

Police: Texas church attack stemmed from domestic situation

By JIM VERTUNO
Associated Press

SUTHERLAND SPRINGS, Texas — The gunman who opened fire in a small Texas church, killing 26 people during Sunday services, had sent threatening text messages to his mother-in-law before the attack, which appeared to stem from a domestic situation, authorities said today.

Investigators have concluded that the massacre was not racially or religiously motivated, Texas Department of Public Safety Regional Director Freeman Martin said.

Based on evidence at the scene, they believe that Devin Patrick Kelley died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound after he crashed his car. He had been chased by armed bystanders.

The 26-year-old shooter also used his cellphone to tell his father that he had been shot and did not think he would survive, authorities said.



Devin Patrick Kelley

Once the shooting started at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, there was probably “no way” for congregants to escape, Wilson County Sheriff Joe D. Tackitt Jr. said.

The gunman, dressed in black tactical gear, fired an assault rifle as he walked down the center aisle during worship services. He turned around and continued shooting on his way out of the building, Tackitt said.

The gunman also carried a handgun, but authorities he did not know if it was fired. The attack claimed multiple members of some families and tore apart a close-knit town of 400 people.

“It’s unbelievable to see children, men and women, laying there. Defenseless people,” Tackitt said.

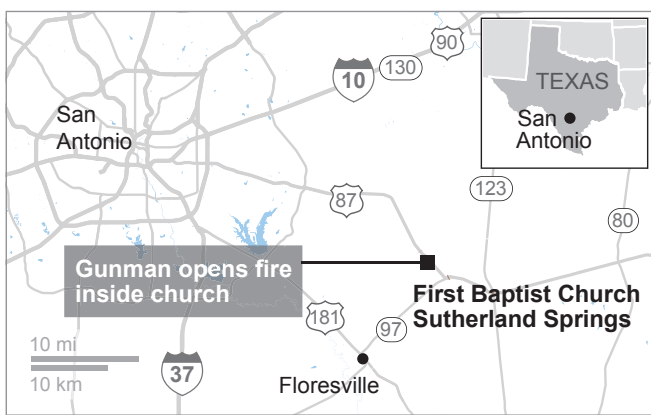
The dead ranged in age from 5 to 72 years old. About 20 other people were wounded.

Authorities said Kelley lived in New Braunfels, about 35 miles north of the Sutherland Springs church.

A U.S. official told The Associated Press that Kelley did not appear to be linked to organized terrorist groups. The



Investigators work at the scene of a deadly shooting at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, Sunday. A man opened fire inside of the church in the small South Texas community on Sunday, killing more than 20 people.



SOURCE: Maps4News/HERE

official spoke on the condition of anonymity because the person wasn’t authorized to discuss the investigation.

Investigators were looking at social media posts Kelley made in the days before the attack, including one that appeared to show an AR-15 semi-automatic weapon.

Kelley received a bad conduct discharge from the Air Force for assaulting his spouse and child and was sentenced to 12 months of confinement after a 2012 court-martial. Kelley served in Logistics Readiness at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico from 2010 until his 2014 discharge, Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said.

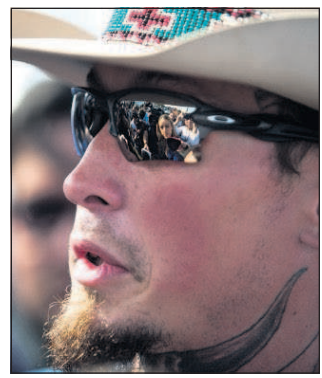
The attacker pulled into a gas station across from the church, about 30 miles (48.28

kilometers) southeast of San Antonio, around 11:20 a.m. Sunday. He crossed the street and started firing the rifle at the church, then continued firing after entering the white wood-frame building, said Freeman Martin, a regional director of the Texas Department of Safety.

As he left, the shooter was confronted by an armed resident who “grabbed his rifle and engaged that suspect,” Martin said. A short time later, the suspect was found dead in his vehicle at the county line.

Twenty-three of the dead were found in the church, two were found outside and one died after being taken to a hospital, Martin said.

The man who confronted Kelley had help from another local resident, Johnnie Lan-



Nick Wagner/Austin American-Statesman via AP

Johnnie Langendorff speaks to reporters about the mass shooting at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas today. Langendorff says he and another man chased down the gunman after he fled the church where he killed more than two dozen people.

Sunday’s service, told the AP that his cousin, who was eight months’ pregnant, and her in-laws were among those killed. He later told the Houston Chronicle that three of his cousin’s children also were slain.

President Donald Trump, who was in Japan, called the shooting an “act of evil,” later calling the gunman “a very deranged individual.”

On Sunday evening, two sheriff’s vans were parked outside the gate of a cattle fence surrounding the address listed for Kelley on the rural outskirts of New Braunfels, north of San Antonio.

Ryan Albers, 16, who lives across the road, said he heard intensifying gunfire coming from that direction in recent days.

“It was definitely not just a shotgun or someone hunting,” Albers said.

The church has posted videos of its Sunday services on a YouTube channel, raising the possibility that the shooting was captured on video.

In a video of its Oct. 8 service, a congregant who spoke and read Scripture pointed to the Oct. 1 Las Vegas shooting a week earlier as evidence of the “wicked nature” of man. That shooting left 58 dead and more than 500 injured.

Gov. Greg Abbott called Sunday’s attack the worst mass shooting in Texas history. It came on the eighth anniversary of a shooting at Fort Hood, where 13 people were killed and 31 others wounded by a former Army major.



Nick Wagner/Austin American-Statesman via AP

Mona Rodriguez holds her 12-year-old son, J Anthony Hernandez, during a candlelight vigil held for the victims of a fatal shooting at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Sunday in Sutherland Springs, Texas.

gendorff, who told KSAT-TV that he was driving past the church as the shooting happened. He didn’t identify the armed resident but said the man exchanged gunfire with the gunman, then asked to get in Langendorff’s truck and the pair followed as the gunman drove away.

Langendorff said the gunman eventually lost control of his vehicle and crashed. He said the other man walked up to the vehicle with his gun drawn and the suspect did not move. He stayed there for at least five minutes, until police arrived.

“I was strictly just acting on what’s the right thing to do,” Langendorff said.

Among those killed was the church pastor’s 14-year-old daughter, Annabelle Pomeroy. Pastor Frank Pomeroy and his wife, Sherri, were both out of town when the attack occurred, Sherri Pomeroy wrote in a text message.

“We lost our 14-year-old daughter today and many friends,” she wrote. “Neither of us has made it back into town yet to personally see the devastation.”

Church member Nick Uhlig, 34, who was not at

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a strong passion for working with dogs who were reactive.”

During her time at Petco, the store went from near invisibility within the company to No. 10 in the country for sales in dog training.

Canine body language

But Foss was most drawn to working with dogs Petco ruled had to be turned away.

“I’m really good at reading canine body language,” Foss said. “I was bitten twice as a child and my response was not to be afraid of dogs, but to learn everything I could about their body language.”

She also studied canine physiology and canine emotional response.

Her training method relies on conditioned emotional response, the Tellington Touch Training, praise, petting, treats, and force-free, positive interaction.

“I do corrections,” Foss said. “But not painful corrections.”

For a time, she was a mobile dog trainer, going to people’s homes. In 2016 she was offered the opportunity to buy Amicadia, founded in 2008 by Erica Curtis.

“I took over the business from Pam Small, who bought it in 2013,” Foss said. “It had no physical location and no group classes; all work had to be done outdoors.”

In search of a space that would accommodate group classes and be large enough to have an agility and obstacle course, Foss lucked out when a client offered her a lease in one



Eve Marx/For The Daily Astorian

Dogs get a workout using agility equipment.

of his buildings, she said.

Team building

Foss offers clients a menu of trainings and activities. There’s individual and group classes for behavior modification, starting with basic manners and recall, as well as dog-to-dog and dog-to-human interaction, and training to address canine frustration, overexcitement, and mild-to-moderate aggression. Social protocols, she said, can be taught to dogs of any age.

Then there is professional-level training.

“I offer limited service dog training. I do public access,” Foss said.

She aims to be a certified therapy dog evaluator and already helps the Search and Rescue team, not as a trainer, but at their trail practices.

“I’m the person who gets lost they have to find,” she laughed.

She also works with dogs on rally, agility training, and tracking, as well as CGC, the

acronym for Canine Good Citizenship.

“I help dogs and their owners become a team,” Foss said.

Training does more than give the dog a physical workout, she said.

“It’s a mental workout, too, because the dog has to think. Mental exercise is more tiring than physical exercise.”

Everyone agrees a tired dog is a happy dog and an easy dog to live with.

“I’m also working towards building a true community space,” Foss said. “A place where people can come with their dogs and play.”

Amicadia Dog Training is the first facility on the North Coast to offer indoor agility to the public, as well AKC Trick Dog, and the CGCA and CGCU certifications.

For more information, go to Amicadia Dog Training on Facebook or call 503-468-2559. It’s located at 2367 S. Roosevelt, right between Ruby’s and Motel 6.

PERS: ‘Some options may overlap or be mutually exclusive to implement’

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leaders and people with public sector experience, to find ways to reduce the unfunded liability by at least \$5 billion over the next five years.

Rather than making recommendations of specific actions, the task force offered options it judged to be reasonable and likely to deliver “a material reduction” in the liability.

The report looks at a number of ways that the state could use available funding and assets to reduce the liability. They include:

- Increasing state alcohol revenue by raising taxes, getting better prices from suppliers and establishing a demand-based retail pricing structure. Changes could net more than \$453 million.

- Dedicating one-time financial windfalls to PERS liability. Those windfalls would include proceeds for increased debt collection, legal settlements, estate and capital gains tax revenue in excess of projections, and monies collected on foreclosures in excess of taxes owed. These windfalls could be worth \$1.2 billion.

- Dedicating proceeds from the sale of unclaimed property to PERS for funding of \$200 million.

- Make use of surplus capital held by SAIF Corporation, the state’s tax-exempt workers comp insurance company. That could yield more than \$500 million.

- Reducing the cash and short-term investments held by state-controlled entities.

The task force estimates this would yield between \$750 million and \$1.5 billion.

- Privatizing some or all of Oregon’s eight public universities by seeking nonprofit backing to buy the institutions. The task force estimates privatization could yield between \$250 million and \$1.5 billion.

- Selling state property, such as the Portland State Office Building and other facilities. The task force says the state could raise more than \$128 million.

- Increasing water right fees, raising the cap on firefighting costs paid by private land owners and dedicating proceeds of timber harvest conducted by the state on federal lands to offset the PERS liability could raise up to \$330 million.

If all of those measures were implemented, between \$4.2 billion and \$6.4 billion could be saved, the task force estimated.

The task force also recommended setting up a state incentive program that would match 25 percent of the money paid by non-state public employers to pay down their liability. According to the report, the incentive program could reduce the unfunded liability by an additional \$2 billion to \$4 billion.

The funding estimates come with a caveat: The dollar amounts were provided by agencies affected by the possible changes, and the task force didn’t try to independently confirm them.

Neither, in most cases,

did the task force include the costs of putting the changes into place or “collateral financial impacts on public or private entities.”

“Some options may overlap or be mutually exclusive to implement,” the task force wrote in Nov. 1 letter to Brown.

Jim Green, executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association, called the report a good initial step. He emphasized in a prepared statement that the state needed a “broad approach” to paying down the PERS unfunded liability.

Green said one of the options provided by the task force — sweeping money left over at the end of the school year to pay down PERS debt — would pose a difficulty for schools.

Meanwhile, the head of the Oregon Education Association, the state’s largest teachers’ union, praised the findings.

“We applaud the governor and the task force for working to find innovative ways to reduce costs to employers without cutting the retirement benefits that are so essential for recruitment and retention of teachers, first responders, nurses, and other public employees,” said union President John Larson.

Brown’s likely GOP opponent, Republican State Rep. Knute Buehler of Bend, dismissed the report as “the governor’s pawn shop politics” in a news release through his campaign, arguing “the only solution is a change in leadership.”