

Guns in Church: *No Sanctuary* | BY TERESE THONUS



IMAGE SOURCE: FOOTAGE FIRM, INC.

It was on Monday afternoon that I first realized how deeply the fear had leached into my bones. I'd eased my Prius behind a Jeep in the near left turn lane at Clinton Parkway and Iowa. When the light changed, my foot slipped on the brake, and I "bumper-kissed" the Jeep. As I made the turn behind it, the angry male driver flipped me the bird and indicated that I should pull over. In that split second, I decided not to comply. As I sped away, my heart raced as I told myself first, "It's nothing," and then, "He saw my plate. The police will come knocking on my door." Then it hit me. I wasn't afraid of the police. I was afraid that the driver of the Jeep had exercised his Second Amendment rights and might have pulled out a gun and shot me.

On April 2, 2015, Governor Sam Brownback signed into law the amended Kansas Personal and Family Pro-

tection Act, K.S.A. 75-7c01 et seq. *The Kansas City Star* reported, "Kansans soon can carry concealed weapons without permits or training." In part, the Act states:

(a) The carrying of a concealed handgun shall not be prohibited in any building unless such building is conspicuously posted in accordance with rules and regulations adopted by the attorney general.

(b) Nothing in this act shall be construed to prevent:
1) any private employer from restricting or prohibiting by personnel policies persons from carrying a concealed handgun while on the premises of the employer's business...

(e) No public employer shall restrict or otherwise prohibit by personnel policies any employee, who is legally qualified, from carrying any concealed handgun while engaged in the duties of such employee's employment...

The Kansas State Attorney General reports that 109,258 handgun concealed carry applications were received between January 1, 2016 and January 1, 2017, with 88,587 licenses granted.

Dear Pastor,

On Sabbath, October 29, I picked David up at Church W after service and potluck. On our way home, David informed me that he had seen a man with a weapon in the men's bathroom. He told me that he hadn't known what to do or whom to speak to about this. He was clearly shocked.

That afternoon, I called our Pathfinder leader and voiced my concern not only for David but for any person in the building that day. She mentioned that visitors from Church L may have been in attendance, and that perhaps one of them had packed a pistol into the church building ... I asked whether she might approach the church board to discuss whether Church W should have a policy re: guns on the premises. Since the Kansas concealed carry law was passed in 2015, some churches have placed "no weapons" signs at each entrance and made mention of their policies on church websites and in bulletins.

I would very much like David to continue to attend both Pathfinders and church services at Church W. The congregation and the Pathfinder leaders have been very kind to him over the past ten years and offered him many opportunities for spiritual and personal growth. However, I cannot allow him onto the property until the church makes a public determination about this issue. It is non-negotiable, in my view, just as important as the background checks required of church staff and volunteers who work with children.

Terese

Send

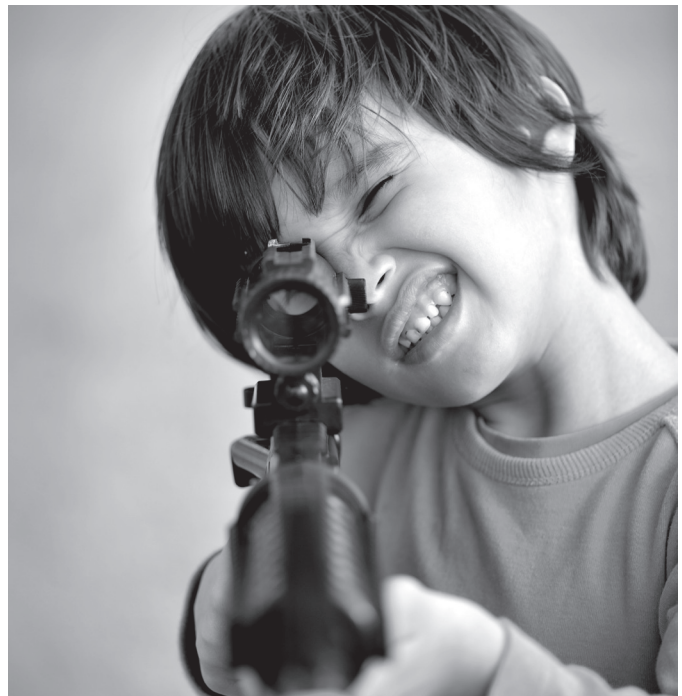


IMAGE SOURCE: FOOTAGE FIRM, INC.

It was August 29, 2016. David lives with autism, and because of his disability, I attend yearly Individual Education Plan meetings at his high school. As the meeting was winding down, David was excused from the room, with his counselor, case manager, and work experience coordinator remaining. "I don't know whether you've talked to David lately about this," P said, "but he seems less interested in welding and blacksmithing and more interested in gunsmithing lately. He wants to attend the Colorado School of Trades after graduation." "Gunsmithing?" I asked. "Where did he get that idea?" My heart sank. But I already knew. No matter that I preached non-violence and pacifism at home and minimized his exposure to violent films and videogames—like many boys, David was fascinated with weapons of all kinds. I tried to channel this interest into archery, with limited success. David spends a good part of every day at his "imagination station," crafting weapons out of cardboard, rubber bands, papier mâché, discarded plastic, PVC pipe, and lately, metal.

When David was fifteen, he stole my debit card and purchased a gun on Amazon.com. Fortunately, I intercepted the package and sent it back. Amazon wouldn't accept it, so I returned it to the gun manufacturer. "We can't give you a refund," they wrote. I replied, "I don't care."

Dear Elder S,

I'm wondering: Has the Kansas-Nebraska Conference created any policy or policies around firearms on church properties or at church-sponsored events? Thank you in advance for any information you can provide.

Terese Thonus

Send

Dear Terese,

You are not alone in asking about this. The short answer is that KS-NE Conference, Mid-America Union, North American Division and the General Conference have no written policy about this issue other than recommending each church follow the laws of the state where they are located . . .

We advise pastors that declaring a church a "gun free zone" is not a decision any pastor should make unilaterally. Also, no one speaking for the church should encourage someone to bring a weapon or to use a weapon in case an "active shooter" situation is anticipated or arises. Consult your leaders. Process any recommendation of those leaders through your board.

KS state law was amended this past summer . . . again. Now, like most states (only 2 states specifically prohibit guns in churches), KS law treats churches and houses of worship like any other private property, allowing that unless prohibited by the property owner, those with concealed carry permits or the legal authority to carry a concealed handgun may do so in a house of worship.

I hope this information helps.

Elder S

Send

No Sanctuary

I remember

A steel belt buckle striking softer flesh
Pants around ankles below fingered hand
My mother's face, lifeless on one side,
Med-evaced to Florida.

I remember

An asphalt runway sprouting bamboo huts
People through fences behind barbed wire
A mother's heart, childless on eight sides,
Spirited to Bangkok.

I remember

A flash of steel striking innocent eyes
Guns inside holsters beneath Sabbath suits
Our children's souls, defenseless on all sides,
Invited to church.

(3)(d) The governing body or the chief administrative officer . . . may permit any employee who is legally qualified to carry a concealed handgun into any building of such institution:

- 1) a unified school district
- 2) a postsecondary educational institution
- 3) a state or municipal-owned medical care facility
- 4) a state or municipal-owned adult care home
- 5) a community mental health center
- 6) an indigent health care clinic

Waivers for public institutions have been rescinded, effective July 1, 2017.

KU Campus Forum on Concealed Carry. 4-6 pm. Wednesday, February 15. Review questions that have already been submitted:

- Will instructors be aware of the identity of the individuals who have concealed firearms in their classes?
 - As faculty are we allowed to suggest that people leave their guns elsewhere when they meet with us in our offices?
 - What are we to do if a concealed gun accidentally discharges? Who will be held accountable?
 - Am I responsible for disarming an active shooter?
-



It was a Wednesday night. David and I argued as we drove home from Pathfinders. “You’re embarrassing me,” he accused. “None of the other parents care whether someone has a gun at church.” I replied, “I’m waiting to hear from Pastor about what has been decided. I don’t want you or the other kids in an unsafe situation.” “Let *me* decide what’s safe or unsafe,” David stated. “*You’re* afraid of guns. *I’m* not.”

(c)(1) Any private entity which provides adequate security measures in a private building and which conspicuously posts signage in accordance with this section prohibiting the carrying of a concealed handgun in such building shall not be liable for any wrongful act or omission relating to actions of persons carrying a concealed handgun concerning acts or omissions regarding such handguns.

(2) Any private entity which does not provide adequate security measures in a private building and which allows the carrying of a concealed handgun shall not be liable for any wrongful act or omission relating to actions of persons carrying a concealed handgun concerning acts or omissions regarding such handguns.

Dear Pastor,

FWD: Conference Firearms Policy question.
I would like to discuss this issue with you when you have time. Thank you.

Terese

Send



Terese,

There is diversity on this issue. We disagree on some things, but I respect you and I respect your position...I am stuck because obviously the Church has a noncombatant position and has had that historically. At the same time there are some with concerns about protecting our members. The hardest thing for me is being told of a fear, not acting and then something happening. I think the chances of an active shooter, bomb etc. etc. to be so minimal that the chances are inconsequential, but if I do nothing and something happens I would never recover. My position was to involve law enforcement . . . Adventist Risk Management won't insure us so we can't do that, so we are still where we were.

Pastor

Send





Active Shooter: How to Respond U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Good practices for coping with an active shooter situation:

- Be aware of your environment and any possible dangers.
- Take note of the two nearest exits in any facility you visit.
- If you are in an office, stay there and secure the door.
- If you are in a hallway, get into a room and secure the door.
- As a last resort, attempt to take the active shooter down. When the shooter is at close range and you cannot flee, your chance of survival is much greater if you try to incapacitate him/her.

Run. Hide. Fight.

It was my regular Tuesday afternoon therapy appointment. I told my therapist about the “bumper-kiss” at Clinton and Iowa and how I’d reacted. Changing the subject, I remarked, “You know, I’m thinking about working from home one day a week so that I can consolidate my research and writing. I got so much done yesterday at home.” A pause. She regarded me kindly. “Terese, what do those two have in common?” Another pause. “I want to be safe.” Another pause. “That’s right,” she said. “Safety.”

Dear Pastor,

I think I need to more clearly state my concern(s).

1. This is not about whether Adventists should bear arms. They do. That ship has sailed.

2. This is not about whether people should have the right to open or concealed carry their guns. They have the right. It’s Kansas law. That ship has sailed.

3. This is not about liberal or conservative political beliefs about gun control. There’s been an election. That ship has sailed.

Here’s what does concern me:

As a private entity and house of worship, Church N has no policy about who may/may not step onto church premises carrying a gun either openly or concealed. And we need to have a policy, and our members and visitors need to know what it is, and all of us should participate in active shooter training.

The denomination offers no counsel other than what they can or cannot insure us for. I suggest we look at what other denominations are doing as well as to law enforcement for guidance. Here are some reports that I have found informative:

- FBI, *Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*.
- Mennonite Mutual, *Guns in Churches*.
- The Daily Caller, *Concealed Carrier? Active Shooter Considerations*.
- The Truth About Guns, *Why You Shouldn’t Engage an Active Shooter and What to Do if you Do*.

I urge you to read this information and to discuss it with the church board. Not doing anything is the worst enemy of safety.

Terese

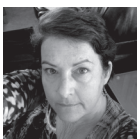
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IMAGE SOURCE: DREAMTIME STOCK

It was David's Sunday afternoon skate date. I volunteered to pick up two similarly awkward, unwashed, unshaven young men for the forty-minute drive to the rink. "Did you see Mr. ___ in church yesterday talking to Pastor?" one asked. "Dude, that was a cool holster he was wearing. Tooled leather. I think he had it made special." I asked no one in particular, "Do you think it's O.K. for someone to bring a gun into church?" David was silent. M answered, "Why not? They're not going to use it!" That moment, I realized we hadn't got a chance. ■



Terese Thonus is a linguist who directs the Writing Program at the University of Baltimore. Previously, she taught at Southwestern Adventist College, East Carolina University, California State University-Fresno, and the University of Kansas. One of the reasons Terese joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the age of 18 was its history of conscientious objection and noncombatancy. She is mother to David, 20, and Cassandra, 22. In the spring of 2017, the Kansas-Nebraska Conference addressed the issue of guns in church to advise pastors that they "can neither encourage nor discourage members from carrying weapons on church property." Partly because of this, Terese has since moved away from Kansas to Maryland, where she feels she can, "worship more safely."

References

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8. *Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-study-2000-2013-1.pdf>.
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