

# THE AWAKENING

**How America's Churches and Schools Are Learning That Seconds Save Lives**



On June 22, 2025, in Wayne, Michigan, an armed gunman wearing camouflaged clothing and a tactical vest arrived at CrossPointe Community Church carrying an AR-15-style rifle with more than a dozen fully loaded magazines, a semiautomatic handgun with an extended magazine, and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. Inside, children filled the sanctuary for Vacation Bible School—laughing, learning, completely unaware of what was unfolding in the parking lot.

The attacker never made it through the door.

Trained church security personnel engaged the threat immediately, fatally stopping him before he could access the building. Parents

Law enforcement officials gather in the road leading to the home of the suspect being sought in connection with two mass shootings.

picked up their children that afternoon from a church that had prepared for the unthinkable—and because of that preparation, those children went home alive.

Contrast that with what happened at Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis on August 27, 2025, during an all-school Mass on the first day of school. An armed attacker opened fire through the church windows, killing two children—ages 8 and 10—and wounding 21 others, including 18 schoolchildren. The shooter, a former student, ultimately took his own life.

Or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Grand Blanc Township, Michigan, where on September 28, 2025, an attacker drove his truck into the building, opened fire, and set the church ablaze—killing four people and injuring eight others before dying in a shootout with law enforcement.

These are not hypotheticals. These are not fear tactics. These are the realities of 2025.

Experience over the past two decades has taken me from combat zones, contracting with government agencies, and executive protection details across multiple continents. I've seen what happens when people are unprepared for violence, and I've witnessed the difference that training and decisive action make in the critical first seconds of a crisis. Nothing prepared me for what I would still continue to witness here at home: American churches, schools, and communities under siege—by predators targeting the most vulnerable among us.

The question is no longer *if* violence will come to your door. The question is: *Will you be ready when it does?*

Preparedness is not fear. It is love in action. It is the tangible expression of our responsibility to protect the vulnerable, defend the innocent, and shepherd those under our care with vigilance and courage.

## THE REALITY: 2023-2025 IN REVIEW

### A Nation Under Assault

According to the FBI's 2023 Active Shooter Incidents report, there were 48 active shooter incidents across the United States in 2023, occurring in 26 states. These attacks resulted in 244 casualties, with 139 wounded and 105 killed—the highest death toll in recent years. Fifteen of these incidents met the federal definition of a "mass killing," in which three or more victims are killed during an attack.

Between 2019 and 2023, active shooters violently targeted members of the public at a rate that was 89% higher than in the previous five-year period. California experienced the highest number of active shooter attacks (8), followed by Texas and Washington (4 each).

Houses of worship, schools, and public spaces remained primary targets, with open spaces like roadways, neighborhoods, and outdoor venues accounting for 28 incidents in 2023 alone.

While preliminary data suggests a decrease in incidents in 2025, the threat remains persistent and deadly.

### When Worship Becomes a War Zone

Houses of worship have faced a disturbing series of violent attacks in 2025:

April 3, 2025 – Seneca, Oklahoma: A gunman entered Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church and shot Father Arul Carasala, who died at a hospital. The suspect, Gary Hermesch, 66, faces first-degree murder charges.

May 6, 2025 – Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania: An explosive device was set on the altar inside St. Teresa of Calcutta Adoration Chapel. Kyle Kuczynski, 33, faces felony arson and related charges.

June 22, 2025 – Wayne, Michigan: An armed individual approached CrossPointe Community Church during Vacation Bible School. Church security, who had trained for such scenarios, engaged and fatally stopped the attacker before he could enter the building filled with children. No church members were injured.

August 20, 2025 – Brooklyn, New York: Multiple buildings, including the Church of St. Luke and St. Matthew, were set on fire. Bryan Oviedo, 32, faces arson charges for approximately 20 building fires.

August 27, 2025 – Minneapolis, Minnesota: Robert Westman, 23, opened fire at Annunciation Catholic Church during an all-school Mass, killing two children and wounding 21 others before taking his own life.

September 28, 2025 – Grand Blanc Township, Michigan: Thomas Jacob Sanford, 40, drove his truck into a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints building, opened fire, and set the church ablaze, killing four



CrossPointe  
Community Church

**“because of that preparation, those children went home alive.”**

- CROSSPOINTE CHURCH

people and injuring eight others before dying in an exchange of gunfire with law enforcement.

2025 – Lexington, Kentucky: A gunman opened fire on Richmond Road Baptist Church, killing two female congregants before being fatally shot by law enforcement. Pastor Jerry Gumm was also shot but survived.

These incidents reveal a critical truth: violence against houses of worship is unpredictable, often occurring during services, special events, and in transition spaces where security awareness is weakest.

## **SCHOOLS: WHERE SECONDS DETERMINE SURVIVAL**

### **The Reality of School Violence in 2025**

According to the K-12 School Shooting Database, there were 233 shooting incidents at elementary and secondary schools in 2025—the lowest number since 2020. While this represents a decrease from the 2023 peak of 352 incidents, the threat remains significant. These 233 incidents resulted in 148 victims who were wounded or killed.

California experienced 22 school shooting incidents in 2025—more than any other state—followed by Texas with 21 incidents and Tennessee with 14. According to Education Week's tracking, seven people died and 44 were injured in school shooting incidents in 2025.

Three active shooters targeted schools in 2023, according to the FBI—two at colleges or universities and one at a pre-K-12 grade school.

Twelve were killed and 7 wounded during those shootings, including the three young students and three faculty members killed by a shooter at Covenant Presbyterian School in Nashville, Tennessee.

### **The 3-Minute Window**

The data is unforgiving. In active shooter incidents, victim survival rates fall by 7-10% for every minute without emergency treatment for critical injuries such as cardiac or neurological trauma. For less critical injuries, survival rates still drop 1-2% per minute.

The "golden window"—the period when rapid response has the greatest impact on survival—is 4-5 minutes.

Here's the problem: it takes an average of 5 minutes just to call the police during an active shooter incident. By the time law enforcement arrives—typically 14-15 minutes after the initial call—the golden window has closed.

The lesson is clear: in the first minutes of a crisis, victims are the first responders.

### **The Technology Revolution**

School security in 2026 is undergoing a seismic shift, driven by legislative mandates, emerging technologies, and hard lessons learned from tragedy.

Alyssa's Law—which requires schools to implement silent panic alarms capable of directly notifying law enforcement—is gaining momentum nationwide. More states are adopting the legislation, and pressure is mounting for a federal mandate.

But panic buttons are evolving. Schools are moving away from stationary devices hidden beneath front office desks toward wearable panic systems for staff, faculty, and even authorized visitors. These devices provide highly accurate, real-time location information alongside emergency notifications.

AI-powered video analytics are transforming threat detection. Modern systems can distinguish between a holstered weapon and a brandished one, alerting staff only when a legitimate threat is present. Advanced detection systems can differentiate between benign items—like a student's three-ring binder—and actual weapons, dramatically reducing false alarms and wait times. Companies like Ubiquiti offer non-subscription networking gear that integrates PoE cameras and NVRs into its equipment, offering a

reasonably priced and fairly robust system with AI capabilities for license plate reading, object detection, and access control.

Geofencing and real-time location tracking allow for zone-specific alerts, ensuring messages reach only affected classrooms or buildings—reducing panic and confusion while improving response coordination.

### The Human Element

Technology alone won't save lives. School safety experts identify two critical trends shaping K-12 security in 2026: integrating mental health supports with safety measures and balancing people with technology.



Kyle Kuczynski, faces felony charges after an explosive device was set on the altar inside St. Teresa of Calcutta Adoration Chapel.

Schools are embedding behavioral threat assessment and management programs into multi-tiered systems of support, strengthening prevention and early intervention. Data-driven approaches to behavioral incidents are helping educators move from reactive discipline to proactive prevention.

As industry standards drive consistency across the sector, one truth remains constant: trained, decisive people—empowered by the right tools—are the ultimate line of defense.

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

If you lead a church, you cannot assume your congregation is safe simply because you are a house of worship. The data proves otherwise.

If you run a school, you cannot rely solely on law enforcement response times. The math is brutal: by the time help arrives, the outcome is often already determined.

If you are a parent, you have every right to ask hard questions about your children's safety—and demand real answers.

Preparedness is not fear. It is love in action. It is the tangible expression of our responsibility to protect the vulnerable and defend those who cannot defend themselves.

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