

WEAPONS AT CHURCH – THE UNTHINKABLE IN GOD’S HOUSE

We like to think of our churches as a place of safety and refuge. A place to commune with God and join in fellowship with our church community. Unfortunately, others view churches as targets. White supremacist Dylan Roof murdered nine people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina in 2015. Recently a Las Vegas man with a grudge against Taiwan entered the Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California and shot members of the Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church who were gathered at a celebratory luncheon.

It is unfortunate that church leaders must think about how to prevent such violence or how to respond to it if it happens. But sessions should discuss church safety. There are many resources available for churches, including the following:

- Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship (FEMA)
https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Developing_EOPs_for_Houses_of_Worship_FINAL.PDF
- Safety for Faith Based Events at Houses of Worship - Department of Homeland Security
https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/17_0531_NSI_SAR-Faith-Based-Events-Houses-Worship.pdf
- FBI Active Shooter Resources
<https://www.fbi.gov/about/partnerships/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-resources>
- Five Options for Survival – Brotherhood Mutual
<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/safety-library/risk-management-articles/disasters-emergencies-and-health/violence-at-church/surviving-a-violent-attack-at-church/>
- Active Shooter – The Insurance Board
<https://www.insuranceboard.org/active-shooter/>
- Developing an emergency plan for violence on church property – Creating Safe Ministries (PCUSA)
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/legal-resources/creating-safe-ministries/developing-an-emergency-plan-for-violence-on-church-property/>

Congregations and mid councils should consider organizing a committee to discuss and make recommendations to the session or its governing board concerning safety.