

# **Church ministers in aftermath of Nashville bombing**

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NASHVILLE (BP)—Security cameras at First Baptist Church in Nashville captured the moment a bomb exploded four blocks away on Christmas morning, damaging 40 buildings downtown and injuring at least three people. The church's proximity afforded a unique outreach opportunity.

The FBI National Citizens Academy Alumni Association eyed the church's kitchen facilities for volunteers with special security clearance to prepare meals for the many first responders investigating the scene, including Nashville police, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigations, the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

"This was a very elite group. They were trained by the FBI," Senior Pastor Frank Lewis told the congregation during a virtual worship service Jan. 3. "They go into cities after there is a crisis such as the one that we experienced, and they specialize in having food prepared for the first responders and others, but they needed a place. And our church was ideally located.

"Our kitchen was such an incredible gift to them, that they were able to feed approximately 1,000 people a day during this previous week as they responded to the need that was here in our city."

## **Volunteer group served 3,000 meals**

Volunteer cook Ginger "Mama" Passarelli, president of The Soup Ladies in Buckley, Wash., was among nine volunteers the FBI alumni group deployed.

“Having a kitchen like that was vital for us to be able to put out 3,000 meals in two and a half days,” said Passarelli, a graduate of the FBI Citizens Academy and a retired restaurant owner. “If we didn’t have all that equipment and cooking capacity, it would have made it twice as hard. And we have been in places where we had to build our own kitchen with butane burners. We’ve had to haul water, because we’ve been in remote areas on old crime scenes.”

Investigators have tied the explosion to Anthony Q. Warner, a 63-year-old Nashville area technology consultant, saying he built a bomb in a recreational vehicle he owned, drove it to an AT&T building near Second Avenue and Commerce Street early Christmas morning, and used a loudspeaker to warn residents to evacuate before detonating the bomb around 6:30 a.m.

Investigators said Warner died in the explosion that displaced residents, damaged commercial and residential buildings and rendered at least seven buildings uninhabitable. Three people suffered minor injuries.

## **‘It will make us more aware of our neighbors’**

Gary Morgan, urban missions pastor at First Baptist in Nashville, lives less than a mile from the explosion. He said the crime makes clear the importance of developing relationships with neighbors and others in order to help in times of need. He heard the explosion at home with his wife and two daughters, but was not required to evacuate.

“I think it will make us more aware of our neighbors, and continually coming alongside to know those needs. Most of those things are out of our hands. However, we can always ask,” he said. “I think it’s important for us to know who lives there, and know what businesses are there. ... Those are

our neighbors.

“I love how we had the opportunity to come alongside of the FBI and the team that was in there. We had conversations with ... all kinds of people, just trying to be helpful. ... There is something to be said about coming alongside people from all points in their journey, that I thought was so, so helpful.”

Lewis said First Baptist Nashville is helping displaced residents and business owners by participating in a recovery fund established for that purpose.

“While we are thankful that our building was not damaged, we are broken-hearted for the property damage and losses felt by those who were affected by the blast,” Lewis said. “These are our neighbors, and many of them have become personal friends of mine through our relationship with the Nashville Downtown Partnership.

“We care for people. When people are out of work due to a catastrophic and senseless act such as this, with no fault of their own, the least we can do is find tangible ways to be supportive of them, and when we do, to be generous in the process. We would be doing this even if our building had been damaged.”