

Georgia church condemns 'wicked' actions of member

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MILTON, Ga. (BP)—Elders at Crabapple First Baptist Church condemned both the “extreme and wicked” actions and the purported motives of a church member who allegedly killed eight people in a series of shootings, calling them a direct contradiction of his professed faith in Christ and the church’s teachings.

In a [statement](#) released March 19, the church expressed grief for the victims and their families during a time of “unimaginable pain and sorrow,” saying they were “absolutely devastated” by the killings March 16 at three massage parlors in the Atlanta area.

Robert Aaron Long, 21, has been charged with eight counts of murder and one count of aggravated assault. Six victims were women of Asian descent. Police said Long confessed to the killings after his capture, asserting he had a sex addiction and viewed the massage parlors where he had been a customer as “a temptation he needed to eliminate.”

“These unthinkable and egregious murders directly contradict his own confession of faith in Jesus and the gospel,” the statement from Crabapple First Baptist read. “We want to be clear that this extreme and wicked act is nothing less than rebellion against our Holy God and his word.

“Aaron’s actions are antithetical to everything that we believe and teach as a church. In the strongest possible terms, we condemn the actions of Aaron Long as well as his stated reasons for carrying out this wicked plan. The shootings were a total repudiation of our faith and practice, and such actions are completely unacceptable and contrary to the gospel.”

‘No blame can be placed on the victims’

The church rejected Long’s claim that he was trying to eliminate temptation, saying in the statement:

“No blame can be placed upon the victims. He alone is responsible for his evil actions and desires. The women that he solicited for sexual acts are not responsible for his perverse sexual desires nor do they bear any blame in these murders. These actions are the result of a sinful heart and depraved mind for which Aaron is completely responsible.”

The church has started the process of church discipline to remove Long from membership “since we can no longer affirm that he is truly a regenerate believer in Jesus Christ.” Crabapple First Baptist’s Statement of Faith and Church Covenant outlines its definition of what constitutes a church and membership.

Along with the statement released Friday, the [statement of faith](#) was posted again to the church’s website. The church had taken down its online platforms, which included personal information of church leaders, after the news of the killings Tuesday.

Church repudiates ‘misogyny and racism’

Although police said Long denied racial motivation for the killings, the church said in the statement it “repudiate[d] any and all forms of misogyny and racism” and “explicitly denounce[d] any and all forms of hatred or violence against Asians or Asian-Americans,” adding: “We deeply regret the fear and pain Asian-Americans are experiencing as a result of Aaron’s

inexcusable actions.”

The church had issued a statement March 17 saying it was heartbroken for the victims and called for prayer for all involved. Shortly after security camera images of the then-unknown shooter were released to the public, Long’s parents contacted authorities over suspicions that it was their son and informed them of a tracking device on his phone. Authorities later credited the parents with potentially preventing further bloodshed.

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms said at a news conference Long was heading to Florida, “perhaps to carry out additional shootings.”

The church said Friday it had “been in complete cooperation with law enforcement, and we pray for justice to be done. We pray for both earthly justice and divine justice.”

The Long family has been members for years at Crabapple First Baptist. Aaron, as he was known, grew up in the church’s ministry. The church said contrary to media reports, Long’s father never has been employed by the church.

The church asked Christians to “join us in praying for the families of the victims, the communities affected, the Long family, and the Crabapple Church family,” and expressed thankfulness “for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that offers forgiveness and new life to all who truly repent of their sins and place their faith in Christ alone for salvation.”