



CONCILIUM

Violence During Church Activities from 2019 to 2022

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Introduction

Concilium is a Christian non-profit that seeks to build resilient disciple-makers globally through biblically-based and Gospel-centered security training and insights. There exists a continuity between churches and missionary-sending organizations in their mutual responsibility for Great Commission evangelism, discipleship, mobilization, and church planting. Concilium firmly believes there should also exist a continuity between churches and sending organizations in how they view risk and security at home and abroad. Concilium has been teaching “Security in the Context of Ministry” to sending organizations since 2013, but its principles are just as applicable to U.S. churches and their safety teams as they are to career missionaries across an ocean.

From January 2019 through December 2022, we analyzed 92 violent incidents involving church activities and locations, six foiled *imminent* attacks in which an armed person with expressed or probable violent intent entered church property during a church activity, and two foiled *planned* attacks. Those 100 incidents are listed below and, except for four, were originally covered in *Insight Digest*, Concilium’s publication for U.S. churches addressing Security in the Context of Ministry.¹

All information was gleaned from open, publicly available sources. The list may be incomplete depending on the nature and extent of media coverage, as well as the performance of our automated Internet searches. FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) statistics are only available through 2019, and they pose several problems that cannot be solved without sorting the original entries in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). Most notably, published data tables do not say

¹ *Insight Digest* is available to members of U.S. churches via subscription. Visit www.concilium.us/insight or write to info@concilium.us for more information. Donations in support of our work can be made on our website.

which crimes against persons at houses of worship occurred during church activities. They also do not differentiate between aggravated and simple assaults. Finally, only about half the jurisdictions in America submit data to the NIBRS system, and there is no guarantee that officers, dispatchers, or crime analysts who fill out reports properly code incidents.

We have chosen to focus on incidents during church activities due to the lower relevance of “off hours” incidents that did not endanger church attendees or staff and the time prohibitive nature of studying the hundreds of violent incidents on church properties that have occurred when no staff or attendees were present. Church staff and security volunteers should think about what happens on church properties when “off hours” violence occurs because they may need to gather/preserve evidence, repair property damage, or even counsel members disturbed by an incident’s occurrence. They also have methods available to them to help prevent “off hours” incidents. These issues are beyond the scope of this paper.

Executive Summary

The 50 percent increase in violent incidents in 2022 as compared to 2021 indicates that the nationwide post-covid violence surge is affecting churches. Regardless of the motive, the violence occurring is not coordinated, nor is it particularly ideological. Church-related incidents share similarities with violent incidents occurring throughout American society, but they do not indicate rising persecution, jihadist terrorism, or far-left/far-right terrorism.

The most disturbing element about 2022’s incidents is the number of deaths (including assailant deaths). There were 21 deaths in 2022—compared to 6 in 2019, 7 in 2020, and 6 in 2021. Fourteen of 39 incidents in 2023 were fatal, an unusually high rate. Three assailants committed suicide after murdering a combined total of 6 people. While this is not an unusual occurrence in incidents across society, it is in churches, where assailants usually flee or are neutralized by bystanders, law enforcement officers, or security volunteers.

Church security training typically has a myopic focus on protecting Sunday morning gatherings, and church safety teams usually provide little, if any, coverage for other gatherings. This disparity needs to be corrected—especially considering that 76 incidents occurred during smaller weeknight, weekday, and weekend activities and only 24 incidents occurred during large congregational gatherings. Additionally, 60 percent of incidents occurred outdoors, highlighting the need to layer security across a series of concentric perimeters, especially physical security presence in parking areas.

This study reinforces our previous conclusion in “Targeted Violence at U.S. Churches in 2019 and 2020” that attacks not motivated by robbery or theft are usually foreshadowed by warning signs – erratic behavior, severe mental health symptoms (hallucinations, paranoia, delusions, depression, and suicidal thoughts), a major life stressor, communicated threats, or the harboring of a grievance

against a church or member – which are visible to people the assailant knows. When these observable warning signs are reported, law enforcement and the potential assailant’s family members, friends, and peripheral contacts stand a good chance of preventing violence. The U.S. Secret Service’s National Threat Assessment Center has recently reported that *every single mass attacker from 2016 through 2020 had elicited concern from others about his behavior, shared one or more concerning communications, demonstrated behavior changes, or engaged in overt planning behavior.*²

Good ministry can lead to good security when awareness of security implications is high and relationships are built with law enforcement to quickly intervene when a person needing spiritual care becomes physically threatening. While adding or increasing security measures necessitates some adjustment to a church’s culture, security should not confine ministry. Instead, security measures should be used *in the context of ministry* to move alongside church activities and advance the Gospel. Churches who decide to limit their obedience to the Great Commission are moving in the wrong direction; churches who adopt security measures that help inspire and enable Great Commission obedience are moving in the right one.

Violence during Church Activities from 2019 to 2022

The following list includes acts of violence on church property in which an assailant *apparently motivated by a desire for criminal gain or a personal or ideological grievance, bias, or dispute 1) harmed or attempted to harm, or 2) arrived on church property with the probable intent and/or confirmed capability to harm, or 3) had formed advanced, specific plans to harm one or more people during a church activity.* One Sunday morning pre-service incident has been included due to its proximity to the morning service, though no attendees were yet in the building.

Unlike our first report, “Targeted Violence at Churches in 2019 and 2020,” this report includes robberies and carjackings (i.e., violence with an economic or financial motive). Two years ago, our purpose was to help churches understand mass casualty attacks. Our purpose now is to help church leaders and security volunteers *calibrate* their security policies, strategies, and tactics in response to the range of pre-meditated or intentional violence that can occur at churches. We expanded the scope due to the realization that “classic” active shooter or mass shooting scenarios are rare, but violence at least partially pre-meditated by an assailant takes place much more commonly, and this violence matters, even if the assailant is simply an armed robber who shows up on church property prepared and willing to physically harm others.

One of the main takeaways we hope readers will remember is that security is a task for the entire church, *not just volunteer security teams.* Church security typically begins when a pastor sees a need to protect the congregation from mass-casualty events and approaches qualified church members. Sometimes a team is formed to respond to such scenarios, but often permission is simply granted for

² National Threat Assessment Center. *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016-2020.* <https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/usss-ntac-maps-2016-2020.pdf>. U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security. January 2023.

certain individuals to carry concealed weapons or respond to incidents. Response is prioritized over prevention, and Sunday mornings dominate everyone's attention. These 100 incidents, however, illustrate the need for all church staff members and volunteers to have good situational awareness and some level of training. Churches need to understand that many violent incidents are preventable, and most of them occur during activities other than Sunday morning worship services.

To clear up a misconception common in today's media and social media content, arson and vandalism incidents are *not* violent crimes. They are property crimes, unless an arsonist intends to harm people. We excluded incidents in which guns were fired at unoccupied church buildings from this study, as well as several incidents in which church attendees inside church buildings were struck by stray bullets from shootings elsewhere. We have been compiling data on arson incidents since 2019 as well and hope to publish our findings later in 2023.

Violence during Church Activities in 2019

1. **Kansas City, Missouri, on 5 January 2019** – A man attempted to carjack two church members outside a church in the Westport area of Kansas City before being pursued to a second church approximately two blocks away by responding police officers. The suspect allegedly told at least one of the would-be victims that he had a gun, though he apparently did not display one. The first driver locked the vehicle's doors and backed away; the second driver called 911. In an altercation during the arrest in an alley outside the second church, the suspect allegedly grabbed an officer's firearm, leading another officer to shoot the suspect. The suspect was expected to recover from his injuries. A security volunteer at the first church was credited with helping disrupt the two carjacking attempts. He pursued the suspect at a distance, called 911, and directed officers to the scene.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Fleeing suspect

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning services

LOCATION: Parking lot, outdoors

2. **Atlanta, Georgia, on 20 February 2019** – A man leaving a Wednesday night church service found someone trying to break into his car. After a confrontation, gunfire ensued, and the victim was non-fatally shot by the suspect. After the gunshot, the suspect fled the scene on foot.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activity

LOCATION: Parking lot

3. **FOILED IMMINENT ATTACK Franklin Park, Illinois, on 1 April 2019** – A man was found hiding in a church basement closet with multiple loaded weapons the night before a weekday church event after posting his violent intentions to social media. He had traveled from South Dakota.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown, mental instability

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Transient, lay in wait

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Weekday activity

LOCATION: Closet

4. **FOILED PLANNED ATTACK Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 19 June 2019** – The FBI arrested a Syrian refugee for planning to attack a Nigerian church in Pittsburgh on behalf of the Islamic State. This case was significant because the grassroots jihadist had bypassed another target (a Shiite mosque) because of good locks/doors and CCTV. He selected the church as a target because it had less security and he thought it would be easier for him to attack given his limited capabilities. This case was also an FBI sting, so there was little real threat of this suspect executing the attack.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Terrorism, persecution

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Refugee, jihadist

WEAPON: Bomb

EVENT TYPE: Service

LOCATION:

5. **Halethorpe, Maryland, on 12 August 2019** – A suspect entered a suburban church through an unlocked door and robbed band members at gunpoint during their Monday evening rehearsal.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activity

LOCATION: Sanctuary

6. **Newberry Township, Pennsylvania, on 24 August 2019** – A man was charged with simple assault, reckless endangerment, disorderly conduct, criminal trespass, and harassment after demanding an individual spraying weeds on church property tell him what chemicals were in the spray and then threatening that individual with a flare gun when the victim attempted to drive away.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Mental instability, grievance against church

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Known to church

WEAPON: Flare gun

EVENT TYPE: Saturday activity
LOCATION: Outdoors

7. **Columbia, South Carolina, on 25 August 2019** – An armed robber entered a church during an early morning Sunday service and demanded money while firing his gun in the air. He shot one person and fled after his weapon stopped working.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service (early prayer meeting)
LOCATION: Sanctuary

8. **Portland, Oregon, on 25 August 2019** – A man armed with a knife and heavy chain entered a church during children’s choir auditions but left shortly thereafter. He entered through a door that had been unlocked for him by an unwitting church member after the door had been locked specifically to keep him out. He took a hostage down the street minutes later and engaged in a standoff with police at a fast-food restaurant, where he was ultimately arrested with the help of a bystander.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown, mental instability
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:
WEAPON: Knife, chain
EVENT TYPE: Sunday afternoon activity
LOCATION: Indoors

9. **Lubbock, Texas, on 14 September 2019** – A man assaulted a pastor and threatened to shoot up a church during a Sunday service before being disarmed by church members. The reporting officer claimed the suspect was yelling nonsense words “as if he was attempting to perform sorcery.” This was the second incident that year involving the same suspect and pastor.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute, mental instability
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Disruptive
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service
LOCATION: Auditorium

10. **Roseville, Minnesota, on 18 September 2019** – A man was killed in a drive-by shooting as he left church with a small group after a Wednesday night Bible study. One person in the targeted group returned fire with a concealed handgun. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang, dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:

WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Weeknight Bible study
LOCATION: Sidewalk

11. **Fort Dodge, Iowa, on 2 October 2019** – A pastor and police chaplain was robbed and beaten to death outside his church in a late afternoon assault by a man seen on surveillance camera trying to enter the locked building shortly before. The assailant had a history of violence and mental health problems and was found incompetent to stand trial. **ONE KILLED**

LIKELY MOTIVE: Mental Instability, Robbery
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: History of violence
WEAPON: Blunt object
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Outdoors

12. **Pelham, New Hampshire, on 12 October 2019** – A gunman, partially influenced by apparent mental instability, shot a bride and the pastor during a wedding. A history of violence existed within a small circle of people at the church, as the groom's son was the main suspect in the previous murder of one of the church's pastors.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Retaliation, mental instability
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Wedding
LOCATION: Sanctuary

13. **San Antonio, Texas, on 3 November 2019** – A man held a knife to his girlfriend's stomach and threatened to kill her during a Sunday service. A church member successfully disarmed the assailant.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Domestic
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Foreign-born
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service
LOCATION: Parking Lot

14. **Jackson, Mississippi, on 10 November 2019** – Two homeless men engaged in a fight during a church's community meal, resulting in one being stabbed to death. **ONE KILLED**

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Homeless
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Community meal
LOCATION: Kitchen

15. **Rochester, New York, on 13 November 2019** – A guest at a church soup kitchen shot two volunteers with a BB gun.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Homeless
WEAPON: BB gun
EVENT TYPE: Community meal
LOCATION: Kitchen

16. **New Orleans, Louisiana, on 16 November 2019** – A teenager shot three other teens during a church festival. The attacker had a history of violence against the victims.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang, bullying
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Minors
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Church festival
LOCATION: Outdoors

17. **Cleveland Heights, Ohio, on 20 November 2019** – A neighborhood resident entered a church during a Wednesday children’s choir practice and stabbed a woman with a kitchen knife, apparently for wearing fur. The assailant had a history of seeking to murder those within her community who offended her sensibilities.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Ideological, mental instability
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: History of violent threats
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Weekday children’s activity
LOCATION: Auditorium

18. **FOILED PLANNED ATTACK Gainesville, Georgia, on 20 November 2019** – A 16-year-old girl was arrested for planning a knife attack against a black-majority church. Her school classmates discovered a notebook containing her plans and alerted the authorities.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Racism
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Minor
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Sunday service
LOCATION:

19. **Bloomington, California, on 29 November 2019** – A homeless woman stabbed three church kitchen volunteers, two of whom had come to the aid of the first victim.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Homeless

WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Community meal
LOCATION: Kitchen

20. **Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on 1 December 2019** – A man fired a single shot through the glass rear door of a church building while the building was occupied during Sunday evening activities. He had previously been charged with attempted murder as a juvenile and apologized for the shooting after being arrested.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Likely gang member
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday evening service
LOCATION: Outdoors

21. **Pasadena, Texas, on 12 December 2019** – A man armed with a screwdriver ran into a church sanctuary during a Christmas program and began threatening people after being contacted by off-duty police in the parking lot.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Mental instability
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:
WEAPON: Screwdriver
EVENT TYPE: Christmas program
LOCATION: Parking lot, sanctuary

22. **White Settlement, Texas, on 29 December 2019** – A man with mental health symptoms and a grievance against the church benevolence ministry and/or pastor concealed a shotgun through part of the Sunday morning service, then stood and fatally shot a safety team member and an usher before being shot and killed by another safety team member. The safety team had previously identified the assailant as suspicious due to his clothing and apparent use of a wig and were located close to his seat, but they had not confronted him. **TWO KILLED, ASSAILANT KILLED.**

LIKELY MOTIVE: Grievance with church, mental instability
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Disguised
WEAPON: Firearm (shotgun)
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service
LOCATION: Sanctuary

Violence during Church Activities in 2020

1. **Wichita, Kansas, on 19 January 2020** – Two suspects assaulted a woman as she arrived at her church for Sunday services and then stole her vehicle. Police located it the following day after the owner tracked its location using the Ford Pass app.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service
LOCATION: Parking Lot

2. **FOILED IMMINENT ATTACK San Antonio, Texas, on 26 January 2020** – Church parking volunteers were threatened by an armed man who was using his car to block traffic. Allegedly, the armed man was targeting someone who owed him money, and intended to kill that individual if the debt was not repaid. Parking volunteers called 911 after hearing the man's threatening statements.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Personal dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Associate of church member, lay in wait
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service
LOCATION: Parking Lot

3. **Riviera Beach, Florida, on 1 February 2020** – A family dispute led to a street confrontation after a funeral meal. The fight ended with shots fired and four people injured. The armed security guards covering the funeral had already departed by the time the confrontation broke out. TWO KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Domestic
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Family members
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Funeral meal
LOCATION: Street

4. **Austin, Texas, on 13 February 2020** – A homeless man armed with a knife and a large rock threatened to kill children on a church playground. The playground's fence provided church school staff with the space to move the children safely inside.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown, mental instability
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Homeless
WEAPON: Knife, rock
EVENT TYPE: Weekday activity
LOCATION: Playground

5. **Santa Ana, California, on 1 March 2020** – Police killed an armed man inside a church after he entered the church between Sunday morning services. An altercation may have occurred outside prior to the police response. The caller to 911 said the man had a gun. Witnesses told media he may have been suicidal. ASSAILANT KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Suicide, mental instability

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service

LOCATION: Auditorium

6. **Marion, North Carolina, on 24 May 2020** – A man armed with a knife sharpener and a soldering torch disrupted an outdoor church service. He was arrested by responding officers.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Mental instability, unknown

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Disruptive

WEAPON: Sharp object, flame-producing object

EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service

LOCATION: Outdoors gathering

7. **Chantilly, Virginia, on 18 July 2020** – A pastor was stabbed during a Saturday Bible study, reportedly by church member displaying mental health symptoms. He was tackled and disarmed by another pastor and a local police chief attending the Bible study.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Mental instability

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Church member

WEAPON: Knife

EVENT TYPE: Saturday Bible study

LOCATION: Indoors

8. **FOILED IMMINENT ATTACK Troutdale, Virginia, on 27 September 2020** – A man swung a hatchet at an off-duty state trooper who attempted to shut a church's front door on the assailant to prevent his entry. The fact that the man had the hatchet already in his hand as he was trying to access the building indicates a high probability of attempted mass violence.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown, under influence of drugs

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:

WEAPON: Hatchet

EVENT TYPE: Sunday evening service

LOCATION: Entrance

9. **Germantown, Pennsylvania, on 8 October 2020** – Law enforcement officers shot and killed a man wielding a rifle after a series of chaotic events began in a local church. The armed individual entered a church in Germantown in the early morning hours demanding

food, money, and a vehicle from the church staff. The only member of the church staff present provided her car keys after the armed man discharged a weapon in her direction. The suspect left the church and in a matter of an hour, shot and killed a woman driving down the highway, wounded another occupant of the same vehicle, attempted to carjack a vehicle, attempted to steal a police car, and exchanged fire with law enforcement before being shot and killed by responding officers.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown
WEAPON: Firearms (rifle)
EVENT TYPE: Overnight
LOCATION: Indoors

10. **High Point, North Carolina, on 8 November 2020** – A gang-related drive-by shooting following a teenager’s funeral resulted in the death of one man. He was hit by return gunfire from a plain-clothes detective. The detective was in attendance as part of his investigation into a murder. The fatality reportedly had a gun drawn, probably in self-defense. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Drive-by, gang members
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Funeral
LOCATION: Outdoors

11. **San Jose, California, on 22 November 2020** – A man stabbed two volunteers at a church homeless shelter. TWO KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Homeless
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Benevolence
LOCATION: Indoors

12. **New York, New York, on 13 December 2020** – A man with a political grievance against the U.S. government and major corporations opened fire on church steps following an outdoor Christmas concert. He was shot dead by the police. He had expressed a desire to take hostages. ASSAILANT KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Political
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Christmas performance
LOCATION: Outdoors

13. **FOILED IMMINENT ATTACK Jennings, Missouri, on 20 December 2020** – A church employee fired for threatening to shoot up the church after he had been asked to wear a mask was arrested in the church parking lot with loaded firearms in his car. Since his firing, the suspect had continued to communicate threats directed at the church and individuals.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute with church

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Former employee

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Office hours

LOCATION: Parking lot

Violence during Church Activities in 2021

1. **Winona, Texas, on 3 January** – A pastor discovered a man in a church restroom holding the church's cash bag. The pastor asked the suspect to leave and, at some point, drew a concealed handgun on the suspect. A hand-to-hand altercation ensued, during which the suspect disarmed the pastor and shot him with his own weapon. The suspect subsequently shot a bystander while fleeing the building. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Burglary while fleeing from law enforcement

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Fleeing from law enforcement

WEAPON: Firearm (pastor's)

EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning (pre-service)

LOCATION: Restroom

2. **BOMBING Stockton, California, on 9 January 2021** – Two men were arrested for possession of explosives after they allegedly threw an explosive device at a church following a funeral they had attended. They had reportedly been involved in a dispute with other attendees.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Bombmakers

WEAPON: Bombs

EVENT TYPE: Funeral

LOCATION: Outdoors

3. **San Antonio, Texas, on 7 February 2021** – A man fired into a vehicle occupied by five people as it pulled into a church parking lot for a Sunday afternoon event. The subject allegedly waited for the victims in the parking lot. He wounded a father and son in the vehicle.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Lay in wait

WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday afternoon event
LOCATION: Parking lot

4. **Melbourne, Florida, on 21 February 2021** – In a series of escalating events, a man, who was previously known to the church, barricaded himself at the door after officers responding to a disturbance call apparently stopped him in the process of abducting a priest. The original disturbance occurred between the man and several priests around 7:45 a.m., prior to the arrival of most church members. The subject struck one of the priests and tried to abduct him, then brandished a firearm at responding officers. While barricaded, the subject threatened to commit suicide and shouted repeatedly that he needed to be heard. The standoff ended around noon.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute with church
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Previously known to the church
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning (pre-service)
LOCATION: Indoors

5. **Darke County, Ohio, on 22 February 2021** – The presence of a man armed with a rifle in a church parking lot on a Monday evening prompted the four church members inside the building to barricade themselves in the basement while the pastor remained outside. The man was threatening to harm himself and demanded that the building be evacuated. After three hours of effort by law enforcement negotiators, the subject shot himself and was airlifted for medical care. Officers assisted the pastor in escaping the parking lot.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Suicide
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Suicidal
WEAPON: Firearm (rifle)
EVENT TYPE: Weeknight staff meeting
LOCATION: Outdoors

6. **BOMBING Brevard, North Carolina, on 14 March 2021** – A church safety team discovered a plot to bomb their church when their security cameras observed a suspect planting a suspicious package outside the church. After investigating the package, the team immediately contacted police. Authorities found around 20 homemade incendiary devices at the church, a nearby county community services building and an American Legion lodge. Though the devices are believed to have been detonated, they caused only superficial damage.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Political
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: No criminal history
WEAPON: Incendiary devices
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service, government buildings also targeted

LOCATION: Outdoors

7. **Seattle, Washington, on 17 March 2021** – A member of the community was killed following a shooting at a church in south Seattle. The church was providing a meeting space for a local non-profit that provides alternatives to incarceration for troubled youth when the incident occurred. An unidentified suspect entered the church on a Wednesday afternoon and had a verbal engagement with the 19-year-old victim, before brandishing a firearm and killing the teenager. The suspect fled the scene without targeting other victims and before law enforcement arrived. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute, gang

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Likely gang member, was not targeting church activity

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Weekday non-church activity

LOCATION: Indoors

8. **St. Louis County, Missouri, on 23 April 2021** – A gunfight broke out at a murder victim's funeral in unincorporated Spanish Lake following a dispute involving attendees who had reportedly been asked to leave. One man was killed in the shooting. The original murder had occurred in St. Louis city in early April, and certain individuals had been asked not to attend, but they showed up anyway, sparking the confrontation. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang, retaliation

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Had been warned not to attend

WEAPON: Firearms

EVENT TYPE: Funeral

LOCATION:

9. **Jackson, Mississippi, on 14 May 2021** – A pastor helping provide security outside a tent revival had a dangerous encounter with a suspect in the middle of a violent crime spree. The suspect drove up to the revival in a stolen car and attempted to rob the pastor at gunpoint. The pastor responded by saying he had nothing to offer the suspect but the Word of God. The suspect then fled the scene. All told, the suspect committed a triple robbery and homicide, shot a person at a fast-food restaurant, carjacked another person, and engaged police in a shootout before being arrested. Police say the suspect appeared to be “out of his mind” on drugs when confronted by officers.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Theft

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Under influence of drugs

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activity (outdoor revival)

LOCATION: Outdoors

10. **Jacksonville, Florida, on 30 May 2021** – Congregants, including a church usher, dragged a would-be carjacker out of an SUV before he could steal the vehicle with children inside. The

vehicle's owner had left it unlocked and running with the children inside and the air conditioner on while he spoke to other church members nearby. After witnessing the suspect enter the car, an usher jumped into the back seat, grabbed the suspect from behind, and threw the vehicle into park. The suspect hit the usher on the head repeatedly during the struggle. A bystander who had observed the suspect looking through the windows of other parked vehicles and as well as several other church members ran to the SUV when they saw the incident unfolding. When the incident was reported, police did not know the suspect's motive, but the suspect claims he was attempting to reach Miami.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown
WEAPON: Blunt object
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service
LOCATION: Parking lot

11. **Santa Ana, California, on 2 June 2021** – Police responded to a warehouse belonging to a church and shot a suspect who had brandished a gun at a church volunteer. The volunteer had seen the suspect breaking into a car.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Burglary/vehicle theft
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Outdoors, auxiliary building

12. **Gold Run, California, on 25 June 2021** – A burglar shot in the jaw and pistol-whipped a church caretaker who confronted him during an early afternoon break-in. The suspect fled the scene and was later arrested in the woods nearby. He had been wanted on a murder charge out of San Bernardino County, 500 miles away by road. Surveillance cameras reportedly recorded sound and video of the incident showing the suspect reacting angrily to the caretaker's attempt to photograph him with a cell phone.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Burglary
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: History of violence, involved in other crimes, fleeing suspect
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Indoors

- 13-15. **Houston, Texas on 10 July 2021** – During a Saturday afternoon picnic, a man shot at church members and fired into their building before fleeing. Church members pursued him and participated in his apprehension. He claimed the church had brainwashed members of his family. The pastor said this was the third shooting at the church this year.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Grievance against church

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Family ties to church
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Saturday afternoon activity
LOCATION: Outdoors

16. **Mobile, Alabama on 8 August 2021** – A woman threatened a man with a gun following a Sunday morning service. An altercation occurred in which one person suffered a gunshot wound.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Domestic
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Domestic partner
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning post-service
LOCATION: Auditorium

17. **Scott County, Mississippi, on 14 August 2021** – A man armed with a rifle and a shotgun fired at workers at a church on a Saturday afternoon. He was killed in a gunfight with law enforcement. No other casualties were reported. ASSAILANT KILLED

LIKELY Motive: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown
WEAPON: Firearms (rifle, shotgun)
EVENT TYPE: Unknown
LOCATION: Outdoors

18. **Detroit, Michigan, on 15 September 2021** – A man fired a gun into the crowd at a church food drive.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Community meal/food drive
LOCATION: Outdoors

19. **Anderson, South Carolina, on 12 October 2021** – A woman with a history of trespassing at a church stabbed another woman in the church parking lot.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: History of trespassing at church
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Weekday
LOCATION: Parking Lot

20. **Sylacauga, Alabama, on 13 October 2021** – A fleeing suspect crossed onto church property and fired on a pursuing police officer in the parking lot.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Fleeing law enforcement
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Was not targeting church activity
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Wednesday evening activities
LOCATION: Parking lot

21. **Compton, California, on 24 October 2021** – A pastor was shot and killed in the street outside his church in between Sunday School and the main service. He had gone outside to search for his wallet. He was known for attempting to minister to gang members. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service
LOCATION: Outdoors

22. **Nashville, Tennessee, on 7 November 2021** – A pastor tackled a gunman who had taken to the stage and started pointing his weapon at congregants during the altar call. The suspect was charged with 15 counts of assault. He had previously attended the church but been asked not to come back because he had been disruptive.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Known to church, asked not to attend
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service
LOCATION: Sanctuary

23. **Baltimore, Maryland, on 16 November 2021** – An elderly female church sexton was murdered on a weekday morning by a contract worker with a history of violent crime. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Violent criminal history
WEAPON: Blunt object
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Restroom

24. **Toledo, Ohio, on 20 December 2021** – A hearse and three funeral home workers were hit by gunfire at a funeral for a man previously shot and killed while driving.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang, retaliation, harassment
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Funeral

LOCATION: Outdoors

25. **Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 27 December 2021** – A man recently released from rehab walked to the front of a church sanctuary during a sermon and punched a man sitting in the front row. The targeted man said the subject had threatened him at the church several months ago over a perceived insult to the suspect's mother.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Personal dispute

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Associate of church member

WEAPON: Blunt force

EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service

LOCATION: Auditorium

26. **Louisville, Kentucky, on 31 December 2021** – A 20-year-old man was apparently targeted in a church parking lot shooting prior to his grandmother's funeral. A witness said the gunman waited in a car at the back of the parking lot until the victim approached his own vehicle.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Personal dispute

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Lay in wait

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Funeral

LOCATION: Parking lot

Violence during Church Activities in 2022

1. **Florence, South Carolina, on 22 January 2022** – A man was arrested and charged after carjacking and kidnapping a pastor at knifepoint from his church's parking lot on a weekday morning. His staff quickly noticed he was missing, notified police, and attempted (without success) to reach him by cell phone.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown

WEAPON: Knife

EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours

LOCATION: Parking lot

2. **Aurora, Colorado, on 4 February 2022** – A shooting during a Friday afternoon church activity left one woman dead and two men – both reportedly pastors – wounded, with an additional person hospitalized for other medical problems. Several days later, the suspect conducted a shooting, two carjackings, and an armed robbery and was later shot and killed by police. The killer and the deceased woman had reportedly been in a relationship. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Domestic
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Violent criminal
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activity
LOCATION: Unknown

3. **Sacramento, California, on 28 February 2022** – A man murdered his three daughters and the chaperone of a court-ordered supervised visit at a church, then killed himself. The killer was estranged from the girls' mother and had had several run-ins with the law, including an arrest five days prior in Merced County for driving under the influence, assaulting a peace officer, and assaulting medical staff. He has been determined to be an illegal immigrant. **FOUR KILLED, ONE SUICIDE**

LIKELY MOTIVE: Domestic, suicide
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Violent criminal history, estrangement from family
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Indoors

4. **Carson, California, on 10 March 2022** – A man shot himself inside a church-owned building during a standoff with a police SWAT team following a violent crime spree. He shot three men and carjacked two women in North Long Beach before fleeing to the Carson church, where he took additional hostages in what has been described as an “industrial-looking building” used by the church near the main church building. The suspect released one of the carjacking victims and the other hostages before eventually shooting himself. The suspect reportedly knew people inside the church building, and the suspect and the pastor share a surname, but media reporting indicated uncertainty regarding any family relationship. **ONE SUICIDE**

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown, suicide
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Known to church members/victims
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activities
LOCATION: Indoors

5. **Fort Wayne, Indiana, on 6 April 2022** – Police responded to a report of a shooting and found a man with a gunshot wound near a dumpster in a church parking lot during Wednesday evening activities. **ONE KILLED**

LIKELY MOTIVE: Drug deal, robbery
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Minors, were not targeting church activity
WEAPON: Firearm
EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activities
LOCATION: Parking lot/dumpster area

6. **Harrison Township, Michigan, on 15 April 2022** – Police arrested a schizophrenic man after a foot chase a day after he used a machete to assault two young men in their vehicle in a church parking lot. The man was speaking “gibberish” as he began hacking at the car, prompting the two occupants to flee on foot as he chased them. The man has a reputation for disturbing behavior and is thought of as a religious fanatic who is obsessed with women and fantasizes about torturing and killing them. He had previously shown up with machetes at three different churches.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Mental instability

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Mental illness, violent fantasies, violent history regarding churches

WEAPON: Machete

EVENT TYPE: Unknown

LOCATION: Parking lot

7. **FOILED IMMINENT ATTACK Brighton, Alabama, on 30 April 2022** – Police are searching for a man who arrived at a funeral for a murder victim with a handgun visible on his lap and who fled in his vehicle when a police officer providing security attempted to detain him. The church had previously received information that someone was planning to attack the service.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Grievance against one or more parties attending the funeral

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Funeral

LOCATION: Parking lot

8. **Idaho Falls, Idaho, on 8 May 2022** – Police arrested two men for shooting at each other during a confrontation in a church parking lot. The incident occurred on a Sunday evening. During an argument, one man drew a gun on the other. The second man asked if the first man was going to shoot him. The first man did just that, hitting the second man in the hand and then fleeing in his vehicle. The second man then fired on the fleeing vehicle. The first man was also charged with possession of a controlled substance after authorities found fentanyl in his vehicle.

The source of the dispute was the second shooter’s accusation that the first shooter had been involved in a break-in at the second shooter’s home. At the church, the second shooter found a digital video recorder belonging to him in the first shooter’s vehicle.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Involved in other crimes (suspected thief, drug user or dealer), was not targeting church activity

WEAPON: Firearms

EVENT TYPE: Unknown

LOCATION: Parking lot

9. **Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on 10 May 2022** – One person was injured in a shooting at a church, and another was injured when shot outside a police substation after fleeing from the church. The second victim had been pursued to the police station from the church. The incident apparently occurred during a large gathering at the church, which has alternately been described as a “recreation center” in media reporting.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Unknown

WEAPON: Firearms

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activity

LOCATION: Unknown

10. **Laguna Woods, California, on 15 May 2022** – A gunman killed one person and seriously injured five more during a Sunday lunch at a church. The gunman was eventually disarmed and restrained by the lunch attendees. The Taiwanese congregation was honoring one of its former pastors at the lunch meeting, and the only casualty occurred when one of the attendees attempted to subdue the gunman. The gunman is a U.S. citizen over 60 years of age and of Chinese birth who reportedly harbored a hatred of Taiwan and Taiwanese people. He is also reported to have been suffering from some sort of mental decline brought about by suffering a physical assault and difficulties in his living situation.

Authorities say the gunman attended the lunch despite not knowing anyone there and mingled with the congregants for an hour before chaining the doors to the church shut and beginning his attack. He also brought four explosive devices described as being similar to Molotov cocktails. **ONE KILLED**

LIKELY MOTIVE: Political, racism

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: No relationship to church, long grievance against

Taiwanese nationality, foreign born

WEAPON: Firearms, incendiary devices

EVENT TYPE: Sunday lunch

LOCATION: Fellowship hall

11. **Tulsa, Oklahoma, on 20 May 2022** – A man and woman drove a vehicle into a group of homeless people living outside a church around 4:30 a.m. on a Friday morning. The incident apparently began with a verbal altercation that led to the woman striking one person with her Ford Mustang. The couple then left, only to return and drive the Mustang into a crowd, killing a wheelchair-bound man who could not get out of the way.

The church’s pastor says the church had been trying to work with homeless people who had begun gathering on the church’s property a year-and-a-half ago. In a video interview with

the *Tulsa World*, he said cycles of abuse are common among the homeless and that the church had worked hard to help the ones on its property. Among other things, the church had tried to provide them a lighted, “safe” space in exchange for them not damaging the property. He said addictions were a major problem among those present. A motive for the vehicle assaults has not been reported. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Personal dispute, drugs

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:

WEAPON: Vehicle

EVENT TYPE: Homeless camp

LOCATION: Outdoor church property

12. **Ames, Iowa, on 2 June 2022** – A man targeted his former girlfriend and one of her female friends in a church parking lot, killing them both before committing suicide. The incident occurred during a weeknight college ministry gathering. TWO KILLED, ONE SUICIDE

LIKELY MOTIVE: Domestic, suicide

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Violent tendencies, National Guardsman, was not targeting church activity

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activity

LOCATION: Parking lot

13. **Vestavia Hills, Alabama, on 16 June 2022** – A 71-year-old male and occasional church attendee opened fire with a concealed handgun at a seniors potluck. He had arrived alone and insisted on eating alone while drinking alcohol he had brought with him. He was subdued by an unarmed attendee after fatally injuring two people and wounding another person, who later died. THREE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Known to church, drinking alcohol, involved in previous crimes

WEAPON: Firearm

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activity

LOCATION: Fellowship Hall

14. **Hot Springs, Arkansas, on 19 June 2022** – A man with a previous conviction for stabbing someone was arrested for robbing a pastor of his handgun. The incident occurred around 9:45 p.m. on a Sunday when the pastor met a man who had called the church for help. The pastor was carrying a handgun in a soft clip-style holster inside his right front pocket. The suspect pulled the gun out of the pastor’s pocket while they were talking in the sanctuary and then fled the building.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Called the church for help, previous violent conviction

WEAPON: Handgun
EVENT TYPE: After-hours individual meeting
LOCATION: Sanctuary Indoors

15. **Bellevue, Washington, on 28 June 2022** – A man apparently enraged by the Supreme Court’s overturning of *Roe v. Wade* assaulted a Catholic church employee with a rock and spray paint during a daytime vandalism attack on the facility. The assailant may have been trying to force entry to the building by breaking a glass door.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Ideological/political, mental instability
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Political activist
WEAPON: Rock, spray paint
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Outdoors

16. **Chicago, Illinois, on 23 July 2022** – Three men attending a funeral for a popular anti-violence community leader were injured in a drive-by shooting. The men were standing outside at the time and were later reported to be in “good condition.”

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang, intimidation
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Multiple suspects, drive-by shooters
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Funeral
LOCATION: Outdoors

17. **Marietta, Georgia, on 25 July 2022** – A man using a church’s homeless shelter reportedly got involved in an argument with a church employee and stabbed the employee. The incident occurred on a Monday afternoon. The assailant was arrested.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Homeless shelter guest
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Weekday homeless shelter operations
LOCATION: Indoors, church homeless shelter

18. **Baltimore, Maryland, on 1 August 2022** – A pastor was beaten on a sidewalk near his church by an angry vendor and his son, whom the pastor had just asked to relocate from the church’s parking lot prior to a planned event. The vendor and his son reacted angrily to the request and then pursued the pastor after he left the church property.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Vendor, pursued victim away from church, multiple suspects

WEAPON: Blunt object
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Outdoors, sidewalk

19. **Louisville, Kentucky, on 2 August 2022** – A woman taking a break from her work cleaning a church on a weekday afternoon was stabbed repeatedly by a man under house arrest for criminal mischief. The attack has been described by police as random, and it occurred as a total surprise to the woman, who was sitting on a bench outside the church at the time. Bystanders and church staff assisted in providing first aid to the victim and information about the suspect, who was later arrested. Reports indicate he was wearing an ankle monitor.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Under house arrest and wearing ankle monitor
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Outdoors

20. **El Paso, Texas, on 7 August 2022** – A man was arrested and charged with aggravated assault for pinning a man against an interior wall of a church, showing him a weapon, and threatening him. The suspect had called out the victim's name, and the victim had gone to greet him, reportedly offering to shake his hand. The assault immediately followed. The victim was able to walk away and call police, while the suspect left the building. Police found him sitting outside behind the church.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Known to the victim
WEAPON: Handgun
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning services
LOCATION: Indoors, hallway

21. **Winterset, Iowa, on 14 August 2022** – A double-murder suspect from Omaha, Nebraska, led Iowa police in a pursuit and then barricaded himself in a church on a Sunday morning. No one was in the church at the time. Police eventually arrested the suspect.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Fleeing police
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Fugitive murder suspect
WEAPON:
EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning (pre-service)
LOCATION: Indoors

22. **Charleston, South Carolina, on 21 August 2022** – Police are investigating a drive-by shooting that occurred while a church van was being driven on a Sunday morning. Church employees say a vehicle pulled up next to them on the road, an occupant “waved something at them,” and then gunfire struck the van's window.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Multiple suspects, Drive-by shooters
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Driving commute
LOCATION: Road

23. **Dolton, Illinois, on 28 August 2022** – Masked gunmen assaulted a church gymnasium during a Sunday afternoon pickup basketball game, killing one person. Another suffered a laceration while escaping. Police say the incident was not random. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Multiple suspects, masked
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Recreation
LOCATION: Gymnasium, indoors

24. **Westland, Michigan, on 9 September 2022** – A suspect who had eluded police earlier in the day arrived at a suburban church and asked the pastor, who was painting outside, for permission to use the restroom. At that moment, pursuing police arrived, and the suspect drew a weapon and fled inside. He took a position in a second-floor window and engaged authorities in a shootout before surrendering. The pastor left the scene and was not injured.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Fleeing police
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Fugitive
WEAPON: Firearms
EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours
LOCATION: Outdoors, Indoors

25. **Indianapolis, Indiana, on 16 September 2022** – A man shot and killed a woman in front of her children as she was dropping them off at a church day care on a weekday morning. The man was later located walking down the street by police responding to a tip about a man saying he had killed a woman. He engaged officers in a shootout and surrendered after being wounded. Police say the attack was targeted and that the suspect did not pose a threat to the general public. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Domestic dispute
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:
WEAPON: Handgun, Rifle
EVENT TYPE: Weekday school hours
LOCATION: Outdoors

26. **Albuquerque, New Mexico, on 23 September 2022** – A church security volunteer on nighttime foot patrol was fatally struck by a vehicle he had been monitoring as suspicious.

The vehicle dragged the victim off-campus, and the suspect driver stole the volunteer's firearm and other items from his duty belt. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Security Interaction

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Charged with previous crimes, possibly under the influence of alcohol

WEAPON: Vehicle

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight security patrol

LOCATION: Parking Lot

27. **Tulsa, Oklahoma, on 5 October 2022** – A man slashed a church staffer with a machete before unpacking a cooler filled with Molotov cocktails and throwing them at the church's exterior. This incident occurred while the church's school was taking class pictures outside. The suspect came in contact with students and teachers but ignored them as he approached the building. The church staffer attempted to confront him but retreated indoors with defensive wounds.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Possible mental illness

WEAPON: Machete, Molotov cocktails

EVENT TYPE: Weekday office/school hours

LOCATION: Outdoors

28. **Jacksonville, Florida, on 7 October 2022** – A school district police officer shot an ax-wielding man in a church parking lot on a Friday after he had attempted to enter a nearby school and then entered the church. The suspect made a threatening statement before being refused entry to an elementary school, then walked to the church, pursuing fleeing bystanders along the way. Both the bystanders and the suspect reportedly entered the church, the former to seek shelter. A statement from the church says that the church's classrooms went into lockdown, indicating a school operates at that location as well. It is not clear why the suspect left the church building, but he was confronted by officers in the parking lot. He refused to obey their verbal commands to drop the ax and was shot at least once while approaching an officer. The suspect reportedly suffered from severe mental illness.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Mental instability, first attempted to enter public school

WEAPON: Ax

EVENT TYPE: Weekday office/school hours

LOCATION: Outdoors, Indoors

29. **Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, on 23 October 2022** – An armed woman wearing body armor showed up in an Assemblies of God church parking lot immediately prior to the

start of a Sunday morning service. She said she had been told a crime had been committed there and that she intended to find a “priest” and take him hostage. The church went into lockdown.

From this point, different media accounts diverge in their details. One said the woman was armed with a handgun, that two members spoke with her, and that she pointed her gun at them. She ended up placing her gun in her vehicle, according to that account.

According to a second account, the woman was armed with a magazine-fed rifle, had been asked to leave the property several times for kicking a sign, and chambered a round and pointed the rifle at church members who asked her leave. Responding police later found a handgun in her vehicle.

Police say a mental health component was involved and that the suspect knew no one at the church. She was additionally charged with a burglary committed in a neighboring county earlier the same day.

The church apparently did not interrupt its service despite going into lockdown.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Mental illness, committed burglary earlier that morning

WEAPON: Rifle, Handgun

EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning services

LOCATION: Outdoors

30. **FOILED IMMINENT ATTACK Iowa City, Iowa, on 27 October 2022** – A man upset with a church staff member at a weekday community meal threatened to kill her, then retrieved a machete from his vehicle and re-entered the building. Church staff stopped him, and he fled when they told him they had called the police.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Dispute

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Transient

WEAPON: Machete

EVENT TYPE: Community meal

LOCATION: Indoors

31. **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 28 October 2022** – Six people were injured when multiple gunmen opened fire outside a funeral for a murder victim. Five were wounded by gunfire, and a sixth was injured trying to escape. Police said they believe multiple people at the funeral had been targeted. The incident appears to have occurred outdoors.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Multiple suspects

WEAPON: Firearms

EVENT TYPE: Funeral

LOCATION: Outdoors

32. **Indianapolis, Indiana, on 5 November 2022** – One man was shot to death outside a church during a funeral. The shooting occurred during a fight that began as a verbal argument. The killer was the ex-husband of the victim’s wife, and the funeral was honoring her mother. The killer had been threatening his ex-wife and her husband for months and was subject to a protection order. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Domestic dispute

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Subject of protection order

WEAPON: Firearms

EVENT TYPE: Funeral

LOCATION: Outdoors

33. **Vestavia Hills, Alabama, on 6 November 2022** – Three people have been arrested and charged with robbery and assault in the shooting of one person at an outdoor church basketball court. The incident occurred on a Sunday, but the church says the shooters appear to have targeted the single victim. There appears to be no connection to church services. The church had intended for the basketball court to be used by the community.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Multiple suspects

WEAPON: Firearms

EVENT TYPE: Recreation

LOCATION: Outdoors

34. **Portsmouth, Virginia, on 9 November 2022** – A church deacon serving as a security volunteer during Wednesday night activities was grazed in the foot and clothing by at least three bullets fired from a pickup truck that had circled the parking lot several times before stopping near the building exit. Due to this incident, the church is reportedly reviewing long-standing security protocols and may make changes.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Drive-by shooter

WEAPON: Firearms

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activities

LOCATION: Outdoors

35. **Baltimore, Maryland, on 20 November 2022** – A 55-year-old man allegedly suffering from a mental health crisis attacked a 78-year-old pastor with a hammer during a church service. The victim’s injuries were minor.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Mental illness

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Mentally ill

WEAPON: Hammer

EVENT TYPE: Sunday morning service

LOCATION: Indoors

36. **San Diego, California, on 22 November 2022** – A man entered a church on a Tuesday and sexually assaulted an elderly woman. He had previously entered the building and asked to use the restroom. The victim asked him to leave after several minutes, and he subsequently assaulted her. The victim had been alone in the church when the suspect arrived. He was later arrested nearby.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Walk-up visitor

WEAPON: None

EVENT TYPE: Weekday office hours

LOCATION: Indoors, Restroom

37. **Nashville, Tennessee, on 26 November 2022** – Two people were wounded in a drive-by shooting that occurred as people began leaving a murder victim’s funeral. Police attributed to violence to a dispute between “two groups.” Armed people in the crowd returned fire. The funeral was being held for a non-member of the church.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Gang

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Multiple suspects, drive-by shooters

WEAPON: Firearms

EVENT TYPE: Funeral

LOCATION: Outdoors

38. **National City, California, on 28 November 2022** – Two men entered a church just before 9:00 p.m. on a Monday evening, pistol-whipped a 76-year-old woman, and then forced her into her vehicle, which was parked outside. They demanded her address and drove to her house in nearby San Diego, but no one exited the vehicle there. The suspects then drove her to a strip mall back in National City and left her alone in the vehicle.

LIKELY MOTIVE: Robbery

SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Multiple suspects

WEAPON: Handgun

EVENT TYPE: Weeknight activity

LOCATION: Indoors, Outdoors

39. **Mariposa, California, on 30 November 2022** – A deputy sheriff shot and killed a knife-wielding suspect near a church school after the suspect failed to comply with orders to drop the weapon. The school’s principal had called 911 to report the suspect outside the building. The principal attempted to contact the suspect, but the suspect chased the principal

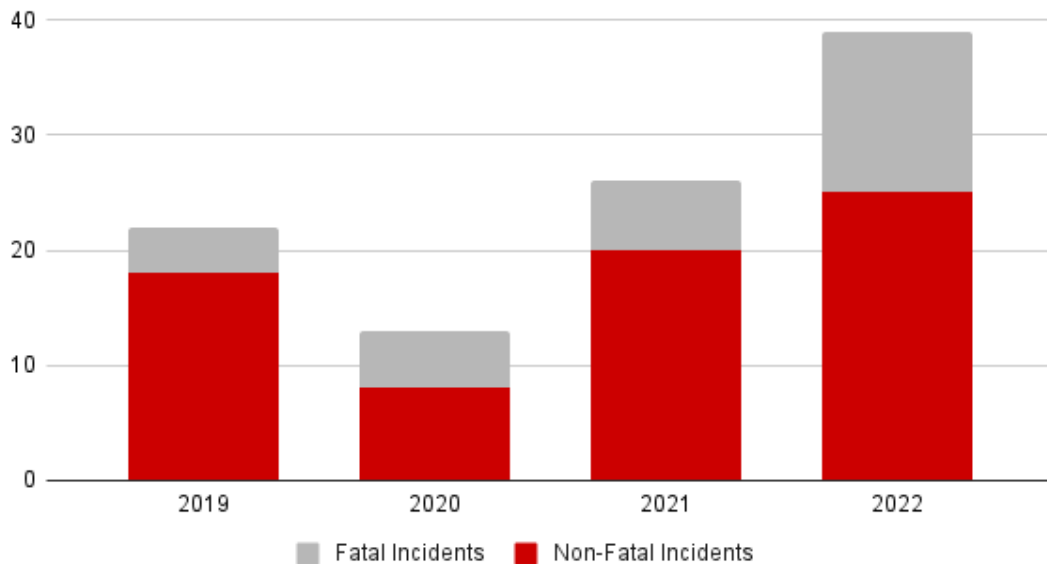
back into the building while holding a 12-inch butcher knife. The principal managed to secure the door and order a lockdown. The suspect then broke a window to a room containing school staff. Deputies encountered the suspect walking down the driveway away from the school. Body-worn camera footage shows the suspect steadily advancing on one deputy, who retreated several vehicle lengths while giving orders for the suspect to drop the knife. The deputy then fired two shots, fatally wounding the suspect, who had come within an arm's length of the deputy. ONE KILLED

LIKELY MOTIVE: Unknown
SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS: Transient
WEAPON: Knife
EVENT TYPE: Weekday school hours
LOCATION: Outdoors

Takeaways from Violent Incidents

- NUMBERS: 2019 – 22; 2020 – 13; 2021 – 26; 2022 – 39

Violent Incidents During Church Activities 2019-2022



A fairly obvious “covid dip” occurred in 2020 with the overall reduction in church activities. Violence in 2021 bounced back to 2019’s level, but it did not surge beyond. In 2022, however, violence increased 50 percent compared to 2021. No clear patterns emerged involving motives or

suspect characteristics. Gang membership, mental instability or illness, homelessness, personal and domestic disputes, and robbery all appear recurrently, but no single factor dominates the data set. The violence occurring is not coordinated, nor is it particularly ideological. Only one incident can be tied to pro-abortion outrage at the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision. Perhaps the most conclusive thing that can be said about the phenomenon is that each incident seems to reflect local dynamics. This underscores the importance of churches knowing what drives crime in their communities, what church activities and facilities are vulnerable to certain types of criminals, which personal disputes have the potential to flare during church activities, and how to recognize and report concerning behavior that may indicate a person is sliding toward violence.

The incidents have similarities with violent incidents throughout American society, but they do not indicate a rise in persecution, jihadist terrorism, or far-left/far-right terrorism. Vandalism and arson are crimes far more likely to be committed for ideologically anti-Christian or anti-church motives.

- FATALITIES: 2019 – 5, plus 1 assailant; 2020 – 5, plus 2 assailants; 2021 – 5, plus 1 assailant; 2022 – 18, plus 3 suicides.

The most disturbing thing about 2022's incidents is the number of deaths. Fourteen of 38 incidents were fatal, an unusually high rate. Three assailants committed suicide after murdering a total of 6 people. While not an uncommon way for active shooter incidents to end across society, it is at churches, where assailants usually flee or are neutralized by police officers, bystanders, or security volunteers.

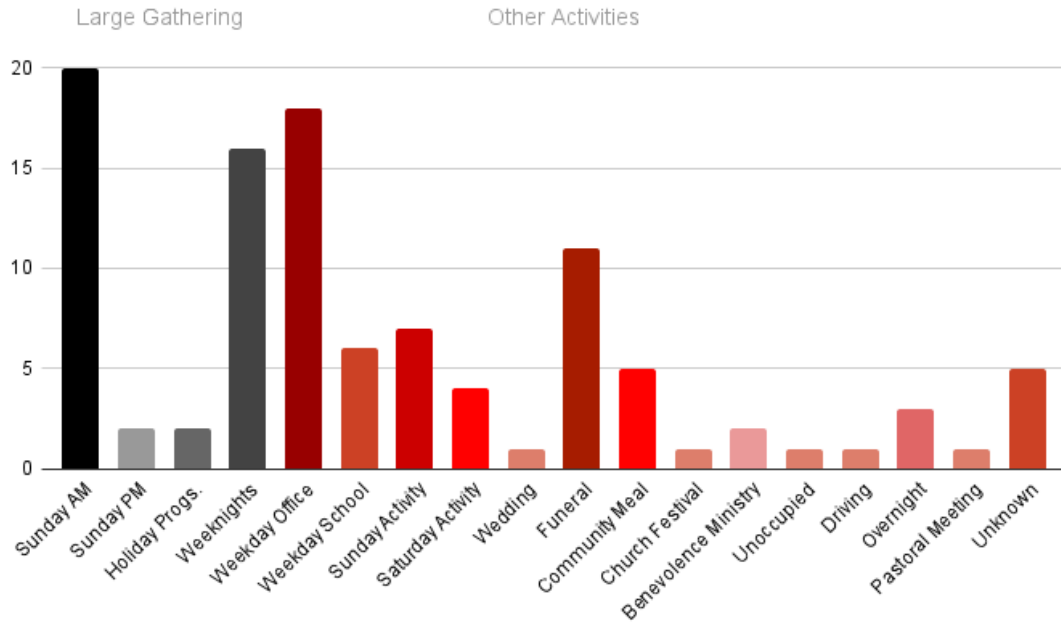
- MOTIVES: From 2019 through 2022, personal disputes are believed to have factored into 18 incidents, with an additional 8 linked to domestic disputes, and 4 more appearing to be cases of retaliation. This emphasizes the need for church leaders and safety teams to be aware of ongoing disputes and foster an environment in which church members feel safe sharing personal struggles with others, as well as admit when they are afraid of someone or have observed concerning behavior.
- MOTIVES: Robbery, burglary, or carjacking occurred in 15 incidents. Parking lot security is essential during all activities, daytime or nighttime.
- MOTIVES: Mental instability appears to have contributed to 16 incidents. It was not always a lone factor.
- MOTIVES: Gangs were likely involved 13 times and in 7 funeral shootings. Such incidents are very context specific. Churches in neighborhoods with gang problems are almost certainly aware of this threat to their congregations, especially in relation to funerals of murder victims or community activists.
- MOTIVES: 5 suspects committed suicide and can be reasonably assumed to have planned to kill themselves in advance of the incidents. Such assailants are nearly impossible to deter. Any

leakage of suicidal ideation or intent should be reported to law enforcement and steps should be taken to prevent – not merely deter – an attack by a suicidal individual who is believed to be a threat to others.

- **MOTIVES:** Only 1 incident can be linked to terrorism or persecution. 6 additional ones appear to have been motivated by some other ideology or political grievance.
- **MOTIVES:** 7 assailants had disputes or grievances with the specific church targeted. These range from the man who fired rounds at the building on three separate occasions because he believed the church was brainwashing his relatives, to the White Settlement shooter, who had been denied his request for money from the church's benevolence ministry.
- **MOTIVES:** Racism was evident in just two incidents.
- **SUSPECT CHARACTERISTICS:** Media reporting revealed a wide variety of suspect characteristics, so many in fact that few stood out as significant. This reinforces the maxim that there truly is no dominant profile for an active shooter, a mass killer, or even a violent criminal. Also, media reporting was probably not thorough enough to provide many details about suspects at the time the incidents occurred or in the weeks immediately following. The long timeline for prosecution of suspects makes ongoing research of each case difficult.
- **SUSPECT KNOWN TO CHURCH:** Media reporting indicates 21 suspects were previously known to or associated with the church or the victim in some way. This statistic is likely underreported considering that initial local media coverage often does not delve into details, especially those that might not be known immediately after the incident. Local media often does not follow up on the findings of criminal investigations.
- **ACTIVITY TYPE:** 24 incidents occurred during large congregational gatherings. 20 attacks occurred during Sunday morning services, 2 occurred during Sunday evening services, and 2 occurred during holiday programs. By contrast, 75 incidents occurred during other times. 16 occurred during weeknight activities, 18 occurred during office hours (and 6 of those targeted church schools), 11 occurred during weekend activities (including property maintenance), 11 occurred during funerals, and 5 occurred during community meals. One occurred during a wedding.

Church security training typically has a myopic focus on protecting Sunday morning gatherings, and church safety teams usually provide little, if any, coverage for other gatherings. This is a disparity that needs to be corrected with additional volunteers or security training offered broadly to church staff, volunteers, and members. Existing security volunteers should be led to understand they are needed at times other than Sunday mornings.

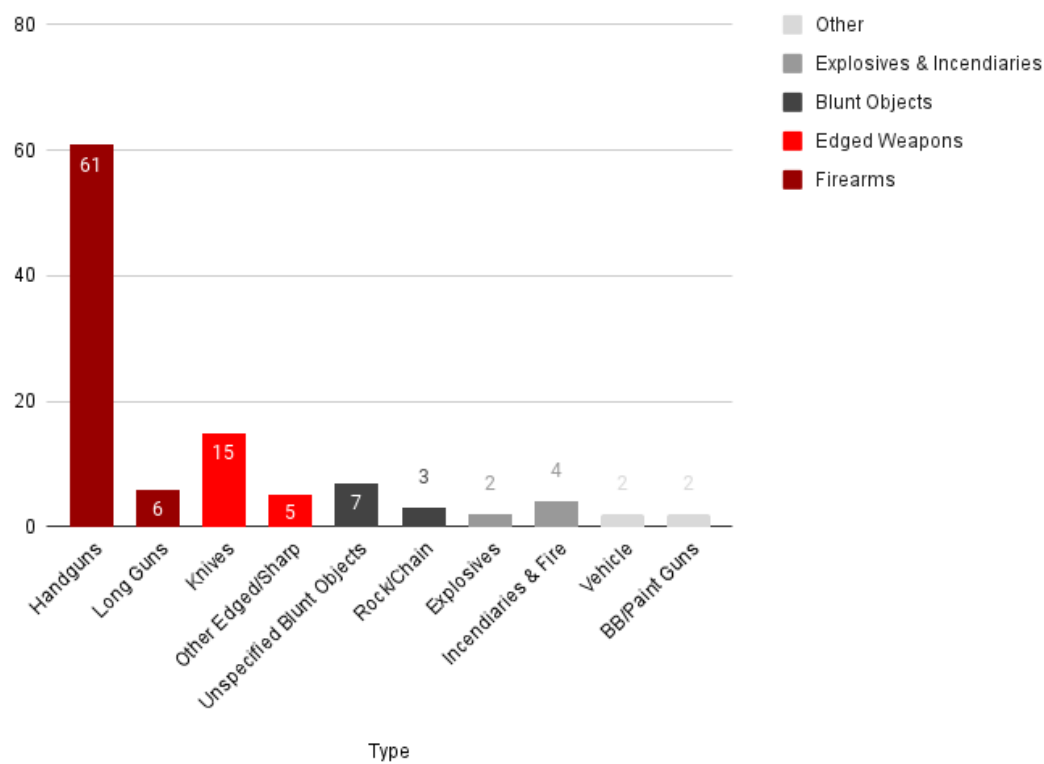
Violent Incidents by Church Activity Type



Violent Incidents by Church Activity Type

- **ACTIVITY TYPE:** 6 of the 11 funeral shootings occurred at funerals for murder victims, and gangs were likely linked to each incident.
- **ACTIVITY TYPE:** 18 incidents occurred during weekday office hours. Church staff members need basic security training and should diligently ensure doors are locked *and latched* when they need to be.
- **WEAPONS:** Firearms were used 67 times. Overwhelmingly the most common weapon, they were far from the only ones. 18 other weapons were used 41 times. Safety teams need to have tactics and rules of engagement for bladed weapons (knives, machetes, hatchets, and screwdrivers), explosive and incendiary devices, rocks, fists, vehicles, and BB guns.
- **WEAPONS:** Rounds fired by long guns can be more lethal, travel further, and penetrate more objects than handgun rounds, posing challenges for church security volunteers. However, long guns only appeared in 6 incidents.

Weapons Used in Violence at Churches



- **SECURITY OR BYSTANDERS:** Reporting on only 11 incidents mentioned security teams. They used force three times — once to kill an assailant.

Bystanders used force against assailants 9 times.

The takeaway here is that relatively few churches seem to have security teams. When they have been mentioned, it has always been in connection to the favorable resolution of an incident. Bystanders have performed admirably as well, but perhaps with an unnecessary level of risk considering the contrast between unprepared bystanders acting on instinct and organized security volunteers acting on training and coordinated mental preparation.

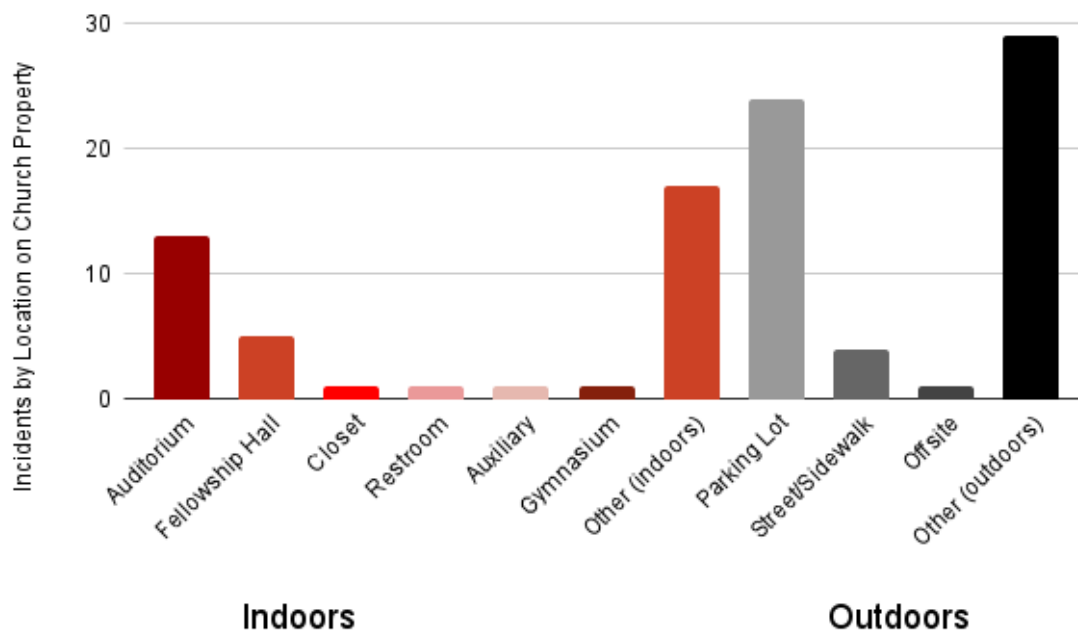
- **SECURITY:** Two security volunteers were killed in the line of duty. One was shot while attempting to engage a gunman. Another was fatally struck by a vehicle he had been investigating as suspicious during a nighttime foot patrol.
- **PREVENTION:** Two attacks were prevented by alert family and community members who called the police for help. The churches would not have known about the plots otherwise. In two other cases, churches increased security measures and sought help from law enforcement as soon as they were informed of the potential threats. One additional incident was prevented by a 911 call by a parking volunteer. In another incident, a security volunteer secured an

entrance just as an armed assailant was attempting to force his way into the building. In a third incident, church staff blocked an armed man from following through on a communicated threat and caused him to flee.

- **LOCATION ON PROPERTY:** 40 incidents occurred indoors. Only 13 incidents occurred in an auditorium/sanctuary, including a robbery during a Monday evening band practice; 5 occurred in a fellowship hall; 2 took place in restrooms; and 16 others occurred at unspecified indoor locations.

By contrast, a total of 60 incidents occurred outdoors, and 24 of them specifically in parking lots. Since every perpetrator of an indoor incident must arrive on church property outdoors, it is likely that most indoor assailants could have been deterred, detected, or interdicted by security in the parking lot.

Incidents by Location on Church Property



Recommendations for Churches and Safety Teams

- **INVEST IN PREVENTION** – Plots are being foiled by alert members of would-be assailants' personal networks, on-the-ball police work, and proper handling of received threats by churches. Research by the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) supports this assessment. Their January 2023 study, *Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016-2020*, revealed that "peripheral contacts" and "others known" were nearly as likely as family members to observe concerning behavior or communications from mass attackers; and they were more likely than friends to do so. Furthermore, every mass attacker from 2016 to 2020

elicited concern from others about their behavior, shared one or more concerning communications, demonstrated behavior changes, or engaged in overt planning behavior.

DETAIL: Church congregations need to know how to observe and report warning signs of violent behavior that might threaten either the church or the surrounding community. Educating their members along these lines and establishing good relationships with local law enforcement and other community organizations are ways churches can bless their communities and discover opportunities for Gospel witness by helping prevent violent crime.

Church staffs need to be coached on how to handle threatening phone calls or e-mails, as well as suspicious packages, and to report all threats to law enforcement.

- **ESTABLISH SECURITY POLICY** - Churches need comprehensive security policies addressing all activities and all staff and volunteer departments. 76 percent of incidents and plots occurred during an event other than a Sunday service or holiday program.

DETAIL: By perceiving your highest value targets to be pastors and Sunday morning gatherings and focusing on protecting them, you are neglecting to protect against higher probability threats during other events on other days of the week.

By relying solely on a volunteer safety team or paid off-duty law enforcement to provide security, you may be inviting other church members to lower their own security awareness, leaving them vulnerable when the safety team is not around.

- **ACHIEVE BROAD AWARENESS** - A comprehensive security policy should encourage the staff, safety team, and other volunteers to be aware of the potential security implications of angry disputes (including those that persist over time and away from the church, not just those that create confrontations during church activities), counseling situations, church discipline proceedings, substance abuse, mental health symptoms, and major stressors.
- **EXTEND THE PERIMETER** - During congregational gatherings, safety teams need to observe and patrol outdoor and indoor spaces—everywhere from the parking lots to the sanctuary.

DETAIL: Parking lots and sidewalks provide time and space for spotting and stopping potential assailants. Churches should not waste that time and space by allowing potential assailants to reach the doors – or pass through the doors – before being greeted, “sized up” (in a non-threatening manner), and if necessary, challenged.

Less than half of the incidents occurred entirely indoors, but obviously, to get indoors, the assailants must have first been outdoors and thus, visible and vulnerable. Several incidents began outdoors with the detection of the assailant. In the case of the man sitting in his parked car waiting to kill the person who owed him money, an incident was avoided by quick-thinking parking volunteers to whom the threat was stated.

- **KEEP DE-ESCALATION IN CONTEXT; BE PREPARED TO REACT QUICKLY** - De-escalation techniques are essential skills for safety teams, who may be able to use them to de-intensify situations before law enforcement becomes involved. Indeed, if not for de-escalation, this report’s list of incidents might be longer. *On the other hand*, the 99 incidents covered here *were not* de-escalated.

DETAIL: De-escalation is a fundamental skill for church safety teams that can save lives and prevent litigation, but it can become useless in a fraction of a second if the subject decides to act violently or follows through on an earlier decision to act violently. Some people cannot be de-escalated.

- **KEEP FIREARMS IN CONTEXT; USE THEM WELL** - Church safety teams discharged firearms to engage assailants in just two of the 99 cases studied.

DETAIL: The importance of firearms skills needs to be contextualized, not de-emphasized. In White Settlement, Texas, crack marksmanship by a safety team member ended the attack after just six seconds and four total shots. Had that safety team member’s only shot missed, more fatalities would almost certainly have occurred, some perhaps resulting from errant rounds fired by the safety team.

Marksmanship, trigger discipline, and good tactics are essential, and yet, they are called upon far less often than de-escalation, threat recognition, intervention, communications, information analysis, and threat assessment skills.

- **BEWARE OF THOSE WHO LIE IN WAIT** - Assailants occasionally break into churches or lurk in parking lots waiting for their victims. 24/7 access controls, surveillance and alarm systems, a congregation educated in observing and reporting suspicious activity, and active relationships with neighbors and law enforcement are all layers of defense that can protect the church.
- **PROTECT ALL ACTIVITIES** - During non-service church activities, churches need to ensure that safety teams or other trained volunteers are present and that doors are locked when open-access is not required.

DETAIL: The training of non-security volunteers in security practices is as important as training non-medical professionals in first aid and CPR. Only the largest safety teams will be able to cover every church event adequately, and in trying to do so, they run the risk of having an overbearing presence at small events and of conditioning church members not to take responsibility for their own security. Security is everyone's responsibility.

- **CONDUCT EVENT RISK ASSESSMENTS** - Funerals and weddings are sometimes targeted for violence, especially when they involve individuals linked to other violent incidents. Risk assessments should be an ongoing process for all events.

DETAIL: Church staffs and safety teams should conduct risk assessments for events to determine what level of security to set. Funerals for gang members, high-profile community members, individuals with criminal ties or histories, or even simply people with volatile family dynamics are particularly high risk.

- **SECURE BENEVOLENCE MINISTRIES** - On-site benevolence ministries such as soup kitchens and community meals should have security in place to protect volunteers and prevent altercations between guests.

DETAIL: Substance abuse, mental health, and personal grievances are all common problems in homeless populations. Depending on local community characteristics, paid armed security (including off-duty police officers) might be more desirable than trained non-safety team volunteers when safety team members are unavailable. The need to preserve trust by not appearing to be "on guard" can be legitimate, but so is the need to maintain order and prevent victimization of clients and volunteers. There's no excuse for not having a context-appropriate security plan and procedures.

Conclusion

Since the late 1990s, church security efforts in the U.S. have prioritized the prevention of “active shooter” and “mass casualty” incidents due to the increase in such incidents across society. This report has filled an important gap in studying a variety of types of violent incidents during church activities because church security/safety teams and church staff must be prepared for a wide range of scenarios. While “active shooter” and “mass attack” incidents are very rare at churches, violence in general is more common, and it can occur during any church activity on any day of the week. Indeed, the large majority do not occur on Sunday mornings, the time slot churches often prioritize for protection to the neglect of all others.

Crime intersects with church life in many ways. When it comes to violence, assailants are sometimes familiar to their victims, and they are sometimes opportunists looking to rob individuals or steal vehicles. Prevention and response methods vary, but both prevention and response deserve effort. This study reinforces our previous conclusion in *Targeted Violence at U.S. Churches in 2019 and 2020* that attacks not motivated by robbery or theft are usually foreshadowed by warning signs – erratic behavior, severe mental health symptoms (hallucinations, paranoia, delusions, depression, and suicidal thoughts), a major life stressor, communicated threats, the harboring of a grievance against a church or member – which are visible to people the assailant knows. When these observable warning signs are properly reported, law enforcement and the potential assailant’s family members, friends, and peripheral contacts may be able to prevent violence.

Furthermore, effective counseling and discipleship ministry toward those experiencing major life stressors or mental health symptoms gives churches opportunities to prevent violent ideas from ever taking root in the first place. *Good ministry can lead to good security when awareness of security implications is high and relationships are in place with law enforcement to quickly intervene when a person needing spiritual care becomes physically threatening.*

While adding or increasing security measures necessitates some adjustment to a church’s culture, this report should not be used to justify massive shifts in approach to ministry. Security should not confine ministry to a box. Instead, security measures should be used *alongside ministry* to help advance the Gospel. Churches who limit their obedience to the Great Commission because of fear are moving in the wrong direction; while churches who adopt security measures inspiring and enabling Great Commission obedience are moving in the right one.