

# West Freeway Church of Christ Shooting Analysis

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**Praying Safe** is available from [www.prayingsafe.com](http://www.prayingsafe.com)

## Prologue

As information about this incident has trickled out to the public, we have been piecing together and analyzing the details. We both understand the enormous difficulty analyzing these incidents, and in providing observations that are apolitical and at the same time respectful of those who lost their lives.

We ask everyone to understand that we do not want this analysis to come off as brash or insensitive to the victims. We also understand this incident is politically charged, and there are issues important to people on both sides of the gun-control spectrum. We have gone to great effort to avoid any specifically political opinions (including our 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment views). Plenty of other people are charging down that road, and we don't intend to join them.

With that said, we do feel it's important to study this incident and share our thoughts in an effort to help others reduce the risks of events like this in the future. Some of these observations may be of a critical nature or may, to some, come across as nit picking. Our intent is simply to provide observations for YOU, the reader, to digest and apply as you feel appropriate to your situation. We know that every place of worship is unique, and not every observation or recommendation will be appropriate.

Again, this analysis is intended to be helpful while still being respectful to those who lost their lives or witnessed this incident first hand. It is not our intention to criticize or cast blame, but rather to show how such an incident develops and how other congregations might prevent one in their community. Please read what follows in that spirit.

## Introduction

On Sunday morning, December 29<sup>th</sup> 2019, 43-year-old Keith Kinnunen opened fire killing killed Richard White and Anton "Tony" Wallace at the West Freeway Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas. After killing Mr. White (a church security team member) and Mr. Wallace (an usher), the shooter was reportedly stopped by a single shot from Jack Wilson, a former reserve deputy Sheriff and head of the volunteer security team. (There have been persistent reports that another security team member fired on the attacker, but we have been unable to substantiate them. At this point, it appears that the only shot at the attacker, and the fatal one, was fired by Mr. Wilson.)

Lisa Farmer (the wife of West Freeway Church of Christ minister Britt Farmer) said in an interview "the church normally has around 280 people attending Sunday services." It doesn't appear from the video there were that many in attendance (possibly due to people traveling over the Holidays). A quick headcount of stills from the video suggest there were about 160 people present in the auditorium during the shooting.

Three people, including the shooter, died in this incident. As far as we could determine, no other injuries were reported.

## Environmental observations & intelligence gathering

Shortly after the first news articles about the attack appeared, we began researching information that might have been used by the suspect. We were looking for indicators of the threat, as well as information that could have been used by the suspect as he prepared his attack.

It is not uncommon for aggressors in these types of incidents to do their homework ahead of time. Sometimes this surveillance is done online, sometimes it is done in person. Therefore, it's important to know what information can be gathered through such surveillance and how that information can be used against us.

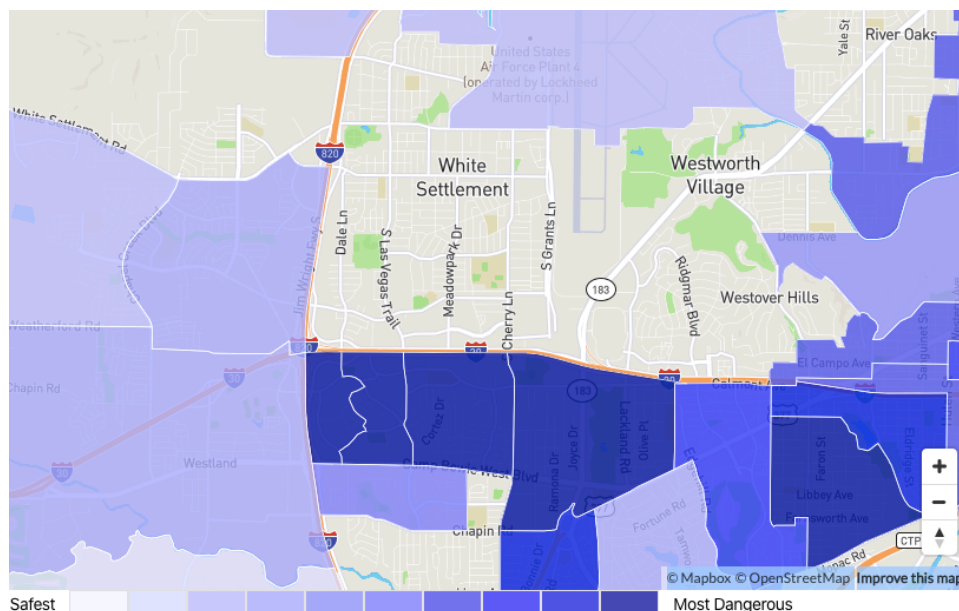
The first place we like to start is the environment where the incident occurred. Is it a noted high crime area? Have there been previous violent issues in the area? How much information is available on the location?

### *Intelligence Gathering*

The West Freeway Church of Christ is located along a major highway. Areas like this have a tendency to experience increased transient traffic and panhandling. This church borders a very high crime area (see map below).

In an interview with Jack Wilson, he revealed the church decided to create an armed volunteer security team about 1 1/2 years ago, when the congregation moved into the sanctuary where this attack occurred. Church leaders felt they needed extra protection after a number of homicides occurred in the neighborhoods around the church: five in 2018 and two more in early 2019. [2]

Their neighborhood and those adjacent are certainly high crime areas, and the decision to put together a security team was a wise one.

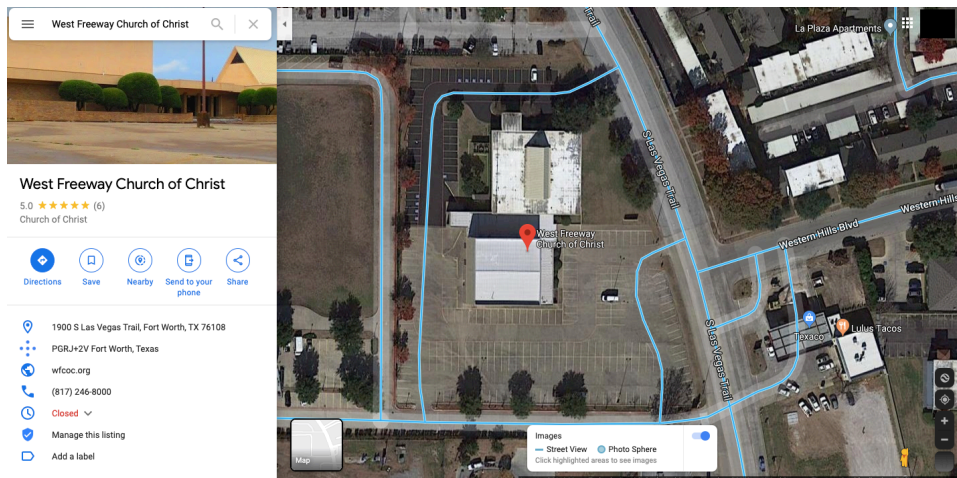


A ton of information can be gathered on this specific church just by looking at Google maps. The Google “Street View” mobile camera actually drove through the parking lot around the facility, documenting all sides of the building and even the employee parking spaces! This continuous imaging gives anyone who cares to look detailed information on the building and grounds.

We examined the satellite and Street View images separately, then compared notes about what we found. Neither of us saw any external security cameras (something we would have expected to find in such a high crime area), and only minimal outside lighting. It was easy to make out the layout of the building; we could tell where the offices were, where doors opened, and other details that someone with malicious intent could use to identify vulnerabilities.

In addition, we noted that there is no fencing around the facility and no gates at the parking lot entries. These are normally installed to provide another layer of security and to prevent vehicle ramming attacks. Many other buildings in the area are so equipped, and some heavily so, making this facility stand out for its apparent lack of security.

To a potential attacker, the lack of cameras, lighting, and perimeter protection taken together suggest a lax exterior security posture, which might cause the attacker to conclude that it extends to interior safety and overall security planning as well.



The easy availability of the Google satellite and Street Views are why we strongly recommend that congregations blur the street view of all buildings and sensitive areas, unless there is a specific and compelling reason not to do so. In most street level maps, you can request a blurring of selective areas or of the entire address. It's up to your congregation to balance what should and should not be shown. (Here's a link that shows you how to do this in Google: <https://www.realworldsurvivor.com/2019/05/01/how-to-blur-your-house-on-google-maps/>)

### *Live Streaming of Services*

Some online security information is given by the congregations themselves. This church had been live streaming their services, and many of their archived services can be found on YouTube. In some of those videos, the cameras frequently pan away from the speaker to show the audience.

If you stream your services, security practices (what should be and not be shown) should be discussed with those running the A/V equipment. We recommend a fixed camera on the speaker or officiants to avoid inadvertently showing where the security team is posted, how many people are attending, whether doors are shut or open during services, when children come in from other religious education, etc. This is all sensitive intelligence which should be closely guarded.

(We'll discuss the particulars later, but in this case the streaming camera was panned and focused on the attacker, suggesting at least some coordination between the security team and the A/V staff. This was a good call; if the event had ended differently, the church would have had evidence for law enforcement of the suspect's concerning behavior.)

In addition to the livestream, we were able to find quite a number of interior pictures of the facility online. On the surface this is not necessarily a bad thing; we understand that pictures of the congregation and their activities are welcoming and inviting to visitors. However, what is posted to public view should always be evaluated from a security standpoint, to ensure sensitive information is not inadvertently revealed. Such things as the presence and locations of security cameras, for instance, can be ascertained through such pictures.

This is not just theoretical. When doing penetration tests as part of his regular job, Josh has on numerous occasions used website and social media pictures to find vulnerabilities in the security posture of the organization being tested. It's a vulnerability to consider, one which many organizations overlook.

## **Pre-Incident Observations & Lessons**

### *Pay attention to significant dates*

In “Praying Safe”, we mentioned that significant dates can and have played a role in the planning of some active shooter and terrorist attacks. We pointed out that during the planning process, some (but not all) attackers will select the date of their attack based on a historical incident that is significant to them. In many cases, they correlate with previous attacks or significant acts of violence in history. Several groups have produced “Threat Calendars” that track such dates. Users (and producers) of such calendars include police gang enforcement groups and terrorism watchdog organizations.

As it turns out, the date of this attack was in fact significant to the shooter. Kinnunen’s sister, Amy Kinnunen, told ABC News that December 29th was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the suicide of their brother Joel Kinnunen. Additionally, the shooting occurring near multiple religious holidays as well as the New Year.

There are other incidents noted for December 29th in the threat calendars we monitor. Notable incidents on this date include the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890, and the bombing at New York’s La Guardia Airport in 1975.

These are all things to consider when staffing and planning congregational security for those times where high attendance or a larger than average collection are expected.

### *Multiple visits prior to attack*

Multiple sources have stated that the shooter visited this church multiple times prior to his attack, and had asked for money multiple times. The Senior Minister of West Freeway Church of Christ, Britt Farmer, said that “We’ve helped him on several occasions with food. He gets mad when we won’t give him cash. He’s been here on multiple occasions.” [1]

This is a significant piece of information, and it’s critical that security teams discuss and have plans in place for those seeking such assistance.

### *How do we deal with people asking for money?*

One of the more common questions we get asked in our workshops is, “How do we deal with people asking for money?” It is not rare that disruptions, robberies, and even attacks at houses of worship, during services as well as at other times, start with transient or homeless individuals asking for money. Christians in particular struggle with the desire to help those in need but are conflicted about the real threats from individuals they encounter. In this particular incident, we believe there are lessons that can be learned, and we have some recommendations that we hope will at least spark the discussion on how your congregation can plan to safely help those asking for money.

Josh, as a member of the Church of Christ himself, shares the following insights:

Some groups that have the name Church of Christ will give money from the church collection to help anyone in need (including non-members). Some groups, on the other hand, feel the money from the church collection can only be given to needy church members, and typically ask members to contribute outside the weekly collection for specific needs of individuals that are not members.

Regardless of the individual congregation’s views on this, some have also decided to not give money at all and instead offer food, shelter, clothing, or other non-cash provisions. This may not be commonly known among those seeking money or other assistance, and could cause those specifically seeking cash to get upset. It’s worth noting that those congregations who have these beliefs must be prepared for a negative reaction.

From a Christian perspective, I believe we have good scriptural evidence that we should be wise stewards of our money and fair in our dealings. Matthew 10:16 says we are to be “wise as serpents, gentle as doves.”

If your congregation chooses to give cash to non-members, we would suggest a few things to ensure the money is being given wisely:

1. Require due diligence before giving assistance to those you are not familiar with or you suspect could be a threat. Some of the individuals who request money may have a history of violence (as was the case with this suspect). It's important to know what you are getting into before giving cash to them. Are they going to turn around and use the cash to buy drugs or alcohol? If you tell them you can't give them cash, are they going to attack or rob you?
2. In our workshops, we suggest the congregation create a form that can be used to request information from the individual. If you have such a form, make sure it states clearly that the church works with local law enforcement and will ask for warrant checks on those seeking assistance. Giving this information should be a requirement for assistance.
3. Follow through on the checks by contacting your local law enforcement and asking them to run a warrant check for you. Most states also have websites where you can lookup criminal history. Although we understand that no one is perfect, and we all certainly have had our difficulties in life, it's important to know the people you're dealing with. If they have the potential for violence, you need to know that. If they have drug issues, you need to know that too. If not for the safety of your congregation, understand that this information is valuable in helping those who truly are seeking to turn their lives around. If the person has active warrants or other reasons to not give their information, they are unlikely to stick around. If they are truly in need, they will give this information and be willing to wait until the due diligence is completed.
4. Clearly post your process for assisting the needy at your building. Have the process attached to copies of the forms the seekers will fill out. This will make it clear what the process is and cuts down on the opportunities for social engineering that scammers and thieves rely on.
5. Have a designated place to discuss their situation, one that doesn't put the church members at risk if the situation turns violent. Ensure that more than one person is present at the time and, if possible, have a video camera in that room. If at any time the discussion or situation makes anyone feel uncomfortable, call 911 as quickly as possible. They can send an officer to investigate and immediately check out the information on the form.

### **The suspect and his motives**

At this point, we can't make a good determination of the motive behind this particular attack. However, it should be pointed out that a New York Times article, in describing the sanctuary of the West Freeway Church of Christ, said that "a pair of water jugs that had been stuffed with bills and coins collected from worshipers" was on the floor in front of the communion table (possibly indicating that the collection had already been taken up).

Some have speculated that this may have been a robbery that turned into a shooting. While it's possible, at this point in time we cannot make a positive link. We will simply point out that many churches do an awful job securing their collection. We know more than one congregation that still puts the trays of collected money on the front pew until after services (when one of the members walks it to a back room to count it). Certainly, unsecured buckets of money would be an enticing temptation to any thief. This reality needs to be considered, and plans need to be consistently followed to secure the collection and reduce the risk that it will tempt someone to rob those entrusted with the money.

### *Suspect had an extensive violent criminal record*

Kinnunen had an extensive criminal record as well as a history of serious mental illness. In 2011 he was charged with felony assault-and-battery with a dangerous weapon, after he attacked the owner of a doughnut shop in Oklahoma. As a result, he was court ordered to a psychiatric facility for treatment. Later that year he was charged with arson, after starting a fire in a cotton field.

### *Suspect was suicidal and had severe mental issues*

Mr. Kinnunen told the court-appointed psychologist after one of his arrests that he had tried to kill himself with a firearm at the age of about 19 — but claimed that he was no longer suicidal. However, according to the psychologist's report, he had attacked fellow jail inmates and even went on a hunger strike, saying he thought he was being poisoned.

One of Kinnunen's ex-wives said, "Keith is a violent, paranoid person with a long line of assault and battery with and without firearms." His sister told ABC News that she believes Kinnunen was on "his own suicide mission".

In "Praying Safe" we devoted a section of the book to discussing those with mental illnesses. Places of worship attract those with mental or emotional issues, because (rarely) do they have the ability to medicate or hospitalize the patient against his/her will. The church is deemed a "safe" source of support, but may also be a way for the patient to show authorities they're attending "therapy" sessions — therefore avoiding hospitalization. These situations occur even though some of these patients are a danger to themselves and others.

This often leads the altruistic to quickly get in over their heads with patients they cannot (and should not) try to help. Congregations who do outreach to the homeless or ill need to have a realistic understanding of their own limitations, and to realize when trained professionals should intervene in the treatment of people with severe mental health issues.

Never underestimate the danger of a person who is suicidal or has a history of self-harm. Rarely are they only a danger to themselves; the suicidal person is often a danger to others as well. As a community, we need to be honest with ourselves and know our limits. People in these situations can be helped; however, they generally need more help, and of a more professional kind, than most places of worship are able to provide.

Many congregations feel as though limiting their participation denies them the opportunity to help their community, but there are still things the house of worship can do to make a positive impact. By partnering with mental health providers, the worship community may be able to supply the things the official practices and agencies cannot: clothing, nourishment, and perhaps emotional or financial support where appropriate.

There is no shame in recognizing and admitting the limits of faith-based service, and working where we can to make substantial and safe improvements in people's lives.

### **Incident Observations & Lessons**

Almost immediately after the incident at West Freeway Church of Christ, the interior video from their streaming camera was made public. The firearms-centric website ConcealedCarry.com posted an excellent detailed analysis of the video from James Boyer, a global security analyst for an evangelical Christian humanitarian organization. [5] We encourage you to read through his frame-by-frame analysis.

At the time his analysis was made, however, some important details had not been released. Here is our analysis of the additional information and its importance to the church's security posture.

#### *How did he get in the building?*

An article in the New York Times stated that he walked down the road and across the parking lot to get into the building. This was unusual, as most attendees drove to services, and is the first red flag in the incident.

In Praying Safe, we noted that parking lots are often the site of personal attacks as well as property crimes, and thus need monitoring (especially during events). However, a parking lot can also be the site of pre-attack reconnaissance, or of last-minute preparation in the opening stages of an attack.

In a case such as this, an integrated monitoring effort — either electronic or human — would discover the anomalous walker, allowing greeters to have advance notice of a possible issue.

If walking to services or events is not common, it may simply be a sign that someone is new to the worship community. In that case, friendly greeting is an appropriate response to welcome the newcomer. However, it could also signal other issues that, again, the greeters should be made aware of by the surveillance.

The suspect “tailed” a family as they entered the church, making it appear as though he was part of the group. [1] This is a common tactic to make entry into buildings with security. Joshua has used this same method to gain access to secure facilities during his job-related penetration tests.

This is one reason we strongly recommend that security or First Responder teams be integrated with the congregation’s greeters. Team members need to be trained to recognize people using the “tailgating” tactic, and practice responding to them.

In the book we discussed the importance of security personnel being familiar with the members of the congregation, and with regulars at services. This allows them to more easily spot new people, particularly those who might be attempting access via a “tailgate”, and to confront them softly so as not to arouse either animosity or suspicion.

One tactic Joshua has personally used with success is to approach the unknown person by saying “Oh, hi, my name is Josh, how do you know <insert families name>?”, while simultaneously stepping between them and the family and holding out his hand out for a handshake. “Oh, so you don’t know them, my mistake, do you need anything? Can I help you find a seat? Let me get you a visitor’s card to fill out. Thank you for being here!”

Someone trying to get in unobserved and unsuspected would at least know that someone is on to them. At the same time, it also comes across as helpful to those who may have simply been in unintentional proximity to the group.

*What if the person seems suspicious?*

If this initial “soft” contact suggests to security personnel that the person is suspect in some way, it’s important to guide them to a previously-designated area where they can be spoken with, an area which is somewhat private (so as not to embarrass the truly innocent) but at the same time away from immediate contact with the rest of the congregants. If your facility doesn’t have a such an area, there should be a plan to get them outside the building or into a foyer where their access to other congregants is limited.

Unless the person in question is clearly a threat, a polite ruse should be used to excuse the interaction. Joshua, for instance, has been known to keep extra visitors’ cards in his vehicle, as well as a box full of song books. He’s said things like “Come with me, I have some visitor’s cards in my car”, or “Walk with me while I grab a box out of my car and tell me about yourself.” Regardless of the method your team decides to use, it’s important that it be pre-planned and be obvious to the other members of the team — who should be trained to covertly move into covering positions should the person truly be dangerous.

In the case of Mr. Kinnunen, the church’s security team was immediately suspicious. Not only did he “tailgate” in, he was wearing a trench coat, a fake beard, a wig, and a hood (possibly from his coat or an under shirt). [1] As many others have suggested, he should have never been allowed in the building — and especially not the sanctuary — wearing a trench coat and a disguise. It’s possible that this was an oversight in the congregation’s security planning and training. At the same time, we don’t know the exact moment when someone on the security team realized Kinnunen was disguised; it may have been only after he made it into the sanctuary.

Let us be very clear: this is not an easy situation to be in. Assuming Mr. Kinnunen was in the door before security recognized he was wearing a disguise, team members would have been in the unenviable position of trying to catch up to the threat. Without an existing and pre-rehearsed plan, inaction in these kinds of situations is the normal human default, and threats can continue to work their way deeper into the building — and closer to the people the team is charged with protecting.

This is why, ideally, these issues should be addressed outside the building. If not there, in a designated room or alcove set aside for greeting visitors. If all else fails, the active defensive stand should be in the entry of the building.

All congregations must all have a plan to identify and prevent threats from entering the sanctuary. One innocent death is too many.

All of this, of course, is expensive in terms of manpower. If a congregation doesn't have sufficient security personnel (to include the greeters), gaps in coverage will occur. For instance, if security is focused in the sanctuary, that leaves fewer eyes to keep watch over all open entries and parking areas. This is common, especially with smaller congregations. In such cases technology, such as remotely monitored cameras and covert radios, can be used to multiply the effectiveness of those who are on duty.

Part of any response plan should include contacting law enforcement at the first sign of a potential issue. We've found too many security teams without a protocol for when and how law enforcement should be notified. In this incident the first 911 call appears to have come after the shooting, from a congregant who was fumbling with his phone during the call; we've been unable to ascertain if the security team notified law enforcement when they became aware of the suspect.

If your team determines that someone is acting suspiciously, enough so that they feel it necessary to maintain close proximity or to isolate the person, law enforcement should be notified immediately. This should be written into your response protocols and practiced during regular, scheduled training sessions.

*What less lethal options were available?*

We hope we've previously made it clear that we are both very pro-2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, and our observations and recommendations are certainly not against armed security in places of worship if it's appropriate. A firearm is the most efficient way to respond to a lethal threat, and we encourage those so inclined to include them in the security planning. We firmly believe that those carrying firearms as members of security teams in places of worship should be trained well beyond normal concealed carry standards, to have response plans in place, and to rehearse those plans on a regular basis.

That being said, if the only response a security team has is a lethal firearm, they will have to wait until the incident becomes potentially lethal to act. Security personnel cannot rely solely on their firearms, and need extensive training in less-than-lethal control techniques to stop a threat before people are actually killed.

Verbal judo, chemical sprays, Tasers, and other non-lethal tools and techniques give a security team member more options to control access to the sanctuary. In addition, some thought should be given to unarmed force, such as defense- and control-oriented martial arts. In the case of someone who might be potentially dangerous, the ability to take the suspect to the ground and prevent him from employing any weapons may stop an unfolding incident. In addition, being able to safely hold someone for law enforcement should factor into a complete response plan.

Would less-than-lethal options have changed the outcome in this situation? We can only speculate; however, both of us agree that if we were in such a situation, we would sure like to have a few more options before having to draw our guns. We suspect many others would also.

Having the tools and training to de-escalate an incident may very well save lives. Is your team putting a focus on this objective?

*Listen to the community, and encourage them to speak up*

According to congregant Isabel Arreola, who sat near Mr. Kinnunen, he made her feel uneasy. "I should have listened to my gut," Arreola said. "While he was there, I couldn't sing. I couldn't pray. There was just something not right about him. But at the same time, I thought that maybe I was being too hard." She wanted to think that he was there to worship, just like everyone else, but she had never seen him in church, and said he appeared to be in disguise.[4]

As Joshua points out, Christians are taught to think the best of people. In spite of all the warning signals going off in her head, she dismissed them until the worst possible moment: when she and her husband had to dive on the floor and protect her child with their bodies.

(We might take some flak for saying this, but if you are sitting in a church and your warning bells are going off and telling you someone is not acting right, that's the time to take your family and move to somewhere safe. Just because a church has security doesn't mean you have been relieved of your responsibility to protect yourself and your family. If your church dismisses your concerns, find another church. Maybe if more people demanded their churches take this seriously, they would. Trust your gut.)



### *Using A/V resources to monitor an evolving situation*

As noted earlier, the security team at West Freeway Church alerted the A/V team to turn a camera toward the person so he could be observed. This was a good call (and we likely wouldn't have video of this incident had they not done so).

Coordination between the A/V team and the security function is important. Does your team have radios to communicate? Can members of the security team run the A/V equipment if needed for observation? Even better, can security access cameras and control them remotely if needed?

Having someone dedicated to communications, even if that person also serves a general A/V function, is incredibly valuable. We've both done security for events, and can attest to the value of an "eye in the sky" feeding information over a radio before, during, and after an incident. Get the A/V team involved in the security training exercises, and let them help with equipment and staffing.

Kudos to the West Freeway team for recognizing the value of the camera and acting quickly to utilize it.

What will the crowd do when chaos starts?

During our workshops, we attempt to simulate the reactions of the people in the congregation. We take our cues from what we've seen in shootings, bombings, and other attacks that have occurred in the past.

The reactions among unrehearsed bystanders vary considerably. Some dive to the floor, some sit covering their ears, and some even stand up to try to get away. In this incident, it appears that a person suddenly standing up forced Jack Wilson to fire a head shot to stop Mr. Kinnunen.

In addition,

It is important for your first responders to know that people will react randomly. It's vitally important to add such randomness into your training exercises and incident response rehearsals.

## **Post-Incident Observations & Lessons**

### *Medical gear and training*

After shots were fired, at least one person (possibly a nurse) appears to provide some medical care to the victims. Though we're not absolutely sure, from our analysis of the video it doesn't appear that the church had trauma-response medical gear available for first responders. This is a grave oversight.

Any house of worship must have the tools and materials to save lives. This includes materials to stop traumatic bleeding (as from an attack), but also to handle the more common life-threatening emergencies such as heart attacks. The emergency kits should include tourniquets, hemostatic gauze, pressure bandages, chest seals, as well as automated external defibrillators (AEDs.)

All first responders should be trained in the use of the lifesaving equipment. At the minimum, this should include basic first aid response as well as a trauma response course such as "Stop the Bleed". Medical response kits and AEDs should be available in every section of the building, and first responders should be encouraged to carry a small response kit on their person whenever they're on duty.

Medical emergencies are the most common incident a congregation will have to deal with. Preparation for those will also help preparation for response to a deadly attack.

### *Armed response training [5]*

Security team members need to be properly trained and should regularly practice as a team. As the video shows, after the shot which neutralized the suspect a number of armed individuals rushed into the scene. They moved among the congregation, toward the suspect, with guns drawn and carried in a "low ready" position.

A close examination of the video shows some of those responders ended up pointing guns at their fellow congregants. This is a known problem with the “low ready”. Running with both hands on a handgun is a difficult task, as the muzzle tends to work itself upward as the person moves their arms in sympathy with their legs.

As in this incident, this often results in guns being pointed at innocent people. This is a violation of basic gun handling rules, and is extremely dangerous to people around the person with the gun.

It’s quite difficult to train people not to do so. It’s natural to use our arms when we’re running, and if we eliminate that option by rigidly keeping them extended and pointed down, we simply move more slowly. In an emergency, when everything in our being is saying “move faster!”, muzzle discipline usually suffers.

While the “low ready” is ubiquitous in law enforcement and concealed carry training, it may not be appropriate for security teams. Preventing an unintentional shooting of innocents should be a fundamental part of first responder training, and the deficiencies of the “low ready” make that quite difficult to do.

While some in the firearms training world dogmatically refuse to consider anything other than the “low ready”, when moving rapidly in a crowd there are a couple of alternatives that are taught to dignitary and executive protection agents.

The first is the “muzzle up” position. The gun is held on the strong (shooting or control) hand, barrel perpendicular to the ground and the muzzle pointing skyward, above the shoulder. This is a very easy position in which to run without the risk of the muzzle pointing at others during the maneuver. The other hand (called the “off” hand) is used to provide balance while running, or to move innocents out of the way, open doors, etc.

Responders using this position should be trained to safely transition to an “on-target” position once the threat has been contacted, and to avoid bending, stooping, squatting, or kneeling with the muzzle up.

The other alternative is to carry the gun with the muzzle pointed straight down. In this position, the gun is also held in the strong hand, with the gun on the outside of the leg. (It’s often taught that the gun is carried next to, and parallel with, the seam on the outside of the pants leg.) As in the muzzle-up position the off hand is used for balance and situational control.

In this position, the gun handler must consciously avoid swinging the gun while running or allowing the muzzle to rise. He/she must also keep the gun from pointing at his or her own feet and leg, as well as those of people in the vicinity.

Both of us have trained with each technique, and generally prefer the muzzle-up for its ease of training and resistance to user errors. It is the currently-taught technique at the U.S. Secret Service.

### *Calling authorities*

First responders should train to notify 911 at the first sign of trouble. The sooner the call is made, the sooner law enforcement (LE) and medical responders will arrive.

In this incident, the first 911 call came from one of these armed responders after shots had been fired. In the video, we see that person put his gun under his arm to operate his phone to call 911. He appears to fumble as he juggles both phone and gun, both delaying the necessary call and posing a risk of injury to himself and others.

Those in a first response role must train and practice holstering their firearm in order to perform other necessary tasks. This makes the response both more efficient and safer.

### *What if the attacker had arrived during bible study?*

In our intelligence-gathering on the church, we learned from their website that worship services started at 10:30am, but bible study classes started earlier — at 9:30am. Joshua points out that it’s common for the Church of Christ to have bible class prior to worship service, and to serve communion at the beginning of the worship services.

It’s important to consider what your congregation would do if someone enters the building during bible study time and, instead of heading for the sanctuary, moves toward the classrooms. Do you have security in place during bible classes? Do you have evacuation or lockdown procedures?

Thankfully Kinnunen didn't target anyone while they were in class, but the danger was obviously there. Additional services, classes, and daycares are often ignored or given less attention in many security plans. This often leaves them more vulnerable than the congregation at large. A good security plan covers everyone at any time they're on the premises.

### **Summary:**

As this is being written, we still have no firm motive for Mr. Kinnunen's attack at the West Freeway Church of Christ. In truth, we may never know his exact motivation. However, both of us believe the suspect intended to rob the church on the anniversary of his brother's suicide and was willing to die trying. It's possible, perhaps likely, that he intended to induce a "suicide by cop" scenario, which is among the most dangerous things for security personnel to handle.

Any security plan should begin at the furthest extent of the area of responsibility. In many cases, that will be the parking lot. Security plans should always take into account the extent of that area of responsibility and include all the events where the safety of people is involved.

Though attacks like this are tragic for everyone involved, it's important for us to understand what occurred and how similar attacks might be mitigated so that we may reduce the loss of life in future incidents. By examining both the successes and failures in an honest and caring manner, we do justice to both the victims and the survivors.

For more information on safety and security planning for houses of worship, get ***Praying Safe: The professional approach to protecting faith communities***, available from [www.prayingsafe.com](http://www.prayingsafe.com)

[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/31/us/texas-church-shooting-white-settlement.html>

[2] <https://abcnews.go.com/US/parishioner-gunned-texas-church-shooter-hero/story?id=67982047>

[3] <https://www.foxnews.com/us/texas-church-shooting-gunman-cash-requests-anger-visits-minister>

[4] <https://www.star-telegram.com/news/local/crime/article238818513.html>

[5] <https://texas.concealedcarry.com/2019/12/31/in-depth-analysis-of-texas-church-shooting-footage/>

[6] <https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/29/us/church-shooting-texas/index.html>

[7] <https://dfw.cbslocal.com/2019/12/31/white-settlement-gunman-keith-thomas-kinnunen-mad-church-money/>