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The document provides a recent historical overview (November 2024 – present) of incidents involving acts of violence or aggression targeting Christian churches within the United States. Its purpose is to assist Clinton County (Ohio) Church Safety and Security Teams in understanding evolving threats, trends, and indicators relevant to faith-based facilities.

This product includes limited recommendations for security posture enhancement and awareness. It does not contain law-enforcement-sensitive, classified, or privileged information and may be freely shared among churches, faith leaders, volunteers, and community partners for planning and training purposes.

# Church Security Threat Intelligence Briefing (Late 2024 – 2025)

Published: Wednesday, 12 November 2025

**Target Audience:** Church leaders and congregations in Clinton County, Ohio and surrounding areas.

## Executive Summary

- Increase in Violent Incidents:** U.S. churches have experienced numerous active aggressor attacks in late 2024 and 2025, including shootings, arsons, and bombings. These incidents span various Christian denominations (Catholic, Protestant, LDS) and geographic regions. The Family Research Council documented 383 attacks on churches in 2024 alone, and the violence has continued into 2025.
- Diverse Motivations:** Attackers' motives range from ideological or religious hatred (anti-Catholic, anti-LDS, anti-Christian sentiments) to personal grievances and mental health crises. Some perpetrators espoused extremist beliefs (e.g., anti-Christian rhetoric, conspiracy theories, or hate tied to global events), while others were driven by domestic disputes or personal issues.
- Attack Methods:** Firearms have been the most common weapon in lethal incidents (active shooters targeting worship services), but arson and explosive devices have also been used. Notably, attackers have driven vehicles into buildings, set fires or bombs in sanctuaries, and in one case combined multiple methods (vehicle ramming,

shooting, and arson). Attacks often occur during worship services or church events when congregants are present, aiming for maximum harm.

- **Casualties and Impact:** Recent church attacks have resulted in dozens of deaths and injuries. High-casualty events include a mass shooting at a Minneapolis Catholic church-school (2 children killed, 30 injured) and a combined shooting-arsenal attack at an LDS meetinghouse in Michigan (4 killed, 8 injured). Even foiled attacks and smaller incidents caused significant trauma, property damage, and community fear.
- **Key Warning Indicators:** Many attackers exhibited observable warning signs before their attacks. These include extremist or hateful statements (online or to acquaintances), prior threatening behavior or criminal acts (e.g., violence, weapons offenses), mental health crises or erratic behavior noted by others, and grievances involving the church (such as theological disputes or conflicts with church leaders). Awareness of these indicators can allow churches to intervene or alert authorities before violence occurs.

**Bottom Line:** The threat of targeted violence against churches is **real and multifaceted**. Churches in our region should maintain vigilance, strengthen security plans, and foster open communication to identify and address warning signs. The following briefing details recent incidents, observed patterns, and recommended precautions to help protect our faith communities.

## Recent Active Aggressor Incidents Targeting Churches (Nov 2024 – 2025)

Below is a timeline and profiles of known attacks on U.S. churches in the specified period. These include all forms of attack (shootings, arson, explosives, etc.) against Christian houses of worship.

### Late 2024 Incidents

- **Nov 2, 2024 – Dallas, Texas (Foiled Church Shooting Attempt):** A 25-year-old man, Russell Ragsdale, attempted an attack during evening Mass at a Dallas church. Ragsdale attended the service, then retrieved a rifle from his car and tried to re-enter the church with the firearm at 5:35 pm. Quick-thinking parishioners locked the doors, barring entry and likely preventing a shooting. The suspect, who had a prior arrest in 2022 for fatally shooting his roommate (charges were later dropped), was arrested on federal firearm charges.
  - **Indicators:** Ragsdale's history (a prior homicide incident and drug use) and the act of closing parking lot gates before retrieving his rifle suggest premeditation. This attempt underscores the importance of physical security measures (e.g., controlled entry) that can thwart an attacker in the moments of an incident.
- **Dec 4, 2024 – Palermo, California (Feather River Adventist School Shooting):** A gunman opened fire at the Feather River Adventist elementary school (affiliated with a local Seventh-day Adventist church). Glenn Nathan Litton, 56, entered a meeting with staff under false pretenses and then shot two young students (ages 5 and 6) on the playground, critically wounding them. He immediately committed suicide at the scene. Litton was a homeless man with a lengthy criminal history (theft, fraud, etc.) and mental health issues. A note on his body claimed he intended "child executions" as retaliation for U.S. involvement in what he called genocide in Gaza and Yemen.
  - **Motivation:** Litton explicitly linked his attack to anti-American and anti-Christian sentiments, citing the church's perceived connection to U.S. actions overseas. The local sheriff labeled the shooting a terrorist attack intended to terrorize parents.

- **Indicators:** Litton's behavior was calculated – he scheduled a fake enrollment meeting to gain access to the school. His note and statements showed extremist ideological motivation; this, combined with his criminal past and mental instability, comprised significant warning signs.
- **Dec 16, 2024 – Madison, Wisconsin (Abundant Life Christian School Shooting):** A tragic school shooting unfolded at Abundant Life Christian School, a private K-12 Christian school on a church campus. The perpetrator, Natalie "Samantha" Rupnow, age 15, was a sophomore student who carried two handguns onto campus. Around 10:57 am, she opened fire, killing a 42-year-old teacher and a fellow 16-year-old student, and wounding six others, before taking her own life when police arrived. Rupnow had no prior violent record due to her age, but subsequent investigation revealed deep extremist influences: she had been active in online spaces glorifying violence. Investigators found Rupnow had been invited to a Telegram chat where an attacker in Turkey had posted a manifesto before a mosque stabbing, and the Anti-Defamation League uncovered a TikTok account of hers that shared white supremacist memes. Disturbingly, it was later found that a 22-year-old man in Florida had been communicating with Rupnow online and was plotting mass shootings at multiple sites (including a church); he was arrested in April 2025.
  - **Indicators:** Rupnow exhibited the profile of a self-radicalized youth: consuming and sharing hate content, hero-worship of prior mass shooters, and even being referenced by a copycat. (Notably, the August 2025 Minneapolis church shooter wrote Rupnow's name on one of his guns, suggesting her attack inspired others.) This case highlights the threat of youth radicalization via social media and the need to monitor troubling behavior in school settings.

## 2025 Incidents (Chronological)

- **April 3, 2025 – Seneca, Kansas (Catholic Priest Assassination):** In a shocking attack at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Father Arul Carasala (age 57) was shot multiple times and killed outside his rectory. The suspect, 66-year-old Gary Hermesch (an Army veteran from Oklahoma), was arrested shortly after. Hermesch was a lifelong Catholic with extremist traditionalist views – he had written a series of letters to a local newspaper condemning the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) and decrying what he called a "strange new version of 'Catholicism'" in the modern Church. In these letters (2011–2024), he advanced conspiracy theories that the Vatican had been "infiltrated" and blamed societal problems on changes in Catholic liturgy.
  - **Motive:** Hermesch's writings make clear that ideological hatred toward the post-Vatican II Catholic Church fueled his actions. The priest appears to have been targeted as a representative of a church that Hermesch saw as illegitimate or corrupted.
  - **Indicators:** Prior to violence, Hermesch's extremist letters were public red flags of fanaticism. He did not explicitly threaten Fr. Carasala in those letters, but the vitriolic rhetoric against Church leadership signaled a potential danger. This incident underscores that threats can emerge even from within one's faith community (an insider threat driven by religious zealotry).
- **May 6, 2025 – Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania (Chapel Bombing):** A lone perpetrator carried out a bombing inside St. Teresa of Calcutta Catholic Church's Adoration Chapel on a Tuesday night. Around 9:00 pm, Kyle Kuczynski, 32, entered the small chapel, placed an explosive device on the altar, lit the fuse, and fled. Seconds later, the device (believed to be a quarter-stick of dynamite) detonated, badly damaging the altar, monstrance, ceiling and windows but, miraculously, causing no injuries – no congregants were inside at that moment. Police arrested Kuczynski shortly after and charged him with multiple felonies including arson and using explosives.

- **Indicators:** The chapel's pastor noted Kuczynski had behaved oddly on prior visits – he had “disturbed the nuns” during a previous prayer visit, prompting concern. Police also knew him as a local troublemaker with possible mental health issues. This suggests the importance of taking note when strangers repeatedly visit and cause disturbances at church facilities. Mental instability combined with anti-religious malice (the bishop called the act “heinous, hateful, and evil,” an affront to faith) likely drove this attack.
- **June 11, 2025 – Portland, Oregon (Arson at Sacred Heart Catholic Church):** In the early morning hours, Dominic Lee Wahl-Stephens, 45, set fire to the historic Sacred Heart Church in Portland’s Brooklyn neighborhood. Around 5:00 am, he used a blowtorch to ignite the wooden front doors of the church. Fire crews responded quickly and extinguished the flames before the fire could spread beyond the entryway. The suspect himself called 911 to turn himself in while firefighters were on scene, confessing to starting the blaze. Authorities determined Wahl-Stephens was experiencing a mental health crisis during the incident. Only the 130-year-old doors were charred (approx. \$3,000 in damage), and services were temporarily suspended for repairs.
  - **Indicators:** This case highlights mental illness as a factor – the suspect “was experiencing a mental health crisis” and even had the clarity to call police on himself. There’s no evidence of religious hatred in his motive; rather, it underscores that disturbed individuals may fixate on churches as targets during episodes of crisis. Quick response and existing fire detection likely prevented greater damage.
- **June 22, 2025 – Wayne, Michigan (Failed Active Shooter at CrossPointe Church):** One of the most dramatic near-misses occurred on a Sunday morning at CrossPointe Community Church in Wayne (a Detroit suburb). At about 11:05 am, as 150 congregants worshipped, 31-year-old Brian Anthony Browning arrived in the parking lot, wearing a tactical vest and armed with an AR-15 rifle (with >12 loaded magazines) and a handgun. Browning exited his vehicle and immediately opened fire on the church from outside, spraying bullets into the lobby and walls. In a swift response, a church member drove their truck into Browning, knocking him off balance, and two volunteer security team members engaged him with their own firearms. Browning was shot and killed at the scene by the armed parishioners, ending the attack within minutes. One security guard was hit in the leg by the gunman’s fire, and another staff member had minor injuries, but no congregants were harmed. Police later lauded the church’s preparedness: “the church had trained for such a situation,” which unquestionably saved lives.
  - **Profile:** Browning had no criminal history and no known extremist ties, but had been experiencing a mental health crisis in the lead-up to the incident. Notably, Browning’s mother was a recently baptized member of the church, and he had attended a few services with her in late 2024. Months before the attack, Browning met with the pastor to debate religious questions, at one point claiming he was a prophet who “heard from God.” The pastor had a second counseling session with him in February 2025 and felt Browning was genuinely seeking help.
  - **Indicators:** Browning’s case is complex – he wasn’t driven by hate for Christianity; instead, he had religious delusions and grievances. Witnesses on the day noted he was “behaving erratically” outside before opening fire. The combination of mental instability, apocalyptic self-identity (prophet complex), and access to weapons made him dangerous. Importantly, his prior debates with the pastor and statements about hearing divine voices were warning signs of potential volatility. This incident underscores the value of armed security and emergency plans in churches; without the quick action by congregants, a mass casualty event was imminent (police found hundreds of additional rounds and more guns in Browning’s vehicle and home).

- **July 13, 2025 – Lexington, Kentucky (Spree Shooting Spills into Church):** A violent crime spree in Lexington on this date tragically involved a church. The perpetrator, 47-year-old Guy House, began the day by shooting and wounding a Kentucky State Police trooper during a traffic stop, then fled. House – who was angry over a domestic dispute with the mother of his children – drove to Richmond Road Baptist Church, knowing she attended services there. Armed with a handgun, he entered the sanctuary around 11:35 am mid-service, and furiously asked for his ex-partner's whereabouts. When told she wasn't present, House shouted "someone is gonna have to die" and opened fire on the congregation. He shot and killed a 72-year-old worshipper (a female parishioner) inside the church and fatally shot a 34-year-old woman outside in the parking lot who had no connection to his ex (she was the church pastor's daughter). He also wounded three people, including the pastor (who survived) and the husband of the 72-year-old victim. Police arrived during the chaos and engaged and killed House outside the church, ending the rampage.
  - **Profile:** House had a lengthy criminal history and a known pattern of domestic violence. In fact, he was due in court the day after the shooting for a domestic violence hearing; he had recently been hit with a restraining order by an ex-girlfriend after stalking and threatening her. That same ex had broken up with him on July 4, 2025 – an event that seemingly triggered House's deadly binge (he stole her car and guns after the breakup).
  - **Motive:** This was fundamentally a domestic violence rampage – House targeted the church as a location only because he expected to find his estranged partner there. It was not ideologically driven, but it demonstrates that churches (often open-access, public venues) can be caught in the crossfire of personal disputes.
  - **Indicators:** House's "menacing" and threats toward his ex were well-documented (authorities knew he was volatile). On that morning, after shooting the trooper, House explicitly drove to a known gathering place of his family – a scenario churches should consider in security planning for domestic situations. Quick police response on-site was crucial in stopping him. The incident left the Lexington faith community shaken, prompting statements like "Today, violence invaded the Lord's house" from officials.
- **July 27, 2025 – Tulsa, Oklahoma (Shooting at Church Youth Event):** Violence struck an East Tulsa parish during a community outreach event on a Sunday night. At St. Thomas More Catholic Church, a 15-year-old attendee shot and killed another 15-year-old boy around 9:10 pm as a church-organized block party was winding down. The shooting stemmed from a personal altercation – the two teens had gotten into a fistfight moments earlier, and one youth pulled out a handgun and opened fire, hitting the victim in the head. The suspect fled but was arrested within hours, and is being charged as an adult for first-degree murder. No one else was injured.
  - **Motive:** This was not a targeted attack on the church or faith, but **rather a tragic outcome of a fight** between juveniles, where one happened to be armed. It highlights the broader gun violence problem even in ostensibly positive community gatherings.
  - **Indicators:** In this case, traditional pre-attack indicators (hate speech, threats) were absent – the key factor was an armed individual at a church event. The lesson for churches is to ensure adequate adult supervision and perhaps security presence even at informal events, and to be aware that conflicts can escalate quickly if weapons are present. This incident underscores the importance of youth outreach and conflict resolution, as well as potential screening for weapons at large events.

- **August 20, 2025 – Brooklyn, New York (Serial Arson Spree Including Church):** Around dawn, a string of fires were set in Brooklyn's Clinton Hill neighborhood, and among the approximately 20 properties torched was the historic Church of St. Luke and St. Matthew. The suspect, Bryan Oviedo, 32, was later arrested and charged with multiple counts of arson. The church's front doors and vestibule suffered fire damage before firefighters contained the blaze. Investigators allege Oviedo went on a one-man arson rampage targeting various buildings (mostly non-residential) for unknown reasons. There is no indication that the church was singled out for religious reasons – it may have been a crime of opportunity.
  - **Indicators:** Serial arsonists often have patterns of prior fires or attempts. In this case, community surveillance footage and rapid investigation led to the arrest. The key takeaway for churches is the importance of fire detection systems and neighborhood watch, as even non-ideological arson can pose a deadly threat if not quickly detected. (No injuries were reported in these fires, fortunately.)
- **August 27, 2025 – Minneapolis, Minnesota (Annunciation Catholic Church Mass Shooting):** A horrific mass shooting took place during morning Mass at the Church of the Annunciation, where a K-8 parish school was celebrating the first day of the school year. At approximately 8:45 am, Robin "Robert" Westman, 23, armed with a semi-automatic AR-15 style rifle, a shotgun, and a pistol, opened fire on the assembled students and staff. Westman, a former student of the parish school, murdered two children (an 8-year-old boy and a 10-year-old girl) and wounded 30 other people (mostly children). The carnage only ended when Westman turned the gun on himself, dying by suicide as police arrived. This attack stands as one of the worst church-related shootings in recent memory.
  - **Profile:** Westman's background was unusual and became a focus of national attention. Born male, Westman had at one point identified as transgender, even legally changing names in 2019, but had later expressed disillusionment with that identity and had not undergone any transition treatment. Importantly, investigators labeled the attack a hate-driven act of domestic terrorism – Westman specifically harbored anti-Catholic, antisemitic, and racist animus. In fact, in the months prior, Westman had prepared a trove of online content outlining warped motives: diaries and YouTube videos (set to auto-publish on the day of the shooting) were found, in which Westman voiced "extremely violent thoughts," suicidal ideation, and bigotry – including phrases like "kill Donald Trump," "6 million wasn't enough" (an antisemitic reference), and slurs against Catholics and Jews. The guns and high-capacity magazines used were scrawled with names of past mass shooters and hate slogans.
  - **Motive & Indicators:** Authorities concluded the act was anti-Catholic hate – possibly Westman blaming the Catholic school/church for personal grievances or simply choosing it as a symbolic target. Westman had no prior criminal record, which made detection harder, but the online signs were stark: time-scheduled videos and writings that essentially served as a manifesto. However, these were only discovered after the fact (they went live just as the attack began). This highlights a crucial gap: the need for peers, family, or online platforms to flag dangerous behavior before an attack. In the aftermath, Catholic communities nationwide reassessed security; for example, some dioceses initiated active shooter drills in churches and schools. This incident emphasizes the extreme end of the threat spectrum: a lone actor, deeply consumed by hate and nihilism, methodically planning an act of mass violence. The challenge for security is identifying such an individual ahead of time, given the lack of direct forewarning to the parish. One hopeful note: many of the injured survived, and all wounded were expected to recover, due to prompt EMS response and trauma care – a reminder that emergency response plans do save lives even when prevention fails.

- **Sept 17, 2025 – El Paso, Texas (Attempted Arson with Hate Message):** In El Paso, police arrested Marynka Marquez, 35, for an attempted hate-motivated arson at Beth El Bible Church. One evening, Marquez placed a large bag full of incendiary material against the church's outer wall and set it on fire, then fled. By providence, the church pastor was exiting at that moment, saw the flames, and managed to extinguish the fire before it spread. Investigators later found disturbing evidence in the bag: a paper plate scrawled with "hateful language" (details not released, but presumably anti-Christian or related to some grievance). Marquez was charged with arson against a place of worship.
  - **Indicators and Context:** The day after this incident, that church was scheduled to hold a vigil for Charlie Kirk, a prominent conservative Christian activist who had been assassinated a week prior. It's speculated that Marquez's attack might have been timed due to that event (perhaps disagreeing with Kirk's views), though her exact motive remains under investigation. Regardless, this was clearly a hate incident, with an attacker acting alone to intimidate or harm a faith community. As an indicator, an unknown person lingering or leaving objects at the church was the only hint – it was the pastor's vigilance that prevented disaster. The case illustrates that even small fires or vandalism attempts can be precursors or probes for larger attacks; thus, every such incident should be taken seriously and reported.
- **Sept 28, 2025 – Grand Blanc Township, Michigan (Mass Shooting & Arson at LDS Meetinghouse):** During Sunday morning services at a Latter-day Saints (Mormon) meetinghouse near Flint, MI, a coordinated attack was launched by a single perpetrator. At about 10:30 am, Thomas Jacob Sanford, 40, an ex-Marine, rammed his pickup truck through the front doors of the church, crashing into the lobby where hundreds of congregants were gathered. Sanford emerged from the wreckage with an AR-15 style rifle and opened fire indiscriminately on the crowd, and then set fires inside the building using gasoline. In the ensuing horror, four church members were killed (two died from gunfire on scene, and two more bodies were found in the burned structure) and eight were injured. The packed congregation's scramble to escape was hampered by flames and smoke. Police arrived within minutes; Sanford engaged in a gunfight with responding officers in the parking lot and was shot dead about 8 minutes after the attack began. The church building was completely consumed by fire ("a total loss").
  - **Motive:** Initial investigations quickly pointed to religious hatred as Sanford's driving motive. The FBI characterized it as a "targeted act of violence" against the LDS community. Sanford's background and statements reinforce this: acquaintances reported that he had been vocal about hating Mormons, even calling them "the antichrist" shortly before the attack. Federal officials announced the evidence indicates bias against the Mormon faith. (It's worth noting Sanford had a criminal record including burglary and DUI, but was not on any terrorism watchlist.) This attack, coming just one month after the Minneapolis church shooting, heightened concerns of copycat or escalation nationwide.
  - **Indicators:** Sanford did exhibit warning signs: open hatred in conversations, a recent history of unstable behavior (his own family noted he'd become unhinged and isolated), and prior arrests. However, no one around him apparently anticipated he would commit mass murder. The tactics he used – vehicle ramming to breach security, combined with firearms and arson – show a high level of planning and a desire to maximize casualties. Churches should take note of such combined-arms approaches when devising emergency plans (e.g., vehicle barriers at entrances, rapid evacuation routes for fire, etc.).

- **Other 2025 Incidents:** In addition to the above, there have been numerous lower-profile attacks – for example, on Sept 29, 2025 in Austell, Georgia, a 25-year-old woman set fire to a church she had briefly attended, apparently as revenge for a conflict with church leadership (she was arrested and charged with arson). And in October 2025 in rural North Carolina, two Baptist churches were set ablaze on the same night (likely by the same culprit) in what authorities labeled intentional arson; fortunately, alert neighbors extinguished the fires before major damage occurred. These cases show that not all attacks make national headlines, but even minor incidents can be harbingers of larger hate trends or inspire fear in local faith communities.

## Key Attack Patterns and Pre-Attack Indicators

Analyzing the above incidents reveals **common patterns and warning indicators** that churches should be aware of. While not every attacker exhibits all of these, the presence of one or more should raise concern and possibly trigger intervention or law enforcement notification:

- **Expressions of Hate, Extremism, or Grievance Ideology:** Many perpetrators voiced hate toward a religion or church before their attack. Examples include the Michigan LDS shooter's anti-Mormon rhetoric a week prior (calling church members "antichrist"), the Kansas priest's killer writing letters against modern Catholicism, and the Minneapolis shooter's online posts with anti-Catholic, antisemitic slurs. Even Browning (Wayne, MI) had religious delusions/concerns – telling his pastor he was a "prophet" and debating scripture intensely. Any explicit threats or fervent hateful statements about a faith group or church – whether made on social media, in letters, or verbally – must be treated seriously as potential precursors to violence.
- **History of Violence or Criminality:** Many attackers had previous violent incidents or criminal red flags:
  - The Dallas attempted shooter (Ragsdale) had a prior homicide arrest and known drug abuse.
  - The California Adventist shooter (Litton) had a long rap sheet of crimes and had even stolen firearms and cars in the months before.
  - The Kentucky church shooter (House) had a documented domestic violence history and restraining orders.
  - The El Paso arsonist (Marquez) had previous run-ins with that church's leaders.
  - The Portland arsonist (Wahl-Stephens) had no notable criminal record but was in a clear mental health crisis (he effectively self-reported).
  - Note that absence of a record does not equal safety – e.g., Westman (Minneapolis) and Browning (Wayne) had no prior arrests. But in many cases, a pattern of escalating behavior (violence, threats, or unlawful acts) was present. Churches should maintain awareness of congregants or locals with violent tendencies, especially if they've previously threatened the church or others.
- **Mental Health Struggles and Social Isolation:** A significant number of attackers were reported to have mental instability or emotional crises:
  - Family or police confirmed mental health issues in Browning, Litton, and Kuczynski.
  - The Lakewood Church shooter (Feb 2024 in Houston – just outside our timeframe, but relevant) was a woman with a long record of mental illness and erratic behavior, which culminated in her shooting inside the megachurch.
  - Several showed signs of paranoia or delusional beliefs (e.g., Browning's prophet claims, Hermesch's Vatican conspiracy theories, Westman's extremist manifestos).
  - Importantly, mental illness alone is not a predictor of violence – but when coupled with the factors above (like hatred or access to weapons), it greatly elevates risk. Congregants who exhibit sudden personality changes, talk of divine missions to act violently, or show severe paranoia about the church

or world events should be gently encouraged to seek help, and possibly be reported if they pose a danger.

- **Online Footprint of Extremism or Violence:** In the digital age, many attackers telegraphed their intentions or obsessions online:
  - Westman scheduled YouTube videos unveiling his hateful ideology.
  - Rupnow was active in extremist chats and followed other shooters on social media.
  - The Annunciation shooter (Westman) even referenced and idolized prior attackers (writing their names on his guns) – a clear sign of copycat syndrome. Law enforcement noted a concerning trend of interconnected plots: e.g., Rupnow had communicated with an individual plotting church shootings in another state, and her name showing up on Westman's weapon suggests a possible chain of inspiration.
  - The Charlie Kirk assassin (though not an attack on a church, it occurred in Sept 2025 at a university) was radicalized online and specifically targeted a Christian conservative figure, reflecting how internet echo chambers can incubate violent intent.
    - **Indicators:** Churches should encourage members to speak up if they see alarming posts by acquaintances – such as someone posting “I’m going to make them pay” or sharing memes glorifying church attacks. Often, after an attack, it comes out that the perpetrator posted warning signs that went unreported. Proactive reporting can enable authorities to intervene (e.g., the Florida man who chatted with Rupnow was caught before he could act).
- **Conflict or Grievance with the Church Community:** Some attacks were precipitated by a personal grievance against a specific church or person:
  - The Lexington shooter targeted his ex’s church (personal/domestic grievance).
  - The Georgia arsonist had clashed with church leadership during her brief time as a member.
  - The Wayne, MI shooter had debated and perhaps been unsatisfied with answers from his pastor.
  - The Oklahoma priest’s killer was angry at the Church’s direction as a whole (a macro-level grievance).
  - Even a case like the Tulsa shooting, while not targeting the church *per se*, reminds us that interpersonal conflicts can erupt on church premises.
    - **Indicators:** Watch for individuals who have become angry at the church – e.g., someone expelled from a church group, denied a role, or feuding with clergy. Disgruntled former employees, ex-congregants, or those who publicly “rage quit” over theological or personal issues deserve attention. Sometimes a simple pastoral follow-up can defuse hurt feelings, but in other cases, trespass orders or security alerts may be warranted if threats were made. Churches should discreetly keep track of any explicit threats received via letters, email, or phone, even if the sender’s grievance seems irrational.
- **Surveillance and Dry Runs:** Prior to an attack, perpetrators may case the target or conduct “dry runs.” We saw this with:
  - Litton (CA) who set up a fake appointment – essentially a planned ruse to test access control.
  - Kuczynski (PA) who visited the chapel and made nuns uncomfortable days before – potentially reconnaissance or a behavioral red flag.
  - Marquez (TX) possibly choosing a time when the pastor was leaving (indicating she watched patterns).
  - Ragsdale (TX) attended Mass, then went to get his rifle, indicating he had thought through locking exits (closing gates) – though in this case the parishioners outsmarted him by locking doors.
    - **Indicators:** Church staff and security teams should be alert to unfamiliar individuals loitering, asking unusual questions about schedules or security, or taking photos of entrances. A benign example could be a new visitor with a large bag who doesn’t actually stay for service (like

Marquez leaving a bag). Trust your instincts – if something seems off, politely engage the person (which can deter ill intent) and report the incident internally. Many attackers do at least one “walk-through” of the target site ahead of time; those are opportunities to spot and stop them.

- **Access to Weapons and Tactical Gear:** In many cases, attackers amassed arsenals or tactical supplies beforehand:
  - Browning had multiple guns, 500+ rounds, tactical vest.
  - Westman legally bought multiple guns “recently” before the attack.
  - Hermesch presumably obtained a handgun and showed up armed despite being older.
  - House stole guns from his ex (who likely owned them legally) and had them in the car.
  - When someone known to the church is suddenly acquiring weapons or tactical gear, it may be a clue – though in most situations this knowledge isn’t available to church leaders. Still, congregants’ family members sometimes alert pastors when concerned about someone’s gun purchases or radicalization. It’s a delicate area, but fostering a climate where congregants feel they can share concerns about a loved one’s alarming behavior is part of holistic prevention.

## Assessing the Threat to Ohio Churches

No deadly attacks have occurred in Ohio churches in the period reviewed, but that should not breed complacency. Ohio has seen church vandalism and threats in recent years (and neighboring states have suffered the incidents above). The ideological currents driving many of these attacks – anti-Christian hate from both extremes of the spectrum, the diffusion of hate online, domestic turmoil – know no state boundaries. Small-town and rural churches (like those in Clinton County) might feel “safe,” but note that several attacks happened in relatively small communities (Seneca, KS; Oroville, CA; Casar, NC) not just big cities.

Clinton County is not immune to the factors that have led to these incidents: we have veterans struggling with PTSD (like Sanford in MI), individuals with mental health and drug issues (like several attackers), people with strong political or religious grievances, et cetera. Local extremist activity (such as white supremacist or anti-government sentiments) can also intersect with anti-church violence – for instance, some white supremacist propaganda portrays mainstream churches as traitorous or Zionist, which can incite attacks. Keeping an eye on hate group activity in Ohio (tracked by organizations like the ADL and FBI) is advisable.

One noteworthy trend is that Catholic churches have been frequent targets in 2025 (four of the nine major violent incidents listed by one analysis were at Catholic institutions). This may be due to high visibility (Catholic parishes often have schools, daily masses, etc.) as well as being caught in cultural and political crossfires (abortion, LGBTQ, etc., where extremists on both sides might lash out). Protestant churches are not exempt – e.g., the Baptist church shooting in Kentucky, the Bible church arson in Texas, and threats to evangelical churches around controversial speakers. LDS (Mormon) and other Christian denominations are also targets, as seen. Thus, all Christian congregations in our area should consider themselves as potential (if unlikely) targets and plan accordingly.

## Recommendations and Best Practices for Churches

To conclude this briefing, we outline key steps and best practices (drawn from law enforcement and security experts’ advice) to mitigate the threat of active aggressors:

- **Develop and Drill an Emergency Action Plan:** Every church should have a written plan for active shooter and other emergencies (fire, medical, weather, etc.). This includes evacuation routes, lockdown procedures, and communication methods. Train staff and volunteers on it and conduct periodic drills (much like schools do). In Minneapolis, the Catholic school's prior safety training helped teachers lock down classrooms, which likely reduced casualties in the shooting. In the Michigan CrossPointe case, regular security training directly enabled parishioners to react effectively. Coordinate with local law enforcement – many will conduct church safety workshops or walk-throughs.
- **Establish a Security Ministry or Team:** A dedicated team (which can include armed security guards or responsibly armed congregants, if appropriate and legal) is crucial. They act as lookouts for suspicious behavior and can respond in those critical first minutes. The Wayne, MI church's security team intervention saved dozens of lives. Not every church member should carry weapons, but having a select few trained (and clearly identified to congregants) can provide fast response. Unarmed strategies like greeters trained to calmly defuse situations and spot trouble are also valuable – the goal is a layered security posture without sacrificing the welcoming atmosphere.
- **Control Access During Services:** Most attackers walked right in through main doors. Consider locking secondary doors once services start (latecomers can use a monitored main entrance). For evening events or lesser-attended meetings, use a single-entry point. In Dallas, simply locking the church doors as soon as trouble was recognized stopped the gunman cold. For larger churches, greeters/ushers can double as door security, keeping an eye out for anyone armed or carrying unusual bags. Some churches have installed cameras and even buzz-in systems for during worship – these can delay or deter an attacker.
- **Harden the Building & Grounds:** Simple physical improvements can help:
  - **Bright lighting and CCTV cameras** around the property to catch vandals or arsonists in the act (and discourage them). The NC churches had quick citizen response because people saw flames – good lighting and perhaps motion sensors could have caught the arsonist earlier.
  - **Trimmed landscaping and perimeter barriers** to remove hiding spots and restrict vehicle access. Bollards or planters in front of main entrances can stop a truck ramming attack like in Michigan.
  - **Keep fire extinguishers** readily accessible. The El Paso pastor literally saved his church by grabbing an extinguisher. Train staff on how to use them.
  - **Lock up ladders, fuel, and other tools** that an arsonist or bomber could use. The PA bomber lit the device on the altar – if he had needed to break in or couldn't find a way to ignite it easily, it might have reduced damage.
  - **Monitor and Share Concerning Behavior:** Create a culture where if a member hears another say something violent like "I feel like burning this place down" (even joked), they report it to leadership. Establish a confidential reporting line or designate a trusted elder for this. Keep a record of any threats received (letters, social media comments, strange phone calls) and share them with police. Often, perpetrators telegraph intent – e.g., Sanford's anti-LDS rants or Hermesch's letters – but those signals need to reach those who can act. In Clinton County, liaise with the local police or sheriff on any issue; they would rather investigate a tip that comes to nothing than miss a chance to prevent violence.
- **Strengthen Community Outreach and Inclusion:** Interestingly, some attackers were former members or had sought help from churches (Browning, Hermesch, etc.). Emphasizing ministries for those struggling (mental health support groups, addiction counseling, conflict resolution workshops) might reduce the likelihood someone feels attacking is the answer. For instance, Browning met with his pastor and seemed to seek help – perhaps more sustained intervention could have diverted him. While we cannot solve every troubled soul's issues, a church

that is proactive in caring for at-risk individuals might catch warning signs earlier and possibly save both that person and others from harm.

- **👉 Coordinate with Law Enforcement** : Inform local law enforcement of service times and special events (so they can patrol or be nearby). Invite them for walkthroughs to point out security weaknesses. After major national incidents, consider asking for an extra patrol check. Many police departments have faith liaison officers. Also, be aware of the *See Something, Say Something* program – if suspicious activity is beyond your church (e.g., someone surveilling multiple churches), report it so patterns can be detected.
- **Plan for Medical Emergencies:** In mass violence events, rapid medical aid saves lives. Train some staff in basic trauma care (tourniquet application, etc.). Have well-stocked first aid kits (including bleed control kits) in the sanctuary. In Kentucky, bystanders used a belt as a tourniquet on the wounded trooper – quick thinking that helped him survive. Empower your congregation: a 5-minute “Stop the Bleed” briefing could make a huge difference in a shooting or bombing scenario before EMTs arrive.
- **Stay Informed and Vigilant:** Continue to monitor reputable intelligence sources for any threats to churches in Ohio or the Midwest. The Department of Homeland Security and FBI periodically issue bulletins if there are credible threats (for example, around the anniversary of a past attack or during contentious public events). Networking with other local churches to share information about suspicious persons or incidents can create an early warning system.

Finally, balance vigilance with faith. Encourage your members to be aware, not afraid. The goal of these violent actors is to instill terror and division. By preparing diligently and responding with unity and resilience, churches can reduce the risk and stand as beacons of hope even in troubled times. As President Trump noted after the Michigan LDS attack, “This appears to be yet another targeted attack on Christians... This epidemic of violence must end.” While we pray for peace, we must also “watch and pray” – being watchful stewards of our flocks’ safety. Adopting best practices from this briefing will help ensure that our local churches remain safe havens for worship and community, as they are meant to be.

**Sources:** Recent news reports and law enforcement releases have informed this briefing’s details and recommendations. Key references include Reuters, Associated Press, FBI and DOJ press releases, local news outlets, and analyses by security organizations (see inline citations). All incidents described are drawn from documented cases in Nov 2024–Nov 2025. Please refer to the cited sources for further reading or verification of specific events and facts. Stay safe and God bless.

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