LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

EXPLORING THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL

FOUNDATIONS OF SECURITY DECISIONS

BY CHURCH LEADERS

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

John M. Tuohy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological multi-case study explored the practical, ethical, theological, and biblical foundations of decisions regarding an active security strategy at church gatherings by a cross-section of mainline and nondenominational churches. For the purposes of this study, an active security strategy was defined as a formal plan for site security based on the use of security personnel. This definition included any combination of volunteer personnel, contracted private security personnel, or sworn police officers acting in an official or off-duty capacity while providing security for the gathered congregation. The theory of shepherd leadership, as defined by Laniak (2006), and which related via the shepherd's responsibility to feed and protect his sheep (p. 26), guided the research. This study sought to illuminate the thought processes of church leaders who had decided either for or against the use of security personnel as well as to advance more profound research into the biblical responsibilities of shepherd-pastors as they apply to the physical protection of the congregation. Data was collected via electronically transcribed online interviews and electronically delivered questionnaires. The methodology for the study included interviews and questionnaires, which were recorded for analysis, coding, thematic development, and result description.

Keywords: shepherd, shepherd leadership, deadly force, image of God, pastoral responsibility, self-defense, security

Dedication

This study is dedicated to those who died in attacks at houses of worship and Christian schools in the United States, most especially at Sutherland Springs, Texas (2017), and Nashville, Tennessee (2023). Their lives have had an impact on the direction of my own.

This research is also dedicated to those who, because of their strength of character, hearts to shepherd, and desire to serve the Kingdom, willingly stand in the gap between approaching evil and their congregations. To my brothers and sisters in church security roles of any type: thank you.

Lastly, and most importantly, this work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, who loved me, saved me, and gave His life for me.

Acknowledgments

This is a moment to think back over the hours, miles, and memories accumulated during this study and thank my Lord and Savior for covering every one of them with me.

My foremost thanks go to my favorite human and co-conspirator, my beloved wife. Her patience, sacrifice, endless prayer, wise counsel, and unceasing encouragement have carried me through. She is my joy and inspiration.

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I owe Kris Maloney of Sheepdog Academy many thanks as, without his extensive list of pastors and friends within the church security family along with his willingness to share, this research may have swiftly foundered for lack of participation.

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Lastly, thank you to my fellow students in the Christian Leadership program at Liberty University and my colleagues at Montana Youth ChalleNGe Academy who supported me with prayer, encouragement, and suggestions.

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List of Abbreviations

English Standard Version Bible (ESV)

Faith-Based Security Network (FBSN)

Liberty University (LU)

Ancient Near East (ANE)

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

House of Worship (HoW)

Old Testament (OT)

New Testament (NT)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 2019, more than 2183 deadly force incidents took place in churches within the United States; these violent attacks caused 734 deaths and resulted in an additional 1149 persons injured (Faith Based Security Network, 2023). Memorable cases make up only a small number of these instances. The videotaped attacks at West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, Texas, and at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas, made national news and were viewed countless times. However, many lesser known events occur each month and make up the majority of reported cases (FBI, 2018; FBSN, 2023; Spriester & Medina, 2017).

The rapid yearly increase in the frequency of violent attacks upon people in houses of worship (HoW) gives cause for additional concern (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018). Each month that passes adds several more to the over 2000 DFIs, or *deadly force incidents*, in the previously defined period. Despite the rising number of violent attacks against American houses of worship, academic study of the issues surrounding the phenomena has not been extensive. High-profile incidents such as the attacks on New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado (2007), Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina (2015), Burnett Chapel Church of Christ in Antioch, Tennessee (2017), First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas (2017), West Freeway Church of Christ, White Settlement, Texas (2019) as well as the shooting disrupted by the courageous parishioners of Geneva Presbyterian Church, Laguna Springs, California (2022) have received some media coverage. Yet, a commensurate body of research has not appeared.

Some limited study and discussion of the issues surrounding the Christian view of war, and to a lesser extent, personal self-defense or defense of others, can be found. With that caveat acknowledged, however, no research into the biblical and theological thought processes of church leadership about the employment of security personnel during congregational gatherings is currently available, if it exists.

Background to the Problem

To create safe gathering places for congregations, many church leaders are considering ways to proactively meet potential threats of attack. Christian organizations throughout the nation currently weigh the feasibility, legality, permissibility, theology, and ethics of utilizing security personnel when the congregation gathers. In a report from Lifeway Research, Earles (2020) notes that, of 1000 pastors surveyed in the fall of 2019, 62% had some plan for an active shooter event, with 45% having armed church volunteers on site, and an additional 23% of surveyed churches employing armed private security during congregational gatherings.

Employing security personnel during church meetings stands as both a pressing and delicate area of discussion. With a marked increase in violent, armed attacks against Christian institutions in recent years, the issue demands urgency (FBSN, 2023). Moreover, the Christian faith holds that man was created in God's image (the *imago Dei*). Therefore, force, whether used to deter violent attack or for aggression, inseparably contains the ability to destroy or mar the image of God in one's fellow human being. As such, the issue requires sensitivity and care.

Considering the continued increase in the number of deadly force incidents in houses of worship, surprisingly little research in this arena exists (FBSN, 2023). The practical, ethical, and theological thought processes church leadership utilize when making decisions about the use of security personnel have not been subject to academic study. Conversely, a wealth of inexpert

discussion on an individual's right to assert force in defense of self or others exists on websites, discussion board forums, blogs, and in magazines and books (Fairchild, 2018; Fawbush, 2016; Gabbert, 2021; Lundberg, 2021; Piper, 2015; Raymond, 2016). Unfortunately, much of the information found in these informal formats suggests a singular interpretation, usually without offering cogent arguments outside each perspective.

Decker (2014), one of a limited number of academic writers to address the issue of personal self-defense, describes most of the writing available in the field as "sensational, belligerent, and poorly informed" (p. 25), a distinction inspiring little confidence. This study began with the intent to partially ameliorate the lack of sensible, practical, and, most importantly, theologically sound discussion of the use of force for self-defense and defense of others, with specific focus on church security. Respondent input from pastors who have made decisions regarding an active role in defense of their flocks combined with rigorous academic and theological research to ensure this study adds to the minimal body of literature forming the discussion on this topic.

Theological Background

From a theological perspective, the issue of active security strategies in churches requires great delicacy. In any situation in which one employs force, either defensively or offensively, violence may be done to a fellow human being. As all humanity bears the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1), force directed against another person intrinsically holds the probability of marring or destroying that image, a prospect that must be approached with great seriousness, considerable care, and significant forethought.

Concerning force directed against another human being bearing the *imago Dei*, an equally pressing or even weightier theological issue may be at stake. Does the shepherd motif of

Scripture enjoin the church's pastor and leaders to provide for their congregation's physical safety in addition to their feeding with the spiritual food of the Word? Can a biblical argument be made for the responsibility of shepherds to provide physical protection for those in their charge?

Surveying historical Christian thought on the matter and exploring the responsibilities of the shepherd outlined in Scripture, this researcher sought to discover if the pastor-shepherd holds dual obligations. The duty to feed the flock is widely accepted (Gunter, 2016; Resane, 2014); this research strove to determine if the shepherd bears equal responsibility for the physical safety of his gathered congregation.

Historical Background

Violent attacks on the defenseless are neither new nor limited to religious gatherings. Within the last 3 decades, active shooters have targeted schools (Columbine, Colorado, 1999; Sandy Hook, New Jersey, 2012; Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Florida, 2018; Uvalde, Texas, 2022; Nashville, Tennessee, 2023), universities (Virginia Tech, Virginia, 2007; Oikos University, California, 2012; Umpqua Community College, Oregon, 2015), concerts (Alrosa Villa, Columbus, Ohio 2004; Las Vegas, Nevada, 2017), evening leisure venues (Aurora, Colorado, 2012; Orlando, Florida, 2016), and workspaces (Washington D.C., 2013; San Bernardino, California, 2015; Buffalo, New York, 2022). Further, mass shootings at religious gatherings have not been confined to Christian houses of worship (Tree of Life Synagogue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2018; Sikh temple, Oak Creek, Wisconsin, 2012).

Notably, the preceding list excludes the 2019 Christchurch, New Zealand mosque attack and the 2017 mass shooting at the Islamic Cultural Center of Quebec City, Canada. These and other attacks on foreign institutions were omitted due to this study's focus on Christian churches in the United States. Observe, however, that violent attacks on religious gatherings have not been

limited solely to those of the Christian faith. The Christchurch, New Zealand mosque attack (2019), filmed and broadcast by the perpetrator as it took place, caused the largest loss of life in any modern assault on a religious institution. Fifty-one worshipers were killed, and another 40 were wounded as they gathered for Friday prayers.

Regrettably, evidence points toward increasing levels of violence targeting faith institutions (FBSN, 2023). In 1999, when Carl Chinn began collecting data and founded the group of like-minded pastors and church security leaders that would eventually become the Faith Based Security Network (FBSN), only 10 attacks at churches in the United States could be verified. In those attacks, 22 lives were lost. In 2019, the last year for which complete data is available, 74 people were killed in 216 incidents. The preceding year saw 88 deaths, while in 2017—the largest number of deaths recorded in a single year and numerically influenced by Sutherland Springs, where 26 were killed in a single attack—118 deaths occurred in faith-based houses of worship as a result of violence. Based on the evidence, this topic deserves substantial attention.

Sociological Background

The issue of defensive and offensive national and military actions has been discussed frequently throughout history and was defined by the Christian church as early as the 5th century in the philosophy of "Just War." Augustine (5th century A.D.) conceived, recorded, and popularized the theory, while Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1485) discussed and refined the concept 10 centuries later, introducing a consideration of ethics to the conversation. Although well documented and argued at the level of nations and wars, the theory, when applied to individual self-defense or defense of others, has received little in-depth consideration. Lack of necessity may, in part, explain this deficit.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that a person who defends his or her life has not committed murder, even if the force necessary for self-defense results in the death of the attacker (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.d., Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 5.1.2264). Further, the Catechism (n.d.) affirms that those responsible for the lives of others "have the right to repel by armed force" those who would harm the ones "entrusted to their charge" (Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 5.1.2265). Hessbruegge (2017) argues that the individual right to self-defense is well attested, "a general principle of law" so well settled as to be inarguable (p. 3). Hessbruegge moreover asserts, "[T]he world's major religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions" reflect this principle, which, he observes, is "shared by all the world's major legal systems" (p. 3).

From an alternative perspective, the Anabaptist stream of the Christian faith has produced a significant breadth of research and writing regarding violence, force, and self-defense (Loewen, 2015; Lohmann, 2018; Simons, 1496-1561). With few notable outliers (Koop, 2016; Thomas, 2015), the Anabaptists and Friends, or Quakers, have historically taken a stance of non-resistance.[1] This position on the use of force for self-defense or defense of others has been reviewed and discussed as dissimilar to that of Catholicism but remains popular among its adherents, nonetheless. Regardless of the tradition, whether permissive or restrictive, the ubiquitous acceptance of the legal concept of self-defense may explain in part the gap in current literature.

Theoretical Background

The theory of "shepherd leadership," a popular term for pastoral stewardship, guided this

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[1] While the Quakers and their doctrinal position on peace operates in close parallel to the larger subject of Anabaptist non-resistance, it is far too broad to include in the current study. It remains, however, a worthy field of research for any student of biblically justified positions on the use of force. For further discussion, see: Brock, P. (2016). *Pacifism in the United States: From the colonial era to the First World War*. Princeton University Press.

study. The discussion centered around the organized theory set forth by Laniak (2006) in his book *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (p. 26). The research sought to understand and define the shepherd's dual roles and responsibilities to feed and protect his sheep. The theory of shepherd leadership provided focus to the discussion on the practical, ethical, and theological foundations of decisions regarding the employment of security personnel by individual church leadership teams. Furthermore, understanding that any discussion of the use of force—regardless of its use for defense of self or of others—attracts strident proponents for both sides, this researcher endeavored to approach the discussion from an irenic perspective, respecting differing viewpoints while unflinchingly seeking biblical truth.

Researcher's Relationship to The Problem

A former senior pastor, this researcher has served on both sides of the pulpit with church security teams. In the roles of volunteer, trainer, pastor, and organization leader, this researcher has considerable personal experience engaging security threats faced by churches. Additionally, as a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces, qualified and experienced as a security team trainer as well as a firearms and self-defense instructor, the researcher possesses an extensive background in federal law enforcement, domestic anti-terrorism service, force protection, and homeland security operations.

Statement of the Problem

Churches within the United States have seen a sharp rise in deadly force incidents, and significant losses of life and property continue to occur (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018). Surprisingly, a dearth of current academic research in the fields of Christian self-defense and church security persists. By contrast, popular material exists in a variety of forms supporting multiple positions (Fairchild, 2018; Fawbush, 2016; Gabbert, 2021; Lundberg, 2021; Piper, 2015; Raymond, 2016).

Decker (2014) notes the "poorly informed" nature of much of what can be found, asserting that a "substantial gap in credible biblical perspectives" pervades the body of material addressing the intersection of Christian faith and the use of force for individual self-defense or the defense of others (p. 25).

This study endeavored to address the identified literature gap through rigorous academic inquiry into the moral, ethical, biblical, and theological foundations underlying decisions regarding the employment of security personnel by church leadership teams in various formal ministry settings within the United States. This research was formulated to develop a greater understanding of the underlying concerns motivating these decisions among individual church leadership teams, to expand awareness of the theological and ethical issues surrounding the topic of security personnel employment for congregational gatherings, and to biblically articulate the responsibility of pastoral leadership to provide for the spiritual and physical safety of the gathered flock.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological multi-case study explored the practical, ethical, theological, and biblical foundations of decisions regarding active security strategies at church gatherings by 21 pastors in the United States. In this study, an active security strategy was defined as a formal plan for site security based on the use of security personnel. The theory of "shepherd leadership," as identified by Laniak (2006), guided this study, and related via the shepherd's responsibility to not only feed and care for but also to protect his sheep (p. 26).

Research Questions

RQ1: What practical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ2: What moral and ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ3: What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ4: What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process, and how was it addressed?

RQ5: In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security strategy?

Research Question Rationale

RQ1: What practical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Research Question One sought to elucidate how practical considerations drove the decision by church leadership teams regarding the use of security personnel at church gatherings. Acknowledging the broadness of this question, this study sought to avoid particulars related to legalities, insurance requirements, and training standards imposed by governmental sources. With the understanding that regulatory issues exist, are local, and must be navigated by wise leadership, this question sought to understand what practical issues compelled the church to consider a security strategy for congregational gatherings.

RQ2: What moral and ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Research Question Two was posed to illuminate the distinctly ethical considerations engaged by the decision-making team at the surveyed local church. This researcher sought to discover specific ethical questions raised, considered, and resolved by the leadership team related to using force in defense of self and others. By analyzing and coding responses, this researcher anticipated that clear themes of morality and ethics would emerge across respondents.

RQ3: What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Research Question Three was designed to produce an understanding of the theological and biblical considerations, understandings, and interpretations that informed and underlaid decisions surrounding the use of security personnel for congregational gatherings. While grouping questions of theology and hermeneutics together created a necessarily large topic, their entwined nature and interdependency allowed respondents to group responses accordingly. This question pursued the specific theological and biblical stance of a responding church leader. Follow-on questions in this regard sought to understand the individual pastor's thought processes as well as his willingness and ability to engage with the inevitable discomfort (both personal and congregational) arising from interpretational differences or disagreements.

RQ4: What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process, and how was it addressed?

Research Question Four reflects an effort to understand how a responding church's leadership team required deliberation, additional research, or biblical study—individually or as a group—before arriving at a decision on a security strategy. Further, this question sought to determine specific areas of theology or biblical interpretation that created roadblocks or opened pathways toward a decision either for or against an active security strategy. This question served to determine if a consistent field of theological and biblical focus by the interlocuters of for-or-against positions existed. A specific focus of this question was the biblical and theological arguments articulated by responding pastors regarding the use of force and security personnel.

RQ5: In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision to utilize security strategy?

Research Question Five endeavored to determine if or how the biblical teaching ministry of the church had been impacted by the decision regarding a security strategy. Previous questions sought to understand primarily internal processes and decisions within the individual church's leadership team. Research Question 5 ascertained how, if, or in what ways the teaching and preaching ministry of the church was impacted by decisions regarding security. Had church leadership taught from their experiences of the decision, engaged the congregation in discussion regarding the biblical, theological, ethical, and moral issues surrounding the use of force for the defense of self and others, or involved the general membership of the church in the discussion utilizing a practical argument, a biblical argument, or some other form? Finally, had the preaching and teaching ministry of the church communicated to the congregation a biblically sound and theologically justifiable position regarding the use of force for the defense of self or others?

Assumptions and Delimitations

Research Assumptions

This researcher assumed that a respondent cohort comprised of pastors directly involved in decisions regarding an active security strategy at the subject churches would provide focused responses to the chosen research questions. The researcher further assumed that a selection of nine to 12 churches from both denominational and non-denominational backgrounds would provide a sufficient range of responses to achieve data saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and form valid conclusions regarding decision-making processes. Due to field research issues discussed in Chapters Three and Four, this number was subsequently changed to 21.

The researcher hypothesized that common themes would arise from the decision-making processes across churches and church leadership teams regardless of geographical location or denominational background. Secondarily, the researcher hypothesized that the data would reveal primarily pragmatic motivations across research participants rather than decisions driven by biblical and theological understandings of the shepherd's responsibilities. Further, the researcher hypothesized that security decisions were made with theological and biblical questions either unasked and unaddressed, or given attention only after the decision had been made.

Delimitations of the Research Design

This study was delimited to senior pastors involved in the decision regarding security at their respective churches. Selecting this cohort allowed the research to focus on the theological, biblical, ethical, and moral bases of decisions regarding the employment of security personnel during congregational gatherings. Participant recollection, introspection, and remembrance of the discussions surrounding security decisions were crucial to the research goals.

Definition of Terms

1. *Deadly Force Incident:* abductions [as well as attempted abductions], [physical] attacks, suspicious deaths, suicides, and deadly force intervention/protection (FBSN, 2023, p. 1).

2. *Force:* the use of physical resistance to halt a violent attack which resistance has the potential to (and may) result in the death of another person (Decker, 2014, p. 64).

3. *Deadly Force:* physical resistance that holds the possibility of causing death or serious bodily injury to the one against whom the force is employed.

4. *Security Personnel:* personnel authorized by church leadership to perform security duties during official church functions. This definition may include volunteers, contracted security personnel, and contracted, uniformed law enforcement officers.

5. *Church Leadership Team:* All persons with a formal role in the ecclesiastic structure of the church. The "team" may consist of sole leadership by a senior pastor or the pastor in concert with an elder board, board of directors, deacon board, etc.

6. *Shepherd Leadership:* Leadership based on the example of Christ as the Good Shepherd. Resane states that shepherd leadership is defined by "caring, courage, and guidance" (Resane, 2014, p. 1).

7. *Active Security Strategy:* a formal plan for site security based on the use of security personnel.

Significance of the Study

This study developed perspective on how the ongoing threat of violence to a congregation impacts pastors and leaders of Christian churches, expanding insight into the thought processes of church leaders who have made decisions about security measures for corporate gatherings. Gaining an understanding of the biblical and theological positions of the surveyed church leaders regarding the Christian's ability to utilize force in defense of self or others carried particular significance. Furthermore, by utilizing the shepherd motif of Scripture (Laniak, 2006) as a framework to understand pastoral responsibilities for the protection of congregations, this research developed a deeper understanding of the shepherd-pastor's role in providing for the physical safety of the gathered flock.

Summary of the Design

The case study research participants included 21 Christian pastors who had made decisions regarding the employment of church security personnel during congregational gatherings. This researcher began with the intention to identify potential participants through their church's participation in the Faith Based Security Network, a partnership organization dedicated to protecting HoWs through information sharing and training (FBSN, 2023). Recommendations from study participants and the research committee, as well as interest from outside the FBSN, led to the inclusion of pastors from non-FBSN affiliated churches.

Participants' interview responses and survey answers were evaluated, coded, and arranged thematically using NVivo-14 qualitative analysis software. Themes were further

analyzed and interpreted with results reported using thick and rich descriptions (Johnson, et al., 2020). The researcher's past experiences as a senior pastor and a church security team leader and trainer influenced the interpretation of the developed themes and conclusions derived from the data; descriptions of how the researcher's experience influenced conclusions are reported and discussed throughout Chapters 4 and 5. The research instrumentation consisted of electronically delivered essay response questionnaires and online video interviews with participating pastors. Transcripts of online interviews were captured using Microsoft Teams.

This chapter provided a brief overview of the study, argued for the timeliness of the research subject, and summarized the methods employed. Chapter 2 offers historical and current theological perspectives and discussion related to the study, as well as a biblical argument for the shepherd's protective responsibilities.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature review explored the current and historical understanding of the moral, ethical, theological, and biblical discussions of a Christian's use of force for self-defense and defense of others. Determining biblical support or refutation of the foundational assumption—a shepherd leader bears responsibility for providing physical and spiritual protection for his flock in addition to feeding and care—served as a central consideration of the study.

Positions both for and against a believer's use of force for the defense of self or others have been surveyed in this chapter, with discussion traced from the Early Church through the Church Fathers and various streams of faith that practice non-resistance, culminating with an examination of the biblical, theological, ethical, and moral issues surrounding the topic. A biblically based and theologically framed argument has been made for the responsibilities of pastors to provide for the gathered congregation's physical safety utilizing the shepherd leadership paradigm.

Divided into five sections, Chapter 2 explores the study's theological framework, theoretical framework, related literature, rationale for the study and gap in the literature, and profile of the current study. A summary of the literature ends the chapter and introduces the research methodology, which appears in Chapter 3.

Theological Framework for the Study

Theology is nothing more or less than the study of God. Erickson (2013) writes, "The study or science of God" is a "preliminary or basic definition of theology" (p. 8). This theological study sought to ascertain the biblical, God-oriented foundation of the decisions about active security strategies for church gatherings. While the pragmatic, ethical, moral, and legal

foundations of these decisions were essential, they were secondary to the gravity of the theological basis.

One primary reason highlights the theological delicacy of the issue considered. In any situation in which either defensive or offensive force is used against another, a high probability exists that a human being will be harmed. Since all humanity bears the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1), force employed against another inherently holds the possibility of marring or destroying that image. This prospect must be approached with great seriousness, care, and significant forethought. For this reason, the study demanded theological clarity when approaching the sensitive subject it sought to illuminate.

A second set of questions ran in parallel. It demanded equal theological weight: Does the shepherd motif of Scripture charge church leaders with providing for their congregation's physical safety in addition to feeding them with the spiritual food of the Word? Can a biblical argument be made for the responsibility of the shepherds of the flock to care for and protect those in their charge? To aid in developing context for these questions, an analysis of the primary theological positions on the use of force by believers begins this section. It has been included to illustrate historical understanding and developing thought.

The Early Church

The Early Church—defined for this research as the period from the Resurrection until the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD—holds a unique place in the history of discussion on the use of force by believers. Defined further by several points discussed below, its uniqueness and noteworthiness can be summarized by its unprecedented nature and unanimity.

From the perspective of its Jewish founder's teachings (Luke 22:36) and that of the Church's historical predecessors, the Early Church held an unprecedented position of

nonviolence. Despite the Hebrew nation's dreams of peace (Numbers 6:24-26; Psalm 29:11, 32:7, 34:14, 85:8, 119:165, 122:6, 147:14; Isaiah 9:6-7, 26:3, 54:10, 55:12), the history of the Jewish people from their establishment through the birth of the Messiah was marked by frequent violence (Genesis 14:1-17; Exodus 17:8-13, 32:26-28; Numbers 21:21-30, 21:33-35; Deuteronomy 2:24-34, 3:1-7; Joshua 5:13-6:27, 7:1-8:29, 8:30-35, 9:1-27, 10:1-43, 11:1-12:24; Judges 4-5, 6-8, 19-21, 1 Samuel 4:1-10 & 13, 2 Samuel 2:12-17, 5:17-22, 15:1-18:33; 1 Kings 14:25, 16; 2 Kings 23:29-30, 24:10-16, 25:1-7; 2 Chronicles 12:1-12, 13:3-19, 14:9-15, 35:20-25, 36:12; Jeremiah 32:4, 34:2-3, 39:1-7, 52:4-11; Esther 9:5-16; et al.). Shortly after the nascent Church's genesis, one of the largest scale wars in Jewish history led to both the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2; Luke 21:10) and the most significant loss of life in the nation's history, excepting only the Holocaust (Josephus, 75/2017, 6:9:3). Thus, the Early Church's stance appears unmoored from both its history and from the previous generation's theological dictums.

A second germane point arises from the unanimity of the Early Church in its stance contrary to the use of force for any offensive or defensive purpose. In his essay *Of Patience*, Tertullian (197) asks, "What difference is there between provoker and provoked, except that the former is detected as prior in evil-doing, but the latter as posterior?" (Chap. 10). Tertullian argues that both individuals "stand impeached in the eyes of the Lord," stating that God "prohibits and condemns every wickedness" (Chap. 10). In forming his argument, Tertullian quotes Romans 12:17 and notes, "The precept is absolute, that evil is not to be repaid with evil" (Chap. 10). Tertullian, it may be observed, sees all force as wickedness, regardless of whether used for attack or defense, and conflates defensive force with revenge or vengeance.

Addressing the entertainment of the gladiatorial games, Athenagoras (177) declares that for a Christian to watch "a man put to death is much the same as killing him," advising that Christians must not even observe violence (Chap. 35). "How, then," queries Athenagoras, "when we do not even look on, lest we should contract guilt and pollution, can we put people to death?" (Chap. 35). Similarly, Lactantius (ca. 303-311) describes a "just man" as one who would consider it "unlawful not only himself to commit slaughter, but to be present with those who do it, and to behold it" (Chap. 18). He additionally states that one who has the knowledge of good and evil "abstains from committing an injury [to another human] even to his own damage," closing with the argument that the highest and best is "to perish" rather than to be the cause of harm to another under any circumstance (Chap. 18).

Taken together, the position against force of any kind held by the Early Church appears unified and attested to by the history of martyrs who peacefully submitted themselves to torture and death rather than offer resistance of any kind (Litfin, 2014). Perhaps buoyed by the example of these stalwarts, several centuries later, another peaceful group of believers suffered indignity at the hands of those in power and did so peacefully and humbly, reminiscent of their predecessors in the Early Church.

Non-Resistance

The Anabaptist tradition of non-resistance has long been clearly defined and historically attested. Friedrich Lohmann (2018) summarizes, "Violence is wrong, and it is wrong to resist it violently" (p. 192). Noting the scriptural basis for the assertions central to the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, Karl Koop (2016) argues that their beliefs are not "based simply on proof-texting," nor are they an over-simplification "where one slate of biblical passages is highlighted at the expense of others" (p. 37). Koop (2016) notes, "A particular Christocentric hermeneutic is

at work in which identification with Christ—his teaching and example—is foundational [and] becomes the lens through which the entire Bible is read" (p. 37).

The early leaders of the Anabaptist movement maintained a strongly Bible-based application of theology and dependence on Scripture as the ultimate authority. Early Anabaptist writings make this Scriptural foundation evident and were central to the theology of Menno Simons (1496-1561), the founder of the Mennonites. In his essay *A Humble and Christian Defense*, Simons (1554) writes:

> O, beloved reader, our weapons are not swords and spears, but patience, silence and hope, and the word of God. With these we must maintain our cause and defend it. Paul says, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal; but mighty through God." [Quoting 2 Corinthians 10:4] With these we intend and desire to resist the kingdom of the devil; and not with swords, spear, cannons and coats of mail. (p. 307)

In this passage, Simons (1554) refers explicitly to "resist[ing] the kingdom of the devil" (p. 307) and does not overtly address the forceful resistance to unlawful assault against either one's self or another.

Later in his writings, Simons comes closer to a discussion of inter-personal violence when he states, "Behold, beloved friends and brethren, by these and other Scriptures we are taught and warned not to take up the literal sword, nor ever to give our consent thereto" (p. 327). Perhaps his clearest advocation for non-resistance notes potential issues encountered by Christians that have the possibility of being answered by violence. To these particulars, Simons declares:

> True Christians know not vengeance, no matter how they are maltreated; in patience they possess their souls, Luke 21: 18; and do not break their peace, even, if they should be tempted by bondage, torture, poverty, and, besides, by the sword and fire. They do not cry for vengeance as do the world; but, with Christ, they supplicate and pray: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (p. 327)

Again, the concern Simons addresses appears to be that of vengeance, an activity with distinct

Scriptural prohibition. The Apostle Paul explains clearly the indisputable biblical precept barring

vengeance, retribution, and revenge.

> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19-21)

Those in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition have historically contended unswervingly

for non-resistance. The Dordrecht Confession of Faith, adopted by the Mennonites at a

conference held in Dordrecht, Holland, in April 1632—some 71 years after Menno Simmons

went to his eternal reward—addresses this point in Section XIV. Titled "Of Revenge," the

segment reads as follows:

> As regards revenge, that is, to oppose an enemy with the sword, we believe and confess that the Lord Christ has forbidden and set aside to His disciples and followers all revenge and retaliation, and commanded them to render to no one evil for evil, or cursing for cursing, but to put the sword into the sheath, or, as the prophets have predicted, to beat the swords into ploughshares. Matthew 5:39, 44; Romans 12:14; 1 Peter 3:9; Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3; Zechariah 9:8, 9. From this we understand that therefore, and according to His example, we must not inflict pain, harm, or sorrow upon any one, but seek the highest welfare and salvation of all men, and even, if necessity require it, flee for the Lord's sake from one city or country into another, and suffer the spoiling of our goods; that we must not harm any one (sic), and, when we are smitten, rather turn the other cheek also, than take revenge or retaliate. Matthew 5:39. And, moreover, that we must pray for our enemies, feed and refresh them whenever they are hungry or thirsty, and thus convince them by well-doing, and overcome all ignorance. Romans 12:19, 20. Finally, that we must do good and commend ourselves to every man's conscience; and, according to the law of Christ, do unto no one that which we would not have done to us. 2 Corinthians 4:2; Matthew 7:12. (para. 14)

Although classifying any or all forms of resistance to enemies as revenge or retaliation does not

appear logical, this clearly stated position coheres with Simons' arguments from the previous

century. Additionally, Simons clearly articulates his assertion in line with Scripture's prohibition

against revenge or retribution.

Pacifism, or non-resistance, remains a central precept within the Anabaptist community. However, although the concept has long been held paramount, instances of radical divergence have occurred. At times, within the history of the Anabaptist stream of Protestantism, groups of Mennonites not only accepted the possibility of bearing arms but served actively and openly in military service. By the middle of the 18th century, notes Koop (2016), "some Dutch Mennonites…viewed the practice of bearing arms as compatible with their religious convictions" (p. 28). Koop confirms multiple instances throughout World War II of Mennonite believers serving in the military forces of both European and American nations. Not confining himself to the 20th century, Koop points to multiple historical accounts of Anabaptists serving in the armies of Europe. "In the northwest German city of Krefeld, the Mennonite community seemed indifferent to the traditional teachings [of nonviolence];" they may have "served in the military to the same degree as non-Mennonites" (Koop, 2016, p. 30).

So prevalent did these attitudes toward military service grow that Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880), a Mennonite leader from provincial Prussia, wrote a seven-part essay in the German Mennonite periodical *Mennonitische Blätter* in which he laid out his beliefs that Mennonites should actively take part in military service (Koop, 2016, p. 28). "Rather than viewing the language of warfare metaphorically, as Simons was prone to do," argues Koop, "Mannhardt concludes that its use in Scripture sanctions Christian participation in it" (p. 40). Koop quickly points out, however, that in light of his previous statements, "Mannhardt is quick to explain that the moral imperative to love the enemy cannot be ignored, a responsibility commanded by Christ" (p. 40).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you

> may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2011, Matthew 5:43-45)[2]

This proclamation unambiguously prohibits revenge or retaliation. It does not, however, address the question of forceful action taken to defend the *imago Dei*, the Image of God, in oneself or others with the understanding that such action might come at the cost of harming that same image in the violent aggressor. Discussing the scriptural prohibitions of Matthew 5, Loewen (2015) notes a tendency within Mennonite traditions to rely on the "Sermon on the Mount as the sole measure for ethics" (p. 325). This explanation sheds light on the Anabaptist-Mennonite position against any use of force.

The pacifism conveyed in Anabaptist theology argues for an explicit and biblically decreed moral responsibility to offer no resistance to violent attack. This obligation, claims Lohmann (2018), rests on the following two contentions:

1. Any use of violence begets violence and leads to a vicious spiral of escalating violence.

2. Anyone who accepts the use of violence, as limited as it may be, believes that violence is the best way for conflict resolution (p. 187).

Lohmann (2018) argues that these statements lean more on "myth than reality," offering historical examples of military action that lead to peaceful results (p. 187). The second contention also raises questions. This researcher has failed to discover a source willing to argue that violence is always the best solution for resolving conflict. Instead, many people, even some among the Anabaptist-Mennonite stream of faith, have operated along a spectrum of willingness that depends upon the situation. Because of this, the tradition of non-resistance is not as cohesive as it initially appeared.

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are from the *English Standard Version Bible* (2001/2011).

The historical record notes several non-adherents to the conventional position, and alternative readings of the biblical texts have been offered as support for noncompliance. Mennonites, such as Ryan (1983), argue for a response to violent aggression that potentially includes resistance elements. Thomas (2015), who describes himself as a "Mennonite pastor and peace educator," teaches martial arts to Mennonites as a form of resistance that seeks to protect the innocent without doing unnecessary harm to the attacker (p. 91). Thomas argues, "Force is not inherently negative or positive," noting that "it depends on one's intent and its impact" (p. 72). Additionally, basing the Anabaptist ethical value of non-resistance on Matthew 5 alone, which Loewen (2015) states has been the tradition, discounts other scriptural perspectives (p. 325). An argument based solely on the Sermon on the Mount fails to consider the Christian responsibility to care for others, particularly in circumstances where such care includes taking action to protect the life of the helpless or weak against unjust attack.

In closing, Koop (2016) appears to leave the door open to this narrower interpretation regarding defensive action when he notes that the use of force "becomes a transgression against God only if one's attitude is vengeful and if one is not willing to negotiate or honestly seek to find alternative solutions" (p. 40). This line of reasoning allows for the possibility that using force to defend life, particularly if one intends to protect the innocent and to "look after orphans and widows in their distress" (*Christian Standard Bible*, 2017, James 1:27), may be biblically and theologically appropriate. Thus, while well-documented and historically relevant, the Anabaptist tradition of non-resistance has been tempered by a parallel stream of theological discussion, begun as early as the 5th century after Christ, that offers limited support to a Christian's right to self-defense and defense of others.

Just War

Augustine of Hippo

The Just War theory, also called *jus bellum justum*, has been primarily applied, argued,

and discussed at a national versus an individual level (Decker, 2014, p. 27). The doctrine traces

its genesis to Augustine, bishop of Hippo, and his treatise *The City of God*, written after the sack

of Rome in 410 AD. Augustine (ca. 426) states:

> [T]hey who have waged war in obedience to the divine command, or in conformity with His laws have represented in their persons the public justice or the wisdom of government, and in this capacity have put to death wicked men; such persons have by no means violated the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."

> [Further,]

> There are some exceptions made by the divine authority to its own law, that men may not be put to death. These exceptions are of two kinds, being justified either by a general law, or by a special commission granted for a time to some individual. (book 1 chap. 21)

Augustine articulates a justification for personal violence at the behest of governmental

authority, in service to a divine command, or within narrowly circumscribed limits under the

law. This argument allows force within a theological framework while limiting it to specific

circumstances. Augustine, however, does not explicitly address the question of force used in self-

defense.

Additionally, Augustine's assertion that divine law disallows killing is confusing,

considering the multiple times in Scripture that death is prescribed as a penalty for various

offenses.[3] Although Bakon (2014) argues that an infinitesimal number of executions were

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[3] For in-depth discussion on the various capital offenses in Mosaic law as well as the progress of rabbinical interpretations throughout history, see: Hiers, R. H. (2014). The death penalty and due process in biblical law. *University of Detroit Mercy Law Review*. 751-843.

carried out, both the Law initially handed down to Moses and the Talmudic addendums contain many capital crimes (pp. 173-175).

A lack of consensus on the various meanings of the Hebrew words *harag, hemit*, and *ratsach* within the Decalogue add a layer of complication to Augustine's argument. According to Cavanaugh (2004), *harag* and *hemit* have primarily been interpreted as "killing," while *ratsach*, which appears in the Sixth Commandment, is interpreted as "murder" (pp. 513-515). Cavanaugh notes that *harag* appears 165 times in the Old Testament (OT) and *hemit* 201 while arguing that these two "terms have multiple uses, including murder, killing the enemy in battle, and putting someone to death according to the Law" (p. 514). Cavanaugh contrasts these with *ratsach,* appearing 46 times and "used only once for killing someone guilty according to the Law (Num. 35:30), and never for killing someone in battle" (p. 514).

Despite differences in translation affording room for diverging viewpoints, Augustine's argument for the justification of violence within the narrowly defined governmental and divine authorities is further delimited by his emphasis that the end goal of all necessary violence must be peace (Augustine, 5th Century, Book 1, Chapter 21). According to Cahill (2019), the primary reason for the enduring centrality of the Just War concept in discussions of warfare is its core tenet of peace as the ultimate aim of warfare (p. 174). In fact, despite the narrowness of Augustine's Just War theory, it has long served national leaders influenced by a Christian ethic as a theological framework to debate or legitimate the justification for making war (Cahill, 2019, pp. 169-171). However, the doctrine's popularity has been tempered by argument, controversy, contention, and vast disagreement among ancient and modern theologians (Cahill, 2019, pp. 169-175).

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) brought additional theological focus to the theory of *jus bellum justum*. Cahill (2019) notes that Aquinas added a significant ethical perspective to Augustine's governmental and divine authority argument (p. 177). The introduction of ethics, argues Cahill (2019), brings "justice and the common good" into the center of the discussion of "the moral legitimacy of specific uses of armed force" (p. 177). The Thomistic argument does not limit itself to issues of authority. However, it broadens Augustine's narrow interpretation by including issues of human will and defining constraints for the justification of violence, some of which Aquinas makes dependent on an individual's intentions or circumstances (Aquinas, 1485, qq. 18–20). In *Summa Theologica,* under the heading "War. Article 1. Whether it is always sinful to wage war," Aquinas lays out the following prerequisites:

> In order for a war to be just, three things are necessary. First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged. For it is not the business of a private individual to declare war, because he can seek for redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior… Secondly, a just cause is required, namely that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault… Thirdly, it is necessary that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil. (Aquinas, 1485, q. 40)

Dewan (2010) reflects Aquinas' position, arguing, "The person attacked has the right to take the necessary steps to save himself, even though this sometimes must result in the death of the attacker" (p. 196).

For believers, the aggressor's death is grievous due to the destruction of the *imago Dei* in the attacker. The Thomistic position, however, recognizes that the actions resulting in that individual's death have theological and ethical justification under specific circumstances and depending on individual intentions. An individual acting against an unjust aggressor does so to protect the divine gift of life, an action that falls within both the ethical paradigm of justice and

the paradigm of critique (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, pp. 12-14). Additionally, utilizing force to protect others conforms to the biblical paradigm of the shepherd caring for and protecting his flock (Laniak, 2006, p. 247; 1 Samuel 17:34-35) and the ethical paradigm of care (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, pp. 16-18).

While room persists for argument, a plain-text reading of Augustine's Just War theory combined with the ethical considerations of Aquinas contends for theological justification for self-defense and defense of others. Moreover, Christians may have an ethical responsibility to care for and defend those less able to provide for their own protection.

A Biblical Argument

Evidence, including the continued rise in the number and severity of attacks, indicates forces and threats are arrayed against the gathered Church (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018). Carl Chinn, founder of the Faith Based Security Network, has an experiential perspective on church security (Chinn, 2012). In 1996, Chinn worked at the campus of Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, CO. During the hostage situation that occurred that year, he engaged the armed hostage taker in conversation and negotiation for the length of the ordeal (Chinn, 2012). In 2007, when an active shooter attacked New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Chinn served as the head of security and found himself seconds and inches away from engaging the shooter, who was ultimately confronted, shot, and stopped by a volunteer security member named Jeanne Assam (Kovaleski, 2018).

In his book *Evil Invades Sanctuary*, Chinn (2012) writes:

Unlike other organizations, Bible-based entities struggle with the perceived conflict between divine protection and active security planning. But there is no conflict; just because we pray for God's protection before driving does not mean we speed or dismiss the value of seatbelts. Likewise, faith-based organizations must intentionally provide for the safety of staff and visitors. (p. 6)

As Chinn notes, considerable theological "conflict between divine protection and active security planning" remains (Chinn, 2012, p. 6). Confusion is understandable since a survey of the Old and the New Testaments reveals neither unambiguous prohibition nor explicit permission to use force in self-defense or to defend others. Although the Bible offers no direct answer to the questions proposed, it nonetheless outlines a framework within which individuals and church leadership teams can find sufficient clarity to arrive at a well-informed decision regarding security for church gatherings and the use of force in aid of self-defense or defense of others.

Force in the Gospels

The Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount remains a foundational element of any biblical argument regarding the use of force (Loewen, 2015; Mueller, 1956). In it, Jesus devotes significant time to addressing ordinances enshrined in the Mosaic Law, shifting the discussion from one of proscribed physical activity to an admonition toward righteousness (Matthew 5:21-23, 27-28, 31-32, 33-37, 38-39, 43-44). In the most applicable passage for the current discussion, Matthew 5:39, Jesus says, "Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Cook (2014), conducting broad research in rabbinical texts, the Law of Hammurabi, and Greco-Roman custom, notes that slaps to the face amounted to affront and humiliation. Demosthenes, Greek statesman and orator, writes in *Against Meidias*, "It was not the blow … but the humiliation. Being beaten is not what is terrible for free men (although it is terrible), but being beaten with the intent to insult" (ca. 348 BC, stanza 72). William Mueller (1956) asserts that the issue is "not so much the bodily injury as the disgrace involved in such a situation" (p. 50). Mueller explains that the back-handed slap was the "most shameful blow that could be struck in Israel" (p. 50). This evidence shifts the subject

Christ addresses from defense against a potential loss of life into the arena of indignity and affront.

Duty to Prepare. Jesus' instructions in Luke 22:36 shed light on preparation issues and may further illuminate the issue of defensive use of force. In a passage occurring chronologically just hours before the events in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says, "Let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one." The sword served as the sidearm of the 1st century, a weapon, not a utility knife useful for the mundane daily tasks of meal preparation and trail making (Decker, 2014, pp. 37-38; see also Mark 14:43; Luke 21:24; Acts 12:2; 16:27; Heb 11:37; Rev 13:10). Jesus' followers understood that discipleship required service to others (Matthew 20:26, 23:11; Mark 9:35, 10:43-44; Luke 22:26), therefore, it was implicit that Jesus did not permit them to employ their swords offensively. Circumstantially, the distinctive non-offensive usage of the Luke 22:36 swords adds weight to the argument for their use in defense.

Okoronkwo (2014) contends that Jesus' command to "sell a cloak and buy a sword" is a metaphor (pp. 1-16) or irony (pp. 7-10). This argument appears illogical since the two instructions prior to the one concerning swords— "Let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack" (Luke 22:36)—concern practical measures (Decker, 2014). Decker refutes a metaphorical interpretation of the latter half of this verse, arguing that such is based not on solid hermeneutical principles or upon context but rather "on a precommitment to a pacifist position" (p. 38). Koop (2016) notes this bias in other Anabaptist literature, insisting, "[Menno] Simons was prone to…view the language of warfare metaphorically," an assertion that casts further doubt on an interpretation of Jesus' instructions as anything other than practical (p. 40).

If one considers that Jesus' arrest occurred mere hours after the discussion recorded therein, Luke 22:36 potentially demonstrates Jesus' prophetic concern for His disciples' safety. Jesus' instruction, given to protect His disciples from danger, should be taken at face value. Although this passage does not contain an explicit directive from Jesus regarding self-defense, any argument—for or against the permissibility of defensive force—must address this verse with a coherent hermeneutic.

Guardians and Gardens. After the previously analyzed discussion, Jesus "went…to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him" (Luke 22:39). When the "great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people" (Matthew 26:47b) "laid hands on Jesus and seized him" (Matthew 26:50), Peter employed one of the swords discussed above to strike off the ear of Malchus, servant of the High Priest (Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:49-50, John 18:10). Of particular interest to the current discussion, none of the Gospels record Jesus reprimanding Peter for weapons possession. Instead, Jesus heals the servant (Luke 22:51) and tells Peter to "sheath" his sword (Matt. 26:52, John 18:11), adding that the time of His betrayal was upon Him (Matt. 26:54, John 18:11). This incident, conspicuously included in all four Gospels, must be included in a biblical perspective on the defensive use of force.

Jesus' rebuke points out the error of Peter's attack, seemingly a matter of timing rather than his use of force to defend the Messiah. Jesus' arrest was—at that precise moment in history—necessary to "let the Scriptures be fulfilled" (Matthew 26:54, Mark 14:49). Matson (2018) argues that, in this situation, "Jesus is not prohibiting the use of the sword per se but is telling his disciples to allow the arrest to go forward so that he may fulfill his twin destinies as Suffering Servant and Son of Man" (p. 464). Further, states Matson, "Taking up the sword [after the Passover supper] ensures Jesus's safe transit to the Mount of Olives in prayerful preparation

for his ensuing arrest" (p. 480). Consequently, the argument for non-resistance based on Jesus' statement that "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52) requires examination.

First, not every person who has taken up weapons has died by violence. Logically, the argument that Jesus made a prescriptive statement in Matthew 26:25 faces difficulty on at least one of its premises. An alternative perspective on this statement focuses on the issue of timing, as did Jesus' rebuke of Peter in the previously discussed passage. Furthermore, had the disciples actively resisted and stopped Jesus' necessary arrest by the armed mob (Mark 14:43), the risk of one or more of them dying would have significantly increased.

An alternative understanding of this passage based on the contextual truth of Jesus' statement exists. Those who take up arms for their defense and the defense of others tend to run toward the sound of the guns (Grossman, 2008, p. 138). That desire to serve may well result in the loss of their own lives and, thus, adds weight to a particular interpretation of "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). This assumptive interpretation of the passage does not, however, explicitly address the issue of self-defense and defense of others.

Martin (2014) has argued that Roman law made the civilian carriage of weapons for self-defense illegal (p. 8). He claims that if the "disciples were armed in Jerusalem, and especially during the celebration of the Passover festival, Jesus and his disciples would in fact *be* a band … [of] brigands, bandits, or rebels" (Martin, 2014, p. 6). In answer, Gerald Downing (2015) notes that, aside from within the city limits of Rome itself, no evidence exists that civilian carriage of weapons for defensive purposes was prohibited by Roman law. Downing further argues, "There is no suggestion in the gospels that Jesus on trial had to face any such charge of him breaching known public safety regulations against carrying or allowing followers to carry a sword" (p.

330). This omission, circumstantial though it may be, appears unlikely if such laws existed and could have been used to enhance charges of zealotry.

The Old Testament

Though the Old Testament records significant levels of violence (Genesis 4:8, 9:6, 19:30-38; Exodus 21; 2 Samuel 11:1, 13:14; et al.), the post-resurrection sphere of the debate complicates an attempt to construct a biblical argument either for or against the use of force. Christians are not subject to the requirement of the Law under which the Old Testament was written (Galatians 2:16, 3:13; Romans 10:4). That truth acknowledged; however, Christianity descended from and is intimately connected to the "before Christ" Judaic tradition that informs so much of its thinking, language, and historical text. A significant discussion of defensive force used in the role of the shepherd in the Old Testament will take place under the Theoretical Framework; however, two brief exemplars—one narrative and one from Mosaic Law—bear further examination presently.

To Kill a Thief. Exodus 22 covers significant ground in setting forth the responsibilities of individuals to one another. Of particular interest for this discussion, the second and third verses state: "If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him, but if the sun has risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him" (Exodus 22:2-3a). The contrast in view clearly distinguishes between "if the sun has risen on him" and prior to sunup or at night. Since Exodus 22 was written long before the invention of the light bulb, identifying an individual forcefully breaking into one's abode would have been problematic, as would have been discerning the offender's intentions.

Modern commentators available to this researcher do not give great attention to this passage. For example, Merida (2014) states that "theft was addressed in the first four verses of

chapter 22," adding no further observation (p. 162). Earlier commentators were, with few exceptions (Henry, M., 1706/1991), unequivocal in their interpretations of this passage and saw the situation as plainly permissible self-defense on the part of the homeowner (Ellicott, 1905/2014; Barnes, 1983; Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, 1961; Poole, 1683-1685; Calvin, 1555-1557).

Some disagreement among commentators persists, however, with Meyers (2005) noting that, in Exodus 22:2-3,

> The assailant is guilty of murder but is given capital punishment only if the incident occurs in the daytime, perhaps because it would [be] difficult at night but not in daylight to discern whether the thief was endangering life or only property. (p. 194)

Meyers' (2005) assertion that the "assailant is guilty of murder" (p. 194) appears to directly refute a plain reading of the subject verse, which says, "[T]here shall be no bloodguilt for him" if killed at night. Hamilton (2011), on the other hand, acknowledges that no bloodguilt is assigned for killing an individual breaking into the home at night (p. 491) and illustrates this by noting Jeremiah's condemnation of the broken covenant when the prophet says, "[O]n your skirts is found the lifeblood of the guiltless poor; you did not find them breaking in. Yet in spite of all these things you say, 'I am innocent'" (Jeremiah 2:34-35a). Exodus 22:2-3 does not allocate bloodguilt to the one who kills a thief at night, and both Exodus and Jeremiah reflect a principle stated elsewhere in Scripture: "The Lord hates… hands that shed innocent blood" (Proverbs 6:16-17). In this case, the nighttime intruder would not be considered "innocent."

Guarding the Work. The book of Nehemiah affords many opportunities to learn leadership principles; however, Nehemiah's actions to guard the work of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls best relate to this study. When the neighboring tribal leaders discover that the walls are being rebuilt, a situation that will impede their abuse of Jerusalem's population, "they all plotted

together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it" (Nehemiah 4:8). The

project leader for the rebuilding reports, "[W]e prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection

against them day and night" (Nehemiah 4:9). Hamilton et al. (2014), argue, "[I]t is not

uncommon for people to do physical violence against those who would protect the vulnerable,"

and note the dual response, highlighting that "Nehemiah and the people of God pray and appoint

guards" (p. 129). Nehemiah further specifies, "[E]ach of the builders had his sword strapped at

his side while he built" (Nehemiah 4:18). This posture of readiness appears to have been

sufficient to dissuade attack, as the reconstruction project was finished "in fifty-two days"

(Nehemiah 6:15b) and without further interference.

The variations in OT commentaries on the passages examined offer a spectrum of

interpretations. However, no commentary or source encountered during this study evinced any

position regarding the rightness or wrongness of Old Testament carriage of arms for self-defense.

The subject appears moot in this context.

Implication for Christian Leaders

The preceding analysis indicates that neither the Old nor the New Testament explicitly

prohibit or encourage the use of force in defense of self or others. Peter's precipitate attack on

the High Priest's servant during Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane is the only recorded instance of

defensive force in the New Testament. Unfortunately, this example offers no conclusive

endorsement or sanction.

The lack of illegal weapon charges proffered at Jesus' trial provides circumstantial

evidence that carrying weapons for self-defense was not a prohibited activity in Roman

provinces. This assumes that the falsified charges brought against the Messiah would

undoubtedly have included accusations of insurrectionist activity among His followers if issues

of weapons legality existed. Therefore, coupled with His directive to His followers to sell a cloak to buy a sword (Luke 22:36), this implies that possession of weapons was not prohibited by Jesus any more than the Roman authorities prohibited it, though room for debate remains.

However, the Bible clearly outlines believers' responsibility to love and care for one another, particularly other believers (Galatians 6:10; John 13:35; Philippians 2:3-4). Based on the preceding, this researcher argues that the activity of "care" may include the use of force in defense of self or others, predicated upon the mindset and heart posture of the individual acting. Revenge and retaliation remain firmly outside of available options for the believer (Leviticus 19:18; Romans 12:19); employing force to protect the divine gift of life in oneself or another as an act of love and care is within available options. In this narrow arena—defense of life—no biblical prohibition against the use of force appears obvious; by contrast, however, retribution and retaliation are both strictly and distinctly proscribed.

Koop (2016) warns that "facile biblicism or proof-texting will not bear careful scrutiny [because] the Bible may be used to support a militaristic view just as well as a nonresistance view" (p. 47). He cautions, "Those reflecting on Mennonite peace theology would be wise to pay attention to hermeneutical assumptions and the role of communal discernment" (Koop, 2016, p. 47). Individuals reflecting on a biblical and theological justification for using defensive force must also take heed of this warning.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of shepherd leadership, a term popularly applied to pastoral leadership within the local church, guided the study. Organized around the shepherd leadership theory articulated by Laniak (2006), this research studied and defined the roles and responsibilities of the pastor. It sought to discover if the shepherd-pastor has a biblical responsibility to feed and protect his

sheep. While the responsibility to feed the flock is broadly accepted (Gunter, 2016; Resane, 2014, 2020), this research endeavored to determine if the shepherd leader bears equal responsibility for the physical safety of his gathered church. The theory of shepherd leadership concentrated the discussion on the pragmatic, moral, ethical, and theological foundation of church security decisions by individual pastors or church leadership teams.

With the understanding that any discussion regarding the use of force for the defense of self and others, especially one that deals in the context of church gatherings, remains sensitive and potentially volatile, this researcher strove to approach the discussion from an irenic perspective that respected differing understandings while unflinchingly seeking biblical truth.

Shepherd Leadership

As used in modern church parlance, the term shepherd is weakly moored to historical reality and suffers in application due to this deficiency (Laniak, 2006; Smith, 2013). Smith (2013) notes, "When we think of the shepherd, we think of a gentle meek nurturer of the lambs," a sterilized picture, and "a highly filtered image" (p. 57). Smith argues that, instead of the mild picture usually evoked by the term, historical shepherds were tough, resilient individuals who carried out difficult and often physical labor in severe and demanding conditions; "the rugged view of a shepherd is closer to reality than the gentle view" (p. 57). Rather than a pristine white smock, the biblical shepherd wore coarse clothing that served him for long days out of doors in heat and cold; both the shepherd's clothing and his person were doubtlessly often besmirched with the inevitable byproduct of animal digestion.

For proper application, the metaphor that draws parallels between the responsibilities of church leadership roles and the biblical shepherd requires understanding the rough and ready reality of the shepherd's work and world. Laniak (2006) writes, "Metaphors assume cultural

competence. To understand pastoral imagery, modern Bible readers need an immersion in the sights and sounds (and smells!) of ancient shepherd life" (p. 42). Conversely, no historical context was required for a resident of the Ancient New East (ANE); agriculture and animal husbandry surrounded them and touched most aspects of their lives.

Laniak points out the historical significance of herd animals and their connection to cultic religion as an animal sacrifice and subsistence in providing meat and wool products. He notes, "Pastoralism was widespread and vital to the economies and societies of the Levant," and the commonplace nature of "large-scale pastoral activity throughout the Levant and outside the great urban centres of the Fertile Crescent persisted into the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman periods" (Laniak, 2006, pp. 45-46). Thus, a first-century reader of the Scriptures would need no explanatory information to assist with cultural competence (Laniak, 2006; Smith, 2013). The same may not hold for a modern reader without a significant background in or understanding of animal husbandry or agriculture.

The shepherd held overall responsibility for his flock. Laniak (2006) emphasizes that "the condition and growth of a flock depends greatly on the care, attentiveness, and skill of the shepherd" (p. 53). While feeding, leading to water, caring for the sick, and other elements of animal husbandry all fell within the shepherd's purview, he was also responsible for the physical safety of the sheep, regardless of whether the threat came from predatory animals or human miscreants (Kinnison, 2010; Smith, 2013). Laniak (2006) notes that the shepherd carried two tools to address these threats: a staff to guide or rescue wandering sheep and a rod or cudgel to protect the flock from predation (p. 56). Kinnison (2010) adds, "Shepherds tended and protected

the flock. Tending meant caring for the lame and sick. Shepherds likewise used the staff and other weapons to protect the flock from predators and thieves" (p. 68).[4]

Viewed from the perspective of history, the biblical shepherd comes into focus as a rugged, resourceful, and resilient problem solver able to compassionately care for a sick lamb while simultaneously having the willingness, mindset, and ability to handle predators (Kinnison, 2010; Laniak, 2006; Smith, 2013). Laniak (2006) explains:

> These elements—the movement, the isolation, the variety, the adjustments, the demands—contributed to a knowledge base and 'skill set' that distinguished shepherds as remarkably and broadly capable persons. They were known for independence, resourcefulness, adaptability, courage, and vigilance. Their profession cultivated a capacity for attentiveness, self-sacrifice, and compassion. (p. 56)

This clarified image brings the metaphor of shepherd leadership into a sharper view for modern audiences, thus allowing for more precise applications of the Scriptures.

Biblical references to "shepherds" may be divided into specific categories, each of which applies to the current discussion in a particular manner. Friedman (2021) notes first, "God is likened to a shepherd who cares for his flock" (Gen, 48:15; 49:24; Isa. 40:11; Ps. 23). He then contrasts this with the second scriptural metaphor of the "failed king," likened to a "worthless shepherd who abandons his flock" (p.118). However, comparisons to herdsmen-shepherds and the metaphor of the shepherd as ruler of God's people offer the soundest applications within the context of the current study.

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[4] Psalm 23:4, perhaps the most familiar Scripture passage discussing the shepherd's tools, was utilized as search parameters in Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials Plus on 27 October 2022, with 431 returned results. Of these, no writer closer to the present than Kinnison (2010) offered any commentary on the defensive or offensive use of the shepherd's rod and staff. Whether this is indicative or not is debatable. However, it must be observed that earlier writers such as Power (1928), citing a significant number of researchers prior to himself, argued that the shepherd's rod and staff of Psalm 23 "are weapons, the one of defense and the other of rule, in the shepherd's vigorous and devoted hand, and constitute the surest guarantee for the protection of the flock" (p. 436).

Freidman emphasizes that the book of II Samuel connects David's experiences as a shepherd to his responsibilities as king (p. 118). In a scene following the death of King Saul, "all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron," where they told him:

> Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, "You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel." (11 Samuel 5:1-2)

In these verses, David's experiences caring for his sheep are directly connected to his duties as the leader of Israel. He is reminded of this later through the prophet Nathan, who tells King David the words of the Lord, saying, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel" (II Samuel 7:8).

Thus, the term *shepherd leader*, examined through the lens of the shepherd metaphor of Scripture and approached with historical clarity, describes a strong, caring, courageous, and observant leader who cares for, feeds, waters, and protects the flock. In the context of the current discussion alongside the biblical metaphor of the shepherd, this researcher argues that the responsibility to protect the flock encompasses spiritual health and incorporates the gathered congregation's physical protection.

Responsibilities of the Historical Shepherd

Application of the shepherd leadership metaphor undoubtedly needs cultural competency; it also requires knowledge of the responsibilities of the historical herdsman (Laniak, 2006, p. 42). The shepherd of biblical times was responsible for the flock's care, feeding, and safety; he was responsible to the herd's owner for the animals' lives and health so they might remain an ongoing source of material wealth. Scripture details this obligation, with the writer of Proverbs commanding:

> Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever; and does a crown endure to all generations? When the grass is gone and

the new growth appears and the vegetation of the mountains is gathered, the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field. There will be enough goats' milk for your food, for the food of your household and maintenance for your girls. (Proverbs 27:23)

The shepherd cared for the general health of the animals, feeding and watering them, providing safe shelter when necessary, and ensuring none wandered away from the protection of the flock. He also protected the group from threats from wild animals. Neither a bear nor a lion surrendered its chosen meal willingly. However, the young man, David, making a case for his ability to face the Philistine, Goliath, in individual combat, explains to King Saul:

Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God. (1 Samuel 17:34-37)

Smith (2013) notes that "part of [the] work was leading the sheep, but the other part of [the] work was beating the wolves. Both were involved" (p. 58). Laniak (2006) confirms this, observing that the danger from wild animals such as "wolves, bears, leopards, and lions" often came at night when both flock and shepherd were most vulnerable (p. 55). In addition to animal predators, various individuals or groups of criminal brigands constantly threatened the safety of herdsmen and their flocks. (Skinner, 2018).

To guard against predators of all types, shepherds in the ANE housed their flocks, when they could, in corrals built for communal usage. Regarding the nature of these pens, Skinner (2018) reports, "The sheep pen was a picture of both exposure and vulnerability, and this is at least one reason why it is necessary to have a capable, diligent shepherd" (p. 103) Skinner further notes that these corrals had neither roof nor door, requiring the shepherd to sleep across the

opening, a responsibility detailed in Jesus' Good Shepherd discourse of John 10 (Skinner, 2018, p. 105).

Cost of Herdsman Failure

In an environment with ample animal predators, human banditry, and robbery, the flock's health, vitality, and continued profitability depended on the "care, attentiveness, and skill of the shepherd" (Laniak, 2006, p. 53). A shepherd who did not maintain a close watch on his flock saw predation and robbery take a toll. A shepherd who failed to ensure high-quality food and water for his animals observed their physical condition rapidly deteriorate. A shepherd who did not care for a sick member of his herd witnessed illness spread from one sheep to another.

Ancient, modern, or metaphorical, the role of the shepherd has included and will always involve caring for, nurturing, and ensuring the safety of his flock. Thus, a shepherd who allows his flock to be destroyed cannot, by definition, be fittingly called a shepherd. In the context of the current study, the value of the flock, necessitating a competent herdsman, argues a circumstantial but convincing case for the swift removal and replacement of ineffectual herdsmen.

The Church and Its Leaders

Ephesians 4:11-13 states that God has, as an act of grace and for the development of the church, given "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." This verse and its roles have been applied broadly, even within specific denominations (Lemke, 2017). The individuals and groups empowered by the church to make decisions for the congregation are referred to in this study with the synonymous terms "church officers," "church leadership teams," and "shepherd

leaders." Grudem (1994) states, "A church officer is someone who has been publicly recognized as having the right and responsibility to perform certain functions for the benefit of the whole church" (p. 932, italics removed from original). In this research, the definition has been simplified into the previously introduced terms to move the discussion away from the mode of ecclesiastical government and toward the decision-making process on which this work focused.

This study did not concern the particulars of an individual church's governance (congregational, pastor-led, plurality of elders, board, etc.), but with the practical, ethical, biblical, and theological foundation of decisions regarding the employment of security personnel at church gatherings. Concentrating on the decision-making process rather than the decision-making apparatus allowed for a multiplicity of church governance models to be surveyed while focusing on the shepherding responsibilities of those in leadership positions and the theological basis of decisions impacting security for church gatherings.

Shepherd Leadership Responsibilities

The Church is identified scripturally as the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 21:9-11) and as the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 3:3, 4:15-16, 5:23; Colossians 1:18, 1:24). George (2017) describes the Church as "the body of Christ extended throughout time as well as space," which is made up of "all persons everywhere who have been, as the Puritans would have put it, 'savingly converted', that is, placed in vital union with Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit" (p. 103). Within the local bodies of the church, God has placed those with specific leadership roles (Ephesians 4:11-13); these leaders can be described as under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd (Laniak, 2006), with responsibilities that lie in close parallel to those of the herdsman responsible for his flock.

In the final chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus gives Peter a three-part command to "feed my lambs" (John 21:15), to "tend my sheep" (John 21:16), and to "feed my sheep" (John 21:17). Gunter (2016) asserts, "Jesus fully intended that His description of the 'Good Shepherd' should be understood as a template for future leadership among God's people" (p. 10). Gunter further argues, "The Good Shepherd continues to provide for the care of his sheep through under-shepherds who are called to guide, feed, nurture, and protect the flock" (p. 16).

Peter, given the assignment by Jesus in John 21, writes to the elders of an unnamed church, exhorting them to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you" (1 Peter 5:2). A commentator notes that, in this passage, the Apostle argues from a foundational understanding of God's ownership of the flock (Peter, 2020). Thus, the picture of shepherd leadership remains one of stewardship, of caring for, protecting, and feeding the flock for the Master to whom both they and the under-shepherd belong.

Stewardship endeavors to maintain and grow the flock entrusted to one's care (Matthew 25:14-30). Citing Paul's instructions on the selection of church leaders in 1 Timothy and Titus, Goodrich (2013) argues, "The image of the overseer as steward [is] … a valuable metaphor" (p. 97). Stewardship of the flock does not simply make up a part of the shepherd's responsibility but describes the entirety of that charge. Peter (2020) observes that "the two essential dynamics of stewardship—authority received from the master and accountability delivered to the master—are part of the warp and woof of pastoral ministry" (p. 39). The church leader "is responsible," continues Peter, "to attend to the spiritual life and care of those members of the congregation to which he has been called" (p. 42).

Resane (2014) expands on the preceding, advising that the shepherd "is the person who tends, feeds, or guards the flocks" (p. 1). In a prominent point applicable to this research, the

shepherd leader holds responsibility for feeding the sheep; however, the word *feeding* does not

describe the entirety of the care obligation. Moreover, although spiritual protection plays an

unambiguous role in the command to care for the flock, this researcher contends that the

shepherd leadership metaphor of Scripture requires church leaders to provide for the physical

safety of the gathered congregation in addition to their spiritual care.

Consequences of the Failure to Protect

Although no narrative reports exist of literal herdsmen in Scripture being unreliable, the

current study examined two passages that use the shepherd metaphor to rebuke the leaders of

Israel. Zechariah 11 closes with the following statement by the Lord.

> Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock!
> May the sword strike his arm and his right eye!
> Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded! (Zechariah 11:17)

Dunham (2018) summarizes Zechariah 11 by arguing that this chapter displays "YHWH's wrath

and judgment of the nation's apostate leaders due to their idolatry, the abdication of godly

oversight, and rejection of YHWH's rightful shepherd" (p. 4). The remonstrance that closes the

chapter speaks clearly of God's disdain for the shepherd who abandons the care of his flock. In

the context of Zechariah 11, the leaders' desertion of, or lack of care for, the flock led God's

people astray to their destruction. They were left hungry, thirsty, and unprotected by those tasked

with their care.

The second passage applicable to this study, Ezekiel 34, prophesies against the shepherd

leaders of Israel who have demonstrated more care and concern for themselves than the sheep.

The opening verses of the chapter contain God's charges against the faithless shepherds. He

says:

> Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the
> sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones,

but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. (Ezekiel 34:2b-6)

Verse 5 speaks most clearly to this study, noting that the sheep "were scattered because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts" (34:5). The lack of protection and guidance from the assigned shepherds resulted in the sheep suffering predation. God, the metaphorical owner of the flock, denounces the shepherds' abandonment of their duty. He says, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep" (34:10). The shepherds, guilty of not protecting the flock, were dismissed for shamefully failing in their duty to care for and protect those in their charge.

Juxtaposed with the failure of Israel's leaders, the next section of Ezekiel 34, verses 11-24, describes how God Himself will take on the responsibility to shepherd His sheep, search them out from where they have been scattered, and care for them. God declares that He will "seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak" (34:16) and "will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey" (34:22).

Both preceding passages address the failure of the shepherds to tend well to their flocks. God communicates His anger with the careless shepherds and points to specific duties and responsibilities for those who lead. Orobator (2019) contends that "the church must seriously assume the demands of an ethical imperative to ensure the safety, care, and proper teaching of children, young people, and vulnerable adults" (p. 913). This researcher would respectfully add the entirety of the gathered congregation to the list of those whose safety, care, and proper teaching belong within the purview of the church. What is more, case law in the United States

establishes that the police do not hold the responsibility to provide for the protection and safety of individuals or groups but rather for the protection of society as a whole (Castle Rock v. Gonzalez, 545 U.S. 748, 2005; Warren v. District of Columbia, 444 A. 2d 1 - DC: Court of Appeals, 1981). As such, this researcher further argues that the shepherd leaders responsible for gathering, feeding, and caring for the flock have a practical and biblical obligation to provide for the physical safety of the gathered congregation.

The Theory of Shepherd Leadership as a Periscope into Church Security Decisions

As described by Laniak in *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (2006), shepherd leadership provides a practical and applicable theoretical position and a framework for qualitatively examining decisions to utilize security personnel at church gatherings. Based upon the assumption that the shepherd leaders of the church bear responsibility for the care, feeding, and safety of the gathered flock, this theory contributed a solid schema for the study. Because little, if any, research has attempted to capture the theological, biblical, practical, and ethical foundations of security decisions made by the leaders of local churches, this study adds significantly to the knowledge base for Christian leaders undertaking similar decisions.

<div align="center">**Related Literature**</div>

Discussions centering on theological and biblical responsibilities of the Christian and the use of force have not been great in number. However, distinct positions and arguments have been proposed throughout history. Although this section does not exhaustively illuminate all extant assertions, theories, or viewpoints, it provides an overview of the debate surrounding the biblical morality and ethics of using force by believers through reflection on the literature.

Morality of Self-Defense and Defense of Others

An individual believer, particularly one who leads and influences other Christians, must point to particular arguments of morality, ethics, biblical truth, and theological accuracy to say with due consideration, "Here I stand." Christians may easily argue that the God-ordained gift of life remains precious and that all of humanity has been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Additionally, the argument that specific roles (father, husband, pastor, elder, deacon, etc.) have the responsibility to provide for those in their care creates strong biblical support for the assertion that the Christian has a moral obligation to engage in life-preserving service (1 Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 5:28; 1 Peter 5:2-4).

The preceding, however, raises an apparent moral quandary for the defensive use of force because force, as defined by Decker (2014), entails "the use of physical resistance in an effort to halt a violent attack which resistance has the potential to (and may) result in the death of another person" (p. 64). Thus, the force used to protect oneself may result in taking another person's life, creating a potential moral dilemma.

Considerations of Morality

The Samurai Yagyū Munenori (1571-1646) wrote:

It may happen that myriad people suffer because of the evil of one man. In such a case, myriad people are saved by killing one man. Would this not be a true example of 'the sword that kills is the sword that gives life?' (p. 98)

Additionally, Bakon (2014), basing his argument on the Mishnah, asserts, "One who has caused the death of a single man is regarded as having led a whole world to perish. Conversely, one who saves a single person is considered to have saved a whole world" (p. 175). Setting aside the undetermined logic of these arguments, where stands the moral obligation of the Christian with a biblical value for life? Gingles (2017), discussing Dietrich Bonhoeffer's decision to join and aid

the group planning to assassinate Adolf Hitler, states that, in acting, one "surrenders to the judgment of God both his moral purity and the meaning of history," noting that, "confidence to act in the face of this seemingly tragic situation is derived completely from faith in the God who judges justly" (p. 93).

Pointedly, Dewan (2010) asserts that killing, even in the case of self-defense, remains "intrinsically bad" (p. 192). On the other hand, killing in self-defense or defense of the helpless may be morally justifiable if the force used is intended to protect the gift of life. Toward this end, Finlay (2008) notes, "A right of self-defence (sic, and hereafter in Finlay) [is] rooted in intuitions concerning the right to life" (p. 86). He continues, laying out his criteria:

> The individual right of self-defence is best understood as a simple 'full' liberty … possessed by the innocent victim of an unjustified attack. As a full liberty, it gives to the victim a right (a 'half liberty'), on the one hand, to act violently in defence when such an action is *necessary* to prevent an injury of equivalent magnitude from an attacker; the violence used must, therefore, be *proportionate* to that which would otherwise be suffered by the victim and the attack to which it responds must be *imminent*. *Necessity*, *proportionality* and *imminence* are thus parts of the moral structure of the right of self-defence; to exceed them is to exceed the right itself. (Finlay, 2008, p. 90)

The reasoning applied by Finlay aligns with the definitions utilized in this research of retaliation and defensive force. Post-act aggression toward a protagonist represents a definition of retaliation, while forceful actions to defend oneself or another person from attack or aggression define defensive force.

Despite a robust debate on the matter, the apparent moral quandary of the necessity to preserve life while using force that may take life persists. Watson (1990) emphasizes "universal obligations," described as "nonsubjective," which may, at times, "conflict with one another" (p. 69). "How these obligations are to be obeyed," he explains, "depends on the circumstances" (Watson, 1990, p. 69). Similarly, and referencing Dietrick Bonhoeffer's decision to assist a group planning to assassinate Adolf Hitler, Gingles (2017) notes, "In Bonhoeffer's world one

does not reach a morally justified decision by running a moral calculus that provides a sure way forward. Instead, decisions are ventures in the twilight" (p. 88). He adds, "But… Bonhoeffer is no relativist" (Gingles, p. 88). To understand Bonhoeffer correctly, argues Gingles, we must adjust our focus. "Rather than assuming that Bonhoeffer's ethic is an ethic *of* limit cases, it is better to think of his ethic as especially *fitted* to the task of dealing with limit cases" (p. 88). Given this framework of conditionality, an argument emerges for the ability to make moral decisions for using force despite its intrinsic potential lethality.

Morality in Emergency

Morally, a clear difference appears between the considered, debated, and prayerfully accepted necessity of tyrannicide, in Bonhoeffer's case, and the reactive, emergency response of an armed guardian intent on defending a gathered congregation. Still, the question of moral obligation remains. Is one morally obliged to protect innocent life at all costs, even by using force against an aggressor which could lead to the destruction of life, or must an individual defend *all* life and, thus, submit to the aggressor as one who must also be protected, refusing to use force, even at the potential expense of the lives of himself or other non-aggressors? Does an alternate approach resolve what presents an apparent moral conundrum?

Dewan, writing in 2010, argues, "We have the obligation to love the nature that God has made and which is destroyed by killing" (p. 197). Kierkegaard (1847) explains this obligation as a "law" and notes, "Without law, freedom does not exist at all, and it is law that gives freedom. We also believe that it is law that makes distinctions, because when there is no law there are no distinctions at all" (p. 291). Having shown the framework for his assertions, Kierkegaard discusses the duty of Christian love to the neighbor—in which group he includes all persons—as to the close friend or lover (Kierkegaard, 1847, pp. 294-298). Jesus' commandment to "love one

another" (John 13:34) scripturally affirms this duty. Thus, love must be extended to those within

one's care and—in the case of the current discussion—to the attacker.

The Christian, furthermore, must extend love to his neighbor, meaning all of humanity.

Personal rights, however, do not end where the obligation to love begins, according to Dewan

(2010), who emphasizes that an individual subjected to an unlawful violent attack has a right to

defend himself even when his actions cause the death of his attacker. He observed that the

individual attacked

> has the right to preserve his own life against the attacker by a use of suitable means. He
> does not have the right to take as means of saving his own life the killing of the attacker,
> but he does have the right to use the saving means, even if they must result in the death of
> the attacker. (Dewan, 2010, p. 198)

This alternate perspective—commensurate force in a given situation—offers a solution to the

Gordian knot of moral obligation to preserve life while simultaneously defending life using

force. Aquinas (1485) reinforces this possibility, stating:

> Nothing hinders one act from having two effects, only one of which is intended, while the
> other is beside the intention. Now moral acts take their species according to what is
> intended, and not according to what is beside the intention, since this is accidental. (II-II,
> q. 64, a. 7, p. 3334)

By this reasoning, if one intends to defend one's own life or the life of another, although the

obligation to love and to value the life of all remains in effect, one is not bound to passivity but

may act defensively, whatever the result of the defensive use of force, as long as said force

remains proportionate to the situation. "Accordingly," continues Aquinas:

> the act of self-defense may have two effects, one is the saving of one's life, the other is
> the slaying of the aggressor. Therefore this act, since one's intention is to save one's own
> life, is not unlawful, seeing that it is natural to everything to keep itself in "being," as far
> as possible. (II-II, q. 64, a. 7, p. 3334-3335)

Aquinas cautions, however, "Though proceeding from a good intention, an act may be rendered

unlawful, if it be out of proportion to the end" (II-II, q. 64, a. 7, p. 3335). Specifically, he states,

"If a man, in self-defense, uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repel force with moderation his defense will be lawful (Aquinas, 1485, II-II, q. 64, a. 7, p. 3335).

Moral Certitude and Dependence on Grace

In summary, the moral obligation of love toward one's fellow human beings must be maintained (Aquinas, 1485; Dewan, 2010; Gingles, 2017; Kierkegaard, 1847). This imperative, however, does not necessitate passivity in the face of aggression; the reasonable force necessary for sustaining life is available to those persons subjected to unlawful attack (Aquinas, 1485; Dewan, 2010). Despite Dewan's (2010) assertion that the taking of life is "intrinsically bad," still, "the person attacked has the right to take the necessary steps to save himself, even though this sometimes must result in the death of the attacker" (p. 196).

The surveyed literature indicates that an inherent tension exists within the debate on using force for self-defense or defense of others, sometimes even within an individual's understanding of the matter. However, a believer can reach a biblically, theologically, and morally justified decision by weighing all available options and holding to well-informed thinking. The literature emphasizes that those who use force to defend themselves or others must be willing to confront their actions' emotional, societal, and spiritual consequences. In the words of Bush (2013), "It is right that one's emotional response to just killing should be complex, not simple" (p. 594).

The complexity inherent in the discussion of the use of force by Christians inevitably connects to the concept of *imago Dei*, the image of God in man, and the potential of that image to be destroyed. While remaining aware of the tension created by this concern, the literature reviewed in this chapter does define a path toward a reasonable decision. When a shepherd leader settles the issue in his mind—either for or against—he may rest in the assurance offered

by Bonhoeffer (2005): "Those who act responsibly place their action into the hands of God and live by God's grace and judgment" (p. 268-269).

Ethical Tensions

This section considers the ethics of Christian self-defense and defense of others by applying the ontological ethical paradigms proposed by Shapiro and Stefkovish (2016). The four ethical paradigms the authors discuss include justice, critique, care, and the profession (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, pp. 11-17). The ethic of justice "focuses on rights and laws" (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, p. 11). In contrast, the ethic of critique "is based on critical theory, which has, at its heart, an analysis of social class and its inequities" (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, p. 13). This ethic of critique has been employed to "deal with inconsistencies, formulate the hard questions, and debate and challenge the issues" (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, p. 13). The ethic of critique asked questions of reasonableness focused on using force for self-defense and the defense of others. The ethic of care is shaped by a desire to care for those who are physically weaker, less able, or less privileged (pp. 15-18). The ethic of the profession, as defined by Shapiro and Stefkovish, is "a consideration of those moral aspects unique to the profession" (p. 19), which returns the discussion to the theory of shepherd leadership posited previously.

The Ethic of Justice

The ethic of justice "focuses on rights and laws" (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, p. 11). Does using defensive force deserve justification in that it may preserve the harmless person's right to life, even though it may, by its forceful nature, deprive the attacker of life? Further, does the element of lawlessness brought to bear by the aggressor assign using force in self-defense or defense of others a justified designation?

Dewan (2010), as noted in the section on morality, argues, "The person attacked has the right to take the necessary steps to save himself, even though this sometimes must result in the death of the attacker" (p. 196). Finlay (2008) concurs, noting that an individual's right to use force in self-defense proceeds directly from "intuitions concerning the right to life" (p. 86). Thus, since one has a right to life, using force to defend against violent, unlawful attacks is justifiable within the ethic of justice.

The Ethic of Critique

Applying the ethic of critique within the abovementioned bounds, the question becomes one of reasonableness (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, p. 13). Namely, is employing defensive force to preserve life reasonable?

In a passage explicitly addressing the questions surrounding self-defense, Aquinas (1485) addresses the question of reasonableness on its own merits. He argues that "If a man, in self-defense, uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repel force with moderation his defense will be lawful" (Aquinas, 1485, II-II, q. 64, a. 7, p. 3335). Farrell (1990) notes that "for any given kind of offense with which we might be faced, there is just so much that we are entitled to do in order to prevent someone from perpetrating that offense against us" (p. 317).

In a 2010 lecture at Kansas State University, Michael Mullen, 17th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made the following assertion regarding military force applied in conflict: "Precise and principled force applies whether we are attacking an entrenched enemy or securing the population—in either case, it protects the innocent … we protect the innocent." Admiral Mullen's statement, when applied to the current discussion of self-defense or defense of others, argues that reasonable force "protects the innocent" (Mullen, 2010). Accordingly, the ethic of

critique ascribes justification to defensive force only when necessary to preserve life and only to the level required to safeguard life. Anything greater than proportionate force to stop an attack would be deemed unreasonable.

The Ethic of Care

The ethic of care asks: Does using defensive force provide care for the defenseless? To place this question in context, consider the following information.

A 2014 FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin study of the active shooter cases between 2000 and 2012 reports that law enforcement response times in 84 active shooter events ranged from less than one minute to 15 minutes, with a mean response time of three minutes (Blair et al., 2014, figure 4). The authors point out that it was "worth noting that in the five largest-casualty events the police were on scene in about three minutes;" nonetheless, the authors explain, "a substantial number of people still were shot and injured or killed" (Blair et al., 2014, para. 13). The five significant casualty events Blair et al. (2014) mention in this regard are Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, Illinois with six killed and 21 injured; Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newtown, Connecticut with 28 killed and 2 wounded; Fort Hood Army Base, Killeen, Texas with 14 killed and 33 wounded; Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia with 33 killed and 23 wounded; and the Century 16 Theater, Aurora, Colorado with 12 killed and 70 wounded (para. 13). Even with a mean police response time of three minutes, 93 people were killed and 149 were wounded.

Sutherland Springs First Baptist Church was attacked by a single shooter on 5 November 2017 for over 11 minutes before being interrupted by a civilian who responded and shot the attacker. Twenty-six were killed and another 20 injured—the most significant loss of life in a church attack in the United States—before police arrived at the scene, several minutes after the

attacker fled (Mooney, 2018; Spriester & Medina, 2017). Additionally, Blair et al. (2014) point

out that of the 84 mass shootings between 2000 and 2012, "67 percent (34) ended with attackers

stopping themselves via suicide (29 cases) or by leaving the scene (5 cases)" (para. 18). They

note:

> In the other 33 percent (17) of the cases that ended before the police arrived, the potential victims at the scene stopped the shooter themselves. Most commonly, they physically subdued the attacker (14 cases), but three cases involved people at the scene shooting the perpetrator to end the attack. (Blair et al., 2014, para. 18)

A situation distinctly germane to the current discussion occurred on 29 December 2019 in

White Settlement, Texas. A man entered the West Freeway Church of Christ worship facility

wearing a fake beard, a wig, and a long coat (Blieberg & Stengle, 2019). During communion, the

individual stood, drew a short-barreled shotgun from beneath his coat, and killed Anton "Tony"

Wallace and Richard White before falling to a single bullet from Jack Wilson, head of the

church's volunteer security team. Six seconds elapsed from when the attack was initiated until

the gunman fell (Levenson et al., 2019). The attack occurred swiftly as did the response.

Regarding the ethic of care, the cases of First Baptist Church Sutherland Springs and

West Freeway Church, White Settlement argue that using defensive force provides care for the

defenseless. Shapiro and Stefkovish (2016) emphasize, "This lens tends to sometimes deal with

emotions" (p. 18). In the face of rising threats of violent attack (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018),

pastoral care for a congregation's emotional well-being may entail assurances that church

leadership takes seriously its responsibility to protect the flock physically.

The Ethic of the Profession

Shapiro and Stefkovish (2016) write, "Professional codes of ethics serve as guideposts

for the profession" (p. 22). Although various denominational structures have promulgated ethical

standards for clergy, this researcher's investigation found no universal code of ethics for church

leadership. Descriptions offered by Paul to Timothy and Titus for selecting deacons and elders come closest to a prescription.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul writes:

An overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:2-7)

These instructions essentially repeat in the following verses as qualifications for a deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-13) and in Paul's instruction to Titus in Chapter 1, Verses 5-9 of the book named for its recipient. In the teachings of Paul, a clear tone of stewardship comes through— "He must manage his own household well" (1 Timothy 3:4)—which Peter further explains in his own instruction for church leaders to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you" (1 Peter 5:2). Grudem (1994) emphasizes the shepherd role stated by Peter in this directive (p. 943), particularly the duties to care for, feed, and protect the flock, all of which have been argued vigorously in the Theological Framework section.

Despite apparent parallels to the caregiving and protective responsibilities of the shepherd, without a "professional codes of ethics [to] serve as guideposts for the profession" (Shapiro & Stefkovish, 2016, p. 22), church leaders are left to opinion and supposition regarding the ethic of the profession. As it is, the guiding and foundational standard of the shepherd leader remains the Bible; arguments for the protective duties of the pastor-shepherd have been explored in the section of this chapter titled The Church and its Leaders (see p. 56).

Toward a Biblical Ethic

Although logical conclusions develop from each of the previously discussed paradigmatic questions, believers—especially church leaders—require the clarity of a biblical ethic. Grudem (2018) states that "Christian ethics is any study that answers the question, 'What does the whole Bible teach us about which acts, attitudes, and personal character traits receive God's approval, and which do not?'" (p. 34). Thus, the discussion must return to Scripture for an ethic that has been "breathed out by God … profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Ethic of Scripture

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

This statement contains a comprehensive ethic and an identifier; it serves as instruction and signature. Disciples of Christ are identified by their love for their fellow man, even for their attackers (Aquinas, 1485; Dewan, 2010; Gingles, 2017; Kierkegaard, 1847). The unavoidable warning of a biblical ethic that makes space for defensive force, though, offers the reminder that the Christian may not, under any circumstance, resort to retaliation or revenge (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19). In keeping with Jesus' instruction and that which marks a follower as such, the ethic of Scripture offers justification for the use of force in defense of life; love does not necessitate passivity or non-resistance, for love can also motivate defensive force (Dewan, 2010; Kierkegaard, 1847).

A Coherent Ethic

Considering the preceding, several conclusions begin to clarify. First, a measurable distance arises between retaliation/revenge and defensive force. Next, with love, compassion, and care for the defenseless as motivation, using force to defend life against an aggressor is permissible. Additionally, a strong argument can be made that defensive force is both service to those in one's care and an intrinsic responsibility of shepherding (I Samuel 17:34-35; John 10:7-14; Aquinas, 1485; Dewan, 2010; Kierkegaard, 1847).

Although all loss of life is regrettable, force employed by the defender may necessarily contain great violence which has the potential of taking the life of the aggressor in situations wherein no lesser force will halt the attacker's unjustified actions (Aquinas, 1485, II-II, q. 64, a. 7, p. 3335; Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.d., Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 5.1.2264; Farrell, 1990, p. 317). This ethical understanding of force employed in defense exposes what Ryan (1983) calls the "true asymmetry of the self-defense situation" in that the victim did not choose the situation and merely responds to the aggressor's actions out of the necessity to preserve the life of the innocent (p. 516).

Thus, a biblically based ethic for a Christian in the role of defender disallows unnecessary violence, offensive force, or retaliatory action (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:17-21). In addition, an ethic of care compels the believer to take action to protect the defenseless, and the ethic of justice argues that one should willingly respond when the life of an innocent may be stolen (Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27). Finally, employing the theory at the center of this study—the ethic of the (profession) shepherd—demonstrates that Christian leaders should consider the biblical shepherd whose responsibilities encompassed not only the feeding of the sheep but also their physical protection (1 Samuel 17:34-35; Laniak, 2006).

In summary, a biblical ethic for using force to defend life compels one to act only when motivated by love and compassion. Additionally, an ethical standard requires an individual to ensure that danger is imminent, take no unnecessary action, and ensure that action is proportionate to the need (Finlay, 2008).

Rationale for the Study

Between 1999 and 2019, according to research conducted by the FBSN, 734 individuals were killed in American churches (2023). Another 1149 people were injured, abducted, physically attacked, committed suicide, attempted to cause harm to another, or committed physical violence in American houses of worship (FBSN, 2023). Since tracking began, these events have increased yearly (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018). Over 2000 of what the Faith Based Security Network calls "DFIs" or "deadly force incidents" occurred during this period, with several more being added each month. Additionally, significant publicity has surrounded the attacks at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado (2007); Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina (2015); Burnett Chapel Church of Christ in Antioch, Tennessee (2017); First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas (2017); West Freeway Church of Christ, White Settlement, Texas (2019); and others.

Consequently, many churches have begun considering the ethics, legality, permissibility, and theology of active measures to protect their congregations. Specifically, many churches have either implemented a security program or are in some stage of planning toward that end. Lifeway Research reports that a 2019 survey of 1,000 pastors indicated 62% had some plan for an active shooter event, with 45% having armed church volunteers on site and an additional 23% of surveyed churches employing armed private security (Earls, 2020).

The questions and thought processes informing the decisions to utilize security personnel—especially armed security—during church gatherings remain necessary and highly sensitive. They are necessary because of the rising number of violent attacks against faith-based institutions and houses of worship (FBSN, 2023). Sensitivity persists because the Bible teaches that man was created in God's image (the *imago Dei*) and, therefore, force, whether used to deter violent attack or for aggression, inseparably contains the ability to mar or destroy God's creation. The potential to disrupt church leadership, groups, and congregations exacerbates the delicacy of the subject.

At the time of the current discussion, few resources exist from which church leadership can seek assistance in understanding the biblical, theological, and historical backdrop against which ethical and moral decisions must be made regarding Christian self-defense, defense of others, or church security. Due to the increasing number of violent attacks against houses of worship (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018) and the lack of a current, focused study, this research was necessary.

Gap in the Literature

Although the question of Christians utilizing force to defend life is not an entirely novel area of study, a review of the literature discovered that recent professional discussion has not increased alongside the sharp rise in violence against faith-based organizations and houses of worship. Conspicuously, a scarcity of current academic inquiry was discovered when exploring the topic of church security, particularly concerning decisions made by church leadership to adopt programs aimed at protecting the gathered congregation.

From a historical perspective, the centuries-old doctrine of Just War has received significant consideration in both military and theological circles. However, the theory has been

applied almost entirely to issues of warring nations (Decker, 2014). However, the robust body of research surrounding the doctrine of *jus bellum justum* illuminates the substantial lack of current, coherent, and biblically based academic research into self-defense or the defense of others. This shortage appears especially pronounced in the specific area of church security and protection of the gathered flock.

One potential justification for this scarcity argues that, until recent times, study into the subject may have been unnecessary due to common acceptance of an individual's inherent right of self-defense or defense of others (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.d., Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 5.1.2264; Hessbruegge, 2017). Also, as the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, a branch of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2020) notes, "The field of HoW [House of Worship] security is relatively small and there is even less established literature on the specific problem of targeted violence" (p. 10). While organizations such as the Faith Based Security Network are increasing the visibility of the subject, the volume of research into the subject remains scant.

In stark comparison to the limited treatment within academic sources, an astonishing amount of information exists on websites, blogs, videos, discussion board forums, and in numerous books written for a popular audience (Fairchild, 2018; Fawbush, 2016; Gabbert, 2021; Lundberg, 2021; Piper, 2015; Raymond, 2016). Sadly, at least for the biblically and theologically inclined researcher, most of the available information fails to meet the rigorous standards of the serious student. According to Decker (2014), most material is "sensational, belligerent, and poorly informed" (p. 25). Additionally, he notes "a substantial gap in credible biblical perspectives" in the information available to the person intent on learning his or her responsibilities as a believer (Decker, 2014, p. 25). To these contrasting issues must be added the

often confusing and contradictory advice from thought leaders of the Church (Grudem, 2018; Piper, 2015). Thus, the complexity of the question increases from the lack of current academic research in the field and the varied perspectives available in popular formats.

This research sought to partially close the identified gap by bringing the discussion up to date. This was accomplished by studying the historical, biblical, theological, ethical, and moral positions on the Christian's use of force and, pragmatically, by engaging with church leaders who have made decisions regarding security for congregational gatherings.

Chapter Summary

With the acknowledgment that any attempt toward exhaustive or comprehensive study of the subject would be futile, this literature review has shown that an ethic considering the entirety of Scripture contains space for using force in self-defense or defense of others. Furthermore, the study has described a responsibility for shepherd leaders to provide for the physical safety of their flock by protecting them from predation. While admittedly complex, biblical, theological, and practical considerations support the need for the gathered congregation to be safeguarded. Additionally, a broad gap was identified in the literature addressing a Christian's responsibilities relative to self-defense and the defense of others. The researcher acknowledges, however, that significant future research is required to create a comprehensive resource for church leaders engaged in the decision of how best to protect their congregations.

Profile of the Current Study

This study focused on an exploration of the ethical, moral, biblical, and theological thought processes of church pastors in the United States who had pondered implementing an active security strategy within their congregations. Though churches within the United States have seen a sharp rise in deadly force incidents with significant losses of life and property

(FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018), surprisingly, a dearth of current academic research persists in the fields of Christian self-defense and church security. By contrast, popular material supporting multiple positions is widely available (Fairchild, 2018; Fawbush, 2016; Gabbert, 2021; Lundberg, 2021; Piper, 2015; Raymond, 2016). Decker (2014) notes the "poorly informed" nature of much of what can be found, asserting that a "substantial gap in credible biblical perspectives" pervades the body of material addressing the intersection of Christian faith and the use of force for individual self-defense or the defense of others (p. 25).

This chapter presented the literature review, which was guided by five RQs that concentrated the study on issues of theology, biblical truth, ethics, and morals. This review of the literature—historical, academic, and biblical—highlighted a gap in the current literature on self-defense, the defense of others, and church security. Chapter 3 presents the research methods centered in a phenomenological multi-case study approach.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design Synopsis

This study sought to develop insight into the biblically and theologically informed thought processes of pastors and church leadership teams in 21 churches in the United States who had made decisions regarding security measures during church gatherings. The study used a qualitative phenomenological multi-case study design. Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrated the pressing need for this research and introduced the literature on the subject. This chapter sets forth the research problem, research purpose and questions, the research methodology and setting, participants, the researcher's role, ethical considerations that required navigation, the methods and instruments used for data collection, and the methods of data analysis.

The Problem

Churches within the United States have seen a sharp rise in deadly force incidents, and significant losses of life and property continue to occur (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018). Surprisingly, a dearth of current academic research into Christian self-defense and church security persists. By contrast, popular material supports multiple positions in various formats (Fairchild, 2018; Fawbush, 2016; Gabbert, 2021; Lundberg, 2021; Piper, 2015; Raymond, 2016). However, Decker (2014) notes the "poorly informed" nature of much of what can be found in popular materials, asserting that a "substantial gap in credible biblical perspectives" pervades the body of material addressing the intersection of Christian faith and the use of force for individual self-defense or the defense of others (p. 25).

This study endeavored to address this literature gap through academic inquiry into the moral, ethical, biblical, and theological foundations underlying decisions about an active security strategy by church leadership teams in various settings within the United States. This research

contributes to a greater understanding of the underlying concerns motivating these decisions among individual church leadership teams, affords an increased understanding of the theological and ethical issues surrounding the issue of security personnel employment for congregational gatherings, and biblically articulates the responsibility of pastoral leadership to provide for the spiritual and physical safety of the gathered flock.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological multi-case study explored the practical, ethical, theological, and biblical foundation of decisions regarding active security strategies at church gatherings by 21 pastors in the United States. In this study, an active security strategy was defined as a formal plan for site security based on the use of security personnel. The theory of shepherd leadership, as identified by Laniak (2006), guided this study and relates via the shepherd's responsibility not only to feed and care for but also to protect his sheep (p. 26).

Research Questions

RQ1: What practical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ2: What moral and ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ3: What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ4: What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process, and how was it addressed?

RQ5: In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security strategy?

Research Design and Methodology

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state, "*Qualitative research* is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Rather than focusing on numbers, figures, or facts, qualitative research focuses on words, descriptions, human experiences, and human understandings. Leedy and Ormrod (2015) add further detail to this definition, pointing out that "qualitative research encompasses a number of methodologies that are in some respects quite different from one another" (p. 269). They argue, however, that all qualitative research assumes two common elements (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 169). Qualitative research schemes focus "on phenomena that are occurring or have previously occurred in natural settings," and "they involve capturing and studying the complexity of those phenomena" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 169).

Based on the preceding, qualitative research can adopt various formats; however, Creswell and Creswell (2018) report that the majority align under phenomenological research, ethnography, narrative research, grounded theory, or case studies. Of the listed qualitative methods, this researcher chose to employ a phenomenological multi-case study approach due to its ability to capture the data necessary to answer the Research Questions.

This researcher employed Yin's definition of a case study, which he characterizes as an approach that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when,

- The boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident (Yin, 2018, p. 15).

The multiple case study approach expanded this definition to include additional cases examined, contrasted, and compared. Houghton et al. (2012) discuss the benefits of this method, arguing

that "multiple case studies allow comparisons, particularly in diverse settings" (p. 12). They further note that employing data from various sources develops a more "convincing and accurate" case study (Houghton et al., 2012, p. 12).

Lastly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) define "phenomenological research" as a research design "in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 62). Since the thought processes of various church leaders who made decisions regarding an active security program within their respective churches made up the focus of the study, this researcher selected a phenomenological multiple case study approach as best suited for the research.

Setting

Based on active and growing threats, a current and expanding movement exists within the American church toward planning for the possibility of violent attacks (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018). Many churches report some form of active security planning up to and including fielding security personnel (Earls, 2020).

The setting for the study was initially proposed as ten churches in the United States with pastors who had formally made decisions regarding an active security strategy for church gatherings. Due to participant interest and more responses than expected, this number was subsequently increased. Notwithstanding local administrative and governmental issues that require navigation with prayerful wisdom and caution by wise church leadership, this study made every effort to avoid unnecessary focus on particulars related to legalities, insurance requirements, training standards imposed by regulatory agencies, and similar questions not directly related to the focus of the study. Delimiting the study to churches within the 50 states preserved the applicability and generalizability of the selected research topic.

Participants

Writing to the church of Ephesus, the Apostle Paul reveals that God has given "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Ephesians 4:11-13). Applied in various forms, even within specific denominations (Lemke, 2017), the roles specified in the preceding verses describe a person or a group of persons given specific responsibilities within the local church body. Grudem (1994) states, "A church officer is someone who has been publicly recognized as having the right and responsibility to perform certain functions for the benefit of the whole church" (p. 932, italics removed from original). In most American churches, the pastor is the primary—often the only—church officer.

In common practice, the church tasks the pastor—or, in the case of multiple pastors on staff, the senior or lead pastor—with making decisions regarding activities, expenditures, and organizational changes within the church (Grudem, 1994). For this reason, the pastor/senior pastor/lead pastor of respondent churches served as the primary research participant.

The sampling strategy was based on the purposeful selection of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The initial strategy consisted of recruiting pastors who had made decisions regarding church security and were members of the FBSN. Once it was determined that this approach was unlikely to produce enough participants, recruitment was opened to a larger group of pastors with whom the researcher had prior relationships and additional contacts volunteered by the research committee members.

Role of the Researcher

A former senior pastor, this researcher has served on both sides of the pulpit with church security teams. In the roles of volunteer, trainer, pastor, and organization leader, this researcher brings considerable personal experience engaging the security threats churches face. Additionally, this researcher possesses a background in federal law enforcement, the U.S. Armed Forces, domestic anti-terrorism, and homeland security operations. He is an experienced security team trainer and a firearms and self-defense instructor.

Several aspects of the current discussion impacted this researcher and led to an interest in this study. As a pastor, he experienced situations requiring intervention by a group of trained, qualified, cautious, and watchful security personnel. As a military servicemember and a law enforcement officer, he witnessed firsthand the necessity of protection for the "widows and orphans" (Exodus 22:22-24, Psalm 10:17-18, James 1:27), the vulnerable, and those unable to defend themselves against violent aggression. As a church security team member, team leader, security trainer, and consultant, he observed the confusion, frustration, deep theological divides, and disregard that often accompanied the question of a security presence during church gatherings. These personal experiences and interests coalesced into a deep interest in church security decision-making processes and developed into the topic of this study.

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) write, "Good qualitative researchers actively try to identify personal, social, political, or philosophical biases that are likely to affect their ability to collect and interpret data" through a process known as "reflexivity" (p. 278). The preceding autobiographical information identified several potential areas where researcher bias had the potential to influence conclusions. Thus, the researcher made a special effort to ensure that all

inferences connected directly to the reported data. However, an individual with this researcher's life history will, of necessity, filter the data and report findings through his lens of experience.

Considering the preceding, the researcher asked open-ended interview questions designed to elicit responses that illuminate the thought processes of individual church leaders as they wrestled with decisions about security in their church gatherings. With those respondents unable to schedule or conduct online interviews, the researcher utilized email questionnaires. Once all responses were collected, the researcher uploaded them to the NVivo-14 qualitative research software package, which was used to analyze and thematically organize data. Lastly, the researcher reported conclusions using thick, rich descriptions with clearly traceable connections to research responses (Johnson et al., 2020; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

The researcher hypothesized that common themes would arise from the decision-making processes across churches and church leadership teams regardless of geographical location or denominational background. Secondarily, he hypothesized that the data would reveal primarily pragmatic motivations across research participants rather than decisions driven by biblical and theological understandings of the shepherd's responsibilities. Further, the researcher hypothesized that security decisions were made with theological and biblical questions either unasked and unaddressed or given attention only after the decision had been made.

Pastors who had received training from the researcher before or during the study were excluded from participation.

Ethical Considerations

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) state that the planning stages provide the appropriate point at which to consider the ethics of a study (p. 125). This research touched on areas of greater or lesser sensitivity for potential participants—addressed further below—but focused primarily on

past decisions and decision-making processes. While the potential existed for varying psychological or emotional discomfort levels, the researcher anticipated that the study's focus would cause minimal or no distress to participants.

The study did not present a risk of physical harm to participants, nor did they incur financial costs (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). To minimize the impact on participating church leaders, the researcher designed research instruments requiring a one-hour or less participant time commitment. Lastly, the researcher guarded all personal data, such as names, phone numbers, email addresses, and employment information, in accordance with the Liberty University Christian Leadership Doctoral Program Handbook (Butler & Jackson, 2023).

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Collection Methods

Qualitative research focuses on human experiences, words, and the situational understandings of individuals instead of the numbers, facts, and figures captured in quantitative analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a result of this distinctly human focus, qualitative research depends on human interactions as the means of data collection to a significant degree; this is especially so in phenomenological and case study qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, case studies derive their data from several different sources, which Yin (2018) states may include "documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts" (p. 113).

The human experiences and thought processes that shaped decisions about active security strategies during church gatherings, along with the respondent church leaders' biblical and theological perspectives, formed the study's focus. To best capture this information, the researcher selected interviews and email questionnaires using identical open-ended questions as

the means of data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Appendix E). The researcher selected

these methods due to their ability to capture "relativist perspectives," which Yin (2018) defines

as "the distinctive perspectives of the case study participants" (p. 110). Further, an inductive and

multi-case study approach provided an opportunity for comparison and contrast among the

results of individual case studies. Methods that elucidated perspective and experiential responses

were most applicable due to the study's focus on "distinctive perspectives" (Yin, 2018, p. 110).

The researcher anticipated that some limited documentation (emails, minutes of meetings,

correspondence between church leadership and church security consultants, insurance, etc.)

would come to light during the proposed research. This assumption proved incorrect. The

participants volunteered no supplementary data, nor did the researcher request it.

Procedures

Johnson et al. (2020) state, "Rigor is best achieved through thoughtful and deliberate

planning, diligent and ongoing application of researcher reflexivity, and honest communication

between the researcher and the audience regarding the study and its results" (p.145). Interviews

and questionnaires, by their nature, insert the researcher into the data collection and

interpretation matrix and require particular safeguards; in qualitative research, the researcher

may be thought of as a research instrument (Johnson et al., 2020).

Instruments and Protocols

Given the preceding, the researcher operated as the primary research instrument.

Secondary instruments consisted of interviews and questionnaires. Where able, the researcher

conducted electronically transcribed one-on-one online interviews with respondents using

Microsoft Teams. Where constraints of time or technology prohibited interviews, the researcher

collected answers to the Interview Protocol (Appendix E) questions via emailed questionnaires.

Interview Protocol questions were generated after studying the relevant literature and developing the research problem and research questions, or RQs. Interview questions were organized to closely align with and elicit answers to the RQs. Interview questions included in the Interview Protocol and email questionnaire were approved by the researcher's dissertation committee and the Liberty University Institutional Review Board.

Data Collection and Protection

This researcher enhanced and protected data collection methods by implementing the four strategies or principles recommended by Yin (2018), which he reports "can help to deal with the problems of establishing the construct validity and reliability of the evidence" (p. 126). These principles are:

1. Use multiple sources of evidence.

2. Create a case study database.

3. Maintain a chain of evidence.

4. Exercise care when using data from social media sources. (Yin, 2018, pp. 126-138)

Of his first principle, Yin (2018) argues for the strength of case study research based on multiple sources and notes, "A major rationale for using multiple sources of evidence in case study research relates to the basic motive for doing a case study in the first place: to do an in-depth study of a phenomenon in its real-world context" (p. 127). The researcher interviewed as wide a field of subjects as practicable—more than doubling the proposed ten interviewees to a final number of 21—to build a robust data set consisting of multiple sources of evidence. This approach aided in developing a generalizable and applicable set of inferences (Yin, 2018, p. 126).

Yin's second principle, "create a case study database" (2018, p. 130), dealt with the collection, maintenance, organization, and accessibility of gathered data, primarily notes, transcripts of interviews, documents, tabular materials, and so forth. All data collected during the research was kept secure via password protection of electronic storage devices and was physically secured when not in actual use in accordance with standards published in Liberty University's Christian Leadership Program Manual (Butler & Jackson, 2023). Participants' names and contact information were stored in a password protected electronic location accessible only by the researcher. Additionally, research participants were assigned a two-digit numeric identification code to ensure their anonymity in reporting; the code identified only the sequential order in which the researcher interviewed or received a response from an individual.

Yin (2018) states that his third principle, "maintain a chain of evidence," exists to "increase the construct validity of the information" and to "allow the reader of the case study to follow the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study findings" (p. 134). A clearly defined path from data to a conclusion, or vice versa, significantly enhances the persuasiveness of research conclusions and should be repeatable without researcher guidance (Yin, 2018, pp. 130-134). The researcher used thick and rich descriptions to connect findings to the data and demonstrated these connections through tables showing research responses and their associated themes and conclusions (Johnson et al., 2020; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Once data collection ended, the researcher reviewed, classified, and cataloged the data using the NVivo-14 qualitative data software package. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that the researcher must "use the coding as well for generating a number of themes … These themes are the ones that appear as major findings in qualitative studies" (p. 175). The researcher

anticipated that significant common themes would occur across respondents, allowing the data to be organized, analyzed, and reported understandably and beneficially. This hypothesis proved correct and is discussed in Chapter 5.

Data Analysis

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), the processes of data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation are interconnected, begin together in the research process, and "may subsequently drive further data collection" (p. 309). This inductive connection between data collection and data analysis reflects Creswell and Creswell's (2018) assertion that qualitative research "involves emerging questions and procedures," data which is "typically collected in the participant's setting," with "data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes" and finalizing with "the researcher making interpretation of the meaning of the data" (p. 4). The authors report that researchers conducting qualitative research engage in an inductive learning process, "focus on individual meaning," and commit to "reporting the complexity of a situation" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4).

Analysis Methods

This researcher used the transcription function of Microsoft Teams to produce transcriptions of interviews, which were saved in password-protected electronic storage as Word documents. Email questionnaire responses were saved as Word documents using identical security procedures. These transcripts and questionnaire responses were subsequently uploaded to the NVivo-14 qualitative research software package for analysis.

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) note the flexible and "inductive reason process" that drives qualitative data analysis, and advocate for beginning the analysis early in the data collection process (p. 309). Additionally, they indicate the great need for reflexivity in the analysis process

due to the inevitability of the researcher's "personal attitudes and opinions" coloring conclusions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 309). Since the researcher serves as the primary research instrument, total objectivity has limited opportunity. This researcher guarded against influencing data analysis by using thick and rich descriptions, allowing the data to speak for itself, and reflexively reporting conclusions influenced by his preconceptions.

The theory guiding the study provided additional aid in analyzing gathered data. Laniak (2006), in his book *Shepherds After My Own Heart,* set forth the theoretical lens of "shepherd leadership," a concept summarized in the statement by Gunter (2016) that "the Good Shepherd continues to provide for the care of his sheep through under-shepherds who are called to guide, feed, nurture and protect the flock" (p. 16). Creswell (2014) notes, "Researchers increasingly use a theoretical lens or perspective in qualitative research which provides an overall orienting lens for the study" (p. 98). The above theory was selected to facilitate a well-grounded data collection process and to aid the analysis of gathered data.

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) describe a helpful system for "organizing and analyzing qualitative data." The steps follow.

1. Convert the data into one or more forms that will be easy to organize and analyze.

2. Organize the data in a preliminary, superficial way that will enable you to locate them easily as you proceed.

3. Identify preliminary categories that are likely to be helpful in coding the data.
4. Divide the data into meaningful units that will be individually coded.

5. Apply the initial coding scheme to a subset of the data.

6. Construct a final list of codes and subcodes, and define each code and subcode as specifically and concretely as possible.

7. Consider using two or more raters to code the data independently.

8. Identify noteworthy patterns and relationships among the codes.

9. Be alert for outliers, exceptions, and contradictions within the data set.

10. Interpret the data in light of your research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, pp. 310-315).

Additionally, they note the "iterative process" of qualitative research, remarking specifically on how qualitative researchers go "back and forth among data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 310). The researcher anticipated that the interconnectedness of the data collection and analysis processes would, at some level, steer the collection of more data. While this suspicion was confirmed, the RQs and subsequent interview questions kept the data on point to a significant degree.

The researcher followed the abovementioned steps in analyzing the gathered data, except steps 3 and 4. The researcher found that codes emerged readily from the data without subdivision (Step 4). Furthermore, the "preliminary category" identification noted in Step 3 became extraneous as the data was already categorized within the four entities of theology, biblical basis, morality, and ethics (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 311). How this framework applied to the data analysis is presented in Chapter 4.

To maintain credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher determined to guard against the influence of bias by using thick and rich descriptions to connect findings to the data (see Tables 1-8, Chapter 4). Additionally, in areas where personal experience, beliefs, or preconceptions could influence conclusions, the researcher reflexively reported personal information essential for reader interpretation.

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) cite the prevalent use of computer software by many qualitative researchers to assist with the organization, study, and interpretation of data. This researcher selected the NVivo software suite based on his preferences for user interface and the

recommendation of a member of his dissertation committee. Once all data had been collected and organized as Word documents, they were uploaded to NVivo-14 for study. This process is described in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), trustworthiness remains an essential element of any research undertaking; analysis and conclusions must stand on their merit and be apparent to any reader (p. 106). Additionally, the researcher should not "claim to be an objective, impartial observer" but should clearly describe "personal beliefs and attitudes that may potentially be slanting observations and interpretations" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 106). Considering this recommendation, and as previously discussed, perspectives held by the researcher, personal history bearing on the proposed research, and closely held beliefs were carefully reported, and those bearing on data assessment or reporting were scrupulously described.

Additionally, Houghton et al. (2012) argue that the four elements of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability increase "rigour" (sic, and hereafter in Houghton et al.) in qualitative research (pp. 13–16). The authors define credibility as "the value and believability of the findings" while arguing that it "involves two processes: conducting the research in a believable manner and being able to demonstrate credibility" of both researcher and data (Houghton et al., 2012, p. 13).

Of dependability, Houghton et al. (2012) assert that it best "compare(s) to the concept of reliability in quantitative research and refers to how stable the data are" (p. 13). "Confirmability," they continue, "refers to the neutrality and accuracy of the data," which they note "is closely linked to dependability – the processes for establishing both are similar" (p. 13).

Lastly, Houghton et al. argue that "transferability refers to whether or not particular findings can be transferred to another similar context or situation, while still preserving the meanings and inferences from the completed study" (p. 13). Utilizing these lenses when collecting and assessing data in case study research ensures that the "contemporary phenomenon" within the "technically distinctive situation" that is the focus of the study is treated appropriately (Yin, 2018, p. 15). The four specific trustworthiness measures of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are discussed below.

Credibility

Houghton et al. (2012) align the term "credibility" with trustworthiness, noting that "value and believability of the findings" are significant to the result of the proposed research (p. 13). Adding nuance, however, they argue that credibility involves conducting the research in a "believable manner" and demonstrating the credibility of both the researcher and the data. (Houghton, et al., 2012, p. 13).

To meet these rigorous requirements, the researcher meticulously recorded each step and process of the study, reporting the data in thick, rich tables while iteratively developing themes and conclusions revealed by the data. The researcher reported all data as gathered and clearly and traceably connected conclusions to the collected data. For research transparency and reader clarity, the data is reported in tables in Chapter 4; complete anonymized responses are included in Appendix F.

Dependability

Johnson et al. (2020) assert that researchers must use a level of descriptive detail sufficient to assure readers that "proper research practices have been followed and that future researchers can repeat the study" (p. 145). Other qualitative research writers describe

dependability as "the stability of findings over time" (Korstjen & Moser, 2018, p.121). The researcher scrupulously detailed the data collection methods and carefully described the analysis process employed to arrive at the research conclusions inductively. This information is presented in a manner that allows readers to follow a "research path" or "audit trail" from the raw data to the conclusions and confirm the same (Korstjen & Moser, 2018, pp. 121–122).

Confirmability

The researcher sought to capture and report the thought processes of leaders who had engaged with the biblical, theological, ethical, and moral questions surrounding decisions regarding security personnel at church gatherings. The researcher employed online interviews using Microsoft Teams and email questionnaires following the same format as the Interview Protocol to gather data. This data and the emergent themes were reported as tables listing the participant responses paired with the associated theme (see Tables 1-8, Chapter 4). This thick and rich description method ensured that the conclusions reached in the study were repeatable and confirmable by future readers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p.106). Where the researcher's past experiences, presuppositions, and biases had the potential to color findings or conclusions, this information was reflexively reported (see Chapters 4 & 5). The conclusions were inductively drawn from the findings and are discussed in thick and rich detail in Chapter 5. All collected data is stored for five years following the guidelines published in the Liberty University Christian Leadership Doctoral Programs Handbook (Butler & Jackson, 2023).

Transferability

Transferability, according to Houghton et al. (2012), measures whether the study's findings "can be transferred to another similar context or situation, while still preserving the meanings and inferences from the completed study" (p. 13). Providing the reader with

sufficiently detailed descriptions of the data collection methods, the data, the analysis, and the conclusions drawn achieves transferability. This allows the reader to determine if "the findings are transferable to their own setting" in a process that Korstjen and Moser (2018) call the "transferability judgment" (p. 122). Although ensuring transferability is not entirely within the researcher's control, he has endeavored to provide the reader with rich and thick descriptions to satisfactorily do so (Korstjen & Moser, 2018, p. 122).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the motivations and methods for the study. The research outlined herein flowed directly from concerns about the increasing prevalence of violent attacks against gathered congregations in churches throughout North America. The FBSN reports that, between 1999 and 2019, 734 persons died in American houses of worship due to violence. (FBSN, 2023). Additionally, 1149 persons were injured, committed suicide, were abducted, suffered an attack, attempted to cause injury to another person, or committed some form of physical violence on church property (FBSN, 2023).

Due to the increased attacks against houses of worship in recent years, many churches have begun to consider what steps to take to protect their congregations when gathered for corporate worship. Reflecting this movement, Lifeway Research conducted a 2019 survey in which 1000 pastors from various denominational backgrounds reported that 62% of their churches had some plan for an active shooter event (Earls, 2020). Additionally, 45% of reporting pastors indicated they utilized armed church volunteers, and 23% employed an armed private security agency (Earls, 2020).

For Christian leaders seeking to effectively shepherd and guard their flocks' hearts, minds, and lives, decisions regarding a security presence during congregational gatherings

cannot be taken lightly, should not be dismissed carelessly, and deserve thoughtful consideration and prayerful reflection. In truth, the decision to employ security personnel—volunteer, private security, or contracted police presence—remains essential and exceedingly sensitive. The decision continues to be necessary precisely due to the increasing number of attacks against houses of worship, gathered congregations, and faith-based institutions (FBSN, 2023). The decision—or, at minimum, the discussion—requires great sensitivity. Christianity holds that God created all of humanity in His image (the *imago Dei*), and thus, force, even force employed to protect life, inseparably contains the ability to destroy or disfigure that image.

While a variety of support is available to assist businesses, organizations, families, and individuals in consideration of personal and organizational security, exceedingly few resources exist to facilitate similar discussions within groups charged with leading the local church. Yin (2018) states that a researcher should use case study research when "the main research questions are 'how' or 'why,' both of which form the core focus of the investigation" (p. 2). This study sought to illuminate the complicated and delicate decisions made by senior pastors and church leadership teams regarding the use of security personnel during church gatherings and to aid those who currently are, or who in the future will be, making similar decisions.

This chapter described the theory guiding the proposed research, data collection methods and instrumentation, illustrated data collection and organization methods, and defined guidelines for ensuring that reports generated from the data are free from bias. Chapter 4 discusses the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

This phenomenological multi-case study investigated the moral, ethical, biblical, and theological foundations underlying decisions regarding the employment of security personnel by church leadership teams in various formal ministry settings within the United States. This research was intended to develop a greater understanding of the underlying concerns motivating these decisions among individual pastors and church leadership teams, to afford an increased awareness of the theological and ethical issues surrounding the issue of security personnel employment for congregational gatherings, and to biblically articulate the responsibility of pastoral leadership to provide for the spiritual and physical safety of the gathered flock.

Chapter One introduced the subject and explained the current threats churches face, contrasting the rising number of deadly force incidents with the lack of recent research. Chapter Two presented a detailed discussion of the literature, while Chapter Three described the research problem, ethical issues, limitations of generalization, the data collection process, and data analysis methodology. This chapter provides the study results and offers an in-depth data analysis.

Research Questions

RQ1: What practical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ2: What moral and ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ3: What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ4: What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process, and how was it addressed?

RQ5: In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security strategy?

Compilation Protocol and Measures

The interviews and questionnaires in each case study were phenomenological, seeking to discover each participant's experience by exploring individual points of view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 258). Interview questions were generated from the RQs and developed to, as briefly as possible, directly answer the RQs following the guidelines of Creswell's "Interview Protocol" (2014, pp. 193-194). All interview and questionnaire questions were left open-ended and were approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board.

One-on-one interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams and were performed in a private office. Transcriptions of online interviews were produced utilizing the transcription function of Microsoft Teams. In cases where online interviews were impractical, participants replied via email questionnaire.

The goal of the field research was to achieve data saturation, understood as having gathered sufficient data to answer each research question adequately. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that data saturation is the point when "the categories (or themes) are saturated: when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties" (p. 301). The researcher gathered sufficient data to achieve saturation and satisfactorily answer the RQs.

Once all interviews were completed and the questionnaires returned, the transcripts and the text responses from the questionnaires were organized in Word documents and categorized by interview question in an Excel spreadsheet. These responses were then imported to NVivo-14 to assist in the coding and thematic organization of the data. Coding work and emergent themes are discussed further in the Data Analysis section of this chapter.

The research for this dissertation was conducted in compliance with the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University. It adhered to the guidelines published by the Liberty University Christian Leadership Doctoral Program Handbook (Butler & Jackson, 2023). Data was utilized in accordance with the published standard of the Liberty University IRB, the Liberty University Christian Leadership Doctoral Program, and the informed consent agreements signed by research participants.

Demographic and Sample Data

Pastors included in this study were required to be over 18 and to have been personally involved in the decision regarding an active security strategy at their current or former church. Once field research commenced, the proposed setting of the study was discovered to be excessively narrow since it was initially designed to capture information only from those pastors who had decided to enact a security strategy centered on armed volunteer security personnel. A modification request was submitted to the Liberty University IRB. Upon modification approval (see Appendix B), the setting was revised to capture responses from pastors and churches who had made security decisions of any nature rather than only those who had decided to enact an active security presence.

In the planning stages and due to membership in the same, this researcher initially intended to utilize the Faith Based Security Network membership as the research field. Once the field study commenced, the researcher discovered that the membership of the FBSN was primarily comprised of Safety and Security ministry leads. In contrast, the pastors who were the focus of the study represented a significantly lower percentage of the active membership. Since the thought processes of the church leaders responsible for the decisions were the focus of the research, the researcher discussed with his research committee and chose to seek participants

outside of the FBSN to reach a more significant number of respondents. This course of action led to increased participation and fulfilled the requirement of data saturation.

State residence data of responding pastors was collected to achieve as broad a United States geographical response as possible. Demographic data such as the number of church staff, average weekly attendance, and denominational affiliation were intentionally left uncollected from research participants to control and remove researcher bias to as large a degree as possible. The denominational affiliation of responding pastors could not be wholly screened out as most participants emailed the researcher from their official church email addresses, many of which contained information about their church's association; however, this information was not recorded for study purposes.

Leaving the information above uncollected was a decision made reflexively due to the researcher's prior experience with church security teams and his observation that church size and attendance potentially correlate to a willingness to adopt an active security strategy. Respondents' personal information was anonymized in all reports. Respondents were reported as a 2-digit number beginning at 01 and continuing through 26 in the order the researcher received their data.

Answers from Respondents 06, 08, and 25 were not utilized in the study, as the only contact the researcher achieved was via telephone. The researcher was concerned that potential bias would color notes he took during the discussions with these three respondents. Further, the only avenue of confirming the researchers' notes would have relied on additional telephone communication with the respondents, decreasing the validity and reliability of data from those sources (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Furthermore, the Liberty University Institutional Review Board approval was limited to email questionnaires and Microsoft Teams interviews. Since other

responses assured data saturation and there was no IRB approval for telephonic interviews, the researcher decided to omit those three responses. The researcher was unable to collect the IRB approved Consent forms from participants 05 and 17, preventing the study from including their responses.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents the data collected during the field research and the associated findings. A detailed discussion of conclusions occurs in Chapter Five.

The raw data, comprised of respondents' verbatim answers, was assembled into the tables below. Remarks unrelated to the question, filler words, and identifying information were excluded from the tables; the full text of anonymized responses is provided in Appendix F. Anonymized information necessary for understanding responses while guarding each respondent's identity was typed within brackets. Parenthetical notes were added in the limited number of cases where the researcher's comments were necessary for the reader's understanding. When pastors named their churches or readily identifiable characteristics and events, this information was obscured to maintain anonymity; where they mentioned churches other than their own, this information was retained.

The researcher engaged with his dissertation committee for oversight in the process of narrowing interviewees' responses to the applicable verbiage for inclusion in the tables. This process had the potential for researcher bias, coloring the portions of the responses chosen for inclusion in the tables and, ultimately, the conclusions drawn from the data. Thus, the researcher submitted the full text of all responses to his dissertation committee with the sections he believed most applicable highlighted. Only after committee input was received were the tables reported.

Where matter was omitted, ellipsis points were inserted. The anonymized full text of all responses to interview questions was included in Appendix F.

The themes that emerged during data analysis were included in the tables directly following the participant's response in italicized bullet points; themes received discussion in the Findings section following the presentation of the data sets. In the infrequent cases of responses not relating to the interview question, the response was included without coding or theme.

Data Analysis

Several RQs were split into one or more interview questions to aid in respondent understanding. Where an RQ was divided into separate interview questions, it was reported separately. In cases where the RQ was split into general and specific questions, they were tabled together.

For ease of reader comprehension, data was organized into the four following data sets: Pragmatic, Moral and Ethical, Biblical and Theological, and Deliberative and Consequential.

Pragmatic Data Set

The pragmatic data set was anchored in **RQ1**: "What practical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?" Interview Question 1 used identical wording. A secondary question asked respondents about specific incidents or events that triggered a discussion within their church. Answers to these questions appear in Table 1.

Table 1

RQ1: What practical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Pastor	**Interview Question 1:** What practical considerations necessitated or informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
01	I think I had observed over 15 years or so, this increase in dangerous situations, life threatening situations, shootings at churches. And in fact, when we had people look at it or I would read about it, it's much worse than what we would observe there, the numbers were just kind of startling. … But is there a responsibility for us and for me, as shepherd of the church, to think carefully about the protection … o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.* o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
02	The reality that individuals are capable of disrupting a gathering of corporate worship with various levels of malicious intent. o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
03	… I was robbed at knifepoint, had two unsuccessful attempts to break into my row house, and had been consuming local media regarding the crack epidemic and the climbing homicide rate. … I was determined to carry out my pastoral and missionary responsibilities and on the other hand I didn't want to expose myself to criminal predation nor to leave my wife without a husband and my children without a father. o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.* o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decision.*
04	There have been a number of instances that have occurred that brought security to the forefront of our thinking. Of course, the increasing frequency of assailants targeting churches being primary… o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
07	[Church name obscured] operates a school with grades from pre-school through 5th grade. Because our location is close to a major interstate, we felt it was necessary to take additional security precautions to protect the students and faculty. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.* o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
09	… maybe there was an event that kind of caused us to think about standing up a team. And in our case, it was, living in Colorado Springs in 2007, we had a shooting at New Life Church. A … shooting that took place there and the shooter was taken out by a security team member. … and just the reality of the times we're living in and the threats that exist. And you think of churches as safe places and a place where things like that don't happen. And that's just not accurate. And things do happen at churches. … o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
10	Yes.
11	The highest practical concern that led me to decide, together with our Church Council (administrative board), to establish a security team at the church is the safety of our

Pastor	**Interview Question 1:** What practical considerations necessitated or informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

congregation and guests. Multiple high profile mass shootings, including those at churches, have heightened our awareness of the kind of violence that is possible against so-called soft targets. …

- o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*
- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

12   Looking around at the world we live in it seemed necessary to work towards protecting the flock God has entrusted to my care.

- o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*

13   … We felt a responsibility to protect our church attendees and their children.

- o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*

14   … For us concerning the Active Threat considerations, it was the proliferation of violence against Houses of Worship. Of course, this was not a new phenomenon, but it seemed statistically that the frequency of occurrences was increasing.

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

15   … I'm a firm believer that it's a right, but it's a responsibility that with that responsibility comes responsibility to be trained. And then of course, you just look at the news.

- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

16   Honestly, ours was less thought through and more focused on sexual abuse, as we had an accusation of that happening in a bathroom after church. We just didn't have a huge theological reason for security, other than protecting the flock.

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
- o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*

18   When we first considered a safety team, it was still a bit controversial in conversation. At that time the general consensus of the congregation would be that guns should not be allowed in church and that God would protect us from evil. It seemed that gun-related incidents were on the rise and it seemed ignorant to think that it could never happen at our church.

- o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

19   National and international events involving violent attacks at churches and schools. …

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

20   1. The arrangement and nature of our physical facility. We have a two-story building, and a modular building on our campus. We have a number of points of entry. We have also had an increase in foot traffic, including a growing homeless population in our community.

2. The demographics of our specific gatherings (women's min, youth, special events)

- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

Pastor	**Interview Question 1:** What practical considerations necessitated or informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
21	One of the major factors in us utilizing a security team in church gatherings came because we have several law enforcement personnel in our congregation. One of the main leaders in this group was a former SWAT member who responded to the Columbine School shooting. He knew from experience that emergencies can happen out of nowhere and there better be people trained to handle the situation. o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
22	… The practical considerations were motivated by the fact that the church was located within a medium-sized city and in an area where crime could affect the church. At any moment, someone could walk in off the street at any church function who was either a criminal, a mentally unstable person, or a person who had the intent to do violent harm to conservative Christians. Without access control and a functioning security team, the church would have been an easy target for violence. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
23	… approximately 9 years ago, when we were watching an up tick in violence being aimed at houses of worship. It was then that we decided to form a safety team of hand picked people with law enforcement background or experience in security areas. … o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
24	The practical reasons that a Safety Ministry was even considered at [name obscured] was simply common sense. The Church facilities had just been expanded for the second time and we realized that due to the expansions our facility had too many entry points. … o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
26	The church I served was in a rural community less than 5 miles from the northwest corner of a large county. The county seat was at least 30 minutes away by the speed limit, and the county only had a few Sheriff deputies on duty at any one time for the whole county. If anyone attempted a shooting there, it would probably have taken at least 20 to 25 minutes for any response, and only if a deputy was available. … o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

Pastor	**Interview Question 1a:** Was there a particular incident or event that sparked the discussion/decision? Please specify.
01	…when the Colorado Springs shootings happened, one at YWAM, and then the same guy at New Life … but it was the Charleston, SC shooting that really got me because I felt like this should not have happened. It should not have gone that to that extent and I felt, you know that if one person had been in that room with a concealed carry, it could have been stopped. And instead of nine people dying, maybe one or two, something like that. … o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
02	… we had an incident where a man showed up during a service trying to get his child out of the children's ministry. His name was not on the list for picking up his child as there was a restraining order against him. Things escalated as the man forcibly was trying to remove the child from the class and fortunately some men in the foyer of the church intervened until the deacons were found to escort the man out of the church by force and letting him know the

Pastor	Interview Question 1a: Was there a particular incident or event that sparked the discussion/decision? Please specify.

police were on there way. The man left before the police arrived. The directors of children's ministry asked for better safety measures for the children and themselves. …

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

03 In the 31 years we lived in [city obscured], I was held up gunpoint 3 times and had some 6 or 7 close calls in which I almost had to draw my weapon or did draw it on an armed criminal but didn't have to fire . …

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

04 The December 29, 2019, shooting in White Settlement only served to concrete the need to provide security. We were already taking some steps, but that situation fueled our motivation. …

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

07 There was no incident that precipitated this decision. It was simply an overall awareness of our liability as a "soft target" that prompted these additional security measures.

- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

09 (No response).

10 1. The State Police called the pastor, (name obscured), with an accusation that a young woman was sexually accosted in the church facilities while the church was in session. … 2. Our church had recently been broken into. 3. There have been a number of break-ins in our area .4. There was no police presence within 20 miles. 5. Our church was located on a main highway and it was not uncommon for vehicles to turn into our parking area during worship times. 6. A number of church shootings have taken place in our country.

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

11 The incident at West Freeway Church of Christ has been particularly instructive, not only in the reality of possible violence committed against church people, but also of our ability to respond and eliminate a threat in such a case, with proper training and preparation.

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

12 There was not.

13 It was certainly driven on some level by the church 'attacks' that have taken place over the last decade in our country and an increasing hostility toward Christianity in general and the local church specifically.

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

14 For our ministry team, not one incident sparked the conversation, but the proliferation of several… I … was able to show the ministry team the increases in occurrences and impact these events had on businesses, events, and Houses of Worship.

- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

Pastor	Interview Question 1a: Was there a particular incident or event that sparked the discussion/decision? Please specify.
15	You look at the rate of violence increase in, particularly with domestic violence spillover. What you just described, it's exponential in its impact on the churches nowadays. So we took a look at that. It really wasn't a hard sell. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
16	(No response).
18	Though it was innocent, we did have an incident where a young man brought a gun to church to show off his newly acquired possession. We knew the person and their character and their apparent lack of judgment, but this occasion brought about discussion with some lay people who had a law enforcement background. o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
19	No particular event, but a series of attacks and shootings at churches across the country and around the world. o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
20	A number of years ago, there was a groundswell of growing concern over public shootings, especially some that took place in worship gatherings around our country. … o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
21	There was no one incident at our church currently, but I was in seminary in Fort Worth when the Wedgewood Church shooting occurred. I saw up close what can happen when a gunman enters a building and is not stopped. o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.* o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
22	(No response).
23	(No response).
24	There was one incident in particular that led to the decision to arm the Safety Team. The Tree of Life Synagogue mass shooting in Pittsburgh, PA in 2018. I remember vividly how the Rabbi described being unable to get some people out and how helpless he felt knowing that a shooter was coming their way and not knowing what to do. I decided right there and then that nothing like that would happen at [name obscured], innocent people would not be left unprotected. o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.* o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
26	There was no singular event that caused us to consider allowing concealed carry, but there was a plethora of recent events leading up to 2009 that caught our attention and caused us to consider it. … o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

Moral and Ethical Data Set

The moral and ethical data set reflected **RQ2**: "What moral and ethical considerations

necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church

gatherings?" This RQ was split into two interview questions to allow respondents to answer

moral and ethical issues separately. Responses are grouped into Table 2, moral considerations,

and Table 3, ethical considerations.

Table 2

RQ2: What moral and ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Pastor	Interview Question 2: What moral considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
01	… this was a later time in my ministry and I really weighed the ethical issues of if I were in that situation, do I have a moral obligation to protect the sheep? … I would call it for a sheep defense, and so I flip 180 degrees. If there's a threat to someone that is entrusted to me, that could be anyone. It could be a child, youth, an older person. It could be a homeless person who wandered in and they're sitting on the back row, but they're suddenly threatened. I feel like as a Pastor, I take the shepherd's position. So that's I think, a moral reasoning that I went through… o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.* o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions*
02	That there is evil in this world that lurks in the hearts of men. It would be immoral not to defend and protect worshippers from potential devastating harm. o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.* o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
03	… The moral considerations consisted of a commitment to self-control and the positivity of legal and moral self-defense when attacked. The US has a well-developed cultural and legal body of work that supports legitimate self-defense in proportion to the level of attack to which one is subjected. … o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
04	Scripture gives a mandate (Acts 20:28 for instance) that the pastor (shepherd) is to provide for the protection of the flock of God… Pastors, ministers, and leaders of the church have been given the role of Shepherd. Traditionally, the Shepherd had three major functions. 1. Feed the Sheep 2. Tend the Sheep 3. PROTECT THE SHEEP

Pastor	**Interview Question 2:** What moral considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Security is a function of the Pastoral staff and leadership of the church.

- *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
- *Biblical context and specific biblical references.*

07 The Board of Directors and the School Board of Directors believed it was our moral responsibility to ensure the highest level of safety possible for our students because we had been entrusted with their care by their parents while they are in our school.

- *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

09 It was the idea that we have a moral obligation to provide some level of safety and thought to a gathering, a mass gathering of people. … So it was really the idea that obviously people's lives, health and safety are important and valuable as image bearers. And that we have an obligation when we gather together in mass like that to make sure that we thought through some safety and security things. And that's not just active shooters. It's ice on the sidewalks on Sundays or whatever else might pose a safety threat to our gathered church.

- *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

10 A major part of our security equipment was the installation of cameras, both inside the church as well as outside the church. We had a large teenage group, boys and girls. Being able to observe all the activities allowed for better control of proper behavior.

- *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*

11 If morals are the internal guiding principles that shape our decisions and guide our lives in the way of virtue, then the greatest moral consideration is my instinct to protect those in my care, as I would my own family.

- *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

12 I believe as a pastor I have an obligation to protect the people in the church.

- *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

13 I believe we have a moral obligation to provide a safe environment that allows members as well as visitors the opportunity to worship without worrying about safety issues.

- *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

14 The need to protect those who come into your care when they come to church. The people have a right to feel safe, and those who run churches have an obligation to do everything within their power to provide a safe and secure place to worship.

- *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
- *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

Pastor	Interview Question 2: What moral considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
	o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
15	… Will this be a detractor to others to say, you know, they believe in corporal punishment? They believe in self protection. They you know, they believe of the responsibility to protect themselves and others, and yet they're doing it by, you know, taking a human life if absolutely necessary. …
	o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
16	(No response).
18	It was a struggle for me to consider the idea of taking someone else's life in order to protect others. In theory, those who are a part of the Church have a future that is eternally secure. In reality, there are many in the church whose future has not yet been established. God is sovereign and in control; where does that leave our responsibility to protect ourselves or fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? How does this pertain to the unbeliever or the skeptic who is exploring the Christian faith? Is it permissible for me to take anyone's life? Am I bringing eternal damnation upon a soul that is wayward? … Without having all of these questions answered, it still seemed ignorant to fail to prepare for what might possibly happen…
	o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.* o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
19	We … concluded that it would be immoral to ignore potential threats and not to protect church members from harm.
	o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decision.*
20	Morally, it was felt that there was not only a right but a duty to provide safety for those gathering for worship and to the best of our ability mitigate any obvious problems or potentially dangerous scenarios that could happen as [name obscured] gathers to worship and minister. While we recognized that God is sovereign and does what He wills, this didn't diminish our responsibilities as moral human agents to do what is best and right for our people in the face of potential dangers and evil.
	o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.* o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
21	As the pastor of the church, I have a moral obligation to protect the sheep in my care. …
	o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.* o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
22	From a moral standpoint, violence done to innocent people is something that must be stopped if at all possible. It is right to stand in the way of such violence to protect victims of such. …
	o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

Pastor	**Interview Question 2:** What moral considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
23	We really take the care and protection of the church body seriously. …
	○ *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
24	Morally we knew that we had an obligation to ensure people's safety when they entered the Church for any type of service. …
	○ *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*
26	The attitude of our Session (Board) and those who carried reflected our basic attitude that we were responsible for the safety of ourselves, our families, and those around us. …
	○ *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decision.*

RQ2 was divided into two questions covering the moral and ethical considerations

pastors encountered during the decision-making process. Table 3 presents responses to the

interview question regarding ethical considerations.

Table 3

RQ2 (Continued): What moral and ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Pastor	**Interview Question 3:** What ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
01	I think, the moral consideration is that we are obligated. I would say agape love obligates us to protect the innocent. …
	○ *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*
	○ *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
02	That safety is a value for human life and also that justice involves restraint and even punishment to the one who is attempting harmful behavior.
	○ *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decision.*
	○ *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
03	The Christian Church long ago developed the "Just War Theory" to justify war involving Christians under certain conditions. That made sense to me and I developed something similar to the issue of individual self-defense. …
	○ *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
04	I and my Elders have prayerfully thought through many of the possibilities and potential issues that might arise. And we have arrived at the understanding that we are responsible for all who

Pastor	**Interview Question 3:** What ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

are "entrusted" to us. 1 Peter 5:1-4. As horrific as it would be to be forced to use deadly force, it would be worse to do nothing.

- o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
- o *Biblical context and specific biblical references.*

07   From an ethical perspective, we meet in a sanctuary. By definition, a sanctuary is a place of refuge and safety. When a person enters our church, the assume that it is a place of refuge and safety physically, spiritually and emotionally. We have an ethical responsibility to provide them a place of refuge and safety as they worship God.

- o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

09   … We have security cameras throughout. … But you know, one of the ethical pieces is, you know, we didn't want. We didn't want those recording voices. Uh, because … we're trying to balance security with privacy. …

- o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*

10   The answer here is similar to the moral answer. We expect certain behaviors, such as boys and girls not being alone in a classroom. This would include adult male teachers and the girls of his class. Inc women and the males of their class. In rural [name obscured] it is common for many people, men and women, to carry firearms. No laws prevent the carry. For those approved in our security program, extra training was required.

11   If ethics are the external guiding principles that shape our decisions and guide our lives in the way of virtue, then the greatest ethical consideration is my charge as a leader to be a faithful steward of the lives of people. I was appointed by the Bishop and have since been hired by the congregation to be the chief leader and shepherd of this congregation, so establishing a security team follows with this responsibility.

- o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*

12   We live in a world where the value of human life is continually diminished, therefore crimes against people have increased. It is incumbent upon those who value human life to protect it.

- o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*

13   Again, it was not a 'deep' decision making process for us. We believe we have a responsibility to protect our church.

- o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decision.*

14   For me specifically, I was prior law enforcement and served in the military. I had been blessed to receive quality training from both and had a responsibility to ensure others were protected to the best of my ability.

- o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decision.*

15   … what we found with our police officers, for example-up until I think it was Parkland shooting, they were trained to basically set up a defensive position and bring in the SWAT team. And we said no, no, no, no, no. I need you to charge that guy. You're protecting

Pastor	Interview Question 3: What ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

everybody else with your life so that that we had a couple of guys that weren't very comfortable with that. And they said no, we'll do the unarmed side. So those are the kind of things that we've taken a look at.

- o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*

16   (No response).

18   We recognize the right to bear arms and the freedom for licensed concealed carry, but as a safety team we didn't want people with evil intentions to have free reign to walk into the church with the ability to do great harm. …

- o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*

19   We approached the church regarding concealed carry, which is allowed in churches in [name obscured], and about the efficacy of training volunteers on the range of possible responses to violence which range from de-escalation efforts to neutralizing an assailant using appropriate force. Church members overwhelmingly supported establishing a security team.

- o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*

20   We had to wrestle with the idea of how force might be used in the case of a crisis event or dangerous situation. Ethically, did we have the right to potentially act defensively and take a life to preserve congregants' multiple lives in a public worship setting? We wrestled with that and came to the conclusion that while that scenario is to be avoided if at all possible – if it were foisted upon us we would act to preserve the many…

- o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

21   We do not want a bloodbath from some outsider coming in, nor do we want a bloodbath from our own people trying to defend themselves. If we are going to have a safety team, they must be instructed on how to conduct themselves in an ethical manner. We want to act appropriately under all circumstances.

- o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

22   Because violence done to innocent people is morally wrong, it is the responsibility of those who are able to stop violence to stand in the way of it when they witness it. … When the church opens its doors for a church gathering it is taking responsibility for what happens in the gathering upon itself. At every gathering, we will most likely have elderly people, women, and young children present. Men cannot stand by and allow a predator to come into a gathering of this nature and do harm to those who are not as capable of protecting themselves. We believed that the church then had a responsibility to make sure that this kind of protection was available at every gathering. In order to make certain this protection was available required a proactive training and planning process.

- o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
- o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

23   … We were concerned that any matters, interviews etc.. would be handled by those who have received training and would respond in a very ethical and professional way.

- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

Pastor	Interview Question 3: What ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
24	I feel that the moral and ethical considerations are one and the same. … o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

26	… After a year of members doing research, hearing about other shootings in church settings especially, and with a changeover of persons on the Session, there was an attitude shift the next year. By that time, everyone came on board without much discussion and we drew up our procedures immediately. …
	
	   o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*
	   o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

Biblical and Theological Data Set

This data set encompasses the responses to **RQ3**: "What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?" The RQ was separated into two interview questions that queried respondents on biblical and theological considerations that impacted security decisions. Responses appear below in Tables 4 (biblical considerations) and 5 (theological considerations). Each section is subdivided to capture the specific biblical references and theological issues pastors considered as they engaged with security decisions.

Table 4

RQ3: What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Pastor	Interview Question 4: What biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
01	… some of the things I thought about a lot are, if I'm a shepherd and I'm a good shepherd, one of my primary images would be David. So David protected the flock and he used whatever he needed to use. And you know in his case he used his hands to attack or to defend against a predator and killed a bear. A lion, you know? … I sort of joked that he had a concealed carry before anybody else, you know, and I think about him as a primary image in and when we have the passage of Psalm 23, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. The rod, as I understand it from many trips to Israel, was a short, maybe 18-inch rod. I've seen them and the staff was the hook which would rescue. So it's for rescuing, but the rod was a club… When they came to arrest [Jesus], and Peter pulls out a sword and cuts off the ear of the of the servant of the high priest. And Jesus says, look, that's not what we're here to do. If you live by the sword, you'll

Pastor	**Interview Question 4:** What biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

die by the sword. He puts the ear back on. … but I think that we are biblically … empowered to protect the sheep and that Jesus did that.

- *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as motivating factor in security decisions.*

02   Yes.

03   I believe Jesus had to go to extremes to make sure his message and mission were understood. He had to fight against the idea that he, the Messiah, was going to be a conquering warrior king who physically led the Jewish nation to throw off their tormentors and establish the Kingdom of God. As a result, pacificists quote his words out of context to justify pacifism as a universal requirement for all believers. However, armed self-defense and lethal force in the course of every day life are hinted at even in the NT, not to mention the legitimate use of arms in the OT.

- *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

04   Moses, David, Peter, Paul, and Jesus Himself… Each of them emphasized the provision for and protection of those that they led.

- *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*

07   Romans 12:21 says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." We do not believe that defending ourselves against evil is contrary to Scripture. When Jesus spoke at the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, the people tried to throw Him off a cliff, but Jesus passed through their midst and went His way. (Luke 4:28-30)

- *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*

09   These things were kind of at the fore, biblically. Proverbs 22:3 the prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty. Uh, yeah, you just need to know the times you're living in, right? The men of Issachar were understanding the times that they were living in and we wanted. … we talked about the gatekeepers that were assigned in 1 Chronicles 9. And then Nehemiah 4:16 through 18 from that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with Spears, Shields, bows and armor. Uh, the officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, … and then the elder's responsibility to keep watch over the flock. Acts 20:28 through 30, you know that we have a responsibility for these precious souls, and certainly when we gather together, we have a responsibility. …

- *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
- *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*

10   None but other churches were contacted

11   There are many Biblical considerations. I tend to be something of a pacifist, having meditated on the reality that when our Lord, Jesus Christ, had the opportunity to save himself by harming others or to sacrifice himself in a violent death, he obviously chose the latter. The cross is God's greatest witness against the violence of this world. And yet as the church we also have a responsibility to care for and protect the least persons in our community. The most outstanding Biblical image that informed my decision is that of the shepherding image of

Pastor	**Interview Question 4:** What biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

church leadership. Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and the leaders of the church are shepherds for the people of God. The shepherd's job is to protect, lead, and care for the sheep.

- o *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
- o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*

12   God speaks in His Word about His care for people (I.E. Matt. 10:29-30). Since we are led by His Spirit and ought to hold human life in high regard protecting the church seemed an easy decision.

- o *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
- o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

13   I suppose one could use Nehemiah as an example for protection. But from a Biblical standpoint I think the consideration goes back to the fact that everyone is an image bearer of God! And life should be protected.

- o *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
- o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

14   We believe part of the Shepherd's role in the Bible was not only to feed the sheep, but also to look out for their welfare and security.

- o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*

15   I mean, scripture is replete with it. I mean, you look at Ezekiel, which talks about the Watchmen, you look at Nehemiah, where he tells him to arm themselves with a sword. You know, Jesus told him when he sent them out. He said if you don't have a sword, get some money and go buy one to defend yourself. …

- o *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*

16   (No response).

18   Some verses that we considered as we formed our group include:

Luke 22:36 - Jesus said to His disciples, "Sell your cloak and buy a sword." It wasn't for the purpose of crusading, but it wasn't for spreading butter, either. We are also commanded to defend the weak, the widow, the fatherless (i.e. Ps. 82:4; Pr. 24:11). This is open to interpretation, but the idea of watching over the wellbeing of our neighbor is evident. Ezekiel 33 - The watchman was obligated to put out a warning to those in harm's way. ... the idea is that some people have been delegated the responsibility to tend to the wellbeing of the masses. Acts 6 - The Church appointed men to tend to the needs of the church so that leaders could avoid being distracted from preaching and teaching.

Nehemiah 4:8-23 - They rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with their swords, spears, and bows in hand. They were not about to let the enemy take them by surprise. They did work with one hand and held a weapon in the other.

1 Chronicles 26:6-8 and other passages mention the temple guard which offered security, stability for worship, and support for ceremonial worship...

- o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

Pastor	**Interview Question 4:** What biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
19	We reviewed Scripture and concluded that Jesus expects His flock to be protected from all manner of threats--spiritual and physical.

- *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
- *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
- *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

20	… At the elder level, we felt we were operating within the bounds of legal conformity and our Christian conscience, and that as such we had the liberty and corporately, a duty to provide as much safety as we could as a function of shepherding. While we all can agree with the leading and feeding elements of shepherding, it gets a little trickier when we consider the protection of the flock as shepherds – many times this is limited to doctrinal matters of defense.

- *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as motivating factor in security decisions.*
- *Theological issues and arguments faced during decision process.*

21	I would say one of the biggest thought patterns of our decision came from the idea of war. There is a difference in going out and murdering someone and fighting in a time of war. For the most part, an active shooter who enters the church facility has declared war on the congregation. In this frame of thinking, we feel it appropriate to defend the defenseless in a moment when an act of war has been declared upon them.

- *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

22	Passages such as Psalm 82:3-4 and Isaiah 1:17 reveal that righteousness coincides with defending those who cannot defend themselves. ... Likewise, 1 Timothy 5:8 communicates the idea that it is the responsibility of the man of a household to take care of all those for whom he has a responsibility… in Exodus 22. In verse 2 God does not hold a property owner liable for the death of a thief if a struggle ensues during the night. A property owner would be acting in self-defense in such a situation without guilt if the result was the death of the intruder. ... Understanding then that there are times when violence in relation to self-defense is acceptable by God, coupled with the requirement for the strong to protect the weak, shows us that it is sometimes necessary to act in violence to protect the innocent from violence. …

- *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
- *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

23	There are several scriptures that came to mind as we formed this team.

- *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*

24	… We believe as leaders of the local Church, Administrative Board Members and Staff persons, we have an obligation to protect people as they come to Church to seek and serve God.

- *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

26	At that time, we did not look specifically at the Bible for justification for the action we took. …

- *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

Pastor	Interview Question 4a: Were specific biblical passages, scriptures, or concepts discussed? Please specify.
01	(No response).
02	There were different scriptures and concepts. One of the passages was Ezekiel 33:1-9 with the principle of having watchmen. Another was the Biblical concept of the attribute of protector that a father possesses and that is to protect and defend. The Nehemiah story of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem with the right to protect their families while doing this. Nehemiah 4:14. o *Biblical context and specific biblical references.*
03	For instance: In Luke 22:36-37 near the end of his ministry on Earth, Jesus advised his followers who didn't have a sword to get one. To me that implied having a sword for self-defense would become necessary in his absence. No longer would he and they have to go to extremes to dissuade the Jews from trying to make him a warrior King. In Romans 13:4 Paul advises his readers that the secular law enforcement authorities are instituted of God and are appropriately armed with their swords for the legitimate enforcement of the law and defense from lethal attacks. … o *Biblical context and specific biblical references.*

04	Acts 20: 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 1 Peter 5: 1-4 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 1 Tim 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
	
	   o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
	   o *Biblical context and specific biblical references.*

07	(No response).
09	(No response).
10	(No response).
11	(No response).
12	(No response).
13	No.
14	I do not recall any specific passages being discussed, but we did look to Biblical examples of what the roles of a Shepherd were. o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
15	(No response).

Pastor	Interview Question 4a: Were specific biblical passages, scriptures, or concepts discussed? Please specify.
16	(No response).
18	See above.
19	Matthew 10:16, Psalm 122:7
	○ *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
20	(No response).
21	(No response).
22	(No response).
23	Psalm 127:1 Talking of how God builds the house and watchman are to protect what God has built. 2 Kings 9:17 talking of the watchman watching for who comes in Peace. 1 & 2 Samuel and Isaiah.
	○ *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
24	1. Matthew 28: 19-20, the great commission
	2. 1st Peter 5:2
	3. Ephesians 6:20
	4. Psalm 23
	5 John 21: 16
	○ *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
26	(No response).

Table 5 continues the Theological and Biblical Data Set, introducing theological

considerations that affected security decisions for the respondent pastors.

Table 5

RQ3 (continued): What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

Pastor	Interview Question 5: What theological considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
01	(No response).
02	That God himself is a defender and protector and we are created in his image. Imago Dei
	○ *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
03	(No response).

Pastor	**Interview Question 5:** What theological considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
04	My view on Theology is derived from my reliance on the supremacy of Scripture. As I contemplated the growing hostility toward the church and Christ Himself, I began studying about the pastoral responsibilities. Focusing on the protection component. ○ *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as motivating factor in security decisions.* ○ *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
07	The decision to provide a high level of security within [name obscured] was more of a practical decision than a theological decision. However, in I Chronicles 12:32, the Scripture speaks of the sons of Issachar as "men who understood the times with a knowledge of what Israel should do…" I believe that understanding the times in which we live is important and being aware of the evil that is resident in this world gives us a strong theological support for providing well-trained security. ○ *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.* ○ *Theological issues and arguments raised during decision process.*
09	I think going back to the value of human life, you know, the creation of mankind in the image of God that we are image bearers and that life is precious. And therefore, worthy of protection and thought about safety and security issues when people gather here on the church premises. Yes, we need to be safe and think through those things, but the Lord has called us to be open handed and open hearted towards people within reason and welcome them and have our doors open. ○ *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
10	None same answer as above.
11	(No response).
12	Again I will point to the value of human life and its disregard in modern culture.
13	None.
14	Our desire to share the Gospel in a safe environment where people could relax and concentrate on the word, instead of having to worry about what might happen. Part of Christianity is caring for the needs of others, and a major need among man is the feeling of security. ○ *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decision.*
15	[Scripture] gives a strong application to protect as shepherds not just spiritually, but physically as well. ○ *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
16	(No response).
18	As mentioned earlier, there is a balance between trusting in the sovereignty of God and practically recognizing the presence of evil in the world. Also, do we have the right to end the life of someone who does not know Christ, thereby sealing their eternal fate? Is the behavior of an active shooter an act of freewill or a predetermined act by someone who is unregenerate?

Pastor	**Interview Question 5:** What theological considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?
	Do we carry within us the capability of determining the eternal destination of a soul? In consideration of these questions, should a Safety Team be permitted to use weapons if necessary, or only be limited to deescalation tactics?

o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

19	I don't recall a specific theological discussion.

20	Broad theological considerations for this team included the problem of evil, our duties as elders to our congregation, and the interplay between our civil rights and those we enjoy as believers.

o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

21	We looked at the difference in murder and killing. We do not want anyone to perish, but when an active shooter comes into a building bent on killing, we feel it justified to end the threat in order to preserve the lives of the innocent.

o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

22	Theologically, understanding that all people are born into sin, are condemned, and are deserving of death is one factor to consider (Romans 3:10-18, 6:23, Psalm 51:5). As well as the understanding that all people are likewise created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). All people are deserving of death, yet all people are likewise image bearers of God. We must be those who protect image bearers of God from those who would harm them unjustly. However, this will at times demand that we take the life of the offending image bearer. In these cases, it is the offender who is responsible for their own demise and not the defender of the innocent. So, it is justifiable for a defender of righteousness to kill a murderer of image-bearers if that is the amount of force necessary to prevent the evil from happening. The fact that the sinner is already worthy of death means that the defender has now been initiated by God as the tool by which he exacts his judgment upon the evil one.

o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
o *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*

23	I don't know if I have a specific Theological consideration here other then what I just stated that we believe that a security team is biblical and that we as Elders of the church are called to protect our flocks in all ways, physically (including security), spiritually (providing a safe environment to be fed) and emotionally.

o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*

24	Jesus was portrayed as the Good Shepherd throughout Scripture and the primary role of the Shepherd was to care for and protect this sheep, that same role was given to Pastors and leaders of the Church. We believed that we had an obligation to ensure that people could come to their Church and worship and celebrate their Savior and Lord without fear or worry.

o *Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.*
o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decision.*

26	… I was the one who brought the idea of allowing concealed carry, partly due to my military experience/ attitude and partly due to all the shootings I had heard about concerning churches

Pastor	**Interview Question 5:** What theological considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

and "no-gun zones". The practical and ethical considerations seemed far more important at the time than any theological concerns…

- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
- o *Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.*

Pastor	**Interview Question 5a:** Were there theological issues discussed or researched in the decision-making process? Please specify.

01   (No response).

02   No discussion other than agreement from the entire leadership team of elders, deacons, board members and pastors. The leadership was unified on this.

- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

03   I struggled with the above issues alone and with my wife. When I had made my decision, I informed our two church leaders. They had no questions or objections. Had they objected, I was prepared to resign months after arriving in [city name obscured]. Because this subject was more controversial in 1988 than it is now, we kept the fact that I was armed a closely held secret in hopes of not alienating anybody. After I had a self-defense shooting, I informed the church the next morning after worship and was completely accepted for my decision. There were no objections then or later.

04   During the discussion of implementing armed security with the Elders, I was asked about Exodus 20:13 "Thou shalt not kill." This provided me an opportunity to teach and correct a long-held misunderstanding. The Hebrew word translated "Kill" [ratsach] is better understood as "murder" as in the NKJV. I then took them through a brief examination of the time God commanded Israel to kill their enemies.

- o *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
- o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

07   No. There were no lengthy theological discussions. I am reminded of the passage in Exodus when the sons of Israel were at the shores of the Red Sea and the Egyptian army was pursuing them. Moses began praying and the Lord said, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to move forward." (Exodus 14:15) Once we know what we need to do, we need to act upon it. …

- o *Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.*
- o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

09   Not biblically and theologically, but more practically, legally, things like that.

- o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*

10   (No response).

11   (No response).

12   (No response).

13   None.

Pastor	Interview Question 5a: Were there theological issues discussed or researched in the decision-making process? Please specify.
14	Yes, there were some who believed incorporating security showed a lack of faith. We discussed this at length talking through the fact that God blesses some with the ability to protect others and that should not be negated at the church doors. o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
15	(No response).
16	(No response).
18	The above scriptures and ideas were presented to our safety team in preliminary discussions. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
19	(No response).
20	(No response).
21	Not really. That may be bad to say, but the reality is don't come in here messing with us unless you want the fight taken to you. We won't start the fight, but we will end it. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
22	(No response).
23	(No response).

24	Overwhelmingly the Church body accepted and welcomed the Safety Team as a necessary part of the Church structure. Many congregants expressed their relief and appreciation for the presence of the Team.
	
	    o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
	    o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*

26	(No response).

Deliberative and Consequential Data Set

The Deliberative and Consequential Data Set asked, "What areas required discussion," and secondly, "What were the outcomes of the discussions and decisions?" This data set encompasses RQ4 and RQ5.

RQ4 asked: "What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process, and how was it

addressed?" RQ4 was split into two interview questions to capture the beliefs that required

deliberation and how these issues were addressed.

RQ5 asked: "In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching

ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security strategy?" Explanatory

information about this question is discussed prior to Table 7.

Table 6

RQ4: What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process, and how was it addressed?

Pastor	Interview Question 6: What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process?
01	We didn't have any I would say any struggle over any of these things.
02	There was no opposition to having a security team and the only deliberation was over getting the best training and resources for a team and the fiduciary decisions over cost involved. ○ *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
03	(No response).
04	See above…
07	There was no deliberation. The BOD was in unanimous agreement about the security issue.
09	(No response).
10	None.
11	None to date.
12	It was important to express to the church that a safety team was not about carrying guns to shoot someone who tried to harm us. While that is a component there is much more to church safety than what is typically thought of.
13	This was a unanimous decision with no debate. The only discussion concerned the operation of the team.
14	The above discussion described in question 5a. It was never contentious, but it did require convincing some of the members that preparation and planning is not a lack of faith. ○ *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
15	None.
16	(No response).

Pastor	**Interview Question 6:** What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process?
18	(No response).
19	There were no theological or Biblical issues. Church leadership understood the threat and accepted the recommendation to form a security team.
20	(No response).
21	No deliberations. Everyone agreed.
22	The security program was designed based on practical guidelines and presented to the church elder board. The elder board reviewed the program and approved it. No problems were addressed in the process. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
23	The main discussion that was had for us was who we would allow on it, so as to ensure that we are staffing it with men and women who are trained and capable to ensure the right response. This was done by setting parameters for the chairperson's position. Such as minimum a police officer or other law enforcement agent or a person with significant security background. These are also the guidelines that we give that person for selecting their team. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
24	The concept of the safety ministry was immediately embraced by the Administrative Board. I feel that it was on the minds of many people but they were not quite sure of how it would come about and operate.
26	Deliberations: As stated above, the idea was not supported enough by the Session and I didn't want to push any action as significant as allowing CCW in the church without full understanding and approval by the leadership. During the year that followed, a number of side conversations, several notorious shootings, and a different group of members easily came to the same conclusion and actually they presented the idea early that next year. And after fairly short discussion we decided to move forward to allowing concealed carry by authorized individuals. We easily established permission requirements, continuing training requirements, and renewal procedures that were acceptable to everyone and moved forward in a short time and without any dissension.

Pastor	**Interview Question 6a:** How was it (the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings) addressed?
01	(No response).
02	There was no need to address anything internally among our leadership as there was no opposition to having a security team.
03	(No response).
04	We studied the Word.
07	N/A

Pastor	Interview Question 6a: How was it (the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings) addressed?
09	(No response).
10	N/A
11	(No response).
12	By group meetings as well as individual conversations.
13	(No response).
14	Through open discussion, valuing everyone's opinion and through prayer.
15	(No response).
16	(No response).
18	The senior pastor recognized the need to provide a safe place for worship … o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decision.*
19	(No response).
20	(No response).
21	(No response).
22	(No response).
23	In the event we cannot get adequate personnel the elders have stated they would consider out sourcing to a private company at that time.
24	Once a concrete plan was presented to them they quickly saw the need and the benefit to the Church. o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*
26	(No response).

In RQ5 and Interview Question 7, the researcher sought information on whether or how security decisions had impacted the church's theology or teaching ministry. The question was posed to measure how pastors or church leadership teams found it prudent to reexamine previously held beliefs or if they had faced a need to publicly address issues of theology or biblical beliefs surrounding the issue of church security.

Table 7

RQ5: In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security strategy?

Pastor	**Interview Question 7:** In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security?
01	Yeah, I wouldn't say that anything has changed. I don't know that we've changed theologically or in terms of our biblical teaching. …
02	The security team was an outcome needed in our setting that came out of a view from the Bible that Godly men will be protectors. So, there was no new impact or information needed to change any teaching because of the decision to formalize a security team. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.* o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
03	I informed the pastor of the small church where I'm a member now that I'm always armed and can be counted on to respond to an active shooter. He asked me to keep the fact I am armed confidential from the rest of the church so as not to alienate anybody.
04	Whenever we have a group meeting at the church, ie youth, women's ministry, we ensure that one of our security team is there. And, frankly, if I am there for any reason, I am armed.
07	[name obscured] has been impacted positively through the use of our security system. o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*
09	Yeah, it's allowed me to not think about it, which is great. I can think about other things that I think are more in my wheelhouse and what I should be thinking about. And you know, whether that's sermon prep or sermon delivery, or having meaningful conversations with folks on Sunday. o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*
10	The church voted and approved each part of our security decisions.
11	None to date.
12	It has not been.
13	All our leadership is aware of our security program and what members are a part of the team. We do not feel and have not experienced any negative impact by having security on our campus. We have not had any members express concern over the fact that we use armed safety team members on our campus. o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*
14	We discussed statistics concerning all hazards the church might face in its day-to-day operations. Many were unaware of some of the threats facing Houses of Worship or other mass gathering locations. Once they were educated, the discussions and subsequent decisions were much easier. o *Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.*
15	No, not at all.

Pastor	Interview Question 7: In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security?
16	(No response).
18	For several years our Safety Team operated incognito, by choice. In more recent years, people have asked if we had a qualified team in place. It has been acknowledged on occasion from the pulpit, but no teaching has been presented on the ideology of a Safety Team in the pews.
19	I don't believe that the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry has been affected positively or negatively by the decision to protect the church.
20	I think it has worked the other way around – that our decision impacted our team and congregation, flowing in that direction, more than it impacted our teaching. If anything, I think that knowing we have dedicated servants who see that as a vital and important part of our ministry and worship gatherings has helped us, giving some peace of mind and a sense of doing what we humanly can to do what we do – well. o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*
21	Security is not an ongoing topic of discussion here. We have it and we will use it in times of need. We would rather not have to deploy any methods of aggression, but we are ready.
22	I do not believe this has changed anything in the way the church teaches. In fact, the security team in both churches where I have served has been developed because of the teaching ministry of the church. The security team was a natural outflow of the church's commitment to biblical clarity in all things. o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
23	We have received great feedback from our congregation since starting the security team. Many have stated that it gives them great peace of mind and allows them to focus better on the worship and teaching. It has actually become a very integral part of our programs here at [name obscured]. As the pastor it does give me great peace of mind as well when preaching that I know any issues that arise we have good people to handle them allowing me to focus on God's Word and the preaching of it to the flock. o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*
24	(No response).
26	… for the Session, allowing CCW was simply a continuation of most people in the church that we have a constitutional right and a moral responsibility to protect and care for others under our care. … o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decision.*

Interview Question 8 did not relate directly to a specific RQ and was asked to capture any

information related to the security decision process that the preceding questions had potentially

missed. While the outcomes of security decisions were brought up by several respondents in

prior questions, several pastors discussed them further in response to this query.

Table 8

Interview Question 8: Is there any additional information related to this decision that you believe this research should capture?

Pastor	Interview Question 8: Is there any additional information related to this decision that you believe this research should capture?
01	(No response).
02	I have experienced four types of security teams in [names obscured] and the churches we planted and also churches we are affiliated with. 1. Having your own trained security team where the security team is not identified with clothing as security personnel to people who come to gatherings. This is where they are not uniformed security, but all the people involved in operating the church services are aware of who they are and how to communicate with them. 2. Having your own trained security team where they are in uniform and recognizable to all. 3. Hiring professional law enforcement or security companies. 4. Having a combination of law enforcement or a security company working onsite with the security team of the church.
03	(No response).
04	I have been used by our [name obscured] association and other churches to do Active Shooter evaluations, drills, and teaching. I have also done weapon qualification for different church's security teams. With my background, I have become the "go to guy" for these issues. So, it was not difficult to implement the needed steps and our church did.
07	We have two security teams, one is identified by their shirts, the other is not identified so that an active shooter cannot readily identify them. We have never had a major incident, but we have done our best to prepare for it. As a pastor, I do not carry or possess a weapon at church. If someone saw me with a weapon, I think it would hinder my ability to effectively minister to them. I trust that God will protect me, but I also recognize that there are others in the church who feel "safe" because we have such a well-trained security team and have installed extensive security measures. o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.* o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*
09	I think it would be interesting to see how churches of various sizes approach an active security strategy due to limited personnel and funds.
10	We lost one family because of our decision to use cameras and record. Also, there should be discussion on the use of the recording, including those who make judgement. o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*
11	Yes. A significant consideration in addition to the others named above is that of the cultural realities of our community. [name obscured] is located in [name obscured], which I affectionately refer to as the buckle of the Bible belt. [name obscured] is a highly conservative

Pastor	Interview Question 8: Is there any additional information related to this decision that you believe this research should capture?

community, for the most part. The people here generally accept gun ownership and the protection of the 2nd Amendment as good and right, wholesome, and American. Likewise, there is a favorable attitude toward law enforcement in general, and toward police officers in particular. Protecting oneself with a firearm and with a security plan is well accepted as the right thing to do. [name obscured] reflects this culture of the greater community of [name obscured].

12   I would say that since the enacting of our safety ministry about a year ago there is a higher level of comfort in the church which has reflected itself in deeper fellowship.

- o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*

13   I would go back to one of my earlier statements. I do not think it is a difficult decision to move to protect our congregation. We also pay uniform police officers with patrol cars to add to our security program on Sunday mornings as well as Wednesday evenings.

14   We made it a point not to concentrate solely on the Active Threat preparedness and response. We were much more statistically vulnerable to fire and/or a natural cause event, such as hurricane or tornado. We had witnessed people in the congregation pass out due to a diabetic episode and low/high blood pressure issues. We chose to address all hazards and not concentrate on just one thing that seemed to capture the world's attention. One of the first things we did was secure medical awareness training and trauma bags for our church. We secured training in routine medical emergencies from our local EMTs, and Tactical Medical training from professionals in that arena. We have utilized the medical kits several times and have developed a great working relationship with our local EMTs. We also designed our Fire and Hazardous Chemical Response Plans with our local Fire Department and our Active Threat Response plan with our local Police Department. We routinely had drills to practice these responses so each member of the team, from the Security Team, the Ushers, to the Pastor know their roles and responsibilities.

- o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
- o *Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.*

15   And actually we're finding that people are more encouraged, they feel safer just seeing that police officer there.

- o *Outcome of the decision to implement an active security strategy.*

16   (No response).

18   The responsibility to protect the physical wellbeing of church members is one way for qualified individuals to serve the Church. It is therefore an opportunity to serve God as a spiritual act of worship. It may go overlooked by the congregation but should not go unappreciated by church leadership.

- o *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
- o *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*

19   (No response).

20   Not that I can think of, but I'm happy to entertain any follow-up questions. We do have a vetting process for our security team which involves background checks, and an interview and we also require them to be covenant members.

Pastor	Interview Question 8: Is there any additional information related to this decision that you believe this research should capture?
21	(No response).
22	Awareness/vigilance is necessary to prevent evil people from preying on the innocent. This is an area where Christians can be complacent and naïve. However, Christian men cannot afford to be complacent and naïve in the current world we live in. We have a responsibility to keep others safe and we must be willing and ready to do violence when it is necessary. When we do not take this seriously, we are in danger of being found unfaithful to our biblical responsibility. ○ *Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.*
23	(No response).
24	The Safety Team has been operating at [name obscured] for the last 4 1/2 years. It has become an integral part of the Church wide ministry. It has been 2 years since I retired and the Lead Pastor recently told me that the Safety Team is a huge part of my legacy at the Church. He said it was one of the best ministries that I could have left them with. The ministry is in very capable hands and is a very vital part of the Church. ○ *Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.*
26	Please see the draft paper which references the ethical and Biblical aspects that I have since researched and do recommend to be part of a church's decision to arm a church safety/security team. (Note: Respondent 26 gave permission for the researcher to utilize all, or part of the paper mentioned in this response. The researcher chose not to do so for ethical reasons).

Findings

This section reports the findings organized by RQ. The researcher utilized thick and rich descriptions to convey the findings, as this avenue provided significant opportunities for reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020).

The thick, rich approach consisted of three elements. First, the researcher chose to include the text of responses in the preceding tables along with the research themes that emerged from the data for research transparency and reader clarity. Second, the findings contain dense explanations of the connections between responses and conclusions. Third, where the researcher's biases, preconceptions, and personal experiences affected the themes, findings, and

conclusions, this information was disclosed, and the impact was discussed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Data collection occurred in accordance with the methods described previously, and all data was securely stored following the guidelines established by the Liberty University Christian Leadership Doctoral Programs Handbook (Butler & Jackson, 2023). Responses were collected via email questionnaires and online interviews. Transcripts of online interviews were captured using the transcription function of Microsoft Teams. Twenty-six pastors who met all delimitation requirements elected to participate in the study. Subsequently, 3 participants were deselected due to communication methods not meeting the modes approved by the LU IRB. The researcher was unable to collect the IRB approved Consent forms from participants 05 and 17, preventing the study from including their responses. The total number of participants included in the study settled at 21.

Coding and Thematic Organization

After the researcher received all responses, they were anonymized and uploaded into the NVivo-14 qualitative data analysis program. Analysis began by reading and re-reading participant responses and using the NVivo-14 software package to highlight key statements related to the RQs within responses. Specific words, key phrases, and peculiar references were selected as initial codes.

Table 9

Codes

Specific incident	General incident
Outcome	Practical
Safety of congregation	Biblical reference
Biblical	Theological
Ethical	Moral
Protection of vulnerable	Obligations

As the researcher spent additional time examining the data, correlations began appearing among the codes, and themes emerged across responses. The researcher found that the movement from code to thematic element happened swiftly and organically. Codes were grouped into categories and organized thematically after assessment through the lens of the RQs. The initial list of emergent themes appears in the order initially conceived as Table 10.

Table 10

Initial Themes

Number	Theme
1.	Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.
2.	Outcome of decisions about security strategy.
3.	Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions.
4.	Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.
5.	Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.
6.	Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions.
7.	Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references.
8.	Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.

In the interest of reflexivity, it should be noted that the grouping of codes into themes and subthemes (discussed further below) was influenced by the researcher's experience as a pastor/teacher and a security trainer. The researcher has experience subdividing significant topics into smaller, more easily understood modules for teaching and training purposes. This background significantly influenced the organization of codes into themes. Additionally, the grouping of motivating factors into themes and subthemes was influenced by the RQs in that the researcher organized coded material and themes in a manner he believed best able to answer the RQs sufficiently.

Through continued study of the data and as data was populated under the themes, it became clear that data were beginning to assemble around core themes with secondary themes grouped beneath them hierarchically.

The researcher engaged a peer with a similar theology and church security background without prior knowledge of the coding, thematic development, or data in a "peer debriefing" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 265). The only information provided to this individual was the eight initial themes. The researcher requested that his peer organize and group the themes without further input from the researcher. This peer debriefing exercise resulted in suggestions for primary and sub-thematic elements.

The NVivo-14 software allowed for coded items to be shifted into groups. Utilizing the results of the peer debriefing, the researcher aligned subthemes around the four primary themes of pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions, safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions, biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references, and outcome of decisions about security strategy. The peer debriefing exercise, as well as researcher reflection, identified significant links between groups

of themes. Several themes that had initially emerged as standalone categories were discovered to fill the role of subthemes better. The list of themes shown in Table 10 was reassessed and organized to best align with the RQs. The final organization of the theme hierarchy is shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Organized Themes

Number	Theme
1.	Pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions. a. Specific or general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions.
2.	Safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions. a. Protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.
3.	Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references. a. Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions. b. Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.
4.	Outcome of decisions about security strategy.

Once themes and subthemes were identified and categorized, the research began to examine the multiple case study data using the framework provided by the themes through the perspective of phenomenology.

Creswell (2007) asserts that phenomenological study "describes the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57). In the words of Leedy and Ormrod (2015), "A phenomenological study is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation" (p. 273). This study, being both phenomenological and a multiple case study, sought to answer how and why church security decisions were made at the respondent church while simultaneously capturing the meaning ascribed by individual respondents. While this endeavor could have escalated to an

unmanageable level, it was kept within reasonable bounds by asking questions designed to elicit a narrow range of information.

Additionally, phenomenology as a field seeks to study universal experiences or achieve a description of "the universal essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). However, Church security decisions are not a universal experience; the researcher experienced difficulty identifying pastors willing to participate in the study and who had made such decisions. That being the case, the phenomenological elements of the study were limited to the experiences and meanings ascribed to the security decisions made by the individual pastors involved in the case studies.

From a data analysis perspective, Cresswell (2007) recommends initially perusing the transcripts for "significant statements" regarding the respondent's personal experience (p. 61). Adhering to this process resulted in the codes identified by the researcher (Table 7). Next, Cresswell (2007) states that the researcher must identify "clusters of meaning" derived from these "significant statements" (p. 61). This secondary process, combined with peer debriefing, led to the developing of the organized themes reported in Table 9. Finally, the phenomenological researcher must describe the experience of the respondent in a process known as "textural description" as well as the "context or setting" in which the phenomenon transpired in a "structural description" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). These descriptions and findings are reported below in conjunction with the relevant RQ.

Findings Organized by Research Question

Research Question 1. This question asked, "What practical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?" Responses to the two interview questions designed to answer RQ1 primarily aligned under Theme 1, pragmatic motivation for safety and security decisions, and its subtheme, specific or

general incidents as a precipitating factor for security decisions. The researcher hypothesized that the study would show that most leaders made security decisions pragmatically or based on a practical need (see Chapter 2, p. 27). This hypothesis proved true to a significant degree.

At this stage, it should be formally noted that numerical data reporting is chiefly the field of quantitative research rather than qualitative. However, Leedy and Ormrod (2015) argue for the necessity of qualitative researchers "quantifying frequencies or probabilities of certain noteworthy characteristics or events" (p. 314). With that in mind, a pragmatic motivation or specific incident/threat was noted as the precipitating factor for security decisions in 20 of 21 responses. Interviewees pointed to issues such as vulnerable building layout (respondents 07, 20, 22, 24), distance from law enforcement assistance (respondents 02, 10, 26), and general safety (respondents 07 & 11) as practical motivations.

The second interview question aligned under RQ1 queried respondents about specific incidents or events that triggered discussions and decisions about church security. Six pastors (01, 04, 11, 14, 19, & 23) reported a general awareness of the threats against churches as the impetus for security discussions, while four pastors (03, 09, 16, & 21) reported that a specific incident triggered the discussion. Additionally, in response to the secondary question on specific incidents, one pastor reported that attack(s) against his person motivated his decision, two reported security incidents at their churches, and two identified allegations of sexual assault/abuse on church grounds as the compelling factors in their decisions.

Respectively, the Arvada YWAM and New Life church shooting in 2007 (same shooter less than 24 hours apart) was mentioned twice, the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 was mentioned once, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church shooting in 2015 was mentioned once, the West Freeway Church of Christ shooting in 2019 was mentioned twice, the

Wedgewood Baptist Church shooting in 2019 was mentioned once, and the Tree of Life

Synagogue shooting in 2018 was mentioned once. General awareness of the rising threat against

HoW was also of note. Based on these responses, the researcher found that practical

considerations played a significant role in decisions about church security in the respondent

cohort.

Research Question 2. This question asked, "What moral and ethical considerations

necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church

gatherings?" As both moral and ethical considerations were in view with RQ2, this research

question was divided into two interview questions, each focusing on a single element.

Participants described the meanings they individually attributed to morality and ethics in

protecting their congregations. The primary theme that emerged from these questions was Theme

2, safety of the congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions.

The subtheme "protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions" was also

present to a significant degree.

Several pastors evinced deeply held beliefs regarding moral and ethical responsibilities.

Respondent 02 stated, "There is evil in this world that lurks in the hearts of men. It would be

immoral not to defend and protect worshippers from potential devastating harm." Respondent 19

noted, "We … concluded that it would be immoral to ignore potential threats and not to protect

church members from harm." Arguing for the ethics of defending his congregation, one pastor

wrote:

> From an ethical perspective, we meet in a sanctuary. By definition, a sanctuary is a place
> of refuge and safety. When a person enters our church, they assume that it is a place of
> refuge and safety physically, spiritually and emotionally. We have an ethical
> responsibility to provide them a place of refuge and safety as they worship God.
> (Respondent 07)

Additionally, several pastors mentioned their role as a "shepherd" and identified the responsibility to guard the flock as an explanation for their moral responsibility. Another pointed to the *imago Dei*, noting, "It was really the idea that obviously people's lives, health and safety are important and valuable as image bearers" (respondent 09).

The word obligation appeared in a large number of responses. Respondent 01 posed the philosophical question, "Do I have an obligation to protect the sheep?" Respondent 09 stated, "We have a moral obligation to provide some level of safety," while Respondent 12 argued, "As a pastor I have an obligation to protect." Respondent 13 wrote, "We have a moral obligation to provide a safe environment," and Respondent 14 asserted, "Those who run churches have an obligation to do everything within their power to provide a safe and secure place to worship." Respondent 21 touched on shepherd leadership by emphasizing, "As the pastor of the church, I have a moral obligation to protect the sheep in my care." Finally, Respondent 24 contended, "We had an obligation to ensure people's safety when they entered the Church for any type of service."

With one potential exception (discussed below in RQ3), replies to the question of moral and ethical considerations elicited the most impassioned responses from the pastors surveyed; there was a marked lack of superficially considered answers to the researcher's questions in this regard. Conversely, with few exceptions, the respondents applied considerable meaning and gravity to their answers (see note on reflexivity at the end of this section).

Research Question 3. This question asked, "What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?" Analogous to the preceding question, RQ3 sought to answer two distinct elements: biblical and theological. This necessitated the RQs division into two interview questions

focusing on each of those distinctions. Additionally, each was subdivided with a follow-up question asking for specific biblical references discussed during the decision-making process and distinct theological issues requiring consideration or discussion.

Responses to the four interrelated questions were organized primarily around Theme 3, Biblical context for security decisions and specific biblical references, along with two subthemes: a) Shepherd responsibility and/or obligation to protect the flock as a motivating factor in security decisions and b) Theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.

While the researcher anticipated some level of introspective reply to these questions, he was unprepared for the depth of response he received. One of the researcher's early hypotheses (see pp. 27) anticipated the study would show that security decisions were made with theological and biblical questions either unasked and unaddressed, or these aspects were given attention only after the decision had been made. This hypothesis was disproven (further discussion in Chapter 5). Research showed that, while some pastors did not recall theological discussion occurring (Respondent 19), others discussed the problem of evil (Respondents 07, 18, & 20), the supremacy of Scripture (Respondent 04) the difference between murder and killing (Respondent 04 & 21), duties of the pastors and elders (Respondent 04, 20, 23, & 24), the *imago Dei* (Respondents 02, 09, & 22), the sovereignty of God (Respondent 18), freewill and predetermination (Respondent 18), the value of human life (Respondent 12), eternal damnation (Respondent 18), original sin (Respondent 22), judgment (Respondent 22), and faith versus active security planning (Respondent 14).

One point raised repeatedly across many responses was the biblical paradigm of shepherd leadership, the unifying theory of this study (Laniak, 2006). The researcher painstakingly

avoided any mention of *shepherd* or *shepherd leadership* during interactions with respondents to limit potentially putting words in their mouths through what Leedy and Ormrod (2015) refer to as "researcher bias," or leading a respondent into a desired answer (p. 188). Despite avoiding any form of the word *shepherd* in correspondence or conversation, multiple respondents raised the subject spontaneously. Respondent 01 stated, "If I'm a shepherd and I'm a good shepherd, one of my primary images would be David … David protected the flock and he used whatever he needed to use." Respondent 11 noted, "Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and the leaders of the church are shepherds for the people of God. The shepherd's job is to protect, lead, and care for the sheep." Respondent 14 remarked, "We believe part of the Shepherd's role in the Bible was not only to feed the sheep, but also to look out for their welfare and security." Respondent 15 insisted that "[Scripture] gives a strong application to protect as shepherds not just spiritually, but physically as well." Respondent 20 highlighted the sensitivity of the discussion when he stated:

> At the elder level, we felt we were operating within the bounds of legal conformity and our Christian conscience, and that as such we had the liberty and corporately, a duty to provide as much safety as we could as a function of shepherding. While we all can agree with the leading and feeding elements of shepherding, it gets a little trickier when we consider the protection of the flock as shepherds – many times this is limited to doctrinal matters of defense.

Notwithstanding the dependence on Scripture and orthodox theology, one respondent noted Moses' prayer on the shore of the Red Sea and quoted God's response to him in Exodus 14:15: "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on." Of this verse, Respondent 07 said, "There were no lengthy theological discussions… Once we know what we need to do, we need to act upon it."

The researcher also received significant amounts of Scriptural references from respondents. Several pastors referenced Nehemiah 4:9, saying, "We prayed to our God and set a

guard as a protection against them day and night." Several others cited Luke 22:36, where Jesus instructs His disciples to sell a cloak and buy a sword if they do not yet own one. Further references were made to Scriptures commanding care for the weak or fatherless (Psalm 82:4; Proverbs 24:11; Isaiah 1:17), directing the watchman in his responsibilities (2 Kings 9:17; 1 Chronicles 12:32; 1 Chronicles 26; Psalm 127:1; Ezekiel 33), and addressing the duties of the pastor-shepherd (Psalm 23; John 21:16; Acts 6, 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 Peter 5:1-4). A total of 33 Scriptures were referenced by respondents, which strongly suggests a thoughtful, biblically based approach to church security decisions by this study's respondents. (See Appendix G for an exhaustive list of Scriptural responses.)

Research Question 4. This question asked, "What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process, and how was it addressed?" The researcher anticipated that there would be some level of theological and biblical understanding or interpretation that would require deliberation or discussion during the church security decision-making process. This did not prove to be the case. The single issue reported by a pastor was a limited discussion between church leadership and members regarding the lack of contradiction in faith alongside planning and preparation (see Respondent 14, Table 4). This response was aligned thematically with subtheme 3. b., theological issues and arguments related to the security decision process.

Research Question 5. This question asked, "In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security strategy?" The researcher posed this question to discover if or how the security decision had impacted the preaching and teaching ministry of responding churches. It was posed based on his experience and the need of one of his former congregations for an open, frank, biblically

centered security discussion, which later influenced his teaching ministry. Like RQ4, this question did not elicit significant results. No pastor reported that a church security decision informed his teaching and preaching ministry.

On the other hand, several pastors used this question to report on the impact their church had experienced from a church security decision, with all but one (Respondent 10) describing positive outcomes. These responses aligned around Theme 4, outcome of decisions about security strategy.

Respondent 09 stated that implementing an active security strategy has "allowed me to not think about it, which is great… whether that's sermon prep or sermon delivery, or having meaningful conversations with folks on Sunday." Respondent 23 remarked that having a security presence during congregational gatherings gives him "great peace of mind as well when preaching that I know any issues that arise we have good people to handle them allowing me to focus on God's Word and the preaching of it to the flock." One respondent reported that:

> I think it has worked the other way around – that our decision impacted our team and congregation, flowing in that direction, more than it impacted our teaching. If anything, I think that knowing we have dedicated servants who see that as a vital and important part of our ministry and worship gatherings has helped us, giving some peace of mind and a sense of doing what we humanly can to do what we do – well. (Respondent 20)

A final interview question was posed to all participants, asking if there was any additional information related to their decision that they believed this research should capture. This information appears in Table 6. Several pastors expounded on the positive impacts of their security decision (Respondents 07, 12, & 15), while one reported losing a family from membership due to the decision to install security cameras (Respondent 10). Others reemphasized the importance of congregational safety and protection of the vulnerable (Respondents 14 & 18). These responses were thematically linked to Theme 2, safety of the

congregation as an ethical and moral imperative motivating security decisions, and Subtheme 2.

a., protection of the vulnerable as motivation for security decisions.

Although the data captured by these questions did not directly reflect the information the researcher hoped to glean, the responses paint an overall positive impact of security decisions on the churches involved in the study.

Bias and Reflexivity

While perusing the findings herein reported, the reader should note that the researcher believes deeply in the moral and ethical imperative of protecting the gathered flock. He is utterly convinced of the biblical and theological assertion that the shepherd is charged with the physical protection of his flock and their spiritual safety.

Thus, the findings noted above, and conclusions appearing in Chapter 5 were inevitably colored by that personal bias to one degree or another. While he endeavored at length to remove his voice in these pages and allow his respondents to speak, he reflexively assumes responsibility for those parts of himself that have influenced the conclusion reached here.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This researcher selected a phenomenological multiple case study approach for this qualitative study due to its ability to capture how and why information and apprehend the lived experience of the pastors who had made security decisions in their respective churches. In order to gather this information, the researcher created an interview protocol of open-ended questions designed to elicit thoughtful, thorough answers centered around the four pillars of biblical, theological, ethical, and moral imperatives. These four main lines of inquiry were theoretically organized around the theory of shepherd leadership, as explained by Laniak (2006).

The research instruments—both the researcher and his interview protocol—could have benefited from additional study on creating interview and research instruments better able to capture a broader range of information. A strength of this approach, however, revealed itself as the data sets began to grow by limiting the amount of extraneous and unrelated responses the researcher was required to eliminate or code.

The process of interviews and email questionnaires, aided by a growing number of respondents, lent itself to achieving data saturation, best explained in qualitative research as having gathered sufficient data to answer each research question in a cogent and sufficient manner. As explained by Creswell and Creswell (2018), data saturation is the point when "the categories (or themes) are saturated: when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties" (p. 301). The strength of this approach resulted in fully saturated themes with a rich and thick depth of responses from which to draw conclusions. Although limited by the researcher's inexperience, the instruments and research design created strong data sets that permitted the researcher to investigate the phenomenon thoroughly and sufficiently across multiple case studies and satisfactorily explore the RQs.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study explored the ethical, moral, biblical, and theological thought processes of church pastors in the United States who had pondered implementing an active security strategy within their congregations. Though churches within the United States have seen a sharp rise in deadly force incidents with significant losses of life and property (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018), surprisingly, a dearth of current academic research persists in the fields of Christian self-defense and church security. By contrast, popular material supporting multiple positions is widely available (Fairchild, 2018; Fawbush, 2016; Gabbert, 2021; Lundberg, 2021; Piper, 2015; Raymond, 2016). Decker (2014) notes the "poorly informed" nature of much of what can be found, asserting that a "substantial gap in credible biblical perspectives" pervades the body of material addressing the intersection of Christian faith and the use of force for individual self-defense or the defense of others (p. 25).

This study sought to address the identified literature gap through rigorous academic inquiry into the moral, ethical, biblical, and theological foundations underlying decisions regarding the employment of security personnel by church leadership teams in various formal ministry settings within the United States. This research was conducted in order to develop a greater awareness of the underlying concerns motivating these decisions among individual church leadership teams, to provide an increased understanding of the theological and ethical issues surrounding the issue of security personnel employment for congregational gatherings, and to biblically articulate the responsibility of pastoral leadership to provide for the spiritual and physical safety of the gathered flock.

Chapter 1 introduced the study, outlining the problem and the proposed research. Chapter 2 provided an in-depth analysis of the literature on the Christian's use of force for the defense of self or others, an inseparable element of discussions or decisions regarding church security. Chapter 2 also examined the biblical shepherd historically and in the biblical record. The literature was considered and aligned under the four foundational principles of ethics, morals, biblical truth, and theology around which the research was designed. Furthermore, Chapter 2 described the theoretical framework guiding the research and discussed the rationale for the study. Chapter 3 disclosed the research procedures and detailed the setting, population, ethical considerations, and data analysis methods. Chapter 4 introduced the study's findings using thick, rich descriptions and offered detailed data analysis (Johnson et al., 2020). Chapter 5 presents the conclusions drawn by the researcher, the implications of the research, and applications for the study. Additionally, Chapter 5 discusses the study's limitations and potential future research areas.

Research Purpose

This qualitative phenomenological multi-case study explored the practical, ethical, theological, and biblical foundations of decisions regarding active security strategies at church gatherings by 21 pastors in the United States. In this study, an active security strategy was defined as a formal plan for site security based on the use of security personnel. The theory of shepherd leadership, as identified by Laniak (2006), guided this study and relates via the shepherd's responsibility to care for and protect his sheep (p. 26).

Research Questions

RQ1: What practical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ2: What moral and ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ3: What theological and biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

RQ4: What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process, and how was it addressed?

RQ5: In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security strategy?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

This phenomenological multiple case study research was accomplished using interviews and email questionnaires as research instruments. Because the focus of qualitative research emphasizes meanings and experiences, the researcher functioned as the primary research instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The motivation for this research topic arose from the researcher's personal experiences as a pastor and church security practitioner; he made every effort to reflexively report where his preconceptions, beliefs, or biases influenced research design or study findings (Johnson et al., 2020; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

The researcher conducted a review of the literature on the Christian's responsibility regarding self-defense and defense of others, specifically focusing on the practice of security for church gatherings. This study exposed a significant gap in the literature, indicating that the subject has received scant attention within the Protestant stream of Christianity for many years.

Violent attacks have deeply impacted Christian educational institutions and churches nationwide (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018). This, combined with the lack of current discussion, reinforced the timeliness of this research focused on the thoughts, actions, and responsibilities of pastors. Thus, the study cohered with the guidelines of Liberty University's Christian Leadership doctoral program, focusing on Christian leadership in ministry and educational contexts.

The study's findings showed an intensely pragmatic rationale for security decisions among respondents. One of the primary motivations reported was a general awareness of mounting threats or specific incidents at the pastor's church or elsewhere. This awareness led to action in all cases explored by the researcher, and aligns with Lifeway Research's findings (Earls, 2020). The findings further uncovered a solid moral and ethical responsibility to protect the helpless, substantiated by many participants and explained by several respondents as a "shepherd" responsibility. The findings also noted an extensive reliance on Scriptural references to protection and shepherding. Furthermore, while the teaching ministry of respondent churches was unaffected by security decisions, outcomes for pastors and congregations because of security personnel onsite were primarily positive.

The subsequent conclusions, implications, and applications describe how this research adds to the literature on the subject and in what manner it closes the gap described above. Moreover, the conclusions illustrate how this study adds to the field of research, suggest ways the study results may be applied, and offer thoughts on future areas for additional research.

Conclusions

As the researcher approached the end of the study, the data, the emergent themes, and the findings all began to inductively coalesce around three distinct conclusion types: theology, theory, and praxis. The researcher is convinced that, within the bounds of his finite ability, these conclusions contribute to closing the gap identified in the literature.

Theology

This research was anchored to an understanding that, as previously discussed, the issues of self-defense, defense of others, and active security strategies in churches require great delicacy. In any situation where one employs force, the likelihood runs high that violence will be

done to a human being. As all humanity bears the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1), force directed against another human being intrinsically holds the probability of marring or destroying that image. This prospect must be approached with great seriousness, care, and forethought.

RQ2 and RQ3 centered the research around four pillars of morality, ethics, theology, and biblical considerations. The responses showed that pastors approached the issue of security at church gatherings with gravity, seriousness, and deep thought. Additionally, the researcher concluded that the respondents experienced a profound sense of obligation to protect their flocks, rooted in their responsibilities as elders, leaders, pastors, and shepherds. One pastor stated that:

> Awareness/vigilance is necessary to prevent evil people from preying on the innocent. This is an area where Christians can be complacent and naïve. However, Christian men cannot afford to be complacent and naïve in the current world we live in. We have a responsibility to keep others safe, and we must be willing and ready to do violence when it is necessary. When we do not take this seriously, we are in danger of being found unfaithful to our biblical responsibility. (Participant 20)

This sense of responsibility and obligation was discovered across a wide range of responses, leading to the conclusion that it significantly motivated security decisions made by responding pastors.

Lastly, based on responses to RQ3 regarding the Scriptural basis for security decisions, the researcher concluded that responding pastors thought, studied, and prayed deeply through their respective decisions, allowing them to confidently argue their positions based on their understanding of the Holy Bible.

Theory

The researcher chose shepherd leadership as the guiding theory of the study due to its insistence on the shepherd's responsibility to feed and protect his sheep (Laniak, 2006). While the researcher scrupulously avoided the use of any form of the word *shepherd* while in contact with study participants, it was mentioned frequently by the respondents. Respondent 11 noted,

"Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and the leaders of the church are shepherds for the people of God. The shepherd's job is to protect, lead, and care for the sheep." Furthermore, from the evidence gathered, the researcher concluded that responding pastors believe the tripartite obligation given to Peter by Jesus in the final chapter of the Gospel of John was not simply a mandate to the apostle. "Feed my lambs…Tend my sheep…Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17); respondents believe this directive extends to all those called by God to serve as under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd.

Praxis

This researcher began his research with three hypotheses.

1. Common themes will arise from the decision-making processes across churches and church leadership teams regardless of geographical location or denominational background.

2. The data will reveal primarily pragmatic motivations across research participants rather than decisions driven by biblical and theological understanding of the shepherd's responsibilities.

3. Responding pastor's security decisions were made with theological and biblical questions either unasked and unaddressed or given attention only after the decision had been made.

This study validated Hypothesis 1. Respondents noted similar motivations for security decisions regardless of their geographical location. Denominational affiliation was left intentionally unsolicited. The primary common theme motivating these decisions across respondents was practical.

The data did not fully confirm Hypothesis 2. The second half of the hypothesis, related to biblical and theological understandings of the shepherd's responsibility, was disproven (see discussion above), even while the research substantiated the assumption of pragmatically driven decisions.

Hypothesis 3 was also disproven by the study, as discussed in the Theology and Theory Conclusions above. While less than half of the researcher's original hypotheses were supported by the data, several conclusions emerged.

First, the respondent pastors thought practically. They saw a problem, issue, or vulnerability and wished to address it helpfully. A respondent noted Moses' prayer on the shore of the Red Sea, quoting God's response to him in Exodus 14:15: "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on." Of this verse, Respondent 07 said, "There were no lengthy theological discussions… Once we know what we need to do, we need to act upon it."

Second, notwithstanding the practical nature of both the problem and the responses, the pastors who took part in this study have pondered the theological and biblical nature of the issue (see previous conclusions). Convinced by the evidence, this researcher concluded that the responding pastors were able to balance the practical needs of their congregations with the biblical and theological issues inherent to the decision regarding security. Whether this conclusion can be generalized across a significant segment of the ministerial population is open to debate and a potential area of future study.

Third, the respondent pastors believed they serve in the role of "watchmen" and those "who have understanding of the times;" this has required they become careful guardians of the trust they have been given (1 Chronicles 12:32: Ezekiel 33). Based on the replies to the interview questions, the respondents were aware of the threats against the gathered church and carefully and prayerfully took action to protect their congregations. Where able, they took advantage of networking opportunities to share information relevant to congregational safety (discussed further in Applications below).

Additionally, the researcher expended significant effort collecting data from as vast a geographical population within the United States as possible. While some states or territories were not represented, the 21 study participants covered significant areas with unique political, legislative, and legal boundaries to navigate. With that broad range of geographical responses in view (see Table 12), the pragmatic and theological parallels across responses are noteworthy.

Table 12

Geographical Dispersion

State	Number of respondents
1. Alabama	1
2. Alaska	2
3. Arkansas	1
4. Colorado	1
5. Florida	2
6. Georgia	2
7. Kansas	1
8. New Jersey	1
9. New Mexico	1
10. Ohio	1
11. Pennsylvania	2
12. Tennessee	1
13. Texas	1
14. Utah	1
15. Virginia	2
16. Wisconsin	1
Total	**21**

Implications

In Chapter 1, Significance of the Study (p. 28), this researcher described his intent to develop a perspective on how pastors and leaders of Christian organizations are impacted by the ongoing threat of violence in their gatherings. Additionally, he wished to generate a study that would expand insight into the thought processes of church leaders who had made decisions about security measures for corporate gatherings. He noted that understanding the biblical and

theological position(s) of the surveyed local church leaders regarding the Christian's ability to use force to defend oneself or others carried particular significance. Lastly, and by employing the shepherd motif of Scripture as a framework to explore pastoral responsibility for the protection of their congregations, this researcher sought to establish a broader understanding of the shepherd-pastor's role in providing for the physical safety of the gathered flock.

The level of thoughtful response to the researcher's questions implies that church leaders do not approach church security decisions impulsively but instead give them deep consideration. Pastors reported extensive knowledge of past church attacks, local crime statistics, and architectural vulnerabilities of their buildings and campuses. Further, they recounted experienced law enforcement and security personnel within their churches and communities who volunteered information, services, and training. Lastly, they described their actions to minimize their weaknesses while maximizing their ability to maintain congregational safety and continue as a welcoming, loving gathering.

Additionally, the research detailed herein implies that pastors are cognizant of the vulnerability of their congregations and take ethical, moral, theologically informed, and biblically supported action to secure their meeting spaces. While the data supports this implication, the findings and conclusions drawn throughout this study suggest significant room for future research and discussion around the issue of church security. Academic literature does not remain completely silent on the subject; however, little meaningful research currently exists.

This research supports the need for additional work in this field (discussed in Further Research below). This researcher, in his former role as senior pastor, often found himself required to make thoughtful, orthodox, and well-informed decisions without the ability to take counsel with mentors, a governing body, or peers in pastoral ministry. A considerable body of

meaningful research to explore, learn from, and apply provided a perspective of great value. The

literature gap regarding church security and the Christian's defense of self and others is closing;

however, significant work remains.

Lastly, in the early months of field research, this researcher discovered that very few

pastors, even within his circle and including those to whom he had provided training or input,

were willing to discuss the subject of church security on the record. Without clear evidence to

the contrary, this reticence potentially implies that the delicacy of the subjects (the use of force,

self-defense, defense of others, and church security) may be a barrier to open and sincere

discussions. Additionally, the attitudes surrounding these subjects within the pastorate could be a

fruitful area of future research.

Applications

Based on the findings and conclusions reached through this study, the researcher

suggested that the application of the study could be relevant in various denominational and

geographic settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Although the

researcher did not capture or weight church size and denominational data, the thought processes

followed by the respondents aligned along markedly similar pragmatic bounds. Additionally,

most respondents revealed a deep sense of obligation and responsibility for the safety of their

flocks, a finding that could be broadly applied.

Second, the study results hold application for pastors and churches beginning to

investigate or consider some form of security for church gatherings (Earls, 2020; Leedy &

Ormrod, 2015). Given the results that emerged from the research and the example of those who

have made these decisions, current or future decision-making processes have a potential

framework within which to explore plans for protecting the flock. The results of this study do not

provide comprehensive guidance for future decisions, but the researcher suggests that they might be applied as a starting point.

Lastly, the study's results support a need for more significant ecumenical discussion, data sharing, and information dissemination in the field of church security. The researcher did not inquire after, nor did the participants volunteer information regarding local or national-level church security organizational membership. However, several respondents mentioned in passing that they had asked questions of other churches or been exposed to information from thought leaders in the church security arena. While several organizations are working in the church security arena to facilitate awareness, the free flow of information, data, best practices, and threat intelligence would benefit from increases attention.

Research Limitations

The researcher noted three limitations of the study. First, in the researcher's third pre-field-research hypothesis, he presumed that responding pastors' security decisions were made with theological and biblical questions either unasked and unaddressed or given attention only after the decision had been made. While the study disproves this hypothesis (See Chapter 5, Theology and Theory Conclusions, pp. 151-153) it also reveals a potential weakness or limitation of the research design. Namely, this researcher was unable to identify and interview a pastor who had considered the issues of safety and security, weighed the biblical, theological, ethical, moral, and practical issues surrounding the subject, and, ultimately, made the decision not to enact some form of active security strategy. Due to the study's focus and the purposive sampling method, respondents were pastors who operated under the assumption that their congregations' safety and security required action. Without a dissenting perspective, this study relied on respondents along a spectrum of favorable opinions regarding active security strategies.

Second, the study sought broad responses from various denominational and geographic backgrounds to identify correlations across these boundaries. Thus, the conclusions and findings may be applied across various denominational perspectives. These generalized conclusions, however, may hamper applicability within a narrow theological or denominational interpretation (see recommendations for further research below).

Lastly, qualitative research necessarily includes the researcher as the primary research instrument (Johnson et al., 2020; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Although the researcher made every effort to report his biases, experiences, and presuppositions reflexively, data analysis was unavoidably influenced at some level. Thus, the study would benefit from being repeated by a researcher holding opposing views to this researcher and writer. Furthermore, the study was limited by the researcher's relative lack of experience conducting phenomenological qualitative studies and would doubtlessly have benefited from an experienced team of researchers.

Further Research

When the study was initially proposed, a significant gap existed in academic literature regarding the issues of church security and Christian responsibility for self-defense or the defense of others. While the researcher acknowledges that the literature is not wholly absent, substantial work remains to accumulate a significant pool of biblically astute, probative academic research applicable to present and future church leaders. Several specific areas of potential research follow.

As noted in the previous section, a profitable research focus would test this researcher's conclusions by approaching the study from a different viewpoint. Whether that differing perspective came from a historical non-resistance stream of Christianity or other personal beliefs, the literature would benefit from having additional viewpoints on record.

The foundational issue of Christian self-defense or defense of others remains open to debate and would make a considerable avenue for further research, rife with potential topics. One prospective question: Is self-defense a matter of Christian liberty, or is it a Scripturally mandated activity?

Future researchers might conduct a similarly structured investigation within denominational boundaries to narrow the focus. While this researcher sought to generalize across those lines, future researchers could seek to either supportively concur with or refute the findings herein recorded by delimiting their study to pastors and church leaders from a specific denomination or geographic locale.

Lastly, a worthwhile avenue of future quantitative research might seek to ascertain if a correlation exists between a church's members/attendance and their willingness to adopt an active security strategy. This researcher avoided this particular issue due to his experience in the field and the concern that his background could influence the findings to a large degree. A future researcher unencumbered by this history can potentially add significant perspective to the discussion of church security and the shepherd's responsibilities.

Summary

This study aimed to explore the ethical, moral, biblical, and theological thought processes of church pastors within the United States as they pondered the implementation of an active security strategy within their congregations. Churches within the United States have seen a sharp rise in deadly force incidents, and significant losses of life and property continue to occur (FBSN, 2023; FBI, 2018).

Chapter 1 introduced the subject, outlined the problem, and described the proposed research. Chapter 2 provided an analysis of the literature on a Christian's use of force for the

defense of self or others, described the theoretical framework guiding the research, and discussed

the rationale for the study. Chapter 3 discussed the procedures of the research. Chapter 4

introduced the study's findings, and Chapter 5 offered the conclusions, implications, and

applications of the research.

The findings of this study clarified the thoughtfulness and decisiveness of the

participants, church leaders who actively took steps to ensure the safety of their gathered

congregations. The researcher and the respondents to this study based their arguments and

actions on the Holy Bible, striving to ensure they fulfilled their stewardship responsibilities.

Describing the thought processes of those pastors who have engaged with the issue previously

enhanced the applicability of this study.

Two compelling outcomes resulted from this study. First, the solid Scriptural basis and

historical Christian attitudes in support of self-defense and defense of others became evident.

Second, how Christian churches around the nation apply these concepts in defense of their

congregations may differ, though the intent to protect remains the same. The research

satisfactorily answered the research questions and provided a framework for future discussions

of active security strategies in faith-based organizations. These applicable results add to the

literature while providing process inputs to churches and pastors facing the challenge of

mounting threats against Houses of Worship.

Conclusion

This study has advanced the argument that the pastor, as an under-shepherd of the Good

Shepherd, bears responsibility for the feeding, care, and physical protection of his congregation.

Though almost certainly not a perspective applied universally, the pastors who took part in this

study have, with one accord, aligned themselves with the statement in Nehemiah 4:9, "We prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them [the enemy] day and night."

Ambrose of Milan (375) states, "Courage, which in war preserves one's country from the barbarians, or at home defends the weak, or comrades from robbers, is full of justice" (Chap. XXVII, para. 129). This Early Church father maintains, "To know on what plan to defend and to give help, how to make use of opportunities of time and place, is the part of prudence and moderation" (Ambrose, 375, Chap. XXVII, para. 129). This research has shown that Nehemiah's prayer and action, along with Ambrose's courage and wisdom, encompass a standard that is upheld by, at minimum, the respondents of this study and likely many more shepherd leaders in the American church.

The issue discussed in the preceding pages remains challenging and sometimes discomfiting. Questions centered on morals, ethics, biblical teachings, and orthodox theology are rarely easy. If the researcher were to suggest to his readers where to start the conversation, even if only in their own minds, it would be this: go back to the beginning. Go back to the Scripture learned as children and the place that first introduced the Shepherd who "leads [us] beside still waters" (Psalm 23:2b). Gaines (2020) notes that the Shepherd leads the sheep to "still waters" because, in turbulent streams, a sheep's wool can become quickly saturated and drag it downstream to drown. The shepherd, even in his choice of streams, protects his sheep.

This researcher sincerely hoped this study would lead to a thoughtful and prayerful discussion, resulting in heightened safety for Christian gatherings nationwide. The collected data indicated that thoughtful prayer, earnest discussion, and protective action in pursuit of safeguarding congregations are already happening in many places and across various streams of faith.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Exemption Letter

February 23, 2023

John Tuohy
Daniel Moosbrugger

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-721 Exploring the Biblical and Theological Foundation of Decisions to Utilize Security Personnel at Church Gatherings

Dear John Tuohy, Daniel Moosbrugger,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
████████████████, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

IRB Modification Approval Letter

April 17, 2023

John Tuohy
Daniel Moosbrugger

Re: Modification - IRB-FY22-23-721 Exploring the Biblical and Theological Foundation of Security Decisions Made by Church Leadership

Dear John Tuohy, Daniel Moosbrugger,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY22-23-721 Exploring the Biblical and Theological Foundation of Security Decisions Made by Church Leadership

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to ask screening questions when interested pastors contact you to express interest in your study, include pastors who chose not to use security personnel, and revise your questionnaire and interview questions to incorporate your updated participant criteria has been approved. Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. Your revised, stamped consent form and final versions of your study
documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬, **PhD, CIP**
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email

Dear [Recipient]:

As a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to explore the practical, ethical, theological, and biblical foundations of decisions regarding the use of security personnel (either for or against) at church gatherings by churches in the United States, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be the sole pastor or the senior pastor at your church. Additionally, participants must have held their current position when the decision regarding security was made at their church.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to:
1. Complete an initial questionnaire via email that will take approximately 15 minutes.
2. Participate in an in-person, recorded interview via Microsoft Teams that will take no more than 1 hour.
3. Review a transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy. (Approximately 20 minutes)
4. Potentially participate in minimal follow-up questions via email if necessary.
   Note: You will only be asked to participate in follow-up questions if clarification is deemed essential to the study. (Approximately 10 minutes)

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential and will not be included in the study results.

To participate, please complete the attached initial questionnaire and return it to jtuohy@liberty.edu. For more information or to ask any questions, please contact the researcher at jtuohy@liberty.edu or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

A consent document will be sent to you before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me.

Sincerely,

John Tuohy
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
jtuohy@liberty.edu.

APPENDIX D

Consent Form

Title of the Project: Exploring the Biblical and Theological Foundation of Security Decisions Made by Church Leadership
Principal Investigator: John Tuohy, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be the sole pastor or the senior pastor at your church. Additionally, you must have held your current position during the time the decision regarding the use of security personnel during congregational gatherings was made at your church. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the practical, ethical, theological, and biblical foundations of decisions about the use of security personnel at church gatherings by churches in the United States. In this study, security personnel will be defined as personnel authorized by the senior pastor to carry and utilize deadly force weapons during their security duties.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Complete an initial questionnaire via email that will take approximately 15 minutes.
2. Participate in an in-person, recorded interview via Microsoft Teams that will take no more than 1 hour.
3. Review a transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy. (Approximately 20 minutes)
4. Potentially participate in minimal follow-up questions via email if necessary.
   Note: You will only be asked to participate in follow-up questions if clarification is deemed essential to the study. (Approximately 10 minutes)

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include increased knowledge and discussion of a field of research that has received little attention thus far.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for five years and then deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is John Tuohy. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at jtuohy@liberty.edu or ███████ ██. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Daniel Moosbrugger, at dpmoosbrugger@liberty.edu

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study

after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Date and Time:

Name of Interviewee:

Name of Interviewer: John Tuohy

Interview Length:

Unique Identifier:

Title of the study:

>   Exploring the Biblical and Theological Foundation of Security Decisions Made by
>   Church Leadership

Purpose of the study:

>   "The purpose of the study is to explore the practical, ethical, theological, and biblical
>   foundation of decisions about the employment of security personnel (either for or against)
>   at church gatherings by churches in the United States. In this study, security personnel
>   will be defined as personnel authorized by the senior pastor to carry and utilize deadly
>   force weapons during their security duties."

Interview questions:
1. What <u>practical</u> considerations necessitated or informed the decision of whether to utilize
    security personnel for church gatherings?

    a. Was there a particular incident or event that sparked the discussion/decision?
        Please specify.

2. What <u>moral</u> considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize
    security personnel for church gatherings?

3. What <u>ethical</u> considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize
    security personnel for church gatherings?

4. What <u>biblical</u> considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize
    security personnel for church gatherings?

    a. Were specific biblical passages, scriptures, or concepts discussed? Please specify.

5. What <u>theological</u> considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

    a. Were there theological issues discussed or researched in the decision-making process? Please specify.

6. What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process?

    a. How was it addressed?

7. In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security?

8. Is there any additional information related to this decision that you believe this research should capture?

APPENDIX F

Full-Text Anonymized Participant Responses

Interview Question 1: What practical considerations necessitated or informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

01:     Well, like many, I think I had observed over 15 years or so, this increase in dangerous situations, life threatening situations, shootings at churches. And in fact, when we had people look at it or I would read about it, it it's much worse than what we would observe there, the numbers were just kind of startling. So I began to think about that specifically; what do we need to do? But is there a responsibility for us and for me, as shepherd of the church, to think carefully about the protection and, of course, for years we've been doing things that were protective. We started doing background checks. Matching wrist bands for children's pickup.

02:     The reality that individuals are capable of disrupting a gathering of corporate worship with various levels of malicious intent.

03:     Upon moving to plant a church in [city/date], I quickly realized my previous experiences with urban ministry in [previous locations] had not in the least prepared me for the much higher levels of crime, poverty, and drug addiction I found in [name obscured]. Within the first three months I was robbed at knifepoint, had two unsuccessful attempts to break into my row house, and had been consuming local media regarding the crack epidemic and the climbing homicide rate. Hearing nearby gunshots was common. I quickly concluded I was in a very unsafe situation, especially performing pastoral visits alone and in the dark and working alone at the church building. On one hand, I was determined to carry out my pastoral and missionary responsibilities and on the other hand I didn't want to expose myself to criminal predation nor to leave my wife without a husband and my children without a father.

04:     There have been a number of instances that have occurred that brought security to the forefront of our thinking. Of course, the increasing frequency of assailants targeting churches being primary. I personally have a law enforcement background and am by nature a protector.

07:     [Church name obscured] operates a school with grades from pre-school through 5th grade. Because our location is close to a major interstate, we felt it was necessary to take additional security precautions to protect the students and faculty.

09:     I think that maybe there was an event that kind of caused us to think about standing up a team. And in our case, it was, living in Colorado Springs in 2007, we had a shooting at New Life Church. A broadcast shooting that took place there and the shooter was taken out by a security team member. It was certainly all the buzz in Colorado Springs and just the reality of the times we're living in and the threats that exist. And you think of churches as safe places and a place where things like that don't happen. And that's just not accurate. And things do happen at churches. Thankfully it's, you know, not all the time,

but it can happen anywhere. So, the idea of having a team that would be dedicated to thinking through issues of safety and security, uh people dedicated during the service to just having an increase in heightened awareness. And so that's really what prompted it. You know, we were all kind of shocked by that happening in our own backyard and grateful that there was a security team member at that very large church to step in and neutralize that threat so that more people weren't hurt and killed.

10:     Yes (see response to next question.)

11:     The highest practical concern that led me to decide, together with our Church Council (administrative board), to establish a security team at the church is the safety of our congregation and guests. Multiple high profile mass shootings, including those at churches, have heightened our awareness of the kind of violence that is possible against so-called soft targets. While our law enforcement in this community is top-notch, it would no doubt take too long for armed officers to arrive should there be an incident in which a person opened fire against our people. Therefore, we are now in the process of establishing safety protocol and recruiting and training a team of concealed carry laypersons, including some current and former law enforcement officers, to protect the congregation.

12:     Looking around at the world we live in it seemed necessary to work towards protecting the flock God has entrusted to my care.

13:     It was actually a pretty simple process. We felt a responsibility to protect our church attendees and their children..

14:     We started with this endeavor from an All-Hazards approach. Our church is located close to a railroad track, and we are in hurricane country. We decided to start with developing a Threat Assessment, evaluating that product, and then developing Action Plans and incorporating them. This entailed Fire Evacuation Plans, Medical Plan for all types of sicknesses and injuries, Weather Plans and Considerations, and an Active Threat Response Plan. For us concerning the Active Threat considerations, it was the proliferation of violence against Houses of Worship. Of course, this was not a new phenomenon, but it seemed statistically that the frequency of occurrences was increasing.

15:     Well, actually that's kind of an easy one when you look at the demographics of where we are in [name obscured], strong military, strong defense and then even just go 10 miles outside of [name obscured] and you're in [name obscured]. So, you know the culture here obviously is one of strong Second Amendment following, strong belief in the Constitution and the right and responsibility to not only protect yourselves, but others. I spent 14 years in corporate America as a defense contractor, and the church was already leaning that way, particularly because we had a lot of what I call undercover police officers in our campus. So, we developed a church security team of about 30-some folks to give them the opportunity to rotate. You know, I'm a firm believer that it's a right, but it's a responsibility that with that responsibility comes responsibility to be trained. And then of course, you just look at the news.

16:     Honestly, ours was less thought through and more focused on sexual abuse, as we had an accusation of that happening in a bathroom after church. We just didn't have a huge theological reason for security, other than protecting the flock.

18:     When we first considered a safety team, it was still a bit controversial in conversation. At that time the general consensus of the congregation would be that guns should not be allowed in church and that God would protect us from evil. It seemed that gun-related incidents were on the rise and it seemed ignorant to think that it could never happen at our church.

19:     National and international events involving violent attacks at churches and schools. Additionally, several agencies such as "[name obscured]" started marketing church security awareness seminars and videos.

Some general reasons for a safety ministry effort were mentioned above. However, this topic deserves a more detailed explanation.

One of the first things the 2018 Safety Ministry Team did was research local and national trends of crime and poverty. This research led to the following alarming facts:

Since 1990 in [name obscured]:

- Violent crime up by a factor of 6 (this is twice the national average) (2014 US Dept. of Justice)
- Property crime up by a factor of two (this is 15% higher than national average). (2014 US Dept. of Justice)
- Poverty up 38% (this is 58% higher national average). (2010 US Census data)
- Drug use and drug related crimes increasing.
- Furthermore, crimes against children have increased significantly since 1990. This is a BIG new problem for churches in America. The [name obscured] reports that, on the average, there are weekly incidents of sex-related problems or crimes in [name obscured] Churches.

These trends are alarming, but they should be kept in perspective. For example, in a year in [name obscured], you have:

- .04% chance of being a victim violent crime
- 2.8% chance of suffering a property crime
  Local data on child sex offenders is available.

20:     1. The arrangement and nature of our physical facility. We have a two-story building, and a modular building on our campus. We have a number of points of entry. We have also had an increase in foot traffic, including a growing homeless population in our community.
        2. The demographics of our specific gatherings (women's min, youth, special events)

21:     One of the major factors in us utilizing a security team in church gatherings came because we have several law enforcement personnel in our congregation. One of the main leaders in this group was a former SWAT member who responded to the Columbine School shooting. He knew from experience that emergencies can happen out of nowhere and there better be people trained to handle the situation.

22:     The team was not initiated because of any single incident, but rather as the result of conversations between myself and other former and current law enforcement officers in the church. Our previous experience and the things we witnessed on the job informed our understanding of the need to form a church protection program. The practical considerations were motivated by the fact that the church was located within a medium-sized city and in an area where crime could affect the church. At any moment, someone could walk in off the street at any church function who was either a criminal, a mentally unstable person, or a person who had the intent to do violent harm to conservative Christians. Without access control and a functioning security team, the church would have been an easy target for violence.

23:     We have been blessed with several members of our church who are in Law Enforcement, including myself prior to retiring and going into ministry. Our security was mainly handled by the ushers (lead usher was a police officer), until approximately 9 years ago, when we were watching an up tick in violence being aimed at houses of worship. It was then that we decided to form a safety team of hand picked people with law enforcement background or experience in security areas. The main reason was to have people dedicated to security so they could be focused on same for the entire time allowing them to be more alert in this area.

24:     The practical reasons that a Safety Ministry was even considered at [name obscured] was simply common sense. The Church facilities had just been expanded for the second time and we realized that due to the expansions our facility had too many entry points. There were 6 different entry doors that could be accessed by anyone at any time during Church activities. There was also the cultural shift that was happening across our country in that Christians were being portrayed as hateful and judgmental and needed to be silenced. In response to these circumstances we installed over 50 cameras throughout the facility and installed automatic time controlled door locking mechanisms on all outside and office suite doors. We began the process of recruiting qualified people as Safety Team members.

26:     The church I served was in a rural community less that 5 miles from the northwest corner of a large county. The county seat was at least 30 minutes away by the speed limit, and the county only had a few Sheriff deputies on duty at any one time for the whole county. If anyone attempted a shooting there, it would probably have taken at least 20 to 25 minutes for any response, and only if a deputy was available. Another practical consideration is to notify the insurance company for the church and find out what they allow or desire for you to do. I know of one church whose insurance company wanted the safety team to be armed, as they would rather pay for as few people injured/ killed as possible. However, there are companies that I have heard about whose insurance would not cover arming a safety/security team.

Interview Question 1. a.: Was there a particular incident or event that sparked the discussion/decision? Please specify.

01:    There was a couple of events and one was … We have connections out in Colorado Springs, so when the Colorado Springs shootings happened, one at YWAM, and then the same guy at New Life Church and we had... [a relative] had done training at the school of worship at New Life Church. That's one, but it was the Charleston, SC shooting that really got me because I felt like this should not have happened. It should not have gone that to that extent and I felt, you know that if one person had been in that room with a concealed carry, it could have been stopped. And instead of nine people dying, maybe one or two, something like that. So that was an event that really made a change in my thinking.

02:    The Deacons of the church had a ministry description to handle any problems during our corporate meetings for worship. They had handled many matters effectively over the first five years of the church. Then we had an incident where a man showed up during a service trying to get his child out of the children's ministry. His name was not on the list for picking up his child as there was a restraining order against him. Things escalated as the man forcibly was trying to remove the child from the class and fortunately some men in the foyer of the church intervened until the deacons were found to escort the man out of the church by force and letting him know the police were on there way. The man left before the police arrived. The directors of children's ministry asked for better safety measures for the children and themselves. It was at this point that the decision was made to have a trained security team to cover all aspects of physical safety for families and individuals attending church meetings.

03:    (In the 31 years we lived in [city], I was held up gunpoint 3 times and had some 6 or 7 close calls in which I almost had to draw my weapon or did draw it on an armed criminal but didn't have to fire ...) My two choices seemed to be: 1) Leave [city] or dramatically restrict my activities to what was "safe," or 2) arm myself, get training and be prepared to defend myself, my family and my parishioners. I chose to stay and arm myself. I had never owned a gun in my life and my parents never had one.

04:    The December 29, 2019, shooting in White Settlement only served to concrete the need to provide security. We were already taking some steps, but that situation fueled our motivation. I have carried a personal firearm most of my adult life and never went without it, except when I was preaching. That changed after this particular case.

07:    There was no incident that precipitated this decision. It was simply an overall awareness of our liability as a "soft target" that prompted these additional security measures.

09:    (Specific incident mentioned in response to previous question).

10:    1. The State Police called the pastor, [name obscured], with an accusation that a young woman was sexually accosted in the church facilities while the church was in session. It was later found that it was not our church, but another church in our area. 2. Our church had recently been broken into. 3. There have been a number of break-ins in our area .4.

There was no police presence within 20 miles. 5. Our church was located on a main highway and it was not uncommon for vehicles to turn into our parking area during worship times. 6. A number of church shootings have taken place in our country.

11: The incident at West Freeway Church of Christ has been particularly instructive, not only in the reality of possible violence committed against church people, but also of our ability to respond and eliminate a threat in such a case, with proper training and preparation.

12: There was not.

13: It was certainly driven on some level by the church 'attacks' that have taken place over the last decade in our country and an increasing hostility toward Christianity in general and the local church specifically.

14: For our ministry team, not one incident sparked the conversation, but the proliferation of several. At this time, I oversaw the Active Threat Response training at a major Federal Law Enforcement academy. I was receiving and disseminating intelligence concerning the proliferation of Active Threat events and was able to show the ministry team the increases in occurrences and impact these events had on businesses, events, and Houses of Worship.

15: You look at the rate of violence increase in, particularly with domestic violence spillover. What you just described, it's exponential in its impact on the churches nowadays. So we took a look at that. It really wasn't a hard sell.

16: (No response).

18: Though it was innocent, we did have an incident where a young man brought a gun to church to show off his newly acquired possession. We knew the person and their character and their apparent lack of judgment, but this occasion brought about discussion with some lay people who had a law enforcement background.

19: No particular event, but a series of attacks and shootings at churches across the country and around the world.

20: A number of years ago, there was a groundswell of growing concern over public shootings, especially some that took place in worship gatherings around our country. These gave rise to discussions that eventually led to the formation of a security team for our public weekly worship gatherings. It was relatively informal, initially. Policy and procedures have developed more fully these last 5 years or so.

21: There was no one incident at our church currently, but I was in seminary in Fort Worth when the Wedgewood Church shooting occurred. I saw up close what can happen when a gunman enters a building and is not stopped.

22: (No response).

23: (No response).

24:     There was one incident in particular that led to the decision to arm the Safety Team. The Tree of Life Synagogue mass shooting in Pittsburgh, PA in 2018. I remember vividly how the Rabbi described being unable to get some people out and how helpless he felt knowing that a shooter was coming their way and not knowing what to do. I decided right there and then that nothing like that would happen at [name obscured], innocent people would not be left unprotected.

26:     There was no singular event that caused us to consider allowing concealed carry, but there was a plethora of recent events leading up to 2009 that caught our attention and caused us to consider it. We did not have a security/safety team. We did establish forms for requesting to carry concealed in the church and an approval format by the Session with renewal requirements. The few of us involved (I carried as well in the pulpit) discussed our responses to various possible situations from time to time. Our effort was simple but official, covert, and thank God, never used.

Interview Question 2: What moral considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

01:     One of the first things that I did after the shooting in South Carolina was I decided myself to train and to get a concealed carry permit in the state of Florida and to buy a firearm. … But this was a later time in my ministry and I really weighed the ethical issues of if I were in that situation, do I have a moral obligation to protect the sheep? And, and this has been a big thing for me. … I have different views about self-defense. As a Christian, I'd say as a pastor, if I were confronted in a parking lot by someone and I was carrying a handgun, I don't know that I would. I'm pretty sure I would not take someone's life to defend my own life. And that's because that's a whole different situation. I would try to seek to bring the gospel to that person. That's and that's where I was for 30 years of ministry. You know, was you bring the gospel to the person and God will protect me as he will and I never really worried about that, you know. Before, but I decided if I carry a firearm, it's not to... It's not for self-protection. It's not for self-defense. I would call it for a sheep defense, and so I flip 180 degrees. If there's a threat to someone that is entrusted to me, that could be anyone. It could be a child, youth, an older person. It could be a homeless person who wandered in and they're sitting on the back row, but they're suddenly threatened. I feel like as a Pastor, I take the shepherd's position. So that's I think, a moral reasoning that I went through, and I began to talk about this with leaders.

02:     That there is evil in this world that lurks in the hearts of men. It would be immoral not to defend and protect worshippers from potential devastating harm.

03:     I was a timid child and was bullied whenever I had to start a new school, which was often because my father was in the military. I attended 5 elementary schools in six years. Then in 5th grade when I began a new school and someone tried to bully me, for the first time I fought back with a viciousness that surprised even me. I never put up with being bullied any more and played football, basketball, baseball and track using my new found determination and physical prowess. The moral considerations consisted of a commitment to self-control and the positivity of legal and moral self-defense when attacked. The US has a well-developed cultural and legal body of work that supports legitimate self-defense in proportion to the level of attack to which one is subjected. I delved into that and accepted it as my own.

04:     Scripture gives a mandate (Acts 20:28 for instance) that the pastor (shepherd) is to provide for the protection of the flock of God. I have taught "Active Shooter" classes to several of the churches in our association and throughout the area. One thing that I have shared is:
Pastors, ministers, and leaders of the church have been given the role of Shepherd.
Traditionally, the Shepherd had three major functions.
        1. Feed the Sheep
        2. Tend the Sheep
        3. PROTECT THE SHEEP
Security is a function of the Pastoral staff and leadership of the church.

07:     The Board of Directors and the School Board of Directors believed it was our moral responsibility to ensure the highest level of safety possible for our students because we had been entrusted with their care by their parents while they are in our school.

09:     It was the idea that we have a moral obligation to provide some level of safety and thought to a gathering, a mass gathering of people. Uh, just as you, you know, have a moral obligation to fence your pool. Or you know, if you dig a hole in the back or in the backyard, you need to, you know, probably put up some cones around it or something. I think the scriptures speak about, you know, if you have a if you have a rooftop, you need to put a parapet around it. So it was really the idea that obviously people's lives, health and safety are important and valuable as image bearers. And that we have an obligation when we gather together in mass like that to make sure that we thought through some safety and security things. And that's not just active shooters. It's ice on the sidewalks on Sundays or whatever else might pose a safety threat to our gathered church.

10:     A major part of our security equipment was the installation of cameras, both inside the church as well as outside the church. We had a large teenage group, boys and girls. Being able to observe all the activities allowed for better control of proper behavior.

11:     If morals are the internal guiding principles that shape our decisions and guide our lives in the way of virtue, then the greatest moral consideration is my instinct to protect those in my care, as I would my own family.

12:     I believe as a pastor I have an obligation to protect the people in the church.

13:     I believe we have a moral obligation to provide a safe environment that allows members as well as visitors the opportunity to worship without worrying about safety issues.

14:     The need to protect those who come into your care when they come to church. The people have a right to feel safe, and those who run churches have an obligation to do everything within their power to provide a safe and secure place to worship.

15:     I mean, we had, we're an elder led church, so we have a we actually have about 30, some elders, 12 of which are on the board of elders that are basically the ruling elders at any one point in time. So which is good, because then the pastors aren't always on the hook, so to speak. It is an elder led church. Uh, and I mean you, you got you had the normal considerations too well, you know. Is that really something we need? Do they need to be armed? Do we need to get insurance to cover it? Should they have their own insurance? Uh, you know, some looked at it as well. Will this be a detractor to others to say, you know, they believe in corporal punishment? They believe in self protection. They you know, they believe of the responsibility to protect themselves and others, and yet they're doing it by, you know, taking a human life if absolutely necessary. Well, that was quite frankly the very, very small minority opinion. Most of them agreed that it was prudent, it was biblical.

16:     (No response).

18:     It was a struggle for me to consider the idea of taking someone else's life in order to protect others. In theory, those who are a part of the Church have a future that is eternally secure. In reality, there are many in the church whose future has not yet been established. God is sovereign and in control; where does that leave our responsibility to protect ourselves or fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? How does this pertain to the unbeliever or the skeptic who is exploring the Christian faith? Is it permissible for me to take anyone's life? Am I bringing eternal damnation upon a soul that is wayward? These are difficult questions to answer. Without having all of these questions answered, it still seemed ignorant to fail to prepare for what might possibly happen. To do nothing was not an option. Also, we have installed a camera system in most rooms in our church. For some, this may seem to breach boundaries of privacy. We have reserved some areas for privacy and taken measures to respect confidentiality. To date, we have had no major issues related to morality regarding our camera system.

19:     We discussed the implications of forming and fielding a security team, and concluded that it would be immoral to ignore potential threats and not to protect church members from harm.

20:     Morally, it was felt that there was not only a right but a duty to provide safety for those gathering for worship and to the best of our ability mitigate any obvious problems or potentially dangerous scenarios that could happen as [name obscured] gathers to worship and minister. While we recognized that God is sovereign and does what He wills, this didn't diminish our responsibilities as moral human agents to do what is best and right for our people in the face of potential dangers and evil.

21:     As the pastor of the church, I have a moral obligation to protect the sheep in my care. I'm not looking for trouble, but I'm also not looking for needless slaughter if the threat can be stopped.

22:     From a moral standpoint, violence done to innocent people is something that must be stopped if at all possible. It is right to stand in the way of such violence to protect victims of such. We believed that we were justified in providing security protection for the innocent from anyone who would do them harm.

23:     We really take the care and protection of the church body seriously. We wanted people to feel secure when they came to church. We also wanted people with training to be the ones addressing matters so as not to address a concern wrong and make matters worse or even handled wrong from the stand point of becoming over zealous etc.. We wanted people no matter if a victim or actor to be handled with the proper care.

24:     Morally we knew that we had an obligation to ensure people's safety when they entered the Church for any type of service. The moral decline in our society and the growing lack of respect for the Church as a whole necessitated that precautions must be taken.

26:     The attitude of our Session (Board) and those who carried reflected our basic attitude that we were responsible for the safety of ourselves, our families, and those around us. We believed that the laws of the land not only allowed us to carry, but with carry

certification, we were trained and prepared to respond to violent action against ourselves and those with us (as in the church for worship and activities). By deciding to carry concealed, we had already considered the consequences of having to use deadly force for protection of persons/property and found it a moral responsibility if/when carrying.

Interview Question 3: What ethical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

01:     I think, the moral consideration is that we are obligated. I would say agape love obligates us to protect the innocent. And yes, there is the possibility of injuring or taking the life of someone who is a predator and we don't want to do that. And actually we have some really skilled people who work against that happening ... [name obscured] he's very involved in that sort of process, deescalation and noticing and welcoming and watching and all those kinds of things.

02:     That safety is a value for human life and also that justice involves restraint and even punishment to the one who is attempting harmful behavior.

03:     The Christian Church long ago developed the "Just War Theory" to justify war involving Christians under certain conditions. That made sense to me and I developed something similar to the issue of individual self-defense. While I respect any Christian's well thought out commitment to pacifism under all situations I don't consider that stance as normative for all believers because I don't see it being required by the Bible.

04:     I and my Elders have prayerfully thought through many of the possibilities and potential issues that might arise. And we have arrived at the understanding that we are responsible for all who are "entrusted" to us. 1 Peter 5:1-4. As horrific as it would be to be forced to use deadly force, it would be worse to do nothing.

07:     From an ethical perspective, we meet in a sanctuary. By definition, a sanctuary is a place of refuge and safety. When a person enters our church, the assume that it is a place of refuge and safety physically, spiritually and emotionally. We have an ethical responsibility to provide them a place of refuge and safety as they worship God.

09:     So here's an ethical dilemma. We have security cameras throughout. That's just a piece of our of our plan here, and we have somebody monitoring those security cameras throughout the day. And of course, they're or throughout services when people are here. And of course, those are recording and so forth. But you know, one of the ethical pieces is, you know, we didn't want. We didn't want those recording voices. Uh, because we we're trying to balance security with privacy. And you know, in the church hallways and you might have a sensitive conversation with someone and share a sensitive need or concern that you're having or maybe it's a confrontation that a biblical concept, healthy confrontation that needs to happen, you know, in a in a hallway setting or classroom or something like that. Uh, we don't wanna be recording those conversations and we want people to be able to know that there's a level of privacy, even though the it's recording video. We can't hear what they're saying. And so we're trying to balance those things.

10:     The answer here is similar to the moral answer. We expect certain behaviors, such as boys and girls not being alone in a classroom. This would include adult male teachers and the girls of his class. Inc women and the males of their class. In rural [name obscured] it is common for many people, men and women, to carry firearms. No laws prevent the carry. For those approved in our security program, extra training was required.

11: If ethics are the external guiding principles that shape our decisions and guide our lives in the way of virtue, then the greatest ethical consideration is my charge as a leader to be a faithful steward of the lives of people. I was appointed by the Bishop and have since been hired by the congregation to be the chief leader and shepherd of this congregation, so establishing a security team follows with this responsibility.

12: We live in a world where the value of human life is continually diminished, therefore crimes against people have increased. It is incumbent upon those who value human life to protect it.

13: Again, it was not a 'deep' decision making process for us. We believe we have a responsibility to protect our church.

14: For me specifically, I was prior law enforcement and served in the military. I had been blessed to receive quality training from both and had a responsibility to ensure others were protected to the best of my ability.

15: So it's the only time we've run into that is when we've asked the guys, how do you feel about taking a human life and some of them have been very introspective. Some of them have kind of given us a flippant answer and we go, "that's not a guy for us." So we go through that whole process. So it's it's a very deliberate, very detailed process, and quite frankly, it's a very somber process because we want the right guy with the right mentality. We're not looking for cowboys. But we're also not looking for someone that-and what we found with our police officers, for example-up until I think it was Parkland shooting, they were trained to basically set up a defensive position and bring in the SWAT team. And we said no, no, no, no, no. I need you to charge that guy. You're protecting everybody else with your life so that that we had a couple of guys that weren't very comfortable with that. And they said no, we'll do the unarmed side. So those are the kind of things that we've taken a look at.

16: (No response).

18: We recognize the right to bear arms and the freedom for licensed concealed carry, but as a safety team we didn't want people with evil intentions to have free reign to walk into the church with the ability to do great harm. We had some Christians advocating strongly for open carry. We posted signs for a period of time to ban people from bringing weapons into the church. Finally, we removed the signs, realizing that we were preventing safety conscious laity from protecting their families and other congregants and recognized that a sign would not prevent a disturbed or angry person from unlawfully bringing weapons into the church. As we established our Safety Team, we made the decision to allow concealed carry in the church and to calmly request attendees who practice open carry to leave their weapons in their vehicle. Open carry changes the atmosphere of worship and communicates a message that can be confusing and disruptive.

19: We approached the church regarding concealed carry, which is allowed in churches in [name obscured], and about the efficacy of training volunteers on the range of possible responses to violence which range from de-escalation efforts to neutralizing an assailant

using appropriate force. Church members overwhelmingly supported establishing a security team.

20:   We had to wrestle with the idea of how force might be used in the case of a crisis event or dangerous situation. Ethically, did we have the right to potentially act defensively and take a life to preserve congregants' multiple lives in a public worship setting? We wrestled with that and came to the conclusion that while that scenario is to be avoided if at all possible – if it were foisted upon us we would act to preserve the many. We also had to discuss if this principled decision was a must for our security team members. We do NOT require them to all provide lethal force as a member of our security team. We leave that to individual conscience's and abilities.

21:   We do not want a bloodbath from some outsider coming in, nor do we want a bloodbath from our own people trying to defend themselves. If we are going to have a safety team, they must be instructed on how to conduct themselves in an ethical manner. We want to act appropriately under all circumstances.

22:   Because violence done to innocent people is morally wrong, it is the responsibility of those who are able to stop violence to stand in the way of it when they witness it. Those of us in the church who were already accustomed to standing in the way of violence felt that it was an ethical issue for us to proactively protect others. When the church opens its doors for a church gathering it is taking responsibility for what happens in the gathering upon itself. At every gathering, we will most likely have elderly people, women, and young children present. Men cannot stand by and allow a predator to come into a gathering of this nature and do harm to those who are not as capable of protecting themselves. We believed that the church then had a responsibility to make sure that this kind of protection was available at every gathering. In order to make certain this protection was available required a proactive training and planning process.

23:   I believe question 2's answer could fit here. We were concerned that any matters, interviews etc.. would be handled by those who have received training and would respond in a very ethical and professional way.

24:   I feel that the moral and ethical considerations are one and the same. The notion of right and wrong hasn't changed whether culture says it has or not.

26:   I presented the idea of allowing concealed carry permit holders (CCW) to the Session in 2009 and the response was split with a third against the proposal. After a year of members doing research, hearing about other shootings in church settings especially, and with a changeover of persons on the Session, there was an attitude shift the next year. By that time, everyone came on board without much discussion and we drew up our procedures immediately. Our rural setting, hunter mentality, sense of responsibility for our congregation, and understanding of constitutional guidance/provision all added to our decision and the ethics of the matter did not seem to be contrary in any way.

Interview Question 4: What biblical considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

01:    Yeah, some of the things I thought about a lot are, if I'm a shepherd and I'm a good shepherd, one of my primary images would be David. So David protected the flock and he used whatever he needed to use. And you know in his case he used his hands to attack or to defend against a predator and killed a bear. A lion, you know? And that's biblical. Umm, we know that he faced Goliath with a sling, which was a powerful tool. I often have… I sort of joked that he had a concealed carry before anybody else, you know, and I think about him as a primary image in and when we have the passage of Psalm 23, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. The rod, as I understand it from many trips to Israel, was a short, maybe 18-inch rod. I've seen them and the staff was the hook which would rescue. So it's for rescuing, but the rod was a club. And I mean it's when I saw one and felt it. It's a formidable weapon. So is it, Is it biblically sound to use a weapon? So I thought about that a lot and I thought, you know, I grew up in the age of WWJD. What would Jesus do? And I thought about that. So we don't imagine Jesus with a stick or a rod or a sling, but I think about some of the things Jesus did when he was being rushed out to the edge of the precipice in Nazareth. He used what he had at hand. He had the ability to just walk through the crowd. I don't have that ability, but he did and he I think he used what was necessary the necessary power at hand in that case to not be thrown over and sort of end the process of his ministry too early. The other case that I think of is in the garden. When they came to arrest him, and Peter pulls out a sword and cuts off the ear of the of the servant of the high priest. And Jesus says, look, that's not what we're here to do. If you live by the sword, you'll die by the sword. He puts the ear back on. Well, he had the ability to do that and talk about deescalating. I mean that could have turned into a massacre in that scene in those same passages. It says that when they asked Jesus are you the one from Nazareth? And he said, "I am," that a cohort of soldiers fell backwards on their rear ends. So he displayed the power that he had. I don't have that power. Don't want that power. And why did he do that? I think he did that because he said I don't want you… You've come here and I don't want you messing with my disciples. And I think he was protecting the disciples. I don't think I'm off base and reasoning that. I mean, I've preached those passages not specifically in terms of church security, but I think that we are biblically, umm, empowered to protect the sheep and that Jesus did that.

02:    Yes.

03:    I believe Jesus had to go to extremes to make sure his message and mission were understood. He had to fight against the idea that he, the Messiah, was going to be a conquering warrior king who physically led the Jewish nation to throw off their tormentors and establish the Kingdom of God. As a result, pacificists quote his words out of context to justify pacifism as a universal requirement for all believers. However, armed self-defense and lethal force in the course of every day life are hinted at even in the NT, not to mention the legitimate use of arms in the OT.

04:    Moses, David, Peter, Paul, and Jesus Himself… Each of them emphasized the provision for and protection of those that they led.

07: Romans 12:21 says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." We do not believe that defending ourselves against evil is contrary to Scripture. When Jesus spoke at the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, the people tried to throw Him off a cliff, but Jesus passed through their midst and went His way. (Luke 4:28-30)

09: These things were kind of at the fore, biblically. Proverbs 22:3 the prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty. Uh, yeah, you just need to know the times you're living in, right? The men of Issachar were understanding the times that they were living in and we wanted. We wanted to, you know, sort of take the cultural temperature and go, you know what, there's something going on here with these mass shootings and, you know, the rise of what is the pink break brigade or whatever they are? Uh, that we're coming into churches? I don't remember what years that was. I think that was a bit later coming in and making disruptions... and we talked about the gatekeepers that were assigned in 1 Chronicles 9. And then Nehemiah 4:16 through 18 from that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with Spears, Shields, bows and armor. Uh, the officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, so that idea of vigilance, watchfulness, preparedness in the face of opposition, which is what, which is what the the situation was there, with Nehemiah, of course. Uh, and then the elder's responsibility to keep watch over the flock. Acts 2028 through 30, you know that we have a responsibility for these precious souls, and certainly when we gather together, we have a responsibility. Certainly, that's first and foremost for their souls, for their spiritual well being, but to A to a similar degree, their physical well being as well, while they're while they're gathered here, we have a responsibility for that.

10: None but other churches were contacted.

11: There are many Biblical considerations. I tend to be something of a pacifist, having meditated on the reality that when our Lord, Jesus Christ, had the opportunity to save himself by harming others or to sacrifice himself in a violent death, he obviously chose the latter. The cross is God's greatest witness against the violence of this world. And yet as the church we also have a responsibility to care for and protect the least persons in our community. The most outstanding Biblical image that informed my decision is that of the shepherding image of church leadership. Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and the leaders of the church are shepherds for the people of God. The shepherd's job is to protect, lead, and care for the sheep.

12: God speaks in His Word about His care for people (I.E. Matt. 10:29-30). Since we are led by His Spirit and ought to hold human life in high regard protecting the church seemed an easy decision.

13: I suppose one could use Nehemiah as an example for protection. But from a Biblical standpoint I think the consideration goes back to the fact that everyone is an image bearer of God! And life should be protected.

14:     We believe part of the Shepherd's role in the Bible was not only to feed the sheep, but also to look out for their welfare and security.

15:     I mean, scripture is replete with it. I mean, you look at in Ezekiel, which talks about the Watchmen, you look at Nehemiah, where he tells him to to arm themselves with a sword. You know, Jesus told him when he sent them out. He said if you don't have a sword, get some money and go buy one to defend yourself. So I mean and then if you look at the entire Old Testament, I mean it's replete with God using lethal force on his behalf to protect his people. (Nehemiah, Ezekiel 33, & Luke 22:36-38)

16:     (No response).

18:     Some verses that we considered as we formed our group include:

Luke 22:36 - Jesus said to His disciples, "Sell your cloak and buy a sword." It wasn't for the purpose of crusading, but it wasn't for spreading butter, either. We are also commanded to defend the weak, the widow, the fatherless (i.e. Ps. 82:4; Pr. 24:11). This is open to interpretation, but the idea of watching over the wellbeing of our neighbor is evident.

Ezekiel 33 - The watchman was obligated to put out a warning to those in harm's way. This is a spiritual warning that is drawn from a physical example. Though not a direct relationship, the idea is that some people have been delegated the responsibility to tend to the wellbeing of the masses.

Acts 6 - The Church appointed men to tend to the needs of the church so that leaders could avoid being distracted from preaching and teaching.

Nehemiah 4:8-23 - They rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with their swords, spears, and bows in hand. They were not about to let the enemy take them by surprise. They did work with one hand and held a weapon in the other.

1 Chronicles 26:6-8 and other passages mention the temple guard which offered security, stability for worship, and support for ceremonial worship.

God gives us the freedom to worship and manage the Church through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He gives us wisdom to love people well and part of loving people is protecting them from evil.

19:     We reviewed Scripture and concluded that Jesus expects His flock to be protected from all manner of threats--spiritual and physical.

20:     Frankly, the biblical and ethical questions were largely handled by our elder board, not the members of the security team. At the elder level, we felt we were operating within the bounds of legal conformity and our Christian conscience, and that as such we had the liberty and corporately, a duty to provide as much safety as we could as a function of shepherding. While we all can agree with the leading and feeding elements of

shepherding, it gets a little trickier when we consider the protection of the flock as shepherds – many times this is limited to doctrinal matters of defense.

21: I would say one of the biggest thought patterns of our decision came from the idea of war. There is a difference in going out and murdering someone and fighting in a time of war. For the most part, an active shooter who enters the church facility has declared war on the congregation. In this frame of thinking, we feel it appropriate to defend the defenseless in a moment when an act of war has been declared upon them.

22: Passages such as Psalm 82:3-4 and Isaiah 1:17 reveal that righteousness coincides with defending those who cannot defend themselves. It is a good thing to stand up and deliver those being harmed from an unjust enemy. Likewise, 1 Timothy 5:8 communicates the idea that it is the responsibility of the man of a household to take care of all those for whom he has a responsibility. A man who does not care for and protect those under his responsibility is essentially a worthless person. These passages inform us of the mind of God as it relates to the responsibility of those who are stronger in defending those who are not from injustice. Likewise, we gather more insight from God's requirements for Israel in Exodus 22. In verse 2 God does not hold a property owner liable for the death of a thief if a struggle ensues during the night. A property owner would be acting in self-defense in such a situation without guilt if the result was the death of the intruder. It is the intruder who broke in during the night and brought about his own death. Understanding then that there are times when violence in relation to self-defense is acceptable by God, coupled with the requirement for the strong to protect the weak, shows us that it is sometimes necessary to act in violence to protect the innocent from violence. The amount of violence used is only as much as is needed to provide defense, and if the attacker dies in the process, he is responsible for his own death.

23: There are several scriptures that came to mind as we formed this team.

24: As a Bible believing and teaching Church we wanted to show the love of Jesus Christ in every way and are a very welcoming Church. Any and all persons are welcome at [name obscured], however, we will not affirm, condone, or tolerate sinful, or disrespectful behavior within the Church. We believe as leaders of the local Church, Administrative Board Members and Staff persons, we have an obligation to protect people as they come to Church to seek and serve God.

26: At that time, we did not look specifically at the Bible for justification for the action we took. However, we were a strongly Bible-based congregation with a strong sense of support and love for each other. It seemed a natural thing to move from our individual desires to protect ourselves/others in initially qualifying for a CCW license. We just had a bigger family now to look after. We also had the blessing of two retired law enforcement officers in the congregation who always carried legally and augmented the few others with CCW permits who were allowed. Since I retired from that church, I was asked to research the Biblical considerations for security in churches and have added the draft of a paper I wrote that specifically addressed Biblical considerations. It contains a number of Biblical references that I now encourage others to use in their decisions.

Interview Question 4a: Were specific biblical passages, scriptures, or concepts discussed? Please specify.

01:     We know that there are times when uh people pray and they don't survive the situation and they pray to Jesus and they don't survive the situation But I also know that if we have in in, in our hands, or in in our power, the ability to protect the innocent, I think we're biblically, umm, justified and empowered to do that. So that's those are some of the passages that that I come to. (1 Samuel 17:34-37, Matt 26:47-56, Luke 4:29-30, Luke 22:47-53, and John 18:3-11 were mentioned by respondent in preceding answer).

02:     There were different scriptures and concepts. One of the passages was Ezekiel 33:1-9 with the principle of having watchmen. Another was the Biblical concept of the attribute of protector that a father possesses and that is to protect and defend. The Nehemiah story of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem with the right to protect their families while doing this. Nehemiah 4:14.

03:     For instance: In Luke 22:36-37 near the end of his ministry on Earth, Jesus advised his followers who didn't have a sword to get one. To me that implied having a sword for self-defense would become necessary in his absence. No longer would he and they have to go to extremes to dissuade the Jews from trying to make him a warrior King. In Romans 13:4 Paul advises his readers that the secular law enforcement authorities are instituted of God and are appropriately armed with their swords for the legitimate enforcement of the law and defense from lethal attacks. Besides, in my experience, Christians who demand pacifism from all Christians are moved to that position more by their own personal revulsion for committing violence for ANY reason as it is from any biblical or theological understandings. In other words, they couldn't bring themselves to armed self-defense no matter what the Bible says. Temperament is therefore a key determinant to most Christians' position on lethal self-defense whether they know it or not. As committed as I am to non-violence in life I have no temperamental hesitation to defend myself at whatever level I am being attacked on.

04:     Acts 20: 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 1 Peter 5: 1-4 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 1 Tim 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

07:     (Luke 4:28-30 and Romans 12:21 mentioned by respondent in preceding answer).

09:     (1 Chronicles 9:17 [the gatekeepers], 1 Chronicles 12:32 [the men of Issachar], Nehemiah 4:16-18, Proverbs 22:3, and Acts 20:28-30 mentioned by respondent in previous answer).

10:     (No response).

11:     (No response).

12:     (No response; cited Matthew 10:29-30 in previous answer).

13:     No.

14:     I do not recall any specific passages being discussed, but we did look to Biblical examples of what the roles of a Shepherd were.

15:     (No response; however, respondent referenced Nehemiah, Ezekiel 33, & Luke 22:36-38 in preceding answer).

16:     (No response).

18:     See above. (Respondent cited 1 Chronicles 26:6-8, Nehemiah 4:8-23, Psalm 82:4, Proverbs 24:11, Ezekiel 33, Luke 22:36, and Acts 6 in preceding answer).

19:     Matthew 10:16, Psalm 122:7

20:     (No response).

21:     (No response).

22:     (No response; however, respondent cited Exodus 22, Psalm 82:3-4, Isaiah 1:17, and 1 Timothy 5:8 in preceding answer).

23:     Psalm 127:1 Talking of how God builds the house and watchman are to protect what God has built. 2 Kings 9:17 talking of the watchman watching for who comes in Peace. 1 & 2 Samuel and Isaiah.

24:     1. Matthew 28: 19-20, the great commission
        2. 1st Peter 5:2
        3. Ephesians 6:20
        4. Psalm 23
        5 John 21: 16

26:     (No response).

Interview Question 5: What theological considerations necessitated and informed the decision of whether to utilize security personnel for church gatherings?

01:     (No response).

02:     That God himself is a defender and protector and we are created in his image. Imago Dei

03:     (No response).

04:     My view on Theology is derived from my reliance on the supremacy of Scripture. As I contemplated the growing hostility toward the church and Christ Himself, I began studying about the pastoral responsibilities. Focusing on the protection component.

07:     The decision to provide a high level of security within [name obscured] was more of a practical decision than a theological decision. However, in I Chronicles 12:32, the Scripture speaks of the sons of Issachar as "men who understood the times with a knowledge of what Israel should do…" I believe that understanding the times in which we live is important and being aware of the evil that is resident in this world gives us a strong theological support for providing well-trained security.

09:     I think going back to the value of human life, you know, the creation of mankind in the image of God that we are image bearers and that life is precious. And therefore, worthy of protection and thought about safety and security issues when people gather here on the church premises. Yes, we need to be safe and think through those things, but the Lord has called us to be open handed and open hearted towards people within reason and welcome them and have our doors open.

10:     None same answer as above.

11:     (No response).

12:     Again I will point to the value of human life and its disregard in modern culture.

13:     None.

14:     Our desire to share the Gospel in a safe environment where people could relax and concentrate on the word, instead of having to worry about what might happen. Part of Christianity is caring for the needs of others, and a major need among man is the feeling of security.

15:     [Scripture] gives a strong application to protect as shepherds not just spiritually, but physically as well.

16:     (No response).

18:     As mentioned earlier, there is a balance between trusting in the sovereignty of God and practically recognizing the presence of evil in the world. Also, do we have the right to end the life of someone who does not know Christ, thereby sealing their eternal fate? Is

the behavior of an active shooter an act of freewill or a predetermined act by someone who is unregenerate? Do we carry within us the capability of determining the eternal destination of a soul? In consideration of these questions, should a Safety Team be permitted to use weapons if necessary, or only be limited to deescalation tactics?

19:     I don't recall a specific theological discussion.

20:     Broad theological considerations for this team included the problem of evil, our duties as elders to our congregation, and the interplay between our civil rights and those we enjoy as believers.

21:     We looked at the difference in murder and killing. We do not want anyone to perish, but when an active shooter comes into a building bent on killing, we feel it justified to end the threat in order to preserve the lives of the innocent.

22:     Theologically, understanding that all people are born into sin, are condemned, and are deserving of death is one factor to consider (Romans 3:10-18, 6:23, Psalm 51:5). As well as the understanding that all people are likewise created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). All people are deserving of death, yet all people are likewise image bearers of God. We must be those who protect image bearers of God from those who would harm them unjustly. However, this will at times demand that we take the life of the offending image bearer. In these cases, it is the offender who is responsible for their own demise and not the defender of the innocent. So, it is justifiable for a defender of righteousness to kill a murderer of image-bearers if that is the amount of force necessary to prevent the evil from happening. The fact that the sinner is already worthy of death means that the defender has now been initiated by God as the tool by which he exacts his judgment upon the evil one.

23:     I don't know if I have a specific Theological consideration here other then what I just stated that we believe that a security team is biblical and that we as Elders of the church are called to protect our flocks in all ways, physically (including security), spiritually (providing a safe environment to be fed) and emotionally.

24:     Jesus was portrayed as the Good Shepherd throughout Scripture and the primary role of the Shepherd was to care for and protect this sheep, that same role was given to Pastors and leaders of the Church. We believed that we had an obligation to ensure that people could come to their Church and worship and celebrate their Savior and Lord without fear or worry.

26:     My background before the pastorate included 20 years in the [military]. I was the one who brought the idea of allowing concealed carry, partly due to my military experience/ attitude and partly due to all the shootings I had heard about concerning churches and "no-gun zones". The practical and ethical considerations seemed far more important at the time than any theological concerns. I don't recall much discussion about theological concerns, neither for nor against the idea. As stated above, our rural community was much more oriented to having and using firearms than other suburban and urban locations usually are.

Interview Question 5.a.: Were there theological issues discussed or researched in the decision making process? Please specify.

01:    (No response).

02:    No discussion other than agreement from the entire leadership team of elders, deacons, board members and pastors. The leadership was unified on this.

03:    I struggled with the above issues alone and with my wife. When I had made my decision, I informed our two church leaders. They had no questions or objections. Had they objected, I was prepared to resign months after arriving in [city name obscured]. Because this subject was more controversial in 1988 than it is now, we kept the fact that I was armed a closely held secret in hopes of not alienating anybody. After I had a self-defense shooting, I informed the church the next morning after worship and was completely accepted for my decision. There were no objections then or later.

04:    During the discussion of implementing armed security with the Elders, I was asked about Exodus 20:13 "Thou shalt not kill." This provided me an opportunity to teach and correct a long-held misunderstanding. The Hebrew word translated "Kill" [ratsach] is better understood as "murder" as in the NKJV. I then took them through a brief examination of the time God commanded Israel to kill their enemies.

07:    No. There were no lengthy theological discussions. I am reminded of the passage in Exodus when the sons of Israel were at the shores of the Red Sea and the Egyptian army was pursuing them. Moses began praying and the Lord said, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to move forward." (Exodus 14:15) Once we know what we need to do, we need to act upon it. [name removed] was one of the first smaller churches (under 200 adults) to install an extensive camera system, train our security staff and perform active shooter skills with the local sheriff's office to prepare for a variety of attacks.

09:    Not biblically and theologically, but more practically, legally, things like that.

10:    (No response).

11:    (No response).

12:    (No response).

13:    None.

14:    Yes, there were some who believed incorporating security showed a lack of faith. We discussed this at length talking through the fact that God blesses some with the ability to protect others and that should not be negated at the church doors.

15:    (No response).

16:    (No response).

18.   The above scriptures and ideas were presented to our safety team in preliminary discussions.

19:     (No response).

20:     (No response).

21:     Not really. That may be bad to say, but the reality is don't come in here messing with us unless you want the fight taken to you. We won't start the fight, but we will end it.

22:     (No response).

23:     (No response).

24:     Overwhelmingly the Church body accepted and welcomed the Safety Team as a necessary part of the Church structure. Many congregants expressed their relief and appreciation for the presence of the Team.

26:     (No response).

Interview Question 6: What, if any, aspect of the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings required deliberation during the decision-making process?

01:     We didn't have any I would say any struggle over any of these things.

02:     There was no opposition to having a security team and the only deliberation was over getting the best training and resources for a team and the fiduciary decisions over cost involved.

03:     (No response).

04:     See above…

07:     There was no deliberation. The BOD was in unanimous agreement about the security issue.

09:     (No response).

10:     None.

11:     None to date.

12:     It was important to express to the church that a safety team was not about carrying guns to shoot someone who tried to harm us. While that is a component there is much more to church safety than what is typically thought of.

13:     This was a unanimous decision with no debate. The only discussion concerned the operation of the team.

14:     The above discussion described in question 5a. It was never contentious, but it did require convincing some of the members that preparation and planning is not a lack of faith.

15:     None.

16:     (No response).

18:     (No response).

19:     There were no theological or Biblical issues. Church leadership understood the threat and accepted the recommendation to form a security team.

20:     (No response).

21:     No deliberation. Everyone agreed.

22:     The security program was designed based on practical guidelines and presented to the church elder board. The elder board reviewed the program and approved it. No problems were addressed in the process.

23: The main discussion that was had for us was who we would allow on it, so as to ensure that we are staffing it with men and women who are trained and capable to ensure the right response. This was done by setting parameters for the chairperson's position. Such as minimum a police officer or other law enforcement agent or a person with significant security background. These are also the guidelines that we give that person for selecting their team.

24: The concept of the safety ministry was immediately embraced by the Administrative Board. I feel that it was on the minds of many people but they were not quite sure of how it would come about and operate.

26: Deliberations: As stated above, the idea was not supported enough by the Session and I didn't want to push any action as significant as allowing CCW in the church without full understanding and approval by the leadership. During the year that followed, a number of side conversations, several notorious shootings, and a different group of members easily came to the same conclusion and actually they presented the idea early that next year. And after fairly short discussion we decided to move forward to allowing concealed carry by authorized individuals. We easily established permission requirements, continuing training requirements, and renewal procedures that were acceptable to everyone and moved forward in a short time and without any dissension.

Interview Question 6. a.: How was it (the church leadership team's theological and biblical understandings) addressed?

01: (No response).

02: There was no need to address anything internally among our leadership as there was no opposition to having a security team.

03: (No response).

04: We studied the Word.

07: N/A

09: (No response).

10: N/A

11: (No response).

12: By group meetings as well as individual conversations.

13: (No response).

14: Through open discussion, valuing everyone's opinion and through prayer.

15:     (No response).

16:     (No response).

18:     The senior pastor recognized the need to provide a safe place for worship and delegated the responsibility to layity who were qualified as law enforcement officials in good standing with the church and society. Character and spiritual maturity are also important factors when hand-selecting our team members.

19:     (No response).

20:     (No response).

21:     (No response).

22:     (No response).

23:     In the event we can not get adequate personnel the elders have stated they would consider out sourcing to a private company at that time.

24:     Once a concrete plan was presented to them they quickly saw the need and the benefit to the Church.

26:     (No response).

Interview Question 7: In what way, if any, has the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry been informed or impacted by the decision regarding security?

01:     Yeah, I wouldn't say that anything has changed. I don't know that we've changed theologically or in terms of our biblical teaching. I've tried to be careful, like I don't talk a lot about my personal views like that. I don't really personally believe in self-defense and that's to me very personal and my wife doesn't like that. She would rather I defend myself, but I don't want to go to bed one night, saying well, I shot a guy today and did he, he probably went to hell. Was there another choice? I could have made some… As a pastor, your highest calling is the gospel and I would always teach that but also, I'm way past the idea that someone can come in and they have free reign to shoot up innocent people. It just if there's a way that I can have that not happen, then I will have that not happen. So I don't know and that's a change. Maybe it's a deepening of or maybe it is a change and I haven't taught directly on this because I just pretty much moved through the Bible.

02:     The security team was an outcome needed in our setting that came out of a view from the Bible that Godly men will be protectors. So, there was no new impact or information needed to change any teaching because of the decision to formalize a security team.

03:     I informed the pastor of the small church where I'm a member now that I'm always armed and can be counted on to respond to an active shooter. He asked me to keep the fact I am armed confidential from the rest of the church so as not to alienate anybody.

04:     Whenever we have a group meeting at the church, ie youth, women's ministry, we ensure that one of our security team is there. And, frankly, if I am there for any reason, I am armed.

07:     [name obscured] has been impacted positively through the use of our security system. On a more humorous note, our security cameras have provided us with information in regard to damage done at the church. In one instance, the church allowed a little league football team to use our fields for practice. One morning, we found that our mailbox had been backed over by a vehicle. The parents of the youth that had practiced on the fields all denied having damaged the mailbox. When we checked our security cameras, we identified the vehicle responsible for the damage. The car owner denied any responsibility for the damage… until we showed him the video of him backing over it and leaving. On a more serious note, we had three Muslim men walk onto our property and begin questioning people one weeknight when the youth group was at the church. Their questions were suspicious and sounded like they were planning an attack on the church. We had clear video footage of each of them which we sent to the FBI for facial recognition. The video footage also prompted our local sheriff's department to post a deputy at our church for the next four weeks to see if these men returned. In another case, we had a woman come to our church who was clearly dealing with some psychological issues She brought a bag into the sanctuary and sat next to the aisle. Our security team monitored her during the service to make sure she didn't make any aggressive moves toward anyone in the congregation. After the service, she threatened to shoot some of the children with a crossbow. Security responded and notified the police who were there in

less than three minutes and the incident was mitigated with little knowledge by the rest of the congregation.

09:     Yeah, it's allowed me to not think about it, which is great. I can think about other things that I think are more in my wheelhouse and what I should be thinking about. And you know, whether that's sermon prep or sermon delivery, or having meaningful conversations with folks on Sunday.

10:     The church voted and approved each part of our security decisions.

11:     None to date.

12:     It has not been.

13:     All our leadership is aware of our security program and what members are a part of the team. We do not feel and have not experienced any negative impact by having security on our campus. We have not had any members express concern over the fact that we use armed safety team members on our campus.

14:     We discussed statistics concerning all hazards the church might face in its day-to-day operations. Many were unaware of some of the threats facing Houses of Worship or other mass gathering locations. Once they were educated, the discussions and subsequent decisions were much easier.

15:     No, not at all.

16:     (No response).

18:     For several years our Safety Team operated incognito, by choice. In more recent years, people have asked if we had a qualified team in place. It has been acknowledged on occasion from the pulpit, but no teaching has been presented on the ideology of a Safety Team in the pews.

19:     I don't believe that the church's theological and biblical teaching ministry has been affected positively or negatively by the decision to protect the church

20:     I think it has worked the other way around – that our decision impacted our team and congregation, flowing in that direction, more than it impacted our teaching. If anything, I think that knowing we have dedicated servants who see that as a vital and important part of our ministry and worship gatherings has helped us, giving some peace of mind and a sense of doing what we humanly can to do what we do – well.

21:     Security is not an ongoing topic of discussion here. We have it and we will use it in times of need. We would rather not have to deploy any methods of aggression, but we are ready.

22:     I do not believe this has changed anything in the way the church teaches. In fact, the security team in both churches where I have served has been developed because of the

teaching ministry of the church. The security team was a natural outflow of the church's commitment to biblical clarity in all things

23: We have received great feedback from our congregation since starting the security team. Many have stated that it gives them great peace of mind and allows them to focus better on the worship and teaching. It has actually become a very integral part of our programs here at [name obscured]. As the pastor it does give me great peace of mind as well when preaching that I know any issues that arise we have good people to handle them allowing me to focus on God's Word and the preaching of it to the flock.

24: (No response).

26: In our case, we never advertised the fact that we had allowed concealed carry in the church and I am not aware of any incident in which a CCW was exposed to the public. I think the Session was very careful not to reveal the practice as well. Thus, for the Session, allowing CCW was simply a continuation of most people in the church that we have a constitutional right and a moral responsibility to protect and care for others under our care. But also, that we didn't have to make a big deal about it; we just did it.

Interview Question 8: Is there any additional information related to this decision that you believe this research should capture?

01:     (No response).

02:     I have experienced four types of security teams in [names obscured] and the churches we planted and also churches we are affiliated with.

> 5. Having your own trained security team where the security team is not identified with clothing as security personnel to people who come to gatherings. This is where they are not uniformed security, but all the people involved in operating the church services are aware of who they are and how to communicate with them.
> 6. Having your own trained security team where they are in uniform and recognizable to all.
> 7. Hiring professional law enforcement or security companies.
> 8. Having a combination of law enforcement or a security company working onsite with the security team of the church.

03:     (No response).

04:     I have been used by our [name obscured] association and other churches to do Active Shooter evaluations, drills, and teaching. I have also done weapon qualification for different church's security teams. With my background, I have become the "go to guy" for these issues. So, it was not difficult to implement the needed steps and our church did not require any convincing.

07:     We have two security teams, one is identified by their shirts, the other is not identified so that an active shooter cannot readily identify them. We have never had a major incident, but we have done our best to prepare for it. As a pastor, I do not carry or possess a weapon at church. If someone saw me with a weapon, I think it would hinder my ability to effectively minister to them. I trust that God will protect me, but I also recognize that there are others in the church who feel "safe" because we have such a well-trained security team and have installed extensive security measures.

09:     I think it would be interesting to see how churches of various sizes approach an active security strategy due to limited personnel and funds.

10:     We lost one family because of our decision to use cameras and record. Also, there should be discussion on the use of the recording, including those who make judgement.

11:     Yes. A significant consideration in addition to the others named above is that of the cultural realities of our community. [name obscured] is located in [name obscured], which I affectionately refer to as the buckle of the Bible belt. [name obscured] is a highly conservative community, for the most part. The people here generally accept gun ownership and the protection of the 2nd Amendment as good and right, wholesome, and American. Likewise, there is a favorable attitude toward law enforcement in general, and toward police officers in particular. Protecting oneself with a firearm and with a security

plan is well accepted as the right thing to do. [name obscured] reflects this culture of the greater community of [name obscured].

12: I would say that since the enacting of our safety ministry about a year ago there is a higher level of comfort in the church which has reflected itself in deeper fellowship.

13: I would go back to one of my earlier statements. I do not think it is a difficult decision to move to protect our congregation. We also pay uniform police officers with patrol cars to add to our security program on Sunday mornings as well as Wednesday evenings.

14: We made it a point not to concentrate solely on the Active Threat preparedness and response. We were much more statistically vulnerable to fire and/or a natural cause event, such as hurricane or tornado. We had witnessed people in the congregation pass out due to a diabetic episode and low/high blood pressure issues. We chose to address all hazards and not concentrate on just one thing that seemed to capture the world's attention. One of the first things we did was secure medical awareness training and trauma bags for our church. We secured training in routine medical emergencies from our local EMTs, and Tactical Medical training from professionals in that arena. We have utilized the medical kits several times and have developed a great working relationship with our local EMTs. We also designed our Fire and Hazardous Chemical Response Plans with our local Fire Department and our Active Threat Response plan with our local Police Department. We routinely had drills to practice these responses so each member of the team, from the Security Team, the Ushers, to the Pastor know their roles and responsibilities.

15: And actually we're finding that people are more encouraged, they feel safer just seeing that police officer there.

16: (No response).

18: The responsibility to protect the physical wellbeing of church members is one way for qualified individuals to serve the Church. It is therefore an opportunity to serve God as a spiritual act of worship. It may go overlooked by the congregation but should not go unappreciated by church leadership.

19: (No response).

20: Not that I can think of, but I'm happy to entertain any follow-up questions. We do have a vetting process for our security team which involves background checks, and an interview and we also require them to be covenant members.

21: (No response).

22: Awareness/vigilance is necessary to prevent evil people from preying on the innocent. This is an area where Christians can be complacent and naïve. However, Christian men cannot afford to be complacent and naïve in the current world we live in. We have a responsibility to keep others safe and we must be willing and ready to do violence when it is necessary. When we do not take this seriously, we are in danger of being found unfaithful to our biblical responsibility.

23:     (No response).

24:     The Safety Team has been operating at [name obscured] for the last 4 1/2 years. It has become an integral part of the Church wide ministry. It has been 2 years since I retired and the Lead Pastor recently told me that the Safety Team is a huge part of my legacy at the Church. He said it was one of the best ministries that I could have left them with. The ministry is in very capable hands and is a very vital part of the Church.

26:     Please see the draft paper which references the ethical and Biblical aspects that I have since researched and do recommend to be part of a church's decision to arm a church safety/security team.

APPENDIX G

Scriptures Referenced by Respondents

1. Genesis 1:26
   Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

2. Exodus 20:13
   You shall not murder.

3. Exodus 22:2-3
   If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him, but if the sun has risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

4. 1 Samuel 17:34-36
   But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God."

5. 2 Kings 9:17
   Now the watchman was standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came and said, "I see a company." And Joram said, "Take a horseman and send to meet them, and let him say, 'Is it peace?'"

6. 1 Chronicles 9:17
   The gatekeepers were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman, and their kinsmen (Shallum was the chief)

7. 1 Chronicles 12:32
   Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command.

8. 1 Chronicles 26
   (The division of the gatekeepers.)

9. Nehemiah 4:8-23
   … And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. … So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows … From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and

coats of mail … Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built … So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out … So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

10. Psalms 23
The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

11. Psalms 51:5
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

12. Psalms 82:4
Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

13. Psalms 122:7
Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!

14. Psalms 127:1
Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

15. Proverbs 22:3
The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

16. Proverbs 24:11
Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.

17. Isaiah 1:17
Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

18. Ezekiel 33
(Ezekiel commissioned as Israel's watchman)

19. Matthew 10:16
Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

20. Matthew 10:29

    Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

21. Matthew 28:19-20

    Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

22. Luke 4:28-30

    When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.

23. Luke 22: 36

    He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one."

24. John 21:16

    He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."

25. Acts 6

    (Men chosen to serve the congregation)

26. Acts 20:28

    Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

27. Romans 3:10-18

    (none are righteous)

28. Romans 6:23

    For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

29. Romans 12:21

    Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

30. Romans 13:4

    [He] is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

31. Ephesians 6:20
    for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

32. 1 Timothy 5:8
    But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

33. 1 Peter 5:1-4
    So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.