

# **Most churches take precautions; divided over armed members**

January 28, 2020

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—In the aftermath of several high-profile church shootings, most Protestant pastors say their congregations have taken some precautions to protect those in attendance.

Since 2000, 19 fatal shootings have taken place at Christian churches, while gunmen also have taken lives at other religious sites like Jewish synagogues, a Sikh temple and an Amish school. They include First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs in November 2017 and West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement last December.

Four out of five Protestant pastors (80 percent) say their church has some type of security measure in place when they gather for worship, according to a [survey](#) from LifeWay Research.

“Churches are some of the most common gatherings in any community, and that makes them targets,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “Most churches understand this and have responded in some way.”







## Which, if any, of the following security measures does your church have in place when your church meets for worship?

*Among Protestant pastors*

An intentional plan for an active shooter

62%

Armed church members

45%

Radio communication among security personnel

28%

A no firearms policy for the building where you meet

27%

Armed private security personnel on site

23%

Uniformed police officers on site

6%

Metal detectors at entrance to screen for weapons

3%

None of these

18%

Not sure

2%

most common form of preparation is making an intentional plan. About two out of three pastors (62 percent) say their church has an intentional plan for an active shooter situation.

## **Church size and ethnicity matter**

The more people who show up to worship services each week, the more likely the church is to have made plans for a potential gunman.

Pastors of churches with 250 or more in attendance (77 percent) and those with 100 to 249 (74 percent) are more likely to have an intentional plan than those with 50 to 99 in attendance (58 percent) or those with fewer than 50 in their worship service each week (45 percent).

More than a quarter of churches (28 percent) have radio communication among security personnel.

African American pastors (47 percent) and pastors of other ethnicities (46 percent) are almost twice as likely as white pastors (25 percent) to take this step.

## **Guns in church?**

The question of guns in church is very much a live debate among pastors, as close to half of pastors (45 percent) say part of their security measures include having armed church members.

Combining this with the percentages who say they have uniformed police officers or armed security personnel on site, 51 percent intentionally have firearms at their worship services as part of their security measures.

Evangelical pastors (54 percent) are more likely than mainline pastors (34

percent) to say they have armed church members.

Half of pastors in the South (51 percent) and West (46 percent) say this is the case, compared to a third of those in the Northeast (33 percent).

Pentecostal (71 percent), Baptist (65 percent) and Church of Christ pastors (53 percent) are also more likely than Methodist (32 percent), Lutheran (27 percent) and Presbyterian or Reformed pastors (27 percent) to say they have armed church members as part of their security measures.

## **Some adopt no-firearms policy**

Other churches place their emphasis on keeping all guns away from the worship service.

More than a quarter (27 percent) have a no-firearms policy for the building where they meet and 3 percent have metal detectors at entrances to screen for weapons.

African American pastors are the most likely to implement these strategies, with 50 percent saying they have a no-firearms policy and 8 percent deploying metal detectors.

One pastor in five (18 percent) says his or her church has taken none of the precautions asked about in the survey, while 2 percent aren't sure.

"While methods vary, most churches start with the resources they have to prepare for what they hope will never happen," McConnell said. "With planning, a church can be prepared without being distracted or paralyzed by the threat. Pastors are trying to balance two responsibilities—protect those on the inside, while being as welcoming as possible to those on the outside."

In the survey, which took place prior to the West Freeway Church of Christ

shooting, close to a quarter of Protestant pastors (23 percent) say they have armed private security on site. Additionally, 6 percent say they have uniformed police officers on site as an added security measure.

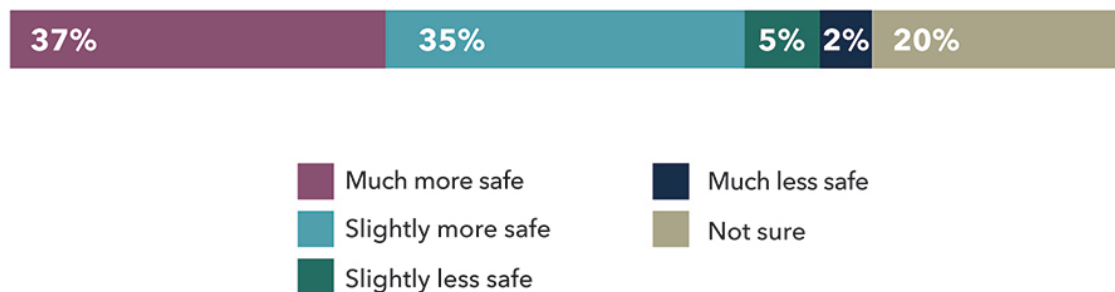
## How do churchgoers feel?

For the vast majority of [churchgoers](#) (73 percent), the presence of a uniformed policeman or security guard at church makes them feel safer, with 37 percent saying they feel much safer.

One in 5 (20 percent) is unsure and 8 percent say it makes them feel less safe.

If you saw a uniformed policeman or security guard working at church, how would that make you feel?

*Among Protestant churchgoers*



*Note: Percentages do not equal 100% due to rounding.* | [LifeWayResearch.com](http://LifeWayResearch.com)

African American pastors are the most likely to say they have both armed private security personnel (41 percent) and uniformed police officers (18 percent) on site.

However, non-white churchgoers are more likely than white churchgoers to



say they feel less safe at church seeing those individuals during worship services.

Ten percent of non-white churchgoers say they feel less safe with uniformed police and security guards at church, compared to 6 percent of white churchgoers.

Female churchgoers, on the other hand, are more likely than their male counterparts to say those visible individuals make them feel safer (75 percent to 69 percent).

Churches with 250 or more in attendance are the most likely to say they have armed private security personnel (43 percent) or uniformed police officers (26 percent).

Those who attend such churches are also the most likely to say seeing police officers and security guards at church make them feel safer (83 percent).

“Any organization that has relatively large gatherings of people has a responsibility for the safety of those gathered,” McConnell said. “In considering security, church leaders have to consider methods, costs, risks and how those safety measures potentially impact their ministry.”

*Researchers conducted a phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors from Aug. 30 to Sept. 24, 2019. The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Analysts used quotas for church size. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called. Analysts weighted responses by region to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.3 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.*

*An online survey of 1,002 American Protestant churchgoers was conducted Sept. 20-27, 2019 using a national pre-recruited panel. Respondents were screened to include those who identified as Protestant/non-denominational and attend religious services at least once a month. Quotas and slight weights were used to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity and education to reflect the population more. The completed sample is 1,002 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.*

For more information on crisis response plans and church security teams, see a related article [here](#).