often hire security firms or off-duty police officers. Some recruit volunteers, and many have raised awareness — and eyebrows — by hosting concealed carry classes for members. Certain gun shops have offered discounts and classes specifically for clergy, such as one Louisiana firm that, after the Charleston shootings, hosted a class exclusively for area ministers and their spouses. Some ministers go on to carry from the pulpit or incorporate self-defense into their messages.

"We're not in Mayberry anymore," one Catholic priest said in a lengthy statement to his Ann Arbor, Michigan, parish regarding organized concealed carry classes. (Unfortunately, the Diocese bishop superseded the priest and forced the class to cancel.)

Some churches even went as far as a Kentucky church that hosted "Bring Your Gun to Church" day in 2009 or a Dallas area megachurch that invited congregants to carry openly. Others host gun "buy-backs" or candlelight vigils to encourage non-violence.

Bottom line: Churches are in on the debate, whether they like it or not.

The federal government has recognized the problem and has issued a report on "Developing High-Quality Emergency Operation Plans for Houses of Worship." Although the report noted that 16 of 41 active shooter incidents studied were ended by potential victims

before police arrived, fighting back is advised only if flight or hiding is not possible. (They suggest using such weapons as "fire extinguishers or chairs.")

In July 2015, the U.S. Attorney's Office also hosted a summit in Detroit with officials from the FBI, the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security to discuss threat reduction, action plans and protection of congregations. Among recommendations, officials encourage holding drills, analyzing and preventing potential threats, and planning evacuation routes. Later, the FBI hosted more than 160 faith leaders in Dallas to address the unique threats faced by church leaders.

Concealed carry isn't automatically an option. Certain states prohibit worshipping while armed, and even some shooting enthusiasts hesitate to carry in church, uncertain of conflicts with doctrinal orthodoxy. Many civilized congregants are incredulous that anyone would ever need a gun in church.

Retired-lieutenant-turned-minister Lawrence Adams knows better. He routinely wears a concealed pistol beneath his robes. In 2009, he responded to an alarm in his Detroit church and was confronted and attacked by an intruder. Drawing on his police training, Adams pulled a concealed firearm and fought back.

In July 2015, an armed church employee in Boulder, Colorado, intervened when a drunken man attacked his estranged wife in a church parking lot. As the man stabbed the woman and began strangling her, the employee displayed a firearm and sent the man running. Local sheriff Joe Pelle told reporters many church-goers had begun carrying in response to church threats.

Also in July, a would-be robber in Baytown, Texas, kicked down a church door, not expecting to find the well-armed Pastor Benny Holmes inside. Fearing for his life, Holmes shot the intruder. (Less than a year earlier, Pastor Holmes had apprehended a serial thief at gunpoint in his home.)

Stories such as these provide a cold reality check on the fearful whispers of gun-control advocates who claim guns "only make things worse." Indeed, guns





aren't the solution to every problem, but they are a solution to some problems, and that includes rapid mass murders.

Charleston's high body count in 2015 dominated headlines, but 200 miles and three years away, another church avoided a similar situation thanks to concealed carry. In March 2012, a convicted felon entered a small Baptist church in South Carolina and pointed a loaded shotgun at the congregation. Parishioner Aaron Guyton drew his concealed handgun and held the intruder at gunpoint, working with the pastor and others to disarm and subdue him. No shots were fired, and authorities praised Guyton for his actions.

"I hope the bad guys are watching, because we are tired of your nonsense," Sheriff Chuck Wright told reporters. "People are simply protecting their families. Prepare yourselves, ladies and gentlemen."

Aurora, Colorado, is still famous for its theater murders, but 20 miles and two months away, a convicted felon crashed into an Aurora church parking lot and opened fire on the crowd, killing one. The man was promptly shot dead by the victim's nephew, an off-duty police officer.

Then there's the New Life Church in Colorado. Just 50 miles from the notorious Columbine High School in Littleton, an intruder armed with hundreds of rounds of ammunition and smoke grenades entered the megachurch and opened fire. He was confronted and killed by former law enforcement officer Jeanne Assam, who was acting as volun-

teer security for the day. (Although the media and even Assam herself continue to define her role as law enforcement, her legal capacity that day was as a private citizen.)

Why don't armed citizens stop mass shootings? Because they stopped them before they became mass shootings. Would guns in Charleston have stopped the killer? Thanks to lawmakers, we'll never know. But one thing is clear: Status quo isn't the answer.

Naturally, denizens of non-violence will still argue that turning the other cheek takes precedence over protection of the flock. Each must act according to the dictates of his or her conscience, but there's no clear-cut argument that any major world religion demands absolute pacifism. For example, most scholars of Hinduism suggest that the non-violent doctrine of *ahimsa* does not require ignoring threats to life or limb. Islam resoundingly endorses self-defense. Sikhs carry ceremonial weapons called *Kirpans* to symbolize courage, self-defense and readiness. Hebrew Scriptures include fairly detailed outlines for the use of deadly force.

The Dalai Lama famously wrote, "If someone has a gun and is trying to kill you, it would be reasonable to shoot back with your own gun." Although personally opposing violence, Mohandas Gandhi condemned laws that disarmed his people from fighting for independence. And Christian scriptures include an account of Jesus telling his disciples

to buy swords, as well as descriptions of a Second Coming when enemy combatants will be slain by his sword.

In early American history, churches were vital to communities, and each settler was expected to do his part to protect the parishioners from attack. Many colonial settlements levied fines against worshipers for coming to church services with defective or absent firearms. Church lawns were often the scene for Sunday afternoon competitions and tournaments to sharpen the skills of colonialists.

For readers interested in beefing up church security, it's important first to check local laws on church carry. Make sure your church isn't acting as a daycare or a school. Promote a dialogue among the church and clergy. Network with other worshipers to form plans. Periodically volunteer to stand watch outside the service. Greeters and ushers often join services and leave church foyers completely unwatched, allowing open access to would-be perpetrators. Learn to watch for concerning behaviors. Train for worst-case scenarios.

Whatever day and in whatever way, many readers keep the Sabbath. It's not a question of if but when and where. When preventative measures fail, being caught without the means to defend yourself, even in a house of worship, is a mistake you might only get to make once.





# DEFENDING HOUSES OF WORSHIP

WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOUR CHURCH BECOMES A TARGET

■ BY GEORGE HARRIS





All of us who celebrate the Sabbath in our chosen religion, whether it be during the weekly services or in other group meetings held at other times, need to be aware of the potential threats to our personal safety — much as in any other gathering of people. Many of us think of our religions as “peace-loving” and that our places of worship are safe from any type of conflict or violence. You have but to read the scriptures or the history books to see that there has always been disagreement leading to physical violence, up to and including all-out war, between — and often within — religious sects. Just because it hasn’t happened yet in your locale doesn’t mean it isn’t happening regularly in other parts of the country or the world.

Sadly, unless there is a high body count or some other distinguishing factor to sell advertising, the media won’t cover it on a wide scale.

For those of you thinking that this is a recent phenomenon, I’d like to relate to you a personal experience. My dad was a Methodist minister whose job was to go as a missionary into mountainous areas of Southwestern Virginia, organize a congregation, establish and build a church, then pass off the working and thriving religious group to another minister before moving to his next assignment. In one of my dad’s assignments, the making of “moonshine whiskey” was a significant industry employing many of the local populous. As my dad went about his work building his “flock,” it was noted by one of the more prominent bootleggers that his production and profits were taking a downturn because of my dad’s efforts. One Sunday, while services were being conducted, the bootlegger entered the church and fired a shot into the ceiling, proclaiming that

he was going to kill the SOB who was ruining his business. As my dad relayed the story, he and all of the rest of the occupants of the church bailed out of any opening available and left the building to the bootlegger. A happy ending to the story came with the help of the local sheriff, who happened to be a relative of the bootlegger, in that he mediated a peaceful solution between the two differing parties, letting the local inhabitants make their own choices as to which road they wanted to follow.

I do know that my dad, who had never owned a gun, traded a banjo to his brother for an S&W .38 Special just in case an incident like that happened again. Fortunately, it never did.

In researching this article, I decided to paint this subject with a pretty broad brush in an effort to stimulate thought and perhaps provide a few answers. Out of respect for the churches of various religions that were contacted — and those that would discuss their plans and preparations for an active shooter event — all will remain anonymous in the interest of safety.

I contacted a church with 35 active members and places of worship with thousands of members as well as memberships that fell in between the two. Congregation members from the corners to the middle of the country as well as a few outside of the country were polled as to how they and/or their fellow members would respond to an active shooter in the midst of a religious gathering. Individual trainers and security groups that were involved with church security — as well as organized police, EMS and other potential responders — were asked for input into this very real and interesting subject.

Realizing that there could be legal impli-

cations that would perhaps influence the thinking of the congregation and church leadership, I consulted several attorneys for their advice.

In addition, I took a Protective Shooting Class from Scott Ballard at the SIG Sauer Academy ([SIGSauerAcademy.com](http://SIGSauerAcademy.com)) to fully orient my thinking to that of an ordinary citizen who carries a concealed firearm on a daily basis. Many readers have been cops, military personnel or armed professionals at some time in their lives, where their actions were influenced and somewhat insulated by the positions and responsibilities that they held with the organizations of which they were members. The mindsets of these professionals is most often to take charge, control the situation and save the day when trouble presents itself. The day they leave the jobs for the last time and become civilians again, those mindsets often don’t change. This can be detrimental to new ordinary citizens in many ways, simply because the game plan has changed.

Being responsible for the safety of others becomes a personal choice with associated consequences as a civilian and that puts a little different perspective on the subject. That point was driven home by what Ballard called “the list.” “The list” was defined as those who you would die for, who you would go to jail for and who you would lose all of your possessions and net worth for in the interest of their personal safety. In reality, when put in that perspective, most of our lists aren’t too long.

This consideration, added to the reality-based training drills that we did involving as many as 20 people in close quarters (and having to make decisions one after the other in a perpetually changing hostile

environment), showed me that many talk a good game. But when it comes down to performing under pressure, they aren't as good as they think they are. Training such as this is invaluable for many applications, especially for armed confrontations in a house of worship where the situation is ever-evolving and split-second decisions mean the difference between success and failure.

This two-day class stimulated me to contact friend, attorney, author and guest SIG Sauer Academy Instructor, Andrew Branca, in reference to the legal aspects of personal defense when in a house of worship. Branca is on his third iteration of his comprehensive book, *The Law of Self Defense* (LawOfSelf-Defense.com). In discussing this subject at length with Branca and referencing a copy of his newest book, I validated my thinking that the variables of a shooting scenario in a house of worship are infinite. There is no legal immunity for religious activities, meaning that those who carry concealed must also be aware of and abide by the legal restrictions specific to that locale.

Fortunately, most of us attend services at the same location every time and are familiar with the layout of the building and what layers of security exist in our particular house of worship. If carrying concealed is condoned in the place of worship that you attend, it is most likely that those who do carry will become acquainted with one another, which helps when things go bad. The more planning and organization that can be done, the higher the likelihood of preventing or controlling an active shooter event should something like that happen.

A publication from FEMA (FEMA.gov), titled *Guide to Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship*, provides some valuable guidelines for dealing with a variety of emergency situations likely to affect a place of worship. Sections of the publication are devoted to planning and preparation, prevention and responding to and dealing with the aftermath of an active shooter event. It is quite comprehensive and provides some good guidelines with which to work, although some might find it not as friendly to firearms carriers in the facility as they would like. It is definitely worth reading, along with its references, to enlighten and educate those who are intent on taking a proactive stance against the potential of an active shooter in their places of worship.

In my research for this article, I did find some interesting trends in the preparedness of various religions and houses of worship. Geographically, in gun-friendly regions, there seems to be a more proactive approach to having an armed, organized congregation. In the more politically liberal regions of the country, many worship centers don't feel the need to address the issue — it isn't a concern of the leadership or the congregation — because it hasn't happened there and there is no recognized threat. The general thinking is that guns aren't welcome, regardless of who carries them ... period!

The exceptions to liberal thinkers' attitudes come from those outside of the predominant religious groups who have been and, in some areas today, are looked down upon and persecuted. I was amazed by the sophisticated security measures in place from some of the larger, more affluent groups who had hired security professionals to ensure congregational safety. Economics, in many cases, dictated the levels of external and internal safety measures that were in place. Some chose to keep their security efforts in-house, preferring to be trained by the security professionals but formulating and executing their own plans to the exclusion of anyone outside of the group.

The use of trained, organized and armed security seemed to be more prevalent in highly populated areas. The more rural congregations, particularly those smaller in size, relied on a few members who were considered prepared to defend the rest should an active shooter incident take place.

Many of those with whom I communicated weren't as concerned about an outside attack as they were about an attack from within. They felt that the perimeter of the property and the entrances to the worship hall were relatively easy to control. However, without TSA-type airport screening, there was no way to be sure of what kind of armament was in the worship hall at any given time. To my knowledge, no place of worship has resorted to pat downs and electronic screening of everyone attending services at this point in time.

This, of course, adds to the horror of an active shooter incident from within the meeting hall in that with an unknown number of guns present, it would be all but impossible to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys. This would, and not to mention shooting from within a crowd of

panicking people, inevitably result in unintended collateral damage.

As a hedge to mitigate shooting the wrong individuals, some have organized their known firearms carriers and issued them brightly colored designators to be worn around the neck when a firearms incident is taking place. There are other ideas, I'm sure, but the fact remains that if there is a shooting incident in a crowd of people, innocent people are inevitably going to get hurt.

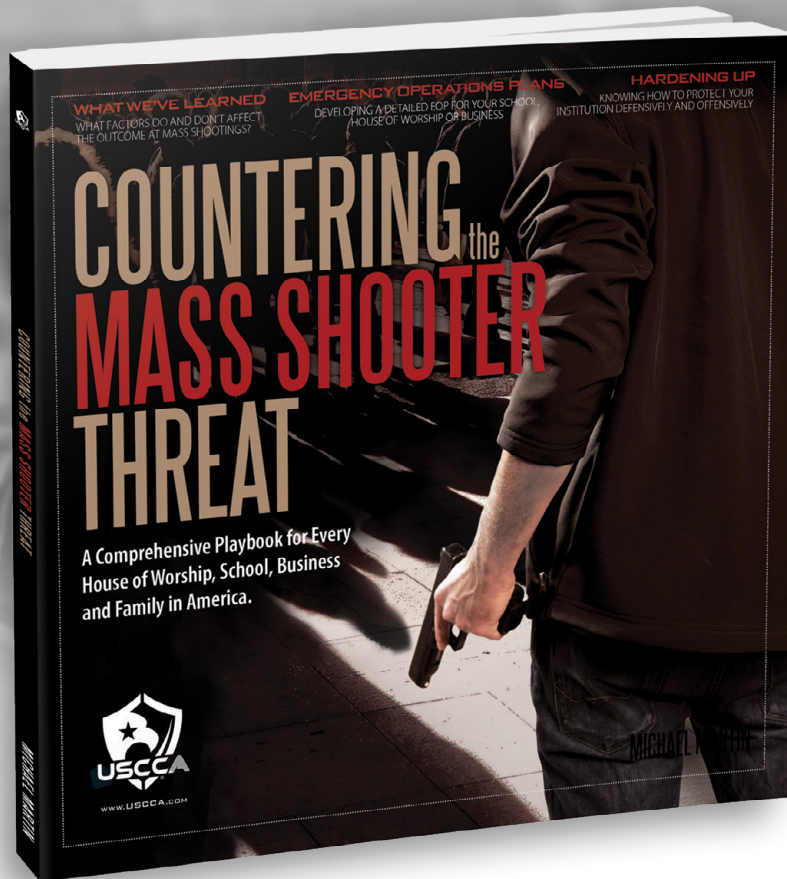
The best thing that can be done to prevent injury and loss of life is to prevent the attack in the first place. If the signs are there, don't ignore the obvious. Usually there is some cue or clue that is dismissed as unimportant, but, if acted upon, could have stopped or attenuated the violent action that took place.

Individually, we can be proactive on our own in saving ourselves and the ones on "the list" that I mentioned earlier. Simple awareness of the potentials and likelihoods of an active shooter event in your house of worship will get you started. Have several tested and practiced plans of action thought out prior to having to come up with one as the event unfolds. As an example, unless you and the shooter are in very close proximity to one another, the best course of action might be to escape. Part of that plan could be in how you are seated in the meeting hall. Where are the most direct escape routes for you and those on "the list?" Being too close to an exit might put you in the direct line of fire should the attacker choose that exit as his point of entry. What are your observation capabilities when the congregation is seated and standing? An attack might play out very differently if the congregation is focused in prayer or in the midst of a song.

There are a lot of things to think about in each given situation and place of worship. What will help is to play out in your mind what the likelihoods might be and have firm in your mind what your response will be. Consider your legal parameters, moral values, personal values and obligations in forming your response. Think of the worst-case scenario and how you would respond to that situation. Think of those on "the list" and how they would fare without you to depend on in the future. These are hard questions for which there are no universal answers.



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