



RUN



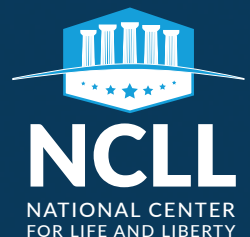
HIDE



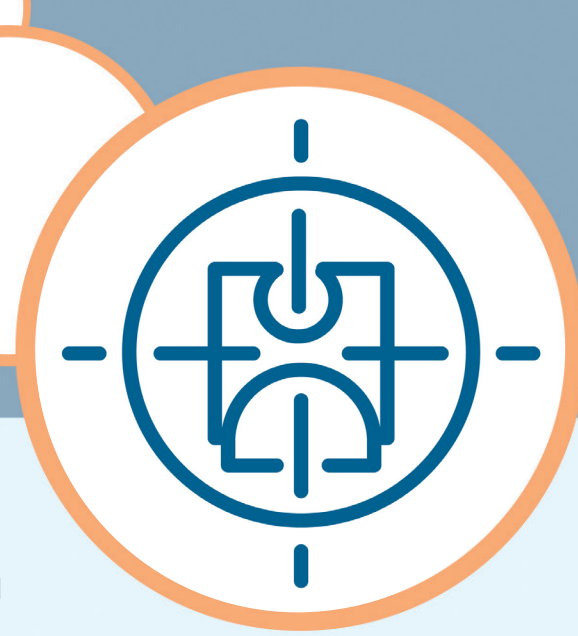
FIGHT

# ACTIVE-SHOOTER *Response Plan*

MAXIMUM MINISTRY.  
MINIMUM LIABILITY.



THE MOMENT WHEN A SHOOTER  
REVEALS HIMSELF ON CHURCH  
PROPERTY IS NOT THE TIME TO  
BE INDECISIVE.



In the past two decades, Americans have witnessed a considerable amount of bloodshed in public places.

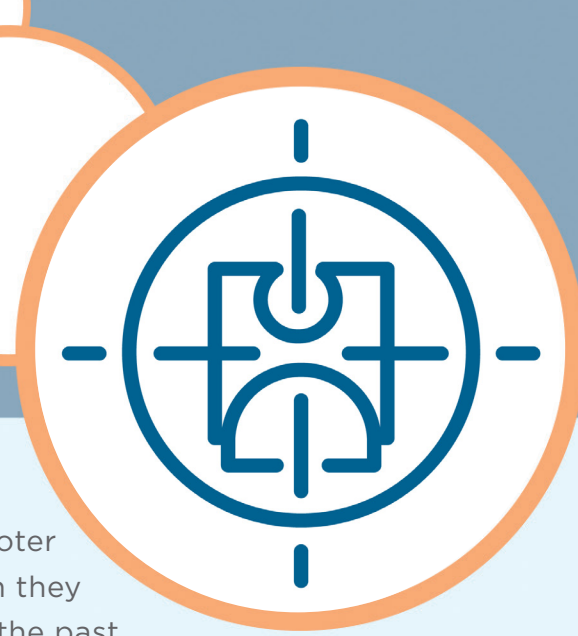
An FBI report on active-shooter incidents in the United States notes that 486 people were killed in mass shootings between 2000 and 2013. A study by Michael Martin, who wrote a book on the subject, reveals that beginning with the Columbine school shooting in the spring of 1999, there were 165 events over an eighteen-year period that the FBI categorized as “active-shooting events,” with 448 people killed (not including shooters) and 369 wounded.

Villanova University researchers keep a running list of mass shootings since 1999, and the death toll is now more than 500. That number includes victims killed in churches.

In September of 1999, a man walked into a Baptist church in Fort Worth and started shooting while a play was being performed. Seven people (four teenagers and three adults) were killed. A man who had brought a youth group to see the play said later that when it started happening, he thought it was part of the performance. “Don’t you think this is a little bit too dramatic?” he told the person sitting next to him at the time.

Even as the shooter started screaming that what he was doing was real, people did not believe him until he threw a pipe bomb that went off in the front of the auditorium.

IF SAFETY TEAM MEMBERS ARE ARMED, THEY SHOULD BE TRAINED TO KNOW WHEN TO DROP THEIR WEAPONS AND SHOW THAT THEIR HANDS ARE EMPTY IF AND WHEN LAW ENFORCEMENT ARRIVES.



This incident illustrates the fact that active-shooter incidents in churches are nothing new, although they have received much more national attention in the past few years.

An incident at a church in Colorado Springs in 2007 was the first time a shooter was challenged by a safety team member on a church campus. The gunman had already killed two members of Youth With A Mission, which was affiliated with the church. The gunman created a diversion on one side of the church and then killed two sisters and wounded their father before he went into the building. Once inside, he was confronted by a safety team member and killed in the ensuing gun battle.

Several years after these two events, many churches remained unprepared, and the consequences proved fatal. In late 2014, a man walked into a church in Bradenton, Florida, talking about hearing voices and making references to the devil. The receptionist called the pastor, who happened to be her husband, and asked him to come talk to the man. She gave no indication that something was wrong or that police should be contacted. The man looked out and saw the pastor walking toward the building, at which time he walked out and shot him dead in the parking lot. It was later learned that the gunman had killed his own wife and a friend of hers before coming to the church.

Perhaps the two most-reported church shootings took place in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015 and Sutherland Springs, Texas, in 2017. Extensive analysis has confirmed that both were preventable.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN VARIOUS AREAS IS CRITICAL, WHETHER IT BE CELL PHONES, HANDHELD RADIOS, OR OTHER DEVICES.



In Sutherland Springs, forty-six people were present in the Sunday morning service, which started at 11:00 a.m. At 11:10, the shooter, dressed in black tactical gear, was spotted across the street at a gas station. He crossed the street and parked in a gravel area with his door open and the motor running, which indicated he was planning to escape.

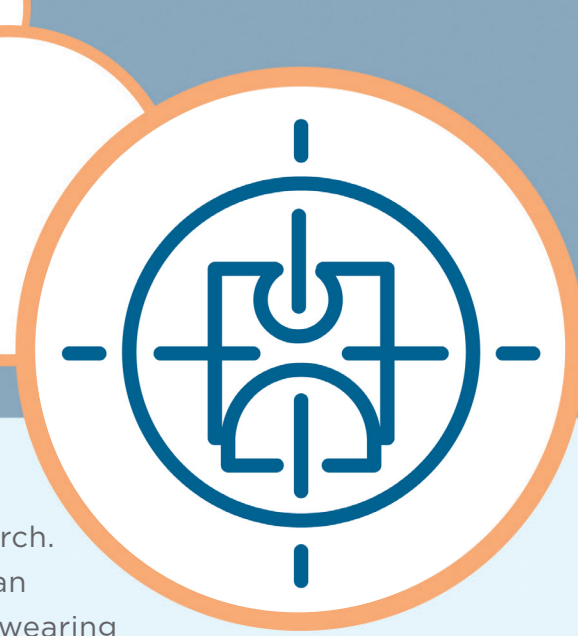
He was there because he hated his ex-mother-in-law. He had sent her threatening text messages and went there that day to kill her. She had not told anyone at the church about his communication with her.

He got out of his vehicle with fifteen thirty-round magazines and started shooting from the outside through the front of the church and around the sides. It is reported that he fired nearly 300 rounds before he walked into the church. No one inside attempted to barricade the doors.

A man who lived across the street heard the commotion from inside his house and thought it was someone tapping against his window. His daughter came in and said, "There's shooting across the street." He ran to his safe and got out his AR-15. He did not have a magazine loaded so he grabbed ammunition and a magazine and told his daughter to load another magazine.

The police responded four minutes after the first call of the shooting, which was an excellent response time. But it also indicates that no one called from inside the church.

A LOCKDOWN POLICY CAN  
BE CREATED AS PART OF THE  
CHURCH'S OVERALL SAFETY PLAN.



The gunman shot all forty-six people in the church. Twenty-six died. He only stopped because he ran out of ammunition. When he came out, he was wearing black tactical gear, a ballistic vest, and a tactical helmet. It is believed that he had more ammo in his car and planned to go back inside. But when the man with the AR-15 fired at him, he ran to his car and took off. He was found later in his car with three wounds—one in his side, one in his foot, and a self-inflicted shot to the head that killed him.

The Wednesday before this took place, the church hosted a Halloween trunk-or-treat event, and the gunman showed up wearing black military-style clothing. It alarmed the pastor so much that he said he was going to talk about forming a safety team at the church and carrying a weapon himself when he returned from vacation in a week. His daughter was one of the people killed that Sunday.

This story is not meant to horrify readers but to make them vigilant. Many people who lived through these incidents are left to wonder what they should have done differently. All other churches should be prepared in case something similar happens to them.

The body count in Sutherland Springs was twenty-six killed and twenty injured, and the next person who tries something like this will want the total to be higher. Shooters often study other shooters. A shooter may ask immediately for directions to the balcony, knowing it to be a better position from which to do harm to the greatest number of people, as happened at a church in Tennessee.

ACTIVE-SHOOTER SITUATIONS ARE UNPREDICTABLE, EVOLVE QUICKLY, AND CONTINUE UNTIL THEY ARE STOPPED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT, SUICIDE, OR INTERVENTION.



The Parkland school shooter in early 2018 knew about a previous shooting in Arkansas during which one of the students pulled the fire alarm, and he knew he would have four minutes before law enforcement responded. So at the appropriate time he dropped his weapon and walked out as one of the hundreds of students with their hands up. He knew what to do, and no one was the wiser. It was more than two hours later before he was apprehended two miles away from the school.

Active-shooter situations are unpredictable, evolve quickly, and continue until they are stopped by law enforcement, suicide, or intervention. It is more important than ever to know how to respond to these types of threats before they happen. That means learning how to react quickly, calling 911, and responding appropriately when law enforcement arrives. Adopting a survival mindset during a crisis is important.

First responders can have a particularly daunting task when arriving at a house of worship because of the number of innocent people who may be on the scene. Many law enforcement agencies make it their policy to combat an active shooter by moving in quickly and with lethal force, regardless of whether there has been any attempt to evacuate. It is a good idea for one of the safety team's leaders to become familiar with what the local police force's strategy would typically be, then make sure the congregation understands it as well. This can be accomplished through printed materials distributed to members and also by addressing it in a new members' class.

CHURCH LEADERS NEED TO  
NOTICE WHO COMES AND GOES  
IN THEIR FACILITIES AND WHY  
THEY ARE THERE.



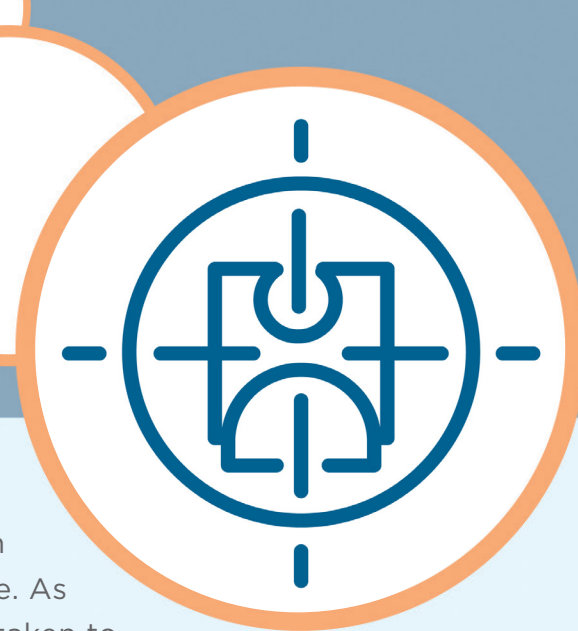
At the same time, the police should be provided with as much information as possible to help its officers help the church. A package that includes a total layout of the campus and all buildings will help authorities know what to expect if they ever have to come in quickly. They can be provided in advance with keys to vital entry doors and directions to where critical utilities are controlled in case they need to be shut off. Providing contact information in advance for key personnel such as pastoral staff and safety team leaders can save valuable time in a crisis. The church should also provide regular updates to police about people who are potential threats, such as anyone against whom the church or one of its members has a restraining order.

If an active-shooter situation arises at a church, it is usually a lone individual on a campus that has activities in various places simultaneously. Key initial responses include locking doors, turning off lights, and turning down cell phones.

A lockdown policy can be created as part of the church's overall safety plan. To avoid confusion during a crisis, it should be established well in advance which personnel are authorized to order a lockdown and what situations would make it necessary. Special attention should be given to protected areas such as the nursery and who can enter them. There should be a plan in place that dictates how or if parents can get to their children during a lockdown. Of course, communication between various areas is critical, whether it be cell phones, handheld radios, or other devices.



SPECIAL ATTENTION SHOULD  
BE GIVEN TO PROTECTED AREAS  
SUCH AS THE NURSERY AND  
WHO CAN ENTER THEM.



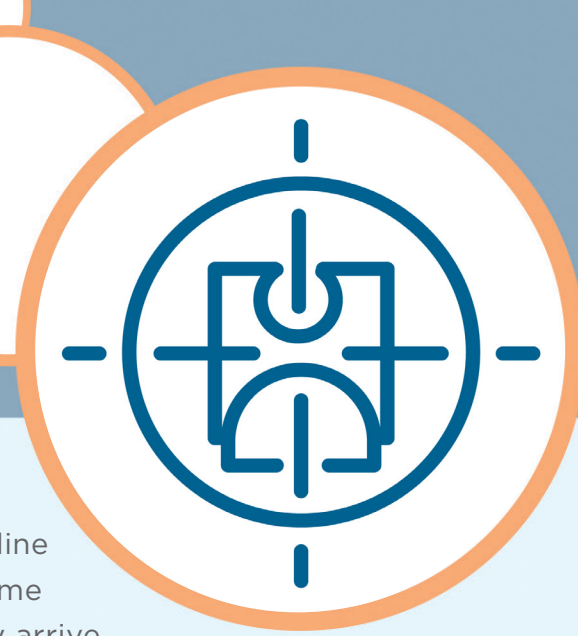
The moment when a shooter reveals himself on church property is not the time to be indecisive. As soon as the target is acquired, action must be taken to distract the shooter and possibly confront him. If the target is a specific church leader, other people should attempt to draw the shooter's attention away from the congregation. If he is about to shoot at the congregation, he must be confronted then and there. Those who can do so might be able to disrupt him by throwing hymnals or even chairs. Numerous people yelling at him from all directions will provide a distraction and weaken his focus. One or two people in the right spot could possibly take him down physically from behind, which is obviously dangerous but could save many lives.

If the shooter is in a location that does not allow maximum access to the entire sanctuary, many in the congregation will be able to take cover under their seats or behind pillars. Safety team members should then approach him with the goal of surrounding and overwhelming him so he cannot make further advancement into the church population.

Communication with police should obviously be made as soon as possible, but there should be predetermined guidelines as to how that is done. It is much less confusing if the safety team is left with that responsibility so that a dozen 911 calls are not made from the same location at the same time. A safety team member can also give police plenty of helpful information such as the number of shooters, their locations, and what kinds of weapons they are carrying.



IF SOMEONE COMES IN ACTING LIKE HE KNOWS HIS WAY AROUND THE BUILDINGS BUT NO ONE IN THE CHURCH KNOWS HIM, THAT PERSON IS SOMEONE TO KEEP AN EYE ON.



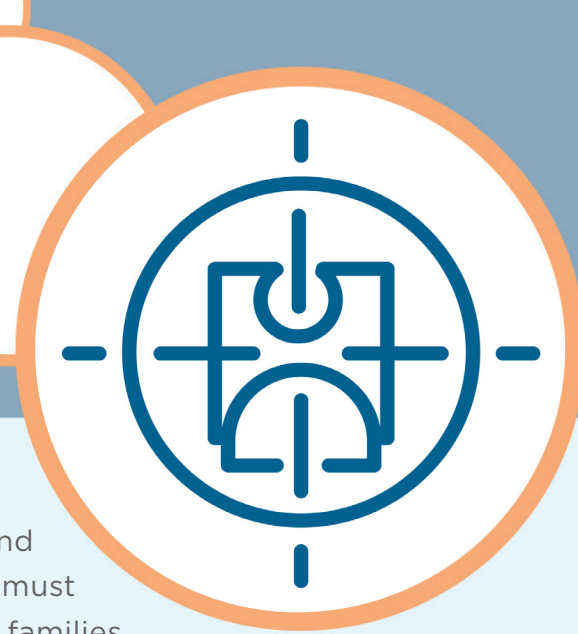
This person should be prepared to stay on the line with the emergency dispatcher and give real-time updates so police can be kept informed as they arrive on the scene.

If safety team members are armed, they should be trained to know when to drop their weapons and show that their hands are empty if and when law enforcement arrives. Law enforcement will not necessarily know who the safety team is, but they will react if they see a weapon. There have been reports of an armed citizen stopping an active shooter only to be wounded himself after inadvertently brandishing his weapon when police arrived.

At the plan's designated rally point, church management must account for all employees—those who have made it safely out of the church, those who hid inside the church and been accounted for, and those who are missing and possibly injured or killed. Depending on the size of the facility, it may take time before church leadership and families know the condition of loved ones who have not been heard from since the incident started.

Church leadership must understand that even though the shooting incident may be over and the threat eliminated, the place where the incident occurred is still a crime scene and all church attendees are witnesses to the crime. Law enforcement personnel may detain witnesses from going home until information is gathered in reference to the crime. Family members should be allowed to reunite as soon as possible after interviews have taken place.

A THREAT MUST BE DEALT WITH IMMEDIATELY. IF SOMEONE IS LOUD AND DISRUPTIVE IN THE SERVICE OR GOES INTO THE CHILDREN'S MINISTRY SECTION WHEN HE IS NOT SUPPOSED TO, ACTION MUST BE IMMEDIATE.



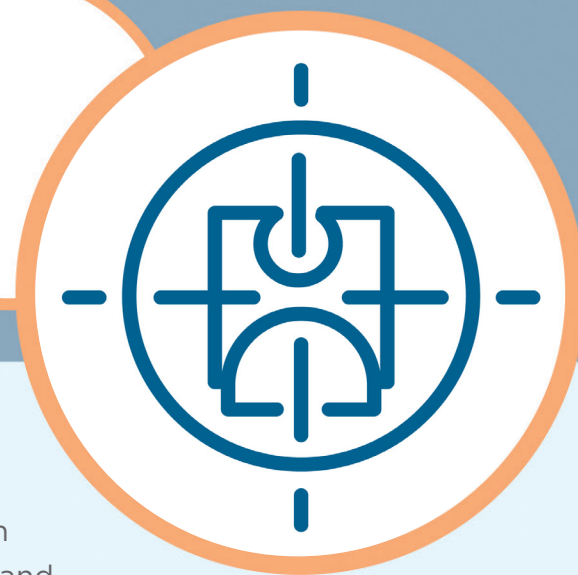
A designated representative from the church and a liaison from the law enforcement community must work together to get information to attendees' families as quickly as possible. If it is discovered that a church attendee has been injured or killed, church leadership should notify family members as soon as possible. Information on where the injured are being transported is of utmost importance to allow families to reunite. Procedures to notify families must be in place as part of the safety plan.

Church leadership should also designate someone to assist family members in getting to the hospital once the injured have been identified. That person should stay with family members until other resources can provide assistance. Law enforcement will assist in communicating to family members of the attendees who have been killed. Resources should be made available to those families as soon as possible to help in dealing with the trauma.

One of the most important pieces of an active-shooter plan includes what to do after a shooting incident. As soon as possible, church leadership should plan to step in and initiate the healing process for those affected by the event.

Church leadership should have a health care provider already designated for cases like this to respond to and assess the psychological state of all individuals that were involved in the crisis. Psychological first aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed, modular approach used by mental health and disaster response workers to help individuals of all ages in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism. PFA is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping.

VIGILANT BELIEVERS CAN WORK  
TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITIES  
TO PROTECT CONGREGATIONS.



In 2017, a town in Wisconsin almost cancelled their Easter celebration because of panic. A man broke into a gun shop, stole a stockpile of guns and ammunition, then released a manifesto expressing his hatred for Christians, political conservatives, and specifically President Donald Trump. The official state Easter egg hunt was cancelled, and many churches eliminated their Good Friday services that year. The man was caught before he could do any harm, and “SIGH OF RELIEF” appeared in giant letters on a newspaper headline.

This is symptomatic of a larger potential problem. If someone goes around threatening to kill Christians, are people even going to go to church? Many people will just stay home.

There are those who, when asked about church attendance, say, “We don’t go to church anymore. We watch it on TV.” Televised services are great for shut-ins and those who are occasionally ill, but it is not the way God intends for His people to worship on a regular basis.

The Bible says in Hebrews 10:25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

Threats to people’s safety in public places will exist as long as there is evil in the world. But vigilant believers can work to the best of their abilities to protect congregations from those threats, providing a safe haven for themselves and a lighthouse to the communities they want to reach with the gospel.