

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY: WHAT SOUTH CAROLINA CHURCH  
LEADERS BELIEVE ABOUT CONGREGATIONAL  
ACTIVE SHOOTER PREPARATION

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Charles D. Watts, Jr.

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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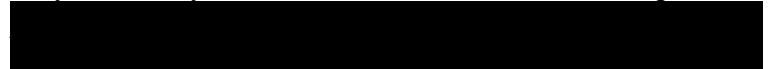
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APPROVED BY:

  
Arlynne Perley-Huebscher, Ed.D., Dissertation Supervisor

  
Micah Noelle Nave, Ph.D., Second Reader

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. This researcher examined how church leaders prepare, train, and equip congregations for security threats like active shooter incidents. This study fills a gap in the existing literature, adding to the research by Auten (2021), Rainer (2017), and the FBI (2016). This researcher examined how churches prepare for security threats like active shooter incidents. This qualitative descriptive study aimed to understand what church leaders of 12 Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina believe about preparing, training, and equipping their congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. The foundational theories discussed in this study include Social Bond/Control Theory, Five Stage Sequential Model Theory, Group Socialization Theory, and Mass Shooting Contagion Theory. Through a qualitative survey and interviews, this researcher discovered what South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders think about the possibility of an active shooter in their church. The Research Subjects were randomly chosen from South Carolina Southern Baptist churches. For this study, *church leaders* are defined as individuals in formal leadership positions at the executive level, including senior and associate pastors of biblically based Southern Baptist church organizations in South Carolina.

*Keywords:* active shooter, congregation, equipping, mass shooting, preparing, training

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### **Dedication**

I love and miss you, Dad, but I know you are singing in the most fantastic choir. This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Charles “David” Watts, Sr., my hero, and guide in life during the good and bad times. He was a father, soldier, educator, mentor, and hero. He taught me the value of hard work, how to open a door for the ladies, and how to stand up when elders walked into a room and demanded respect for authority. Unfortunately, I started this journey after his death, but I am sure he would be so proud and would have enjoyed supporting me in every step.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

After Action Review (AAR)

Concealed Carry Permit (CCP)

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

Protective Action Decision Model (PADM)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

South Carolina Baptist Convention (SCBC)

South Carolina Southern Baptist Association (SCSBA)

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

## CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

### Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, schoolhouses and houses of worship should be places of safety and peace; however, they have not been immune to gun violence. Johnson (2019) explains:

Violence at places of worship in the U.S. appears to have been increasing over the last two decades. While the most tragic and shocking incidents dominate media attention and public awareness, many smaller incidents of violence occur at places of worship every week. (Johnson, 2019, p. 1)

Jesus said the world would change before His return. He said, “There shall be signs in the sun, and moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and waves roaring” (King James Version, 1798/2017, Luke 21:25). When gun violence occurs, multiple fatalities and community trauma can result. Church staff and members could prepare, train, and equip congregations to respond if and when an event occurs, and “people who attend places of worship need to prepare in advance for how to respond when events like these occur” (Johnson, 2019, p. 1). Religious leaders could also prepare their communities for a healthy recovery. In 2023, there was a division of belief about preparing, training, and equipping the congregation to arm itself based on each leader's various beliefs. The problem was to uncover if a division existed in the Southern Baptist church leadership in South Carolina.

Gun violence could happen at any time and during any gathering for all types of activities within the church. Leaders could take preparing, training, and equipping congregations seriously and not have the “it cannot and will not happen here” attitude. This researcher’s experience reflects what VanSparrentak (2017) writes about church leaders wanting to create “a welcoming church” and making “a positive first impression” that “encourages guests to return” (para. 5). To provide and maintain a welcoming atmosphere for

church members and visitors, vigilant leaders could balance preparing, training, and equipping congregations for gun shooter incidents before they occur. These incidents may be due to a multitude of actions. These incidents may be hate crimes, terrorist acts of retribution, or random violence. Regardless of the incident, church leaders could take the time to institute steps to reduce the impact or likelihood of an active shooter event in their house of worship (NatDisaster, 2021).

As of October 2023, the deadliest shooting in a place of worship was in 2017 at First Baptist Sutherland Springs in Texas, with 26 deaths, including an unborn child (Earls, 2018). This researcher used the lessons from past active shooter events and scenarios to develop research questions, investigate, uncover, or reveal what South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for future events in their facilities. This researcher reviewed the beliefs and experiences of the research participants.

Chapter One discusses the background, sociological, theological, and theoretical concerns and issues related to the problem of preparing, training, and equipping congregations. Chapter One also provides this researcher's relationship to the problem.

### **Background to the Problem**

By 2023, active shooter situations were prevalent in the United States. Rainer (2017) wrote, "Church shootings are increasing every year in America. And while the percentage of churches with shootings is small, this issue is one where we could be prepared. The downside is just too great" (para. 1). Risher (2019) calls this situation "one of the greatest tragedies of our time" (p. 163). Citizens could react quickly because cases usually occur within 10 to 15 minutes (DHS, 2015, p. 3). Law enforcement usually cannot arrive on the scene within 10 to 15 minutes. "Individuals must be prepared both mentally and physically to deal with an active shooter"

(DHS, 2015, p. 3). In 2023, gun violence threats existed, and the concern for the safety of the church was vital. Biblical Scripture demonstrated how the church was tormented in the days of Saul, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.” (King James Version, 1798/2017, Acts 8:3).

## **Historical**

The United States Constitution provides the legal right for individuals to own weapons. The Constitution states, “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed” (Constitution Center, 2022, p. 1). Congress passed the second amendment on September 25, 1789, ratified it on December 15, 1791, and included it in the first ten amendments of the Bill of Rights (Constitution Center, 2022, p. 1).

Tupponce (2022) explains, “United States citizens have been owning and using guns since before the country was an official country. There are over 334 million U.S. citizens and more than 390 million registered guns’ (p. 1). In 1966, Charles Whitman climbed the University of Texas bell tower and started shooting people; this is where many writers say the era of mass shootings began (p. 2). The determination is that Whitman did the shooting because of a brain tumor. (p. 2). Smith (2022) explained that in 2022, there was a shooting at a 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade in Highland Park, Illinois, where seven individuals died and 24 were injured (p. 1). By July 2022, 320 defined mass shootings have occurred in the United States. (Barr & Izadi, 2022). There have been 27 school shootings in the first seven months of 2022 (Education\_Week, 2022, p. 1). On May 24, 2022, at the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, 19 children and two adults were killed, and sixteen others were injured. Uvalde was the deadliest school shooting since the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012.

An examination of seventeen years of data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) presented information about serious crimes against houses of worship. NIBRS data was pulled from 2000 through 2016. Incidents of armed robberies, aggravated assaults, shootings, stabbings, and bombings were reviewed by the Dolan Consulting Group (Johnson, 2019, p. 1). The Dolan Consulting Group review of this data revealed 1,652 occurrences where serious violence happened on properties of houses of worship (p. 1). The average of 97 incidents per year within NIBRS-reporting jurisdictions may seem low. It may be a reason many church leaders did not believe their congregation could be affected by violence. Johnson argues that "NIBRS-reporting agencies only cover about 20% of the nation's population," yet the numbers are much higher (p. 1). Dolan Consulting Group estimated the actual number of incidents per year is closer to 480 (Johnson, 2019, p. 1).

### **Sociological**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, uncertainties in potentially hazardous situations in South Carolina Southern Baptist churches could be minimized while maximizing public safety and health. Drabek & Evans (2004) explain that "The goal is to limit the costs of emergencies or disasters by implementing a series of strategies and tactics reflecting the full life cycle of disaster, i.e., preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation" (p. 4). Church leadership could offer their congregations the same strategies discussed by Drabek to enhance safety.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, pro-gun individuals and organizations are pushing for legislation to allow concealed carry, while anti-gun individuals and organizations are pushing for restrictions (Fortunato, 2015, p. 1). With the advancement of technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, social media has enhanced the ability to carry the news to more people more rapidly. The news media has made "concealed carry and mass shootings a heated topic" (Duwe, 2000, p. 364). Before the changes

in social media technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, news was reported and covered locally. However, since the advances in media technology, “news usually quickly breaks into the national market” (Duwe, 2000, p. 365).

### **Theological**

The Christian Bible reveals that “In the beginning,” Adam and Eve were made in the image of God where “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (New International Version, 1973, Genesis 1:27). During God’s initial creation, there were no worries about violence; however, because sin entered into man, violence also became part of humanity. Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him, an example of early violence (New International Version, 1973, Genesis 4:8).

The disciples were curious about the world events that would take place before Jesus’ return. They asked Jesus what the signs would be, and Jesus said:

And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For the nation, shall rise against nation, and the kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. (King James Version, 1798/2017, Matthew 24: 6,7)

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the statement Jesus said to the disciples could be reported in 2023 by news channels. Following the words of Jesus in Matthew 24, Jesus said the enemy would then “deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake” (King James Version, 1798/2017, Matthew 24:9). In 2023, America was being challenged by other nations and war was being threatened by countries such as Russia and China (Cang & Heijmans, 2022, para. 2; Faulconbridge, 2022, para. 1). The church was even warned of possible violence: The Department of Homeland Security warned that “faith-based institutions” could be potential targets amid a “heightened threat environment” in the United States (CNA-Staff, 2022, para. 1).

South Carolina, Southern Baptist Church leaders are responsible for providing an environment that is a place of peace, love, and acceptance. Church leaders are the shepherds of the church flock. Church leaders are responsible for the safety of the church congregation, as the shepherd is responsible for the sheep. Biblical Scripture explains that the elders of churches are to protect the flock (King James Version, 1798/2017, 1 Peter 5:1-4). The church leaders are responsible for presenting the Word of God and ensuring the safety of those they teach. God ordains the church leaders to protect the flock:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over thee which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter among you, not sparing the flock. (King James Version, 1798/2017, Acts 20:28, 29)

Places of worship are where the ministers are to help their flock become more like Christ. Biblically, safety ought to be expected in a church or house of worship where individuals come to worship and not worry about violence:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. (New International Version, 1973, Luke 11:21,29)

The church leaders could have the “heart of a shepherd, just as David used a rod and sling to guide and protect the flock against predators that sought to harm the flock” (Auten, 2021, p.

20). Rainer (2017) argues:

Church security is a ministry more than an expense. I have little patience with church leaders and members who say they can’t afford church security. The church doors should not be open if it can’t afford to keep members safe and secure. The church or leaders may have to spend money to go to a training seminar, or to retain a local police officer every weekend. Those are investments in security, not expenses. (Rainer, 2017, para. 4)

Many theological writers present ways to deal with church shootings and armed individuals within the congregation. Chappell (2017) provides five biblical emotional responses

to church shootings, while Golson (2017) provides his rationale for biblical support for armed response to shootings.

Chappell (2017) discusses how Christians could respond to active shooter events and provides theological answers to the proposed research. Chappell contributes biblical references that address theological questions, issues, and phenomena related to church shootings.

Chappell's five biblical emotional responses are:

1. Pray for those left behind: Our first response to every tragedy should be prayer.
2. Reject Fear: The senselessness of violence leaves us all reeling with unanswered questions. And there's something about this particular shooting taking place in a church that adds an even greater sense of vulnerability.
3. Preach the Word: If you are a pastor, be careful of politicizing. Remember that God has called you to the flock you serve.
4. Physically Protect the Flock: This would be an excellent time to review your security plan if you're a pastor.
5. Remember Your Blessings: Love your family. Love your church family. (Chappell, 2017)

Golson (2017) discusses biblical events that support the theological questions, issues, and problems concerning active shooting events in and out of houses of worship. The author discusses the issues such as "killing and murder," "sins and crimes," and "defender v. martyr." Golson argues many are confused about the difference between killing and murder, where "murder is malicious" and "killing is not." Golson argues that "Christians must maintain a justifiable killing to protect the vulnerable in society," and that includes "the church members" the church leaders are "charged with protecting" (para. 9).

Golson writes that there "seems to be a misunderstanding between a sin and a crime" (para. 10). He explains the difference by using a situation where someone breaks into a home and that breaking and entering is a sin and a crime. However, the homeowner is not killing the intruder because they are sinning but committing a crime. The author explains that an active shooter who enters a church to commit mass murder is committing a sin and a crime. Golson



states that “we would love to share the Gospel with such a person,” but in this situation, there is no time for sharing the Gospel, but “the use of lethal force” is needed to “stop the crime of mass murder” (para. 10).

Golson (2017) also provides valuable information from a minister’s view of armed responses and supports that view with events from Biblical Scripture. He also offers theological statements about the differences between killing and murder, sin, and crimes. Golson presents two principles in his discussion. The two principles are “Abraham (defender) and Eliot (martyr)” (Golson, 2017, pp. 4-5). Golson explains that the Abraham principle is found in Genesis 13-14, where the four Mesopotamian kings went to punish Sodom, a Vassal City. He explains that “Abraham’s nephew was taken prisoner,” and Abraham, with his allies, “attacked the kings and rescued Lot and his family” (p. 4). Golson writes the strange thing about this was that “Abraham was still blessed by Melchizedek, King of Salem” (p. 5). Golson explains The Eliot principle (martyr) is based on “missionaries in Ecuador in 1956,” the missionaries Jim Eliot, Ed McCully, Roger Youdarian, and Peter Fleming “decided not to use the guns they had to kill some attackers” (p. 5). Golson argued that the missionaries' choice ended up “being the correct choice,” and “they laid down their lives for the Gospel” (p. 5).

On June 17, 2015, nine individuals were killed, and a tenth was injured during a Bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina (Risher, 2019). The shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, has been a shooting that was published, and Risher (2019) provides personal accounts of this shooting in her book. She discusses biblical issues with forgiveness in response to the shooting. Chris Singleton is the son of one of the victims of the Emanuel Church shooting, and he has become a “nationally-renowned speaker with a message of resilience, forgiveness, and unity following the loss of his mother in the 2015

Mother Emanuel Church Tragedy in Charleston, SC” (Singleton, 2023). Singleton argues that “love is stronger than hate” (Singleton, 2023).

### **Theoretical**

In 2023, theories about active shooters and shootings in places of worship continued to surface. However, little research focused on the effectiveness of preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter situation in houses of worship. Existing literature about active shootings in places of worship addressed the what and why of the occurrences but lacked discussion about preparedness for the same kind of event in the future. Due to the limited amount of available research and preparation materials, many church leaders did not prioritize this issue. The foundational theories discussed in this study include Social Bond/Control Theory, Five Stage Sequential Model Theory, Group Socialization Theory, and Mass Shooting Contagion Theory.

This researcher aimed to fill the literature gap regarding South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders' beliefs about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for active shooter situations. The concepts related to preparations for school shootings and significant events contribute to the study of protecting any facility with a crowd of people. In houses of worship, leadership may have questions about securing and protecting the flock. Those questions could be answered by studying active shootings at houses of worship and shootings in other places such as schools, malls, and concerts.

### **Researcher’s Relationship to The Problem**

This researcher supports protecting the houses of worship and training teams and preparing, training, and equipping the congregations. This researcher believes that each person has the right to keep and bear arms and provide security for themselves and others from violence.

This researcher lived worldwide and worked in dangerous locations during wartime and peace (not peaceful) when terror was common. This researcher understood how this world could continue to get worse. Biblical Scripture explains things will get worse:

At that time, many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. (New International Version, 1973, Matthew 24:10-20)

Creswell (2018) states that axiological assumptions are characterized by acknowledging that during the research, bias would be intertwined throughout the study. This researcher understood that the researcher brought personal bias to the research. However, this bias had to be acknowledged, and this researcher had to ensure the bias did not impact the study's outcomes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the 21st century, Mass Shootings and active shooter incidents have increased in the United States. Existing research is heavy on school shootings. Before this study, researchers had not provided much information on church shootings or the possibility of an active shooter in houses of worship. Houses of worship are targets of violence (Rainer, 2017, para. 1). There is a gap in the literature in the data that provides leadership of houses of worship in South Carolina Southern Baptist with the information to prepare, train, and equip congregations for an active shooter. The current research falls short of providing the leadership of houses of worship with the background, capabilities, and process to secure their community. Recent research is deficient in providing leadership with reasons to prepare, train, and equip security teams and

congregations. Houses of worship are to minister to the congregations and surrounding communities.

While ministering, South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could consider the possibility of violence against their flock while on the church property. Eschner (2019) argues, “As natural and human-made hazards become increasingly complex and challenging to predict, the need for forward-leaning action is more significant than ever before” (p. 1).

Events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century align with end-time prophecies in the Bible. The Bible proclaims, “For nations shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places” (King James Version, 1798/2017, Matthew 24:7). Do the local churches need volunteer-run safety teams? Who should take steps to ensure congregational preparation, equipping, and safety training happens? Why do others not take the same step? One of the steps this researcher evaluated was the congregational preparation of churches. This qualitative descriptive study design provides church leaders with information and data to assist them in preparing for violence against Christians.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. This researcher examined how church leaders prepare, train, and equip congregations for security threats like active shooter incidents. This researcher discovered what the church leaders believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter in the church. This researcher also discovered what the church authorities believe the possibility of an active shooter is in the case of their

church and what the top ten things church authorities believe could enhance the church's security. This researcher conducted one survey and questionnaire for 12 churches to determine how many church leaders in this study are preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter situation. Due to time limitations, cost, and travel requirements, the data collection for this study was via virtual meeting software and personal interviews. For this study, a church leader is a position held by an individual or individuals in formal leadership positions at the executive level, including associate pastors and lead pastors of biblically-based Southern Baptist church organizations in South Carolina.

The survey was emailed to the potential research subjects to ascertain their qualification to participate in the research and their knowledge of their home church's safety and security preparedness. The goal was to use the survey to discover answers to questions about the research subjects' qualifications. The survey consisted of 31 questions and answers. Two survey question answers were on the Likert Scale, with responses zero to five, with five being the highest. One question had a yes or no answer to determine if the candidate was a church leader serving in a South Carolina Southern Baptist church and, therefore, qualified for the research. There were 18 multiple-choice questions with yes, no, or unsure answers. The remaining 11 questions had multiple-choice answers based on the question. The survey was designed to be completed in 10 minutes.

A qualitative interview methodology was used to collect the data identifying the participants' beliefs about preparing, training, and equipping congregations in this study. The interviews occurred virtually due to time limitations, cost, and travel requirements. This researcher's experience guided this study to discover the thoughts and beliefs of 12 Southern Baptist church leaders in South Carolina. This researcher's experiences included assembling with

multiple congregations, mainly because of his United States military obligations to relocate. Those experiences include observing unprepared, untrained, or unequipped congregants in the area of an active shooter in a house of worship. This researcher drew his conclusions based on the church authorities' opinions about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for the possibility of an active shooter event and what they believe should be done or not done to prepare for such an event.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experiences, how essential is it to involve the congregation in training for active shooter incidents?

**RQ2.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experiences, what is needed to prepare congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

**RQ3.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experiences, what is needed to train congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

**RQ4.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experiences, what is needed to equip congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

### **Assumptions and Delimitations**

Assumptions involved the potential biases of this researcher, and delimitations involved the sample size consistent with phenomenological research design. Each researcher needs to establish the necessary assumptions and delimitations for the study because they provide the reader with this researcher's belief on the subject that requires research. Roberts (2010) argues that "assumptions are what you take for granted in a study" (p. 139). Assumptions and delimitations establish this researcher's desire to conduct the research without bias and personal opinion. Bredfeldt (2021) expressed the importance of establishing a framework for a phenomenological approach where the researcher avoids any possible outliers that do not pertain to the information being studied

and avoids any distraction from the purpose of the study. Assumptions can create a passion for the performance of the study to add to education on the subject being researched and assist in discovering a knowledge gap. Delimitations “clarify the boundaries of the study” (Roberts, 2010, p. 138). The researcher clarifies the boundaries and determines what needs to be set to decide what to use and what is not required for research.

### **Research Assumptions**

In general, as Roberts & Hyatt (2019) argued, “assumptions are what you take for granted relative to your study” (p. 111). In this research, the assumptions present that South Carolina Southern Baptist churches are prime candidates for future attacks when there is no set emergency protocol to counter an attack or emergency, natural or human-made. Auten (2021) states:

Churches are soft targets, where Jihad attack of a Holy War could occur with the ideology that a strike of many church facilities at once could hit across America in a day, just as in the case of 9/11. (p. 25)

In this study, this researcher considered church leaders as the church's principals responsible for the church's safety. The church leaders are to provide the safest facility possible so the members can worship God without worrying about the safety of their family and friends. Church leaders are similar to local school leadership in that they share the same safety standards and regulations to ensure their members remain safe in their houses of worship.

For this study, this researcher assumed that an active shooter event is an event where one individual conducts a shooting in a house of worship, not multiple shooters. This researcher assumed that Christian leaders in this study would have the assets to conduct active shooter training for their congregation. This researcher assumed that the population would not include Southern Baptist churches where the congregation consisted primarily of combat veterans. Finally, this researcher assumed that the participants had access to the data required to provide answers and feedback to the survey.

### **Delimitations of the Research Design**

The delimitations clarify the boundaries of this study. Roberts & Hyatt (2019) state that delimitations are the way the researcher narrows the study's scope and what "will be included and what will be left out" (p.110). This researcher focused on the Southern Baptist Churches in South Carolina and on the preparedness of the church readiness and emergency management protocol to minimize the threat of an active shooter incident. The study focused on Southern Baptist church leaders in South Carolina, enabling this researcher to use his desired methodology of using a survey and interviews to reach participants in South Carolina. The research was delimited to church leaders. In this study, a church leader regularly leads worship services and serves at church events such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Someone who offers personal ministry to church members by mentoring and encouraging people to further their faith and ensuring a positive church experience. Someone who communicates the church's message to the community through words and actions.

This researcher followed the advice of Creswell (2005) when he argued that "Representative refers to the selection of individuals from a sample of a population such that the individuals selected are typical of the population under study, enabling you to conclude the sample about the population as a whole" (p. 145). This researcher delimited the study to a population of South Carolina. The population consisted of Southern Baptist Church Leaders whose congregations did not primarily consist of combat veterans. This researcher limited the study to Southern Baptist churches that are members of the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina.

This researcher understood that future research could include those Southern Baptist churches not associated with or not members of the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina. Another delimitation included by this researcher was the population had to consist of



Southern Baptist church leaders who followed Southern Baptist doctrine and shared similar spiritual beliefs. This researcher delimited the research population to participants eighteen years of age or older. The gender of the population was not delimited by race or gender. Finally, the population of this study was not stratified.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Active Shooter:* “An individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area” (FBI, 2016, para. 1).

*Best Practices:* “Best practices are peer-validated techniques, procedures, and solutions that prove successful and are solidly grounded in experience in operations, training, and exercises” (DHS, 2015, p. 6).

*Biblically-based:* For this study, biblically-based is the act of being founded in biblical truths as presented by the Holy Christian Bible.

*Christian:* One who believes in the non-negotiable birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus and his status of Lord and Savior of whosoever will believe (Perley, 2022, p. 31). Romans 10:11-13 explains what a Christian is, “For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him [whoever adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Him] will not be disappointed [in his expectations]. For there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile; for the same Lord is Lord over all [of us], and [He is] abounding in riches (blessings) for all who call on Him [in faith and prayer].’ For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord [in prayer] will be saved’” (*Amplified Bible, 1954*).

*Church Leader/Leadership:* For this study, a church leader regularly leads worship services and serves at church events such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Someone who offers personal ministry to church members by mentoring and encouraging people to further their faith and ensuring a positive church experience. Someone who communicates the church's message to the community through words and actions.

*Civilize:* “To raise from a primitive state to an advanced and ordered stage of cultural development” (“The Merriam-Webster dictionary,” 1828/2004, p. 131).

*Civil rights:* “The nonpolitical rights of a citizen” (“The Merriam-Webster dictionary,” 1828/2004, p. 131).

*Concealed Carry:* “The practice of carrying a concealed weapon on one’s person in public. Concealed firearms can be carried on a person’s body, typically in a holster or off-body in a purse, backpack, or other specialized concealment accessories and garments” (Delta Defense, 2022).

*Concealed Weapon*: “Any dirk, metallic knuckles, billie (*billy club*), tear gas gun, chemical weapon or device, or other deadly weapon carried on or about a person in such a manner as to conceal the weapon from the ordinary sight of another person” (FloridaState, 2022).

*Congregation*: “A group of people assembled for religious worship” (Oxford Dictionary, 2023).

*Deterrence*: “The use of a threat (explicit or not) by one party in an attempt to convince another party to maintain the status quo” (Quackenbush, 2011, p. 741).

*Domestic terrorism*: “Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature” (FBI, 2023).

*Drill*: “A type of operations-based exercise that is a coordinated, supervised activity usually employed to test a single specific operation or function in a single agency” (FEMA, 2023, p. 4).

*Emergency Action Plan (EAP)*: See Emergency Operation Plan (EOP).

*Emergency Contact*: “The resident director or any other staff member responsible for the well-being of program participants” (Law Insider, 2020).

*Emergency Operation Plan (EOP)*: “An ongoing plan for responding to various potential hazards. An EOP describes how people and property will be protected; details who is responsible for carrying out specific actions; identify the personnel, equipment, supplies, and other resources available” (FEMA, 2023, p. 4). Emergency Operation Plan (EOP), Emergency Action Plan (EAP), and Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP) are interchangeable terms.

*Emergency Preparation Plan (EPP)*: See Emergency Operation Plan (EOP).

*Equip*: to “supply the necessary items for a particular purpose” and to “prepare (someone) mentally for a particular situation or task” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989).

*Evacuations*: “The organized, phased, and supervised withdrawal, dispersal, or removal of students, personnel, and visitors from dangerous or potentially dangerous areas” (FEMA, 2023, p. 4).

*Handgun*: A firearm that has a short stock and is designed to be held and fired by the use of a single hand (NC Legislation, para. 2).

*Hate Crime*: “a crime motivated by bias against race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability” (USDOJ, 2022).

*Hazards:* Something that is potentially dangerous or harmful, often the root cause of an unwanted outcome (FEMA, 2023, p. 6).

*Hazard Mitigation:* “Any action taken to reduce or eliminate the one-term risk to human life and property from hazards” (FEMA, 2023, p. 6).

*House of Worship:* A place where individuals gather to worship with similar beliefs.

*Mass Shooting:* “An event where three or more people (excluding the Shooter) are killed with a firearm of any kind in public places” (FBI, 2016, para. 5).

*Mitigation:* “The capabilities necessary to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage by lessening the impact of an incident. Mitigation also means reducing the likelihood that threats and hazards will happen” (FEMA, 2023, p. 6).

*Pastor:* “A spiritual overseer or a clergyperson serving a local church” (The Merriam-Webster dictionary, 1828/2004, p. 527). “A pastor’s main job is to minister to his church community through the use of sermons, worship and music. The pastor must plan weekly sermons that capture the essence of biblical vision” (Chron Contributor, 2021). “A pastor is a shepherd. Just as a shepherd cares for the flock under his care, a pastor cares for the flock or people of God over which the Holy Spirit has placed him (Acts 20:28). The pastor is a position of great responsibility with moments of joy and sorrow. The pastor leads the flock utilizing his example and vision. He feeds the flock by preaching the truths of God’s word faithfully. He takes heed to the flock by watching for anyone or anything that would threaten the spiritual health and unity of the body” (Southern Baptist Convention, 2024).

*Preparation:* “Actions taken to procure the means for the attack” (Silver et al., 2018).

*Preparedness:* “A continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action to ensure effective coordination during the incident response” (FEMA, 2023, p. 11).

*Prevention:* “means the capabilities necessary to avoid, deter, or stop an imminent crime or threatened or actual mass casualty incident. Prevention is the action houses of worship take to prevent a threatened or actual incident from occurring” (FEMA, 2023, p. 6).

*Protection:* “The capabilities to secure houses of worship against acts of terrorism and manmade or natural disasters. Protection focuses on ongoing actions that protect people, networks, and property from a threat or hazard” (FEMA, 2023, p. 6).

*Protective Action Decision Model (PADM):* “A multistage model that is based on findings from research on people’s responses to environmental hazards and disasters” (Lindell & Perry, 2012, Para 1).

*Response*: “activities that address the short-term, direct effects of an incident. The response includes immediate actions to save lives, protect property, and meet human needs” (FEMA, 2023, p. 12).

*Safety*: “freedom from danger” (The Merriam-Webster dictionary, 1828/2004, p. 638).

*Shepherd*: “One Who Tends Sheep” (The Merriam-Webster dictionary, 1828/2004, p. 663).

*Survey*: A tool used “to query (someone) in order to collect data for the analysis of some aspect of a group or area” (The Merriam-Webster dictionary, 1828/2004, p. 721).

*Targeted Violence*: “Any incident of violence where a known or knowable attacker selects a particular target before the violent attack” (Borum et al., 1999).

*Train*: “to prepare yourself for a particular activity, especially a sport, by doing a lot of exercise; to prepare a person or an animal in this way” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for leaders in houses of worship. Church leaders could evaluate this researcher’s findings and their positions regarding these findings. Handling active shooter situations could involve preparing, training, and equipping congregations. This researcher studied the theoretical and theological support for preparing, training, and equipping congregations in the event of an active shooter or other disasters. This study is essential because Biblical Scripture states that “the end of all flesh comes before me: for the earth is filled with violence” (King James Version, 1798/2017, Genesis 6:13).

This researcher’s study expands the knowledge base on active shooter training in houses of worship and why preparing, training, and equipping congregations could be needed. The number of studies about active shooter training in houses of worship was so limited that this research filled the gap in the literature of the studies that have been conducted, such as the research by Auten (2021), Rainer (2017), and the FBI (2016).

## **Summary of the Design**

### **Research Population**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive research study was to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. For this study, a church leader is a position held by an individual or individuals in formal leadership positions at the executive level, including senior pastors and associate pastors of biblically-based Southern Baptist church organizations in South Carolina.

The research population was chosen from a list provided by the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association by a random selection. The population included Southern Baptist churches with an average membership of 100 or greater in South Carolina. The population did not include Southern Baptist churches, where the congregation consisted primarily of combat veterans. The technique to choose which churches were among the study population was accomplished through random selection. “In this approach, you choose a random start on a list and select every X-numbered church. The X number is based on a fraction determined by the number of Southern Baptist churches on the list and the number that are to be selected on the list (e.g., 1 out of every 80th person)” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 150). The population of 12 South Carolina churches received one survey before the interview. As Creswell suggests, upon completing the study, this researcher provided the Participants with the final findings (p. 186).

### **Sampling Techniques**

Qualitative research design holds specific design characteristics. This research design employs qualitative methods. According to Creswell (2018), “these [qualitative] designs focus

on data collection, analysis, and writing” (p. 187). The qualitative method is preferred for exploring and understanding a social or human problem (p. 4). Qualitative description is a naturalistic paradigm of inquiry (Sandelowski, 2000). Qualitative descriptive research is used in descriptive studies that offer a comprehensive summary of an event in simple terms of those events (p. 336). A comprehensive summary of the phenomenon studied provides a detailed description of the event intending to have descriptive and interpretive validity (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005, p. 128). Due to time limitations, cost, and travel requirements, the data collection for this study was through personal interviews via virtual meeting software.

### **Methodological Design**

For this study, this researcher used “Inductive and deductive data analysis: Qualitative researchers typically work inductively, building patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). This researcher used the “Emergent Design,” where the process may emerge into something different than planned. Creswell explains:

This means that the initial research plan cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data. For example, the questions may change, the forms of data collection may shift, and the individuals studied and the sites visited may be modified. These shifts signal that the researchers are delving deeper and deeper into the topic of the phenomenon under study. The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181)

This researcher gathered data by using qualitative interviews. Due to time limitations, cost, and travel requirements, the data collection for this study was via virtual meeting software. The interviews were conducted through virtual meeting software. The interviews involved unstructured and generally “open-ended questions that are few and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (Creswell, 2018, p. 186). This researcher used Microsoft®

Teams® to record virtual interview sessions audibly for data analysis. Microsoft® Teams® is a previously vetted instrument that provides transparency in studies (Microsoft, 2023b).

Microsoft® Teams® provided this researcher with video recordings and transcripts of the reviewed conversations (Microsoft, 2023b). This researcher used Otter® as a secondary technology to “record audio and automatically take notes in real time” so this researcher could focus on the interview (*Help students succeed with AI*, 2023). Otter® also highlights notes the researcher can reference at any time. During the virtual sessions, Otter® automatically captured the slides during the interviews and added them to the notes, which assisted this researcher in recalling the interview details and finding patterns in the content. This researcher used an expert observer/witness (Dr. Spearman) to assist in taking notes and providing a layer of authenticity. This researcher also gathered data using qualitative documents such as “newspapers, minutes of meetings, official reports, personal journals and diaries, letters, or emails” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 186).

### **Instrumentation**

This study used research tools such as surveys and interviews with church leadership from Southern Baptist churches with an average membership of 100 or greater in South Carolina. This researcher gathered data by using qualitative interviews. The interviews were conducted virtually with participants via Microsoft® Teams® video conferencing (Microsoft, 2023b).

This researcher used Otter® as a secondary technology to “record audio and automatically take notes in real time” so this researcher could focus on the interview (*Help students succeed with AI*, 2023). Otter® also highlights notes the researcher can reference at any time. During the virtual sessions, Otter® automatically captured the slides during the interviews and added them to the notes, which assisted in recalling the interview details and finding patterns

in the content.

This researcher provided the interviewees with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality during the study. The instrumentation for this research included closed-ended and open-ended surveys and interviews. Each closed-ended question consisted of yes or no answers, and the open-ended questions were geared to answers based on the Likert Scale, with a scale of one to five. The Likert scale measures attitudes using five points (anchors) where the third point in the middle represents neutrality” (Chyung et al., 2017, pg. 16). This researcher conducted a pilot test for the survey instrument. Creswell (2018) explains:

This testing is important to establish the content validity of scores on an instrument; to provide an initial evaluation of the internal consistency of the items; and to improve questions, format, and instructions. Pilot testing of all study materials also provides an opportunity to assess how long the study will take (and to identify potential concerns with participant fatigue). (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 154)

### **Limitations of Generalization**

All of the population was in the same Eastern Time Zone. However, the participants were spread across the state of South Carolina. This researcher provided a deadline for participants to complete the survey to secure definite opportunities for all parties in the data collection recruitment process. “Internal validity threats are experimental procedures, treatments, or experiences of the participants that threaten the researcher’s ability to draw correct inferences from the data about the population in an experiment” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 168-169). Creswell also states that “Participants can be selected who have certain characteristics that predispose them to have certain outcomes” (p. 169). As Creswell suggests, this researcher selected “participants randomly so that characteristics have the probability of being equally distributed among the experimental groups” (p. 169).



### **Research Competencies to Conduct Study**

This researcher discovered new information, generated data points, and created further details about the study subject matter. This researcher was competent in providing data reference points concerning the instrumentation used in this qualitative descriptive study. This researcher was competent in locating Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in the field of study.

Qualitative research is “interpretative research; the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 184). This researcher’s experience in combat zones may cause this researcher to lean toward specific themes and may create favorable or unfavorable conclusions about the sites or participants. This researcher had past experiences with this research problem and was his home church’s security trainer for possible active shooter incidents at the time of this research. During his military career, this researcher had been deployed to combat zones worldwide where gunfire occurred.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

In a civilized society, the church should be a holy place of safety, love, kindness, and self-control where souls can come and worship and draw close to God. This researcher examined how church leaders prepared, trained, and equipped congregations for security threats like active shooter incidents. This study aimed to establish a baseline for understanding the current church leadership of 12 Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina in terms of preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on active shooter incidents, preparation, and expectations. This review will progress through developing the study rationale and the identified gap in the current literature pertaining to preparing, training, and equipping congregations for active shooter situations in houses of worship. This literature review provides a history of active shooter incidents in the United States and South Carolina and will provide significant space for developing a theological and theoretical framework.

### **Theological Framework**

Christian lives should not be isolated without interaction with other parts of the body of Christ. Christians should be part of a church that is a “living organism made up of mutually supporting members who interact with each other in highly interdependent, not independent, ways” (Pettit, 2008, p. 22).

While living on earth, Jesus spoke of times of trouble in the future. His teaching included the persecution of His followers and the church. Jesus spoke of great tribulation before His return to earth in the final days. Jesus said:

And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and

kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. (King James Version, 1798/2017, Matthew 24: 6-10)

Jesus also said the enemy (including parents, brothers, relatives, and friends) will persecute his followers, deliver them to synagogues and prisons, and bring them before kings and governors to be put to death because everyone will hate them for His name's sake. In the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke about protecting His followers. He said, "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe" (New International Version, 1973, John 17:12). Jesus prayed that God would not take His believers "out of the world, but that (God) protect them from the evil one" because "they are not of the world" (New International Version, 1973, John 17: 15-16). Jesus asked His Father to protect them as they went through evil events. Jesus could have asked His Father to remove his believers from evil, but He did not. Jesus taught His followers to pray, and in that prayer, He told them to ask God to lead them "not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (New International Version, 1973, Matthew 6:13; Towns, 2005, p. 105).

This researcher produced evidence to expose a gap in the literature that focuses on South Carolina Southern Baptist churches and the church leadership's understanding of preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. Church leadership can protect the church from harm by preparing, training, and equipping congregations.

### **Protection of Churches**

Everyone deserves a place to worship in safety. Often, the individuals attending churches tend to have a false sense of security and become complacent about safety because the church's primary concern is not providing security (Headley, 2020, p. 33). Places of worship are often

“gun-free zones” due to the church’s policy or the laws of the land. South Carolina’s law about carrying weapons on church property states that licensed and trained gun owners must have “express permission given by the appropriate church official or governing body” to carry on church property (SCStateHouse, 2021, SECTION 23-31-215-M-8). Churches are soft targets because they are usually “gun-free zones,” and they do not have the resources to provide security.

In nature, one wolf can ravage the entire flock of sheep. Jesus tells the church to “be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (King James Version, 1798/2017, Acts 20:28-29). Protecting churches is not a recent requirement, and many different views exist on protecting churches from disasters. Church leadership is responsible for protecting congregation members, just as a shepherd is responsible for feeding, tending, guiding, and protecting the flock. Church leaders are responsible for doing the same for their congregation. The pastor is like a shepherd.

### **The Shepherd**

Shepherds protect their sheep from wolves. The shepherd would protect the sheep under his watch. Shepherds provide boundaries for the flock; if one sheep leaves the fold, the shepherd finds that sheep and brings him back to the flock (MacDonald, 2022). The sheep trust the shepherd to provide food, shelter, and protection. The church leader is the shepherd and must provide physical and spiritual boundaries for the congregation. (Grudem, 1994, p. 913; New King James Version, 1982, Ephesians 4:11; Polk, 2007, p. 6; Towns, 2005, p. 686). The church building is the physical boundary for the congregation attending church events. Church members should be able to trust that the pastor will provide spiritual food, physical shelter, and protection while attending church functions. Shepherds are to provide oversight of the flock and be an

example to them. (King James Version, 1798/2017, 1 Peter 5:2-3). God Guided the people of Israel through the desert with the shepherding of Moses. David was considered the shepherd-king, and Jesus is known as the good shepherd (Jamieson, 2014, p. 1). A good shepherd cares about the sheep, but they also care for the sheep. Church leaders serve God and the church members, and they should be servant-leaders and shepherd-leaders.

Shepherds are willing to give their own lives to protect their sheep. Jesus said:

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. (New American Standard Bible, 1960/1971/1977/1995/2020, John 10:11-13)

What is a pastor? The English word for “pastor” comes from the Latin word *pastor*, which means “shepherd.” The word shepherd is a biblical description of a pastor. Biblical Scripture provides examples of shepherds, and the Greek verb *poimaino* means “to shepherd” or care for the sheep. Both Paul and Peter tell church leaders to be shepherds of their flock. Shepherds are to feed the flock (Towns, 2005, p. 643). Biblical Scripture explains to “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” (New International Version, 1973, 1 Peter 5:2; Towns et al., 1981, p. 220). Shepherds carried a staff, but some, such as David, carried slings to protect the flock from threats (Anderson, 2015, p. 1). When a wolf approaches the flock, the shepherd places himself between the sheep and the predator. The shepherd’s actions would take the predator’s attention off the sheep and make himself the target. The shepherd would be willing to kill to protect the sheep and, if necessary, lay down his life for the sheep (Zarlling, 2022). Psalm 23 declares, “The Lord is my shepherd...and His rod and staff comfort me” (King James Version,

1798/2017). There is little doubt that the rod the shepherd carried was used to discipline, control, and defend the sheep. The shepherd is responsible for protecting the sheep from all enemies.

### **The Enemy**

Evil acts against God's people have happened since Cain and Abel (King James Version, 1798/2017, Genesis 4:1-15; Ice, 2009, p. 3). Evil is not something someone dreamed up; Evil is real (Nelson, 2022, p. 1). The world consists of evil people doing the work of Satan. Satan hates good and those who perform good and worship the Holy Father. Satan is the evil one (Graham, 2021, p. 3). Satan has deceived humans from the very beginning. He tempted and lied to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The first temptation of man is described in Genesis 3:1, where Biblical Scripture explains the serpent asked Eve if God told her not to eat from "any tree in the garden." This temptation was an attempt to trap Eve and confuse her. Genesis 3:1 also explains that the serpent was craftier than the other animals God had made. Biblical Scripture explains, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made" (New International Version, 1973). Both Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit through Satan's trickery, and this first sin caused the rest of humanity to be sinful.

After the first sin, Satan did not stop pursuing mankind and tempting them. Satan uses the same tactics to deceive and use man to sin against God and His believers. The devil sins, and we do his work when we sin. Being against the devil is also being against sin since the devil tempts us to sin (Turpin, 2019, p. 2). The disciples of Jesus asked Him how to pray, and Biblical Scripture recorded His answer. Part of the prayer Jesus provided says, "And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one" (King James Version, 1798/2017, Matthew 6:13). In this passage, Jesus calls the devil the "evil one."

Biblically, the evil one is our enemy. He attempts to control man through deception and

deceit. Christians are to “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” because this world is full of threats to the body of Christ (New International Version, 1973, Ephesians 6:11; Murphy, 2003, p. 233; Trammell, 2020, p. 48). Christians are told that the “struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (New International Version, 1973, Ephesians 6:12; Trammell, 2020, p. 48). Biblical Scripture explains believers should be careful because the devil is like a roaring lion and seeks to find someone to devour (New International Version, 1973, 1 Peter 5:8; Trammell, 2020, p. 9). Satan controls those not in Christ. Satan is called the ruler of the kingdom of the air. They are disobedient to God. Biblical Scripture teaches, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (New International Version, 1973, Ephesians 6:1-2).

The first recorded murder was when “Cain spoke to Abel his brother” in a field, he “rose up against his brother Abel and killed him” (New King James Version, 1982, Genesis 4:8; Ice, 2009, p. 3). Since that first murder, the world has seen countless acts of violence, and it does not seem to improve. The evil continues every day; people are allowing their conscience to become seared to the truth “through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,” and because they have allowed their minds to be seared, God gives them over to a depraved mind, “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (Berean Study Bible, BSB, 2016/2020, Romans 1:28).

The deceiver can enrage and generate behaviors such as murdering a group of people for revenge (Auten, 2021, p. 31). There has been an “increase in mass public shootings over the last

ten years” (Bonn, 2018, para. 7). Bonn states that this increase “is very consistent with the increase in suicide” (para. 7). Bonn argues that “Mass murder is frequently a form of suicide in that the perpetrator of such atrocities is often an enraged and fatalistic individual who intends to die at the scene of the massacre” (para. 7). Durkheim (1897/1951) explains that the rates of suicide are a positive reflection on the structure of groups or the class of a person’s social relationship. There is a “definite aptitude for suicide, which is a social fact external to the individual members of a given society” (Bonn, 2018, para. 9). Murder is an act of evil brought about by the irrationality of sin.

### **Sin is Irrational**

Evil is inexplicable and beyond our understanding; all sin is irrational. Sin deceives and destroys. In the beginning, Adam and Eve sinned and were well aware of the results that would occur if they sinned, yet they willfully sinned. God told them the consequences of sin would be death (King James Version, 1798/2017, Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). Both Adam and Eve understood if they sinned, they would be under the wrath of God. Death and separation from God are the consequences of sin, which is still true. Though we understand the consequences of sin, we still sin, and God’s wrath against sin hasn’t gone away.

Biblical Scripture says, “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown, brings forth death” (English Standard Version, 2001, James 1:14–15). Sin distorts people’s view of the world from what God established, and sin crafts a worldview (Anaybwile, 2018, para. 5). Through the false view of sin, the sinner feels “a kind of invincibility even though his/her plans come to nothing and all around them, people perish” (para 5). Anaybwile argues that “sin is not only irrational,” but sin is also “a tremendous violence committed toward our very being” (para.



7). We cannot make sense of sin because sin is irrational.

### **Summary of Theological Framework**

This section provided a literature review of theological resources that discuss the roles of church leaders as shepherds, sin being irrational, Satan as the enemy of God, and evil acts from the enemy. South Carolina Southern Baptist churches should be where worshipers should feel safe to worship God without fear of evil acts. Factually, evil exists, and places of worship are not immune from harm (Nelson, 2022, p. 1). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2013) guide for houses of worship explains that “many people think of a house of worship as a safe area where violence and emergencies cannot affect them,” however, the guide states that “violence in houses of worship is not a new phenomenon” (p. 5). In 2023, church leaders must understand evil acts are the works of Satan. Murder has existed since the early times of creation and was seen when Cain murdered his brother Abel (King James Version, 1798/2017, Genesis 4; Ice, 2009, p. 3). Jesus labeled Satan “a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth” (King James Version, 1798/2017, John 8:44). Violence is due to the fall of man when Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden (King James Version, 1798/2017, Genesis 3; Ice, 2009, p. 2). South Carolina Southern Baptist church leadership could protect those attending worship services as a shepherd protects the flock. South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders are the shepherds of the church flock (Grudem, 1994, p. 913; New King James Version, 1982, Ephesians 4:11; Polk, 2007, p. 6; Towns, 2005, p. 686). Satan perpetrates evil, and houses of worship are targets of evil. Sin entered the world through the rebellion of man. Sin brings about death.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, active shooter incidents have significantly increased fear. Most of the

available literature is limited to public schools and government facilities. In the last section, this literature review considered theological literature that pertains to the research problem. This literature review identified the theology of protection of churches, church leaders as shepherds, the enemy as evil, and the irrationality of sin. A gap in theoretical literature references the background, capabilities, and process to secure houses of worship and protect congregations from disasters such as active shooter incidents. Recent research is deficient in providing leadership with reasons to prepare, train, and equip the congregation for such incidents. This section focuses on the theoretical literature that supports preparing, training, and equipping congregations for active shooter incidents. This section also focuses on understanding active shooter incidents and the individuals who carry out such incidents.

Places of worship should be free of danger; if danger enters, the church should be prepared to protect members from danger. The danger could be natural or manmade disasters. Active shooter incidents have increased in schools and churches worldwide (Auten, 2021, p. 37). Active shooter incidents increase awareness and concern (Snyder, 2014, p. 52). The increased number of active shooter incidents in government buildings and public schools has been studied in the literature. Still, active shooting incidents in places of worship are minimal (Auten, 2021, p. 37). This theoretical review includes active shooter theories, historical development, key contributors, seminal research about active shooter incidents, and how the literature aligns with the biblical worldview.

### **Active Shooter Theories**

This theoretical literature reviews theories about active shooters. For the following theories, this literature review uses Fox's (2021) definition of mass shootings as a "gun-involved killing of four or more victims within 24 hours" (p. 53). The theories discussed in this section are

the Social Bond/Control Theory, Five Stage Sequential Model Theory, Group Socialization Theory, and Mass Shooting Contagion Theory.

### ***Social Bond/Control Theory***

Information about the Social Control Theory can be found in the works of some thinkers and the classical school of criminology in the Enlightenment age. Thomas Hobbes was an English philosopher who wrote about the inherent tendency “toward self-indulgence and evil that requires external constraint” (Kempf-Leonard & Morris, 2012, p. 1). The origin is more often connected to Emile Durkheim, a French writer considered the founder of sociology and structural functionalism (p. 2). This theory began to generate broad interest among crime researchers in the middle of the 20th century when Travis Hirschi added the criminal element to the Social Control Theory, which he calls the Social Control Theory of Crime (Hirschi, 2001; Nickerson, 2022, p. 1).

One of contemporary criminology’s three major sociological perspectives is the social control approach to understanding crime (“Social control theory,” 2022, para. 1). Social Control Theory is unlike most criminology theories because this theory does not purport why people commit crimes. This theory discusses why people obey the rules (Kempf-Leonard & Morris, 2012, p. 1; Pittaro, 2018, para. 7). One of the assumptions of Social Control Theory is that people can see the advantages of crime. They commit the criminal act without any particular motivation or training. Human nature includes free-will and allows individuals to choose their behavior. Individuals are responsible for their behavior (“Social control theory,” 2022, para. 2). Hirschi (as cited in Kempf-Leonard & Morris) explains that deviance and crime occur because there is a lack of adequate social constraints on the individual (p. 1).

Wiatrowski and Swatko of the Department of Justice explain how Hirschi's Social Control Theory suggests that delinquents fail to develop social bonds that consist of:

- (1) attachment to parents, peers, and school
- (2) occupational and educational commitment
- (3) academic involvement, and
- (4) belief in social rules and conventions. (Wiatrowski & Swatko, 1979)

Nickerson (2022) argues that sociologists believe the delinquents that commit crimes can be attributed to the fact that their families, schools, and neighborhoods were too weak to control the behavior of the delinquent, thereby allowing the delinquency to flourish (Nickerson, 2022, para. 8). When one or more of the four social bonds are weakened or broken, the individual is more likely to commit crimes or acts of deviance (Pittaro, 2018, para. 8). School shooters lack attachment. If someone has an attachment, they will have compassion and empathy toward friends, family, coworkers, and even acquaintances like classmates (para. 10). Commitment of an individual is usually displayed by energy spent pursuing a specific social goal such as obtaining a college degree or profession. Active shooters adopt a thought process that they do not foresee a future beyond the shooting event (para. 11). Involvement - individuals involved in social activities found in conventional or social settings usually do not engage in unlawful activities. Active shooters are often considered loners or outcasts, so they do not belong to any group or community (para. 12). Belief - individuals that have a strong belief in social rules, expectations, and laws that are taught to them by their family, friends, educational and religious institutions usually do not commit crimes (para. 13). Nickerson (2022) explains that many of the active school shooting incidents had been conducted by individuals who disregarded what they were taught and rationalized what they were doing so they could go through with the shooting.

### ***Five-Stage Sequential Model Theory***

In 2009, researchers Levin & Madfis proposed a Five Stage Sequential Model Theory for

mass murder at schools. This theory discusses school shooting incidents. This researcher did not successfully find literature that applies the Five Stage Sequential Model Theory to church shootings. However, this researcher believes all the information could be applied to church and school shootings. The authors list the five stages as Chronic Strain, Uncontrolled Strain, Acute Strain, The Planning Stage, and Massacre at School (p. 3). Bonanno & Levenson (2014) explain Levin and Madfis's five stages and argue each stage is distinct and hypothesized as necessary. The authors explain how different factors intersect, build on each other, and lead to school shootings (p. 3). Levin & Madfis (2009) use the term Cumulative Strain to emphasize that the five stages intersect and cumulatively build on each other (p. 1,229). The authors argue that none of the stages or variables stand alone and will not be the cause of a mass shooting.

### ***Chronic Strain***

Levin & Madfis (2009) state that many sociologists and criminologists have argued that strains, various life pressures, and difficulties may result in criminal behavior (p. 1,229). The authors discuss how many active shooters have experienced *Chronic Strain* for years at home, and the individuals were usually hostile toward their parents and other family members. The authors argue that individuals structurally barricaded from achieving their success goals will experience strain and are more likely to accompany their disappointment with deviant and criminal behavior. The authors argue that chronic strain is a necessary contributing factor; it alone is not enough to push an individual into a multiple-victim spree of violence (p. 1,230).

### ***Uncontrolled Strain***

Levin & Madfis (2009) state the second stage is *Uncontrolled Strain*. The authors discuss a study conducted in 2000 that determined that individuals lacking social constraint, with little attachment to their parents or school, and with troublesome friends are more likely to engage in

delinquent behavior (p. 1,232). The authors argue that teenagers are less attached to their parents. The authors say that most strain is controlled within established and prosocial relationships, but sometimes, individuals never develop a meaningful social relationship within the conventional or prosocial environment.

They argue that teenagers are less committed to success in school and are more likely to have friends who get in trouble (Levin & Madfis, 2009, p. 1,232). They suggest that this developmental phase of life, known as adolescence, is marked by a desire for independence and rebellion, where peer groups become more critical than supportive parents. Many young people who suffer strain for extended periods may become isolated from conventional sources of encouragement and support and still live a long, law-abiding life (p. 1,234). Many individuals will move past the isolation and rebellion stages and increase their social bonds (attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs) to conventional social institutions (p. 1,235). In the next stage, disaster is usually perceived as possible, and the strained and uncontrolled individual advances one step deeper into the pit of executing a multiple murder.

### ***Acute Strain***

The third strain Levin and Madfis (2009) discuss in their Five Stage Sequential Model Theory is the *Acute Strain* (p. 1,235). This strain can advance the individual one step closer to executing a multiple murder. The authors argue that most mass murder cases will reflect some evidence of the individual experiencing acute strain. The murderer has most likely experienced some loss that they perceived as catastrophic, and this loss serves as a catalyst or precipitant.

Levin and Madfis (2009) describe the distinction between chronic and acute chronic illness as being found in medical terms. They compare medical chronic and acute terms to their chronic and acute strains. They say the medical term “chronic illness refers to a persistent and

long-standing medical condition,” and acute symptoms “develop rapidly and have a substantially shorter life span” (Levin & Madfis, 2009, p. 1,235). The authors say the chronic strain is persistent and long-term, and the acute strains are short-term. The authors also argue that troubling situations or incidents can seem catastrophic to someone frustrated and isolated. Levin and Madfis also say that individuals who may already be frustrated and isolated may have lost any ability to cope with adversity. The authors found in their study that the catalyst for most school shooters was a humiliating loss of face, a rejection of a girlfriend, a loss of academic standing, an eviction from a community of peers, or a significant illness (p. 1,236). The study revealed that eviction for an adult could be a catastrophic loss because it could threaten the removal of the individual from a perceived protected environment (p. 1,237). The study research suggested that various acute strains involved in school shootings precipitate the planning stage. They also stated that the planning stage could be executed, but the massacre may not happen. The precipitants may exist, but the massacre does not occur.

### ***The Planning Stage***

An individual may have acute losses that may prove to be catastrophic. The acute loss the individual experiences may be because of a lack of a positive or supportive environment (Levin & Madfis, 2009, p. 1,237). The potential shooter may feel like he or she cannot cope with the stresses and feels there is nothing left to lose, so he or she is inspired to show the world who he or she is and get even with the world where he or she believes he or she is no longer ignored and diminished. The potential shooter’s mind has been made up to carry out the massacre, and then he or she starts planning the event. The killer may change a few plans, but the ultimate goal is to find a way out of a terrible situation by conducting the killings to assert power, even though the action is fatalistic. After the killer has experienced his final cumulative loss, he or she focuses on

the vision of massive human destruction. Massive human destruction is a way to gain a personal sense of pride, accomplishment, and masculine force (p. 1,239).

### ***Massacre at School***

The fifth and final stage of the Five Stage Sequential Model Theory is the massacre. Not all individuals who suffer from chronic and acute strain conduct massacres. Not all individuals who distance themselves from mainstream social control go on a killing spree. Many troubled young people have considered committing murder or have even planned an attack but have not gone through with it. Some individuals who want to be mass killers may try but fail because they lack critical factors, training, skills, or access to tools to accomplish the murders (Levin & Madfis, 2009, p. 1,239).

### ***Group Socialization Theory***

The Group Socialization Theory suggests that the internet provided several school shooters with a source of in-group support for the hostility the shooter turned outward (Markward et al., 2001, p. 135). The authors discuss how many experts have viewed access to guns, exposure to media, or the breakdown of the traditional family as an explanation for recent school shootings. Markward argues that other experts fail to understand group socialization because the *Group Socialization Theory* could be another explanation for school shootings.

Markward (2001) discusses in-group favoritism and how favoritism is often accompanied by out-group hostility that may be acute during adolescence. Individuals accepted in a group are sometimes accepted based on their social status, as defined by popularity or dominance (p. 137). The individuals in a group based on social status and power are more likely to antagonize or bully those not meeting the standard or social status required to be included. Some media outlets, such as National Public Radio (2019/2022), selectively suggest that school shooters are socially



oppressed and bullied. Pollack (1999) believes that society is forcing young boys to give up empathy, vulnerability, and sadness, and repressing those feelings contributes to violent actions (Pollack, 1999, Chapter 2).

Often, individuals will find social status and social support online in many forms (Markward et al., 2001, p. 142). Media may play a role in the origination of school shootings in a way that could be understood by examining the connections of the individual with societal and interpersonal processes (Bockler et al., 2012, p. 40).

### ***Mass Shooting Contagion Theory***

The word *contagion* has several aspects and applications. This theory focuses on two of the eight popular uses. The two that the Mass Shooting Contagion Theory uses are Emotional and Behavioral Contagion. Emotional contagion is the tendency of an individual to feel another individual's emotions, and behavioral contagion is an individual's tendency to mimic others' behavior (Goldstone & Janssen, 2005, pp. 424-427).

The Mass shooting contagion theory studies the nature and effects of media coverage of mass shootings and the potential increase of mimicked incidents (Fox et al., 2021, p. 53). The authors argue that highly publicized incidents can influence future similar occurrences in multiple ways. They say mass killings are notorious cases that inspire others to commit the same atrocities for the perpetrator to gain fame. The copying of incidents is known as the "copy-cat effect." The recent increase in the media coverage of mass shootings has generated a significant increase in fear (p. 53). The authors argue that recent research on the media's influence on murder has focused on mass shootings' most extreme and visible manifestations. The attention and recent research are due primarily to the growing public concern and what some call an emerging epidemic. The authors argue the media is the catalyst for the incidents.

## **Historical Development**

The United States has historically experienced increased crime, specifically mass shootings and murder. Hammack (2016) supports the study of violent crime in the United States from 1891 to 2022, which can shed light on how the average citizen of the United States understands violent crime, particularly mass shootings. Historically, active shooter incidents are remembered for a time and then forgotten. The remembrance and forgetting of these incidents have shaped the perception of the continuity of active shooter incidents (Hammack, 2016, para. 1). To effectively understand the extent of active shooter incidents, the historical occurrences could be examined. Hammack argues that the active shooter incidents that are witnessed in recent times are seldom a reflection of the generation but reflect violent crime dynamics that have existed for a very long time in the United States (para. 2).

Since 2017, single-shooter active shooter incidents have increased rapidly. From 1891-2016, 32 active shooter incidents occurred in the United States (Hammack, 2016). The FBI (2022) released statistics showing 31 shootings in 2017, 30 in 2018, 30 in 2019, 40 in 2020, and 61 in 2021 (p. 3). In 2020, 34 were killed, and 126 were wounded. In 2021, active shooter incidents rose 52% when 103 were killed and 140 were wounded (p. 1). The FBI report indicates that active shooter incidents occur more often in June, followed by April. Most incidents occurred on Saturdays, followed by Tuesdays (p. 5).

## **Biblical Worldview**

Some scholars suggest there is a need for individuals to be aware of their surroundings. Horne (2012) argues there are three types of people in the world: good guys, bad guys, and the clueless (para.1). He discusses how people will drive the speed limit and remain in the left lane, people who will walk down the middle of a sidewalk with their heads buried in their cell phones,

and there are people that will stop in the middle of a walkway full of other people. None of these people know that they are causing others to line up behind them or are in the way of others getting by. Horne writes these people represent most of the population and “must understand the dangers lurking around the next corner” (para. 1).

The average American has a greater risk of being killed in a car crash or dying of heart disease or cancer than being killed by an active shooter (Chan, 2019, p. 2). Individuals should be prepared in some form or fashion; the word *prepare* is used 159 times in the Christian Bible (40 important Bible Scriptures on preparation, 2020). Biblical Scripture says to be prudent and see the dangers (King James Version, 1798/2017, Proverbs 22:3). Another Biblical Scripture says to make sure you are ready and stay ready and be sure to be on guard for those that you will host in an assembly (New King James Version, 1982, Ezekiel 38:7). Every school, business, or church could be prepared for manmade or natural disasters. Every school, business, or church could have standardized protocols for incidents such as an active shooter (Roberts, 2015, para. 2). Roberts states that if the founding fathers of the United States could have looked into the future and seen what is happening with the many killings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he (Roberts) would argue, they (the founding fathers) would think they were looking at the end times (paras. 2-3).

Roberts (2015) argues that a person’s theology or biblical worldview informs almost everything (para. 6). The author explains that the belief in God is inextricably tied to the beliefs about other human beings, the world, the future, the afterlife, and the overall purpose of existence. He argues that some individuals who believe in God will have some loose-fitting web of beliefs even if it has not been thoroughly thought through. Roberts argues that some beliefs may be theological and operate in the background of all our decisions (para. 8).

Roberts (2015) reminds his readers of a couple of previous generations when the population shared a basic knowledge of the Bible. Roberts reminds us that not all the generations before his writings were avowed Christians in the true sense, but many thought about life's problems through the biblical perspective lens. Their moral framework was derived from Biblical Scriptures when the worldview passed down morals based on biblical teachings and was rooted in Christian theology (para. 9-10).

Through the lens of a biblical worldview, God is still in charge and should still be feared. Society has changed from biblical to more secular thinking. Roberts (2015) argues that it would be highly unwise to die and pass from this life into the next with any grievous sins to answer for (para. 39). In 2023, the secular culture had removed any biblical consideration from people's deliberations about sin.

Active shooter incidents destroy the lives of thousands of people every year (Everytown, 2020). In most cases, the shooter commits suicide or is killed by law enforcement, and on rare occasions, the shooter is arrested and taken to jail to be tried in a court of law later. A Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) study explains that, on average, fifty-six percent of active shooter incidents end with the shooter committing suicide, fleeing, or stopping the shooting (Active shooter study: Quick reference guide, 2014). The study also indicated that thirteen percent of the incidents ended in an armed citizen engaging the shooter, and twenty-eight percent ended when law enforcement engaged the shooter. Many survivors and families of those killed feel justice has not been served, even if the shooter is killed (Agar, 2012).

How should Christians look at these incidents? Should these incidents be viewed through a biblical or a secular lens? What is the biblical worldview of active shooter incidents? Through either lens, the results are usually the same. The biblical worldview of God could be used to

teach those who are angry and turn to murder or mass shootings and would be a stabilizing force for people who feel desperate and depressed. The biblical worldview of God would give those inclined to commit mass murder hope and a way forward (Perry, 2001). However, churches could prepare for possible active shooter incidents because the world has turned further away from God.

### **Summary of Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical literature review provides the reader with a few theories that experts believe describe what may or may not contribute to an individual contemplating or carrying out an incident of mass murder. Also, this literature review discussed the biblical worldview concerning active shooters and their actions in this section. This research demonstrates the gap in the theoretical literature that provides information on past active shooters or the possibility of an active shooter incident. However, the information this researcher found tailored to schools, businesses, or government facilities could be modified or adapted to support the need for policies, procedures, and training for active shooter incidents in houses of worship.

### **Related Literature Framework**

Humans were created in the *Imago Dei*; however, as sad as some scholars say it may be, the world is troubled, and not all individuals desire to submit to God's authority. In 2023, the world was in a time of hate, envy, strife, and division. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, individuals, specifically those in church congregations, cannot afford to be caught off guard. Butler argues the world is witnessing a decline in love for one another. The lack of safety training in churches can contribute to the increase in deaths due to neglect of hazards in the local area (Auten, 2021, p. 69). Aten argues that if churches do not know safety protocols and preparedness, they could be guilty of endangering the congregation's lives (p. 69).

Butler (2019) argues that “Churches must be vigilant and become serious about the words and actions of those who want to harm them” (para 5). Butler writes that “the church must take the time to invest in the extra steps to become proactive and protect the congregations from the time they enter the property to the time they leave” (para. 6). Butler writes churches “must Watch and Pray.” Those that do “will lessen the chances of being a soft target” for an active shooter (para. 7).

### **Violence Against the Church**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a cultural struggle going on between politics and religion (Plasterer, 2020, para. 1). Plasterer explains the struggle is about a rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation from sin by the Lord Jesus Christ (para. 1). He also explains the rejection is in favor of a gospel of self-actualization. This struggle comes from evil. The secular left had turned to violence to gain power (para.1). The struggle and violence can be seen in the recent attacks on law enforcement and private businesses and even against churches.

The attacks on people of the Christian Bible are not new. Attacks on the people of the Bible have been happening since the time of Cain and Abel, as seen in the fourth chapter of the book of Genesis. The attacks have occurred in Europe, especially France, for many years (Plasterer, 2020, para 2). In France, many attacks include the desecration of sacred objects, vandalism to statues, hostile graffiti, and burning of churches, resulting in significant damage to church buildings. Local news has reported incidents of vandalism of local Baptist and Methodist churches with satanic graffiti spray painted on them, and headstones were overturned (Staff, 2019).

Violence against the church has been part of human history due to extremists targeting worship houses to intimidate and terrorize (Senbel et al., 2022, p. 1). Senbel argues that people

of all faiths generally denounce acts of violence against churches. Collins (2020) argues that Christians are still one of the most persecuted religious groups in the world (p. 2). Collins also defines Christian persecution as “any hostility experienced as a result of identification with Christ” (p. 2).

Collins (2020) states that “Christians worldwide continue to risk imprisonment, home loss, torture, rape, and death because of their faith” (p. 2). Collins provides statistics about the daily persecution of Christians around the world. She writes that eight people are “killed, twenty-three are raped or sexually harassed, twenty-five churches are targeted and attacked, and ten are unjustly arrested or imprisoned” daily (p.3).

### ***The Settings***

Johnson (2019) writes that most tragic incidents get media attention and public awareness. Many more minor incidents occur weekly in churches but do not get media coverage (para. 1). Johnson (2019) argues the vast majority of churches in the U.S. are Christian churches (para. 4). He states that ninety-four percent of the violence in churches has occurred in Christian churches.

### ***Motives of Violence***

Jacobson (2022) argues there are many causes of violence, including “frustration, exposure to violent media, violence in the home or neighborhood, and a tendency to see other people’s actions as hostile even when they’re not” (para. 2). The author argues the most common motivation for violence is an inappropriate attempt to handle one’s emotion. Motivation is often a medium to express anger, frustration, or sadness openly (para. 4). Violence is sometimes a form of manipulation to get what someone wants or needs. Jacobson argues violence is sometimes used to retaliate against someone else to get even (para. 4). Other times, violence can

be caused by people who grew up seeing other people being violent and seeing violence as an appropriate way to act (para. 5).

Johnson (2019) writes that violence against places of worship has multiple motives (para. 5). Johnson states that the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data shows the primary motives include mental illness or derangement (28%), robbery (26%), family dispute or domestic violence (17%), personal dispute (14%), ethnic, racial, or religious hate crimes (6%), and nine percent of the incidents reported were undetermined (para. 6). Johnson also states that domestic violence usually involves targeting a family member (para. 4).

### ***Location and Timing of Incidents***

The NIBRS data shows that fifty-two percent of the incidents occurred outside the church building, and forty-eight percent occurred inside (Johnson, 2019, para. 6). The majority of the assailants did not enter through the main entrance, seventy-one percent of the time they enter through a back door, side entrance or a window. Johnson said only twenty-nine percent of the assailants entered through the main entrance (para.6). The majority (58%) of the incidents occurred immediately before, during, or immediately after a formal event such as a worship service, prayer service, or a youth event, etc. (para. 6). Several incidents occurred during office hours (14%) and after-hours (28%) when the building was unoccupied.

The NIBRS data showed that incidents after-hours included beatings, shootings, or robberies involving people from the surrounding neighborhoods (Johnson, 2019, para. 7). Only thirteen percent of the incidents involved unarmed physical violence. Johnson also said the NIBRS data showed that most incidents, including active shooter events, were over in less than six minutes (para. 7).



## **Emergency Management and Training**

Emergency management and training in a church could be needed because disasters are sudden and unexpected; they can occur anywhere and anytime. The safety of the church community could be paramount to the South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders. Churches “should have precise plans” in case of a crisis (AlertFind, 2023, para. 1). Emergency plans can be organized and detailed enough to provide instructions for everyone to be prepared if something happens (para. 2). The more specific the plans are, the less confusion there will be and less precious time loss (para. 2). AlertFind reports there are three phases to disasters, first response, clean-up, and recovery (para. 5-8).

Auten (2021) writes that members of churches need to know how to exit the building to the safest location in the event of an active shooter while keeping everyone in order (p. 55). Emergency planning and training with the help of standard operating procedures and plans could include the steps required for action in the event of a disaster. Those steps could identify how and where individuals will gather and how an evacuation will proceed (AlertFind, 2023). South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could be familiar with and inspect the evacuation routes for proper lighting, possible debris, or any obstruction that could cause a safety hazard (Auten, 2021, p. 55).

## **The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Support for Active Shooter Incidents**

The FBI possesses a repository of information about active shooter incidents. The FBI describes an active shooter as an individual who kills or attempts to kill people in a populated area (FBI, 2016, para. 1). The FBI’s mission concerning active shooters is to coordinate the response by law enforcement and others to save lives (para. 2). Local law enforcement is usually the ones to respond to active shooter incidents. The FBI plays a significant role in supporting

local law enforcement in the event of an active shooter incident. The FBI will provide expertise, specialized capabilities, training, and resources before and after an incident (para. 2). The FBI also provides threat assessments and threat management services that help detect and prevent acts of targeted violence. FBI Officers help academic, mental health, business, community, law enforcement, and government entities recognize potential active shooters who may be planning to conduct an active shooter incident (para. 3).

### **Disasters, Hazards, and Their Dangers**

Disasters range in size, scope, and intensity. There are natural disasters, technological and accidental hazards, terrorist hazards, and public health emergencies. Michael Hart, a member of FEMA, said there is a need to be more prepared than ever due to natural and manmade disasters becoming increasingly complex and challenging to predict (Eschner, 2019, para. 4). FEMA encourages a “culture of preparedness” because the agency encourages everyone to be prepared to reduce the possibility of death and injury (para. 8).

#### ***Disaster Classifications***

Classification of disasters takes on several dimensions. All disasters are not the same and vary in complexity and impact. Most of the time, there is a tendency to lump all disasters into one category. Understanding the differences between the classification of disasters is essential (Aten & Boan, 2016, p. 31). Aten & Boan say there are two classifications of disasters: primary and secondary, natural and manmade (p. 31). Primary disasters are usually initial or triggering events such as earthquakes, tornados, floods, and fires that lead to secondary disasters such as power failure, dam failure, tidal wave, or fires (p. 31). Natural disasters are weather-related hazards such as tornados, hurricanes, droughts, snow, ice, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes

(p. 31). A manmade disaster can include fires, riots, explosions, transportation accidents, terrorist attacks (including active shooter incidents), and war (p. 32).

### ***Natural Disasters***

Natural disasters are weather-related. Natural disasters include floods, fires, earthquakes, tornadoes, windstorms, hurricanes, water control structures, dam or levy failure, extreme temperatures (cold or heat), lightning strikes, and pandemics (Avian flu, COVID) (Aten & Boan, 2016, pp. 26-27). People cannot stop natural disasters but can prepare for unexpected occurrences to lessen human and material damages.

### ***Technological and Accidental Hazards***

Technological and accidental hazards are not easily predicted; therefore, there is a need to be prepared in case of these hazards. Examples of technological and accidental hazards include Hazardous material spill or release (e.g., oil spill), utility interruption or failure, nuclear power plant incident, explosion or fire, building or structure failure, and transportation accidents (Railroad, Aircraft, Automobile) (Aten & Boan, 2016, pp. 27-28).

### ***Terrorist Hazards***

Nations have experienced terroristic threats to the security of nations throughout history that contribute to large-scale loss of life, destruction of property, illness and injury, displacement of large numbers of people, and devastating economic loss (The City of San Antonio, 2022). Recent technological advances and ongoing political unrest are components of the increased risk to national security. Terrorist hazards are manmade hazards. Some terrorist hazards are kidnapping, hostage incidents, civil disturbance, bomb threats, or workplace violence/active shooter incidents (Aten & Boan, 2016, p. 28).

### ***Public Health Emergencies***

Historically, public health emergencies are the result of manmade or accidental hazards. Bioterrorism hazards include biological, pandemics (Flu, COVID), and food and water-borne illnesses (Aten & Boan, 2016, pp. 29-30). As recently as March 2020, the world experienced a widespread infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus called Coronavirus disease (COVID-19, 2022).

### ***Preparation for Disasters***

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) writes there are four things to do to be prepared for disasters. The four things are to be informed, plan, assemble a disaster supply kit, and maintain the plan (DHS-FEMA, 2022). Most people do not know how to prepare for or respond to disasters (Aten & Boan, 2016, p. 10). Aten & Boan's research has found significant variability in the readiness of churches (p. 10). The authors state that many churches will help other churches after a disaster or incident. Still, even though the church leaders realize threats, they rarely prepare before something happens (p. 10). There has been an increase of over 400 percent in natural disasters since the 1980s (p. 11). There have been over 5000 annual terrorist attacks since 2001 (p.11). It is too late to prepare when a disaster or crisis occurs (p.12).

### **Protective Action Decision Model (PADM)**

Lindell & Perry (2012) explain that researchers have been interested in explaining the “process by which people respond to environmental cues or socially transmitted warnings” about hazards and disasters (p. 1). Lindel argues that risk communication can influence the response time for immediate disasters and assist in “long-term hazard adjustments” (p. 1). Burton (1993)

explains that “actions that intentionally or unintentionally reduce risk from extreme events in the natural environment” result in long-term hazard adjustments (p.328).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many emergency personnel use the Protective Action Decision Model (PADM) as a “multistage model based on research findings on people’s responses to environmental hazards and disasters ” (Lindell & Perry, 2012, p. 616). Lindell & Perry explain that the PADM integrates the processing of information derived from social and environmental cues with messages that social sources transmit through communication channels to those at risk (p. 616). PADM includes factors that individuals adopt to influence protective actions (Lindell, 2012, pg. 616). PADM can be used to address decisions made by individuals to comply with disaster warnings and to adopt hazard adjustments (Auten, 2021, p. 41).

Lindell & Perry (2012) state that the PADM process “begins with environmental cues, social cues, and warnings” (p. 617). Lindell & Perry say environmental cues are “sights, smells, or sounds that signal the onset of a threat (p. 617). Steg explains that these cues are from experience that will “trigger a reactive response” (Michaelsen-Olivas, 2015, p. 1; Steg, 2013). Michaelsen-Olivas argues that reactive responses are influenced by environmental cues (pg. 1).

Steg writes:

Individual exposure to an experience receives a signal that triggers a behavior response causing the individual to react in a particular manner. The environmental cues inform the individual of what is occurring in the environment, influencing the expected reciprocated behavior. (Steg, 2013)

Lindell & Perry indicate that the PADM stages demonstrate how people “typically make decisions about adopting actions to protect against environmental hazards” (p. 617). Depending on the source of information providing the cues, the information received may be extremely credible or robust, and the more credible the source, the more immediate the responses may be (p. 617). The author explains the importance of the warning sources and the credibility of that

source to have “substantial power to compel compliance” from the individuals receiving the warning message (p.617-618). The greater the ambiguity of the warning message, the more likely it is to cause the recipients to spend more time pondering what the message means and processing the information instead of preparing for protective action (Perry et al., 1981). The ambiguity may cause a delay in information processing, which can persist until the hazard begins. Therefore, action is delayed, and safety is at risk (Lindell & Perry, 2012, p. 618).

### ***Risk Identification***

Lindell & Perry also describe research that states there is a positive relationship between the level an individual believes and the response to the disaster across a “wide range of disaster agents, including floods, volcanic eruptions, hazardous materials emergencies, hurricanes, earthquakes, and nuclear power plant emergencies” (p. 621).

### ***Risk Assessment***

Risk Assessment is the second step of PADM and refers to the process where individuals determine the impacts they expect the disaster to cause (Lindell & Perry, 2012, p. 621; Perry et al., 1981). During the risk assessment stage or step, the individual may ask questions like “Do I need to take protective action?” (Lindell & Perry, 2012, p. 621). If organizations have a warning system, the warning confirmation can increase compliance with the desired protective actions; however, systems may delay reactions (p. 622). Warning systems may delay the individual’s actions to protect themselves by having their devotion to protect property, and this can be dangerous because the “time of disaster impact cannot be predicted with perfect accuracy” (p. 622).

### ***Protective Action Search***

People are motivated to begin a protective action search if they perceive a threat is real

and there is some acceptable level of personal risk (Lindell & Perry, 2012). Lindell & Perry argue that people can recall protective actions from memory (p. 622). The authors also say that people obtain information about protective actions from others around them. Lindell & Perry (2012) explain that in many cases, individuals seek a type of protection based on their knowledge of the hazard.

### ***Protective Action Assessment***

Lindell & Perry (2012) suggest that after a person has established one protective action is available through the protective action search, they will enter the protective action assessment stage (p. 622). During this stage, Lindell & Perry state that the individual will examine alternative actions, compare them to the consequences of continuing with routine activities, and then determine the most suitable response to the situation. Lindell & Perry (2012) state that:

Choice is an inherent aspect of emergencies because those at risk generally have at least two options – taking protective action or continuing normal activities. (Lindell & Perry, 2012, p. 622)

Lindell & Perry (2012) also explain that the protective action assessment stage results in adaptive plans. However, adaptive plans vary widely among individuals because some people will only set vague goals while others will set highly detailed plans and goals.

### ***Protective Action Implementation***

The fifth stage is what Lindell & Perry (2012) describe as the protective action implementation stage. This stage occurs when the individual satisfactorily answers all the previous questions. Since the protective actions consume resources that individuals would prefer to allocate to other activities, Lindell & Perry (2012) states those at risk will “frequently delay implementation until they have determined that the immediacy of the threat justifies the

disruption of normal activities” (p. 623). People sometimes “postpone the implementation of protective action even when there is imminent danger” (p. 623).

### ***Information Needs Assessment***

Individuals will assess the available information, and some will find that information is insufficient to justify a “resource-intensive protection action” (Lindell & Perry, 2012, p. 623). Lindell & Perry argue that if the information is unavailable for individuals to process, they will search for additional information. The information may be insufficient to justify proceeding with the protective action decision process (p. 623).

### **The Constitution, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, and Legal Authority/Right to Bear Arms**

The United States Constitution is a document that unites states with different interests, laws, and cultures into one colossal merger that the first national government designed. The Constitution is a document that united citizens and vested the union’s power in the people (The Constitution of the United States, 2022).

### ***The National Archives of the United States***

The National Archives is where the United States government keeps the nation’s records and all the documents and materials created in the United States Federal government’s business (USGOV, 2022, What is the National Archives and Records Administration?). Only about one to three percent of the records are maintained forever because of their legal or historical significance (para. 1). The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is located in Washington, D.C., and the Constitution, with all the sections, is stored and preserved there.

### ***The Bill of Rights***

The Constitution’s first ten amendments gave the citizens more confidence in the new government and contained many of the most valued freedoms in America (The Bill of Rights,



2022). The first ten amendments are known as the Bill of Rights of the People, and without the amendments, the Constitution may never have been ratified by the framers (The Bill of Rights, 2022). The Bill of Rights guarantees the civil rights and liberties of the individual and protects the individual's freedom of speech, press, and religion. This section of the Constitution provides rules for due process of law. Also, it reserves all the powers not delegated to the Federal Government by giving those powers to the people or the States. This section emphatically states that "the enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people" (National Archives, 2022, para. 1).

### ***The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment***

The Second Amendment is one of ten amendments that form the Bill of Rights (History.com editors, 2019, para. 1). Often, this amendment is referred to as the Right to Bear Arms Amendment (para. 1). Throughout history and even more recently; there have been differing interpretations of the amendment. The different interpretations have fueled a debate over gun control and legislation (para. 1). The different interpretations also fuel the debate on individual citizens' right to buy, own, and carry firearms (para. 1).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment protects the people's right to keep and bear arms (National Archives, 2022, para. 2). The framers of the Bill of Rights brought their version of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 for incorporation into the Constitution (Ashland University, 2023). The final version adapted the wording of nearly identical clauses in some of the original thirteen constitutions (History.com editors, 2019, para. 2). During the formation of the United States of America, many people believed governments would oppress the people by use of soldiers, and these people believed that the government should only use a full-time, paid army to defend against foreign adversaries (para. 4). They also believed that the people should

turn to part-time militias, or ordinary civilians using their weapons for all other purposes (para. 4). Mass shootings had become an increasingly frequent occurrence in American life by 2023. There were still public debates over the rights given by the Second Amendment and gun control (History.com editors, 2019, para. 23).

### ***Concealed Carry***

Tom Grieve, an attorney for the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA), argues a person is performing the act of concealed carry when they practice carrying a concealed weapon on their person in public (Delta Defense, 2022, para. 1). The United States Federal government has not issued a law concerning concealed carry of firearms (para. 2). Each state has their law about individuals carrying firearms while concealed in public (Delta Defense, 2022, para. 1; NAGR, 2022). Some states, such as Hawaii, are very restrictive, and others, such as Vermont, are unrestricted (para. 1). States vary in who can issue a concealed carry permit at the local or state level (para. 1).

Concealed weapons carried on a person's body are typically carried in a holster or off-body, such as a purse or backpack (Delta Defense, 2022, para. 1). States differ in what the law covers. Some states limit concealed carry permits to handguns, while others include electronic weapons, Billie (billy) clubs, and knives (para. 1).

### ***Constitutional Carry***

Constitutional Carry law provides every law-abiding U.S. citizen the right to carry a firearm, openly or concealed, on their person without government permission in the form of a mandatory state-issued permit (NAGR, 2022). Each state differs in the law; some have passed a law authorizing constitutional carry. States that allow an individual to carry without requiring a law-abiding citizen to carry without a mandatory state-issued permit are called constitutional

carry states (Delta\_Defense, 2022, para. 4). At the time of this research, in those constitutional carry states, there is no licensing or training required to carry a firearm legally (para. 4). The constitutional carry is not the same as unrestricted carry, it does not supersede any existing permit systems or any reciprocity agreements between other states (NAGR, 2022, para. 5).

### **Preparation for Emergencies/Active Shooter Incidents**

It may be uncomfortable for church leadership to discuss active shooter incidents and the possibilities with the church; leadership could prevent an incident. If the unthinkable does occur, the church leadership “should have done all they could to ensure the best outcome” (TeamZeroEyes, 2022, para. 9).

Preparing, training, and equipping are the keys to successful deterrence. To have the ability to deter danger, “one must first be prepared for the danger” and make an irrevocable commitment to a hardline strategy (Quackenbush, 2011, p. 745). The churches “need a coordinated effort to confront emergencies” (Auten, 2021, p. 105). Churches could establish emergency plans, which vary with each church based on location, size, and structure (p. 105). Each emergency plan could include evacuation procedures with diagrams, emergency contacts, CPR and first aid training, security team design, and other safety-related actions (p. 105).

In 2023, with the increased threats against soft targets such as schools, government offices, and churches, the need for preparation for active shooter incidents was essential (AlertFind, 2023, para. 1). Churches are open soft targets where individuals can open fire on a group if the church does not have a counter plan in place to stop them (Auten, 2021, p. 32). Petho-Kiss (2020) discusses that violent non-state actors have threatened and targeted churches since the late 1990s (p. 74). The author stated in her research that fewer than twenty percent of the church members responded in self-defense (p. 79). To harden soft targets, Petho-Kiss

suggests that religious sites develop and cultivate a mindset oriented toward security and then develop a risk-based security plan (p. 80). South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could consider the peculiarities of open environments when planning for and designing security systems. South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could create a concentric circle of defense while finding a delicate balance between the inherently open nature of churches and the need for security. Peth-Kiss argues that there could be multiple security measures to establish a defense-in-depth system to ensure the attacker that gets past one layer is intercepted by a subsequent layer of security (p. 80). The author explains that the different security layers could make it more difficult for intruders to enter without interception. Since traditional church services have the worshipers facing away from the door and facing the altar, “the entrances must constantly be under surveillance” (p. 81).

The congregation’s “education must be part of the preparation and planning” to enhance security (Petho-Kiss, 2020, p. 81). Too often, churches are averse to discussing procedures for disasters, especially possible active shooter incidents, with the congregation for fear of alarming them; the observational skills and the security consciousness of the churchgoers will provide better awareness (p. 81).

### ***Importance of Active Shooter Incident Preparation and Training in Churches***

The unpredictability of an active shooter incident makes preparing difficult but not impossible. Active shooter incidents evolve quickly (CISA, 2023, para. 1; HSI, 2022, para. 2). An active shooter fires one shot every four to fifteen seconds with a 50-70% hit rate (AliceTngInst, 2018). Within fourteen minutes, the average active shooter fires fifty-six shots, fourteen people are injured, and fourteen are killed (AliceTngInst, 2018, Chart 3).

The response time of EMS and law enforcement for most active shooter incidents is after the incident is over (Buchanan & Leatherby, 2022, p. 2; HSI, 2022, para. 1). The average length of an active shooter incident is 12.5 minutes, during which time widespread panic occurs and five minutes goes by before law enforcement is contacted (Amberbox, 2022, para. 1).

Amid the chaos, anyone can play an integral role in mitigating the impacts of an active shooter incident. Chaos is the inherent unpredictability in behavior (Merriam-Webster, 1828/2004, p. 120). Harris (2017) argues that being unprepared is the most significant contributor to chaos (Harris, 2017, p. 2). Having teams trained with a plan can be the difference between life and death (p.3). Active shooter incidents have shown the importance of rapid response because every second counts during such incidents, and training will allow a quicker decision and reaction time (HSI, 2022, para. 3).

Earls (2022) and Voice of America Radio (2020) argue that gun violence against churches in the United States is less than the probability of gun violence against schools and public events. However, the lower probability does not relieve church leadership from planning and preparing to protect their congregation. With active shooter incidents occurring in houses of worship at a greater frequency, these locations are no longer off-limits to society's ills (Harris, 2017, p. 2). Because of the greater frequency of attacks, South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could be better prepared, and the church security teams could often train for any emergency to include an active shooter. To ensure critical incident resolution, the security teams could have adequate planning, preparation, and training (p. 3). The probability of an active shooter should not deter the church leadership from preparing and training.

### **Southern Baptist Convention Resources**

The Southern Baptist Convention is a community of like-minded churches with the

mission to impact the world with the message of Jesus Christ (Southern Baptist Convention, 2022a). This researcher coordinated the study population with the Southern Baptist Convention and the South Carolina Southern Baptist Convention to locate participants (Southern Baptist Convention, 2022b; SBCSC, 2022). The South Carolina Baptist Convention is a community of more than 2,100 churches that work together to advance the Great Commission (South Carolina Baptist Convention, 2022).

### **Summary of Related Literature Framework**

The literature review provides the reader with literature covering information related to the research. In this section, this literature review discusses possible hazards and disasters churches need to be prepared to respond to and understand. This researcher presented an existing gap in the literature regarding preparing, training, and equipping congregants for the possibility of an active shooter incident. This literature review provides information on literature that is tailored to schools, businesses, or government facilities. However, churches can modify or adapt the information to support the policies, procedures, and training congregations for active shooter incidents in houses of worship.

### **The Rationale for the Study**

Active shooter incidents in churches are not as common as in schools. However, the rate of incidents at churches is increasing (TeamZeroEyes, 2022). The social climate, the threats against churches, and the periods of intense strife found in situations like the COVID-19 pandemic often accompany attacks on religious groups (para. 4). The likelihood of death and serious injury during active shooter incidents could encourage churches to build awareness and a survival mindset among leaders.

The rationale for this study was to provide information for church leaders to assist them in understanding the possibility of disasters happening in and to their congregation and property. This study fills the gap in the literature referencing information for church leaders to prepare, train, and equip congregations in the event of a disaster such as an active shooter incident.

### **The Gap in the Literature**

The ability to respond to an active shooter is essential to the safety of each person inside the church. Jesus told His disciples, “But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into” (New International Version, 1973, Matthew 24:43). This researcher found very little information on church shootings and preparation for active shooters in houses of worship. This researcher found a large amount of information on active shooters in schools and civilian assemblies. The limited amount of information found by this researcher referencing active shooter events in houses of worship has indicated that it is a disaster when there is such an event where there has not been adequate training for the security teams or a team was absent. This researcher provided information to fill a gap in the literature and provided church leadership with information about safety preparedness and protocol to plan, train, equip, prepare, and react to a gunman’s threat against the church.

### **Conclusion**

South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could consider the possibility of violence against their church. Active shooter incidents are becoming part of life in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and houses of worship are not immune to this violence; they could also be targets of violence (Rainer, 2017, para. 1). Churches are supposed to be Holy places where souls can come and worship and draw close to God with love, kindness, and self-control. South Carolina

Southern Baptist Church leaders could implement security teams to monitor church services and activities. However, South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could prepare, train, and equip congregations for hazardous incidents and events. This literature review has provided information about hazards that are on the rise and how churches are being targeted. Churches are no longer sacred grounds but locations that can be targeted for killings (Auten, 2021, p. 73).

South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could research and establish safety protocols to deal with the increasing threats of natural disasters and manmade hazards such as active shooters. South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could consider the opportunities to prepare, train, and equip congregations for such situations. Chapter Two has reviewed the literature on hazards and crises with a priority on active shooter incidents. This review has progressed through developing the study rationale and identified a gap in the current literature about active shooter preparation in houses of worship. This literature review provided a history of active shooter incidents in South Carolina and the United States. This literature review also provided information on the theological and theoretical framework. This researcher explored the population's beliefs concerning preparing, training, and equipping congregations for active shooter situations. This qualitative descriptive study aimed to provide South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders with more information and data to prepare, train, and equip congregations in their churches for possible violence.



## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Chapter Three explains the research methodology and design, the population, sample selection, and data sources. The study's trustworthiness and data collection, management, and analysis procedures are addressed. Human-ethical considerations are addressed, particularly the safety of the participants.

### **Research Design Synopsis**

The appropriate research approach is critical in launching a qualitative research project. The approach a scholar will choose depends on the research being conducted. When considering a research methodology, this researcher focused on what Roberts & Hyatt (2019) suggested, “(1) problem and research question to be investigated, (2) purpose of the study, (3) theory base (including prior research), and (4) nature of the data” (p. 142). Due to the nature of qualitative descriptive research, this researcher used the phenomenological design. Phenomenological research is designed to study the “lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants and is common in philosophy and psychology research” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). Qualitative descriptive research exists within the phenomenological research window. A study on church leaders' beliefs concerning active shooter incidents requires a qualitative descriptive case study where the researcher “attempts to understand participants' perspectives and views of social realities” (Roberts, 2010, p. 100).

The research population for this study was chosen from a list provided by the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association by a random selection. The population included Southern Baptist churches with an average membership of 100 or greater in South Carolina. The population did not include churches consisting primarily of combat experience veterans. Creswell (2018) writes, “In this approach, you choose a random start on a list and select every X-

numbered church. The X number was based on a fraction determined by the number of Southern Baptist churches on the list and the number that are to be selected on the list (e.g., 1 out of every 80th person)” (p. 150). The population of 12 South Carolina churches received one survey before the interview. As Creswell suggests, upon completing the study, this researcher provided the participants with the final findings (p. 186).

For this study, this researcher used “Inductive and deductive data analysis: Qualitative researchers typically work inductively, building patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). This researcher gathered data by using qualitative interviews. The interviews were conducted via virtual video conferencing with participants via Microsoft® Teams® (Microsoft, 2023b). The interviews involved unstructured and generally open-ended questions that were “few and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 186). This researcher used Otter® as a secondary technology to “record audio and automatically take notes in real time” so this researcher could focus on the interview (*Help students succeed with AI*, 2023). Otter® also highlights notes the researcher can reference at any time. During the virtual sessions, Otter® automatically captured the slides during the interviews and added them to the notes, which assisted this researcher in recalling the interview details and finding patterns in the content. In addition, this researcher gathered data by using qualitative documents such as “newspapers, minutes of meetings, official reports, personal journals and diaries, letters, or emails” (p. 186).

### **Research Problem**

In 2023, research was primarily related to school shootings and did not provide ample information on church shootings or the possibility of an active shooter in houses of worship. The

current research falls short of providing the leadership of houses of worship with the background, the capabilities, and the process to secure their community. Recent research is deficient in providing leadership with reasons to prepare, train, and equip congregations. Houses of worship are to minister to the congregations and surrounding communities. While ministering, South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could consider the possibility of violence against their flock while on the church property.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, how essential is it to involve the congregation in training for active shooter incidents?

**RQ2.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to prepare congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

**RQ3.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to train congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

**RQ4.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to equip congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This phenomenological qualitative descriptive study of what South Carolina Southern

Baptist church leaders believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship follows Creswell's (2018) suggestions to use inductive and deductive data analysis. Creswell explains that qualitative researchers typically work inductively and build patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up (p.181). This researcher gathered data through a survey and qualitative interviews. The interviews were conducted via virtual video conferencing with participants via Microsoft® Teams® (Microsoft, 2023b). The interviews involved unstructured and generally open-ended questions that were few and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (p. 186). This researcher used Otter® as a secondary technology to "record audio and automatically take notes in real-time," so this researcher could focus on the interview (*Help students succeed with AI*, 2023). Otter® also highlights notes the researcher can reference at any time. During the virtual sessions, Otter® automatically captured the slides during the interviews and added them to the notes, which assisted this researcher in recalling the interview details and finding patterns in the content. In addition, this researcher gathered data by using qualitative documents such as "newspapers, minutes of meetings, official reports, personal journals and diaries, letters, or emails" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 186).

### **Setting**

The setting for this qualitative descriptive study was 12 traditional Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina affiliated with the South Carolina Southern Baptist Convention. The participants were church leaders with an average Sunday attendance of over 100. Due to time limitations, cost, and travel requirements, the data collection for this study was conducted via virtual meeting software and personal interviews. Due to distance and time constraints, the interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants via video conferencing. This researcher

also used email to communicate information to the participants. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, some South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders used their office at home to conduct official duties. Some church leaders need assistance setting up their computers for the virtual interviews. In this case, the individual who helped the church leader set up the computer was asked to leave the room during the survey and the interview.

### **Participants**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. The study was delimited to a population of South Carolina and did not include Southern Baptist churches where the congregation consisted primarily of combat veterans. The Southern Baptist churches that did not associate with or were not members of the Southern Baptist Association of South Carolina were excluded from this study. The participants were randomly chosen with the support of the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association. This researcher delimited the research population to participants eighteen years of age or older. The gender of the population was not delimited by race or gender. There were 12 randomly selected churches. The participants were given a pseudonym to protect the data they provided during the research. These pseudonyms were used in the recorded data, reflexive journal, and the participant list. Since explanations within qualitative research tend to be broad and act as theories, this researcher employed theory to lead to a basis for explaining behavior and attitudes, which could include variables, constructs, and hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Table 1*****Participant Pseudonym Formation Logic***

<b>Study Pseudonym</b>	<b>Pseudonym Name</b>	<b>Sequence Number</b>	<b>Participation Number</b>	<b>Random Run</b>
Peter01011	Peter	01	01	1
James03021	James	03	02	1
Philip05031	Philip	05	03	1
John04041	John	04	04	1
Titus15051	Titus	15	05	1
Timothy13061	Timothy	13	06	1
Matthew25072	Matthew	25	07	2
Mark46083	Mark	46	08	3
Luke35092	Luke	35	09	2
Paul73102	Paul	73	10	2
Isaiah64114	Isaiah	64	11	4
Daniel19124	Daniel	19	12	4

*Note:* Table 1 displays the formation logic for the study pseudonym of each participant. The pseudonym is an alphanumeric name consisting of a Biblical name and the sequence number, the participation number, and the random run used by this researcher.

**Role of the Researcher**

This researcher was a member of a Baptist church associated with the Southern Baptist Convention and the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association. This researcher was also a leader of his church security team. This researcher has had extensive experience in hostile situations involving gunfire. This researcher remained open to contrary findings in the study and honestly reported the findings correctly.

The role of this researcher, as an instrument, was to conduct interviews with the participants in the study, compile the data that resulted from the interviews, analyze the collected data, and convey the analysis results to explain the study's findings. This researcher was the recorder and the reporter of the information obtained during the interviews. Creswell (2018) argued that researchers are tasked with identifying the biases, values, and personal backgrounds

that impact the interpretations included in their study. Mehra (2002) explains that the researcher is an essential component in the research and cannot be separated from the topic or participants in the study. (p. 11).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This researcher complied with Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity's Christian Leadership Doctoral program. The IRB is a third party and ensured the research complied with and maintained human ethical regulations within the study.

When researching human participants, the researchers must anticipate possible ethical issues. In research such as this, the most significant risk is the potential to violate confidentiality; therefore, participants' right to privacy is of utmost concern (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Mertens (2012) states that "researchers are obligated to promise confidentiality to participants in a study; this means the data will be reported in such a way that they cannot be associated with a particular individual" (p. 36). Creswell (2018) states that ethical issues command researchers to pay more attention than ever, and ethical issues may apply to any research method.

Yin (2011,2016) explains that any study that deals with human participants must receive prior approval from an Institutional Review Board. This researcher sought approval from the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University. This researcher did not interview participants who were "mentally incompetent, victims, persons with neurological impairments, pregnant women or fetuses, prisoners, and individuals with AIDS" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 19). Leedy & Ormrod explain that the "participants should not appear at risk beyond appreciably greater than the normal risk of day-to-day living" (p. 102).

The participants in this research study were emailed with an informed information form

(see Appendix B) before providing personal or confidential data. Leedy and Ormond (2015) state that research using human participants requires informed consent before providing personal or confidential data. With the permission of the IRB, this researcher adapted the informed consent form for this study. Creswell (2018) writes the IRB application and the informed consent form should be presented to each participant when requesting a signature to participate in the study; however, due to the approval of the IRB, signatures were not required. Sarantakos (2005) suggested that informed information Forms should provide the following:

1. The identity of the researcher.
2. The sponsoring institution.
3. The purpose of the study.
4. The benefits for the participants.
5. The level and type of participant involvement.
6. The possible risks, if any, to participants.
7. The agreement of confidentiality to participants.
8. The participant's assurance they can withdraw at any time without prejudice.
9. The names of the individuals or individuals to contact if questions arise. (Sarantakos, 2005)

Creswell (2018) argues that ethical considerations that the researcher performs also protect the participants and preserve the integrity of the research while shielding against possible misconduct. This researcher used the human ethics forms and materials provided by the IRB and followed IRB verbal and written instructions to comply with all human ethics safety measures to protect his participants.

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

The following sections discuss the data collection process used in this research. This researcher worked with the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association to identify potential participants for the study. The collection and security of the research data are of utmost importance in protecting confidential information from each participant. The data collection was conducted in several phases. This researcher ensured there was redundancy in data retrieval to



ensure correct information was gathered and analyzed. Redundancy and consistency are essential to establish validity and credibility.

### **Collection Methods**

The data collection process took place in several steps. First, this researcher coordinated via telephone and email with the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association's point of contact to identify potential participants for the study and seek approval to conduct the study. The South Carolina Southern Baptist Association's point of contact provided this researcher with a list of possible participants. The technique to choose which churches were among the study population was accomplished through random selection. "In this approach, you choose a random start on a list and select every X-numbered church. The X number is based on a fraction determined by the number of Southern Baptist churches on the list and the number that are to be selected on the list (e.g., 1 out of every 80th person)" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 150). The population of 12 South Carolina churches received one survey before the interview. To ensure confidentiality in the research, the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association staff was not provided information on who the study population was. Only this researcher was privy to the actual names of the participants. The participants were assigned an alpha-numeric identifier once they consented to the study.

The next step was to work with the identified participants by sending each participant the Research Recruitment Form (see Appendix B), indicating an overview of the study. The following step was the data collection phase, which involved participant interviews. This researcher conducted web-based, virtual video conferencing interviews with each selected church leader from 12 churches. Microsoft® Teams® was used as the platform for the web-based interviews, and this researcher used the transcripts provided by Microsoft® Teams®

software (Microsoft, 2023b). Audio recordings of each interview were collected to ensure there was a backup system in case of a technical failure or mishap.

This researcher used Otter® as a secondary technology to “record audio and automatically take notes in real time” so this researcher could focus on the interview (*Help students succeed with AI*, 2023). Otter® also highlighted notes this researcher can reference at any time. During the virtual sessions, Otter® automatically captured the slides during the interviews and added them to the notes, which assisted this researcher in recalling the interview details and finding patterns in the content. The security of the data gained from the research is paramount in protecting confidential information.

### **Instruments and Protocols**

As discussed in the previous section, there were several steps in the data collection process and the actual data collection. The data collection methods included one survey and 12 interviews.

Qualitative research involves the researcher looking at individuals' different meanings of a particular phenomenon. Interviews were the primary data collection method for this study. The interview is often the most appropriate method to explore the phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tsdell, 2016). The interview provided a way for this researcher to understand the experiences of each participant. The overall interview process remained informal and semi-structured. The survey took no more than ten minutes to complete, and the interviews for this study lasted 30 to 45 minutes. Also, this researcher informed the participants to take a break whenever necessary for data recording procedures. The participants were informed they could bring water or snacks to the interview. The participants were also informed they would be welcome to take a break to use the bathroom if necessary.

Moustakas (1994) argues that interviews in phenomenological research involve “an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (p. 114). This researcher asked questions about South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders’ beliefs about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for active shooter incidents. The semi-structured interview consisted of a general set of questions to guide the interviews (Lichtman, 2014, p. 248). The semi-structured approach gave the interviewer a general guide and the flexibility to vary the sub-questions based on each participant’s participation. Yin (2011, 2016, Chap. 6) and Moustakas (1994) argue that phenomenological interviews are more flexible and allow the researcher to have a broad set of questions to cover. The questions asked to participants were primarily open-ended to allow them to describe their experience with the phenomenon in their own words. This researcher kept an informal, conversational tone as he engaged with the participants to encourage them to be open regarding their experiences and beliefs.

Survey and interview questions for this study stem from the research questions. The interview questions were used to address a research question being studied. Questions that could not be answered with a “yes” or “no” and required a deeper description by the participant about the lived experience were used. The questions used are located in Appendix E.

## **Procedures**

The data collection methods and all the necessary resources were gathered and submitted to the IRB for approval. The resources to be included were the Recruitment Form (see Appendix A), Information Form (see Appendix B), Recruitment Follow-up Letter (see Appendix C), Permission Request Form (see Appendix D), Permission Response Form (see Appendix E), Survey Questions (see Appendix F), Interview Questions (see Appendix G), Open-Ended Interview Questions Pilot Test Form (see Appendix H) and the Interview Questions Feedback

Letter (see Appendix I). Upon approval by the IRB, the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association was contacted and provided with information reflecting the background and rationale for the study. Information Forms (see Appendix E) were sent to the participants.

Confidentiality is of utmost importance. Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requires research to assure confidentiality (Liberty-University, 2023). Liberty University IRB states:

Investigators and personnel conducting research on human subjects must agree to maintain in strict confidence the names, characteristics, questionnaire scores, ratings, incidental comments, and/or other information on all subjects and/or subjects' data they encounter so as not to conflict with State and/or Federal laws and regulations. (Liberty-University, 2023)

Liberty University IRB requires the researcher, when appropriate, to assure confidentiality by “substituting codes for participant names, storing Information Forms separately from data or scores, limiting access to data,” and “storing research records, documents, or data files in locked locations” (Liberty-University, 2023). The participants were assigned an alpha-numeric identifier once they consented to the study. To ensure confidentiality in this research, this researcher substituted codes for the names of the participants and limited access to the data by ensuring that the information on the participants and data retrieved from the study is safeguarded on a separate external hard drive stored in this researcher's home safe.

### ***Data Recording Procedures***

To collect the data for this study, the author completed a few steps required by the IRB. First, this researcher obtained IRB approval to proceed with the study since this study deals with human participants. IRB approval was required for this study. Second, after obtaining IRB approval, this researcher contacted potential study participants. During the outreach for participants, this researcher ensured that each participant was provided with the informed

Information Form before gathering data via the survey and interviews. This researcher ensured that all physical and electronic materials were safeguarded during and after the interviews. In the final report, this researcher ensured that the names were changed so that participants' identities were not revealed.

The interviews were recorded using video and audio means with the consent of each participant. These interviews were conducted using Microsoft® Teams®, vetted video conferencing software that was accessible to the participants of the study (Microsoft, 2023b). Part of the protocol was that this researcher informed each participant that he or she could leave the interview at any time, take a break when necessary, and not be penalized. If a participant decided to leave the interview altogether, all his or her materials were destroyed, and no record was kept.

According to Creswell (2018), there are typically several options for recording data in a qualitative study. Creswell (2018) notes several options for collecting data and recording qualitative interviews. Creswell (2018) provides options such as videotaping, audiotaping, and handwriting notes during interviews. While using Microsoft® Teams®, this researcher utilized the video conferencing feature of the virtual software, where there is an option to record meetings (Microsoft, 2023b).

This researcher obtained permission from the participants before recording the interviews. The interview recording did not require additional work or setup from the participant or this researcher. This researcher activated the recording by clicking on the record icon in the virtual software. The capability of recording each interview in Teams® allowed this researcher to give his undivided attention to the participant being interviewed. This researcher shared with each research subject being interviewed that he would be taking notes by hand, and no one

objected. Yin (2011) argues that researchers are not able to capture everything, so the focus of the researcher should be “recording what you need without disrupting a participant’s rhythm or pace” (Yin, 2011, p. 156).

The anticipated time to complete the research survey was within 15 days of receipt. However, several surveys were not returned. Therefore, this researcher had to contact additional purposive participants from the population pool. The interview was scheduled to be conducted within 30 days after the completion and return of the survey. The anticipated length of interviews was not to exceed 45 minutes in total. If the participant's answers exceeded 45 minutes, he or she could continue until all questions were answered in full at the participant's convenience. The recordings were kept on a password-protected external hard drive in the office safe of this researcher. All the collected data from the research and other data resulting from the study were kept in a locked file cabinet in the possession of this researcher. The collected data remained confidential to respect each participant's privacy and preserve the research's integrity. The data will be destroyed three years after the publication of this dissertation (IRB, 2023).

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data is equally crucial to the data collection process. This researcher incorporated patience and thoroughness when analyzing the survey and interview data. By employing a phenomenological design, this researcher recognized the challenge of analyzing collected data from each participant’s experience. Vagle (2018) argues that qualitative research methodologies sometimes make it challenging to separate gathering the material from analysis of the material because the two are delicately intertwined through the study process (p. 108). It is essential to have a plan to analyze the data within a phenomenological design. This study used

the five-phased cycle of qualitative data analysis as described by Yin (2011, 2016). The five-phased cycle includes compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding.

### **Analysis Method**

Analyzing data intends to make sense of the text and image data (Creswell, 2018, p. 190). For the phenomenological design, Yin (2011) suggests the researcher compares “the words of the participants alongside the researcher’s interpretations.” Creswell (2018) argues that the text and image data “are so dense and rich” that “all the information cannot be used in a qualitative study” (p. 192). This researcher analyzed the data by “winnowing” (Creswell, 2018, p. 192). The winnowing strategy aggregates the “data into small number of themes, something between five and seven themes” (Creswell, 2018, p. 192).

This researcher manually processed the data utilizing coding. This researcher utilized the method of “research as key instrument” (Creswell, 2018, p. 181). It was this researcher who gathered “the information and interpret(ed) it” (Creswell, 2018, p. 181).

The first phase of data analysis included compiling the data, and this researcher followed the advice of Yin (2011/2016), where the researcher arranged the raw data to make “logical sense” to the research. This researcher also followed Yin’s (2011, 2016) suggestion to include transcriptions of each interview's audio recordings.

This researcher compiled all the collected data and compared the transcripts of the video to the audio recordings for each interview to check for any inconsistencies. If there were gaps between transcripts and audio recordings, this researcher reviewed both recording methods to fill in the gaps accurately. If there were questions, this researcher contacted the participant and requested a short second interview to be sure of what the participant initially said.

The second phase of the data analysis included disassembling the compiled data, which

was broken down into smaller pieces (Yin, 2011, 2016). Using a Microsoft® Excel spreadsheet, this researcher was able to break down the actual language and keywords used by the participants during the interviews (Microsoft, 2023a, Watts, 2023). This researcher consolidated critical themes from each research question and input the data into different spreadsheet tabs. The coding of the data begins in the disassembling phase. The codes provided a pattern and classification, and later in the analysis, the codes provided a way to reorganize each datum for further analysis (Saldana, 2011).

The third phase of the data analysis was reassembling the disassembled data. This researcher reviewed the key terms from each research question and reorganized them into different groupings or categories (Yin, 2011, 2016). This researcher organized the data in Microsoft® Excel to provide a method to identify the key terms and grouped the terms into different groupings or categories (Microsoft, 2023a). During the data analysis phase, this researcher examined the possibility of broader meanings and patterns behind the analyzed data.

The fourth data analysis phase was the interpretation phase. During this phase, this researcher determined what the findings mean and how they are relevant to answering the research questions. Yin (2011, 2016) states that “interpreting may be considered the craft of giving your own meaning to your findings” in the reassembled data, and this phase brings the “entire analysis together and stands at its pinnacle” (p.220). During this data analysis phase, this researcher examined the codes from phases two and three and gathered information to identify critical meanings from the findings. This phase aimed to identify what to do with all the findings and what they mean. In qualitative data analysis, this phase is where the researcher may test objective theories by examining the data and identifying the relationship between the findings.



The fifth phase in the data analysis process is the conclusion phase, where the significant findings of the research are to be captured and explained to the readers. The conclusion answered the “so what” question of the research (Yin, 2011, 2016). In the conclusion phase, this researcher summarized the most important findings and provided an interpretation of the potential implications and applications of the research. The conclusion phase also provides the need for future research.

### **Trustworthiness**

Creswell states that trustworthiness in qualitative research often determines the research's quality, credibility, and accuracy (2018). Several validity strategies were used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. This researcher used strategies that established reliability and validity by clarifying this researcher's bias, checking the transcripts for accuracy, and presenting any discrepant information. Easton & McComish (2000) said qualitative research could be very subjective. Therefore, qualitative research requires meticulous work to ensure valid results. The authors discuss the importance of taking great care in collecting, processing, and analyzing the data.

This researcher extensively monitored and examined his personal bias during the research and strived to maintain objective accountability. The need for accountability ensured the interview and survey questions were not designed toward this researcher's believed outcome. This researcher used Dr. Spearman as an expert observer/witness, consultant, and an extension of this researcher to assist in taking notes and provide a layer of authenticity and trustworthiness. Dr. Spearman is an educator with expertise in research, education, literature, English language, and grammar.

## *Credibility*

The credibility of the research is the display of confidence this researcher has in the truth of the study's findings. The research results must be believable, applicable, and capable of being replicated in future research. Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999) argued that research is "valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorize" (p. 53). Leavy (2014) described credibility as:

The elements that allow others to recognize the experiences contained within the study through the interpretation of participants' experiences; checking for the representativeness of the data as a whole; member checking involving returning to the participants to ensure that the interpretations of the researcher are accurate representations of participants' experiences; peer debriefing; and prolonged engagement. (Leavy, 2014, p. 680)

To be transparent, this researcher followed the suggestion by Yin (2011) to ensure that all data retrieved from the study would be available for inspection by other researchers and readers. Yin (2011) argues that "language is valued as the representation of reality" (p.20). This researcher aimed for perfection but attested that it might not be entirely possible, yet this researcher strived for perfection. This researcher maintained a journal of the research steps and kept the digital journal on a secured external hard drive and in a locked safe in this researcher's office. Any physical journal was secured in a locked safe in this researcher's office. In this study, Yin's argument is valid because the primary evidence for this study is the individual words about the participants' beliefs.

This researcher included the triangulation strategy to ensure the study's validity. Creswell (2000) argues that "triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). Robertson (2020) explains that "through triangulation, multiple methods

may reveal different aspects of the participant's perceptions, providing more substantial and real data to support the validity" (p. 84).

### ***Dependability***

Dependability is the extent to which the study can be repeated, and the findings remain consistent and dependable (Merriam & Tsdell, 2016). Creswell (2018) states that research should include documentation of study procedures, drift elimination, and memo writing about the codes and their definitions to ensure dependability. Creswell also writes that dependability "indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and projects" (p. 201).

If another person wants to replicate this study, dependability will ensure they have enough data from this research. To establish dependability, this researcher used help from vetted outside sources to review and examine the research process and the data analysis. An outside audit ensured the findings were consistent and could be repeated. If another study uses the same questions, data collection, and analysis methods used in this study, a qualified researcher should be able to replicate this study.

This researcher attempted to build dependability by checking the transcripts for accuracy and comparing each transcript to the audio recordings to ensure there were no errors in the transcription. If there were gaps between transcripts and audio recordings, this researcher reviewed both recording methods to fill in the gaps accurately. If there were questions, this researcher contacted the participant and requested a short second interview to be sure of what the participant initially said. Any mistakes noted from the transcriptions were corrected, and inaudible portions from audio recordings were not included in the resulting data analysis.

### ***Confirmability***

Confirmability requires neutrality in the research study's findings. In this study, the

findings were based on the participant's responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of this researcher. To establish confirmability, this researcher ensured an audit trail highlighting each data analysis step to provide a rationale for the decisions made.

Hays & Singh (2011) state that “confirmability refers to the degree to which findings of a study are genuine reflections of the participants investigated” (p. 201). To guard against researcher bias, this researcher spent additional time analyzing the transcripts and audio recordings of the participants. The additional time required to analyze the transcripts and audio recordings took this researcher approximately 36 hours.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability is how qualitative researchers demonstrate that the research findings apply to other contexts (Merriam & Tsdell, 2016). Transferability can be problematic in qualitative research because the findings deal with the participants' experiences. Despite this difficulty, this researcher followed Merriam and Grenier's (2018) suggestion to use rich, thick descriptions. The authors write that using rich, thick descriptions “involves providing an accurate database, that is, enough description and information for readers to be able to determine how closely their situations match, and thus whether findings can be transferred” (p. 29). This researcher ensured transferability by recording each step of the research process in detail to allow for a comprehensive understanding of the data and assist in any other research. Leed & Ormond (2015) argue that using rich, thick descriptions, if described in enough detail, will allow the reader to conclude the data rather than entirely rely on the conclusion offered by the researcher. Additional research may be recommended to validate the transferability.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three explains the overall research process for this phenomenological qualitative

descriptive study. Chapter Three introduced the reader to the research design process, the participants, ethical considerations, data collection methods, and instruments for data collection. Chapter Three provided a picture of the methods and procedures to prepare the final research plan, which was submitted for approval. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. Chapter Three discussed the design methods used to measure data to enhance the study's quality, credibility, dependability, and transferability. This research design ensured the safety of the research subjects. Chapter Three also discusses the researcher's steps to ensure the study accurately reflects the participants' experiences. This researcher was the instrument, the interviewer, the listener, the recorder of the collected data, and the analyst. The primary role of the researcher was to conduct a qualitative descriptive survey of the random population and conduct interviews with the population. This researcher attempted to have the interviewees tell their stories in their own words, and this researcher documented the words and thoughts of the participants accurately. The overall goal of Chapter Three is to provide ample scaffolding or a tiered support approach for the research design and the steps necessary to ensure a high-quality research study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. This researcher examined how church leaders prepared, trained, and equipped congregations for security threats like active shooter incidents. Chapter Four consists of the compilation of the research protocol and measures, demographics, sample data, and finally, the evaluation of the research design. The qualitative descriptive study method ensured the recordings of the interviews were transparent by incorporating transcripts. This process gave this study an unbiased platform that provided trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

### **Compilation Protocol and Measures**

The research instruments utilized in this study were the survey and interview protocol. The survey and interview protocols were the same for each research subject in this qualitative descriptive study. Though there were deadlines set for conducting the interviews, they were not held to a rigid schedule. Yin (2011) suggests that the interview protocol should represent a mental framework of what should be covered during the interview. Due to the open interview process, Research Subjects were open to describing their own experiences and beliefs in their own words, asking questions, and explaining their comments when this researcher asked the Research Subjects for greater clarity. The open interview allowed the Research Subjects to discuss their beliefs in as much detail as possible so the research could accurately represent what the Research Subjects believed.

The data for this research was collected using semi-structured interviews using Microsoft® Teams®, and the interviews were recorded. Transcripts were produced for each interview and available in a downloadable file from Microsoft® Teams®. To ensure that the transcripts were accurate, this researcher meticulously reviewed the audio recordings, the transcripts, and his notes to ensure data accuracy. Transcription is a valuable service and is "frequently used in fields such as law enforcement, academia, law, insurance, and business management" to ensure the researcher gets "accurate notes for work, court documents, and hiring procedures" (Clements, 2023). Clements (2023) argues, "Transcribing your interviews is an excellent option if you want to enhance your interviewing abilities or make a written record of a significant session." Clement (2023) also gives eight reasons a researcher should transcribe interviews, "boost your interview skills," provide "actionable information," make the "research objective," "promote collaboration," help keep the "research accurate," "ensure accuracy," gives the researcher the ability to "spend less time on the assessment," and aid in producing "better reports" (p. 2).

### **Expert Observer**

This researcher used Dr. Spearman as an expert observer, consultant, and an extension of this researcher to assist in taking notes and provide a layer of authenticity and trustworthiness. Dr. Spearman is an educator with expertise in research, education, literature, English language, and grammar. Dr. Spearman reviewed the transcripts and coding analysis for this study to maintain consistency and ensure fluidity of the data collection and analysis processes. Dr. Spearman was an onsite nonparticipant observer. As a nonparticipant observer, Dr. Spearman did not engage with Research Subjects.

### **Pilot Study**

The Pilot Study was conducted with two Research Subjects who met the criteria. However,

the two Research Subjects in the Pilot Study were not part of the research pool. In addition, both Research Subjects exhibited interviews that flowed without interruption, and no changes were needed. The Pilot Study was not incorporated into the final number of interviews.

### **Data Coding**

This researcher used hybrid deductive and inductive data coding in this study. Creswell (2018) suggests coding is “the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins” (p. 193). Creswell (2014) indicates that, in general, researchers in the social sciences “allow the codes to emerge during the data analysis” (p. 199). Thus, this was the practice followed by this researcher. Coding helped this researcher ensure that the analysis was valid and approached systematically. The Coding was conducted using Microsoft® Excel® (Microsoft, 2023a).

### ***Coding Types***

This researcher incorporated three types of Coding: Deductive or Priori Coding, Inductive Coding, and Hybrid coding. Deductive (Priori) Coding uses preestablished and predefined sets of appropriate labels given the evaluation questions. Inductive coding does not use predetermined sets of codes. The codes are based on data from the stakeholders, interviews, and Research Subjects' experiences. Hybrid coding is a combination of both Deductive and Inductive coding. This researcher used a pre-determined (priori) set of codes and then added new codes (inductive) while working through the data.

The deductive coding approach is the use of a predetermined set of codes in what Creswell (2018) calls a “qualitative codebook,” which “contains a list of predetermined codes” (p. 196). Deductive codes are developed before reviewing the data. Inductive Coding is the use of no predetermined set of codes. The codes were developed as this researcher reviewed the data. Creswell (2018) calls inductive codes “surprising codes,” codes “that could not be anticipated



before the study began” (p. 195). This researcher used predetermined codes based on the questions from the survey, and inductive coding was based on the answers provided by the Research Subjects during the interview process.

This researcher used two stages of coding: the initial stage and line-by-line coding. In the initial stage, this researcher reviewed the data and developed a general understanding of the essence of the text. During the line-by-line stage, this researcher developed more detailed coding. This researcher narrowed and winnowed the data after completing two stages of coding. The winnowing strategy aggregates the “data into a small number of themes, something between five and seven themes” (Creswell, 2018, p. 192).

**Table 2**

*Alignment Between RQs, Themes, and Codes*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>RQ1.</b> As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, how essential is it to involve the congregation in training for active shooter incidents?	The Logistical Process to Involve the Congregation.	* Talk about/discuss how to involve the congregation.
		* No present model to follow.
		* Maintaining an open environment/welcoming/fearful.
		* Priority and placement of time to inform.
<b>RQ2.</b> As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to prepare congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?	Installation of Alarm/Warning Systems.	* What type of alarm system, visual or audible?
<b>RQ3.</b> As perceived by Christian leaders from	Deciding if the Congregation is Prepared.	* What priority is it to prepare the congregation

Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to train congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?		* Should professionals train the congregation?
RQ4. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to equip congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?	Importance of Equipping the Congregation.	* Planning for the time.
		* Congregational sense of security.
	What is Equipping? Physical or Mental?	* Providing knowledge to the congregation by discussing what to do in case of an active shooter.
		* Providing knowledge to the congregation through active drills.

*Note:* Table 2 demonstrates the relationship between the research questions, the themes, and the codes.

### ***Data Codes***

Initially, the coding process resulted in several codes. However, after the initial Coding process, this researcher made several passes through the initial list of codes to merge like type codes and remove codes that did not align with any research questions or participant-interested topics.

This researcher identified the major themes from the data using the final list of codes outlined in Table 2 (above). This researcher followed Creswell's (2014) suggestion to identify five to seven themes for a research study and as a guide for identifying the major themes from the data.

Five major themes were identified as the data was analyzed. The five major themes identified were:

1. The logistical process to involve the congregation.

2. Installation of alarm/warning systems.
3. Deciding if the congregation is prepared.
4. Importance of equipping the congregation.
5. What is equipping? Physical or mental?

### **Demographic and Sample Data**

For this study, this researcher's demographic was all South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders chosen from a list provided by the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association. The South Carolina Southern Baptist Association provided a list of 2,008 Southern Baptist Churches in South Carolina, where only 415 churches met the study qualifications. Of those 415 churches, there was a random selection of 65 churches as candidates for participation. This researcher contacted 65 churches, and 12 agreed to participate in the study (see Table 3 below).

**Table 3**

#### ***Research Pool Data***

<b>Participant Pool</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage of Pool</b>
SCSBA Participant Pool	2008	100%
Qualified Participants	415	20.67%
Random Participants Chosen to Contact	65	3.24%
Required Number of Participants	12	0.60%

*Note:* Table 3 demonstrates the research pool provided by the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association.

The random selection process was used to determine the Research Subjects. According to Creswell (2014), the sample size should range from approximately three to ten Research Subjects for a phenomenological study. Thus, 12 Research Subjects are within reason for the guidelines that Creswell (2014) offers for a study of this type. About 20% of the SCSBA participant pool

qualified for the research. To meet the required number (12) of Research Subjects, this researcher had to choose to contact about 3.25% of the qualified participant pool.

The Research Subjects were all in church leadership positions in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. The Research Subjects were given a pseudonym to protect the data they provided during the research. These pseudonyms were used in the recorded data, reflexive journal, and the research subject list, as demonstrated in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Descriptor of Research Subjects*

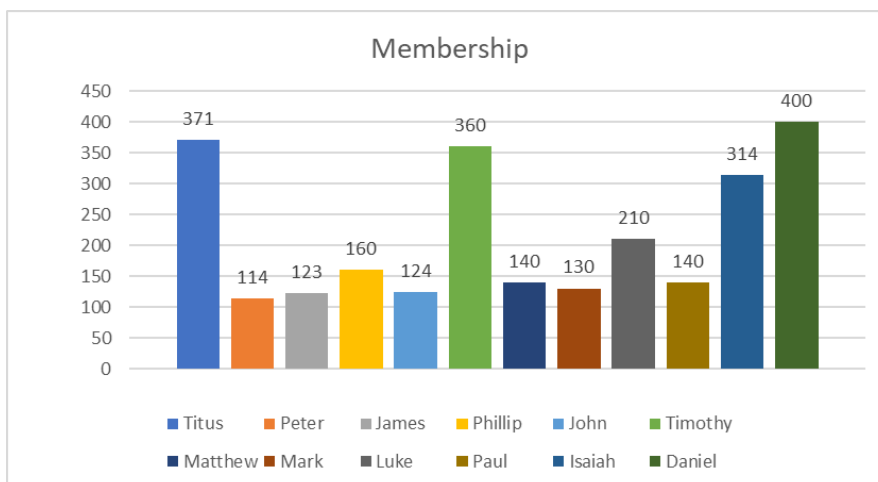
<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Experience (Years)</b>	<b>Church Membership</b>
Peter01011	Senior Pastor	27	114
James03021	Senior Pastor	20	123
Philip05031	Associate Pastor	13	160
John04041	Senior Pastor	26	124
Titus15051	Senior Pastor	24	371
Timothy13061	Senior Pastor	40	360
Matthew25072	Senior Pastor	35	140
Mark46083	Senior Pastor	10	130
Luke35092	Senior Pastor	17	160
Paul73102	Senior Pastor	17	140
Isaiah64114	Senior Pastor	8	314
Daniel19124	Intern Pastor	0.5	400
Total		237.5	2,536
Average		19.79	211.33

*Note:* Table 4 lists the demographic descriptions of the Research Subjects. Each Research Subject was asked how long they had been in their present role and how many years of experience they had in other positions. This researcher combined the years to determine each Research Subject's total years of experience. The Research Subjects' years of experience ranged from .5 to 30 years for an average of 19.79 years for all Research Subjects.

The Research Subjects' churches ranged from 114 to 400 members, averaging 211.33, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

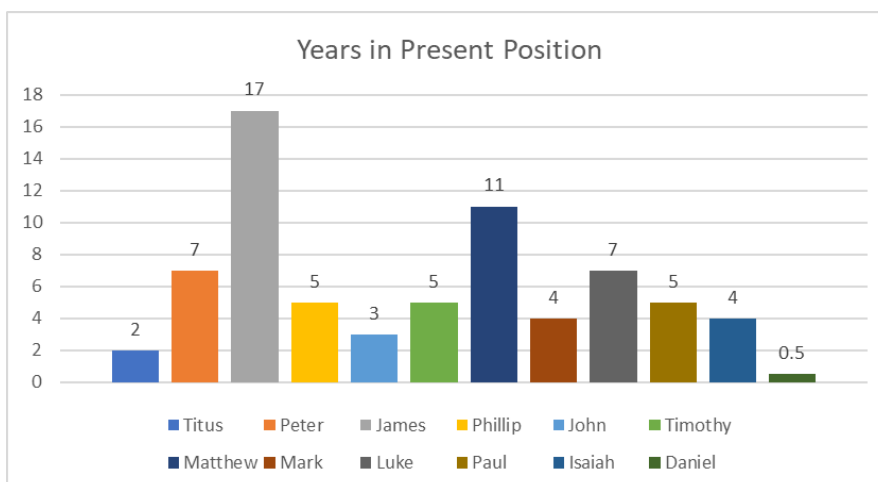
***Research Subject's Church Membership***



*Note:* Figure 1 displays the Research Subjects' home church membership. To qualify for this research, this researcher required each research subject to be a church leader with at least 100 members in their home church. The church sizes ranged from 114 members to 400 members. The average size of the research subject's churches was 211.33 members.

**Figure 2**

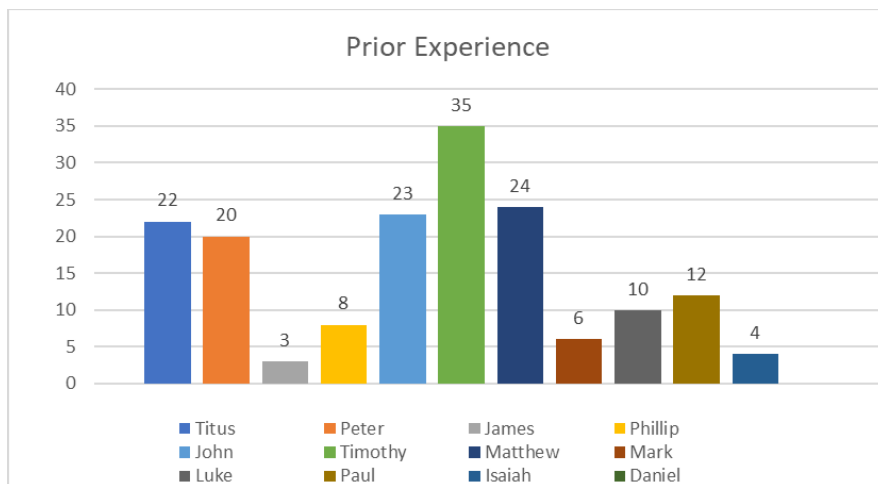
***Research Subject's Present Position Experience***



Note: Figure 2 displays the Research Subjects' years in their present position at their present church, ranging from six months to seventeen years. The average number of years at the present church is about six years.

**Figure 3**

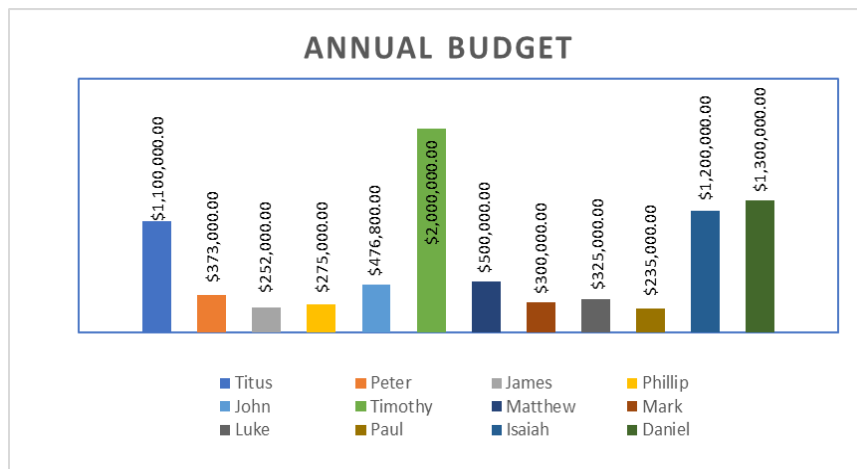
*Research Subject's Prior Experience*



Note: Figure 3 displays the Research Subjects' experience before their current position, which ranged from zero to thirty-five years. The average experience of the research subject was about 19 years.

**Figure 4**

*Research Subject's Annual Budget*



*Note:* Figure 4 displays the annual budget of the Research Subject's churches; Research data ranged from \$235,000 to \$2 million. The average budget was \$694,734.

### **Data Analysis**

The study consisted of 12 Research Subjects. The survey was designed to generate a quick screening of each research subject after question three. Question three provided this researcher with a primary qualifier for the research participation. If the participant indicated that they were not a church leader serving in a South Carolina Southern Baptist church, the continuation of the participation would be terminated. All 12 church leaders met the requirements to participate in the research.

This researcher conducted a qualitative descriptive study that provided trends and themes in the data received from all the retrieved responses. Data analysis occurred after all the surveys were received, interviews were conducted and transcribed into Word documents and Excel files (Microsoft, 2023a). This researcher used narrative analysis by examining the stories the Research Subjects presented.

### **Survey Findings**

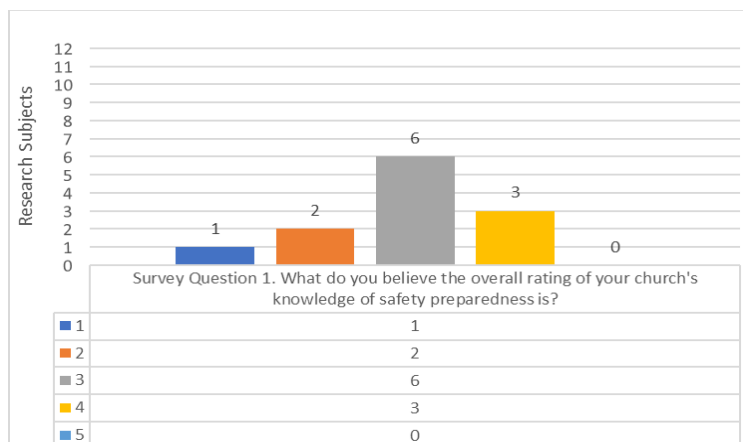
The safety preparedness survey comprised thirty-one questions; two were Likert questions to demonstrate how the participants understood an active shooter's church preparedness. The twenty-nine remaining questions concentrated on cleanness and safety preparedness in the church. To ensure a more diverse research population was represented, these demographic questions focused on ethnicity, church population, age, and church location, rural, suburban, or inner city. Participation was voluntary and allowed an individual to withdraw from the study at any time during the process.

## Survey Results

This researcher surveyed 12 Research Subjects from a pool of 2,008 Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. This researcher's goal was to establish a baseline of understanding the experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. First, the survey was emailed to the research subject for data analysis. Second, a frequency and mean table was created to display the frequency and mean of the responses.

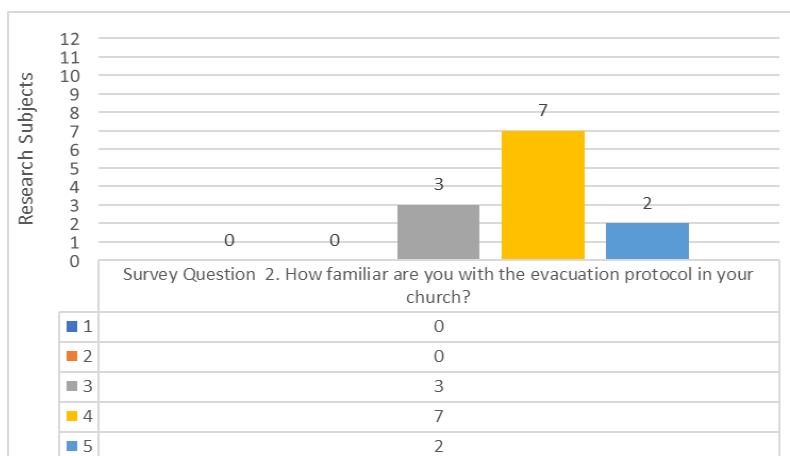
### Figure 5

#### *Overall Rating of Church Knowledge of Safety Preparedness*

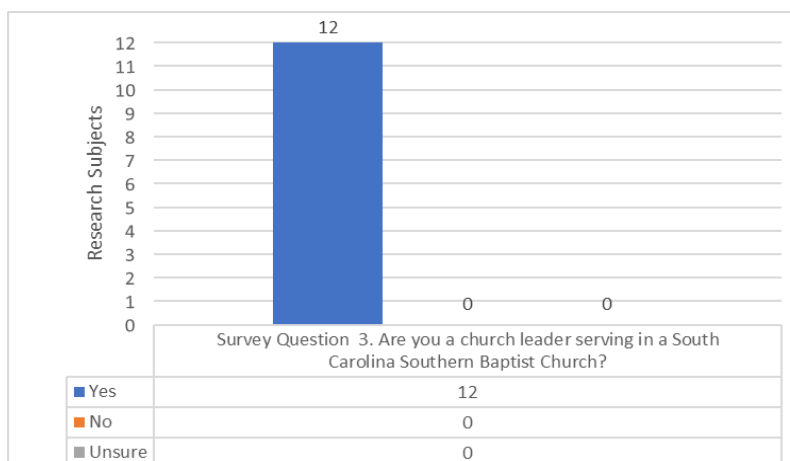


*Note:* Figure 5 displays the research question, “What do you believe the overall rating of your church’s knowledge of safety preparedness is?” This researcher sought to understand the research subject’s level of knowledge of safety preparedness. On a Likert scale of 0 to 5, with zero being no knowledge and five being full knowledge, most Research Subjects had some knowledge of safety preparedness, and no research subject believed they understood it.



**Figure 6*****Evacuation Protocol Familiarity***

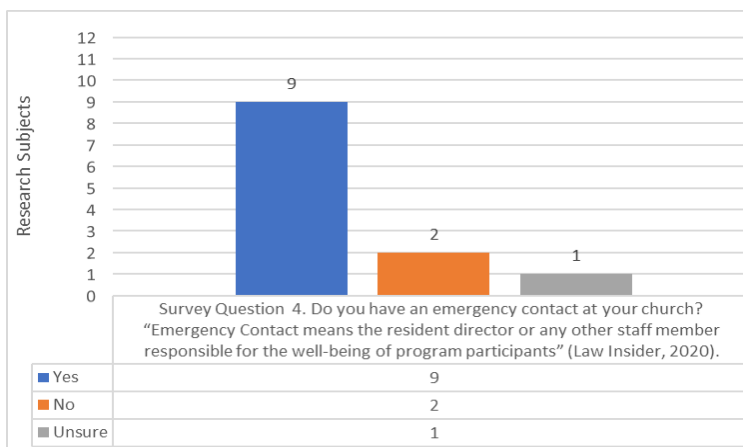
*Note:* Figure 6 displays the research question, “How familiar are you with the evacuation protocol in your church?” This researcher sought to understand the Research Subjects’ knowledge of their evacuation protocol that could affect the hazards of an active shooter and fire, power outages, and other emergencies. On a Likert scale of 0 to 5, zero is no knowledge, and five is complete knowledge.

**Figure 7*****Church Leader In SCSB Church***

*Note:* Figure 7 displays the survey question that asked the potential candidate if they are a church leader serving in a South Carolina Southern Baptist. All 12 Research Subjects are.

## Figure 8

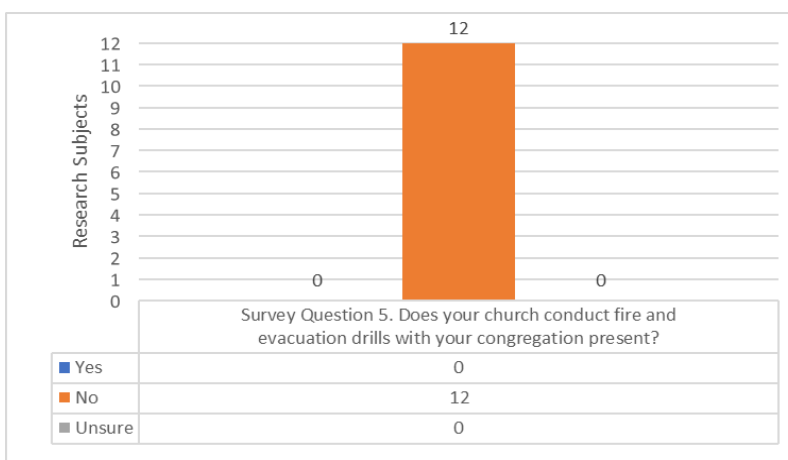
### *Emergency Contact*



*Note:* Figure 8 displays the survey question that asked the potential candidate about emergency contacts for the research subject's church. Nine of the 12 Research Subjects said they had an emergency contact at the church.

## Figure 9

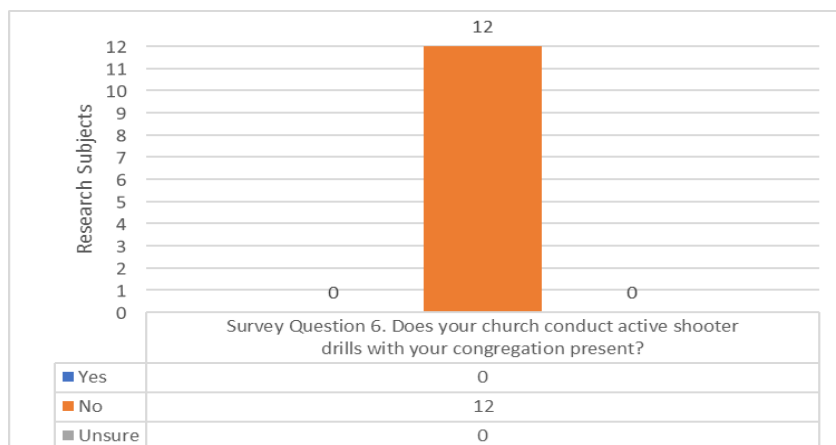
### *Fire and Evacuation Drills*



*Note:* Figure 9 displays the survey question about congregational fire and evacuation drills. All 12 Research Subjects stated they do not include the congregation in fire and evacuation drills.

**Figure 10**

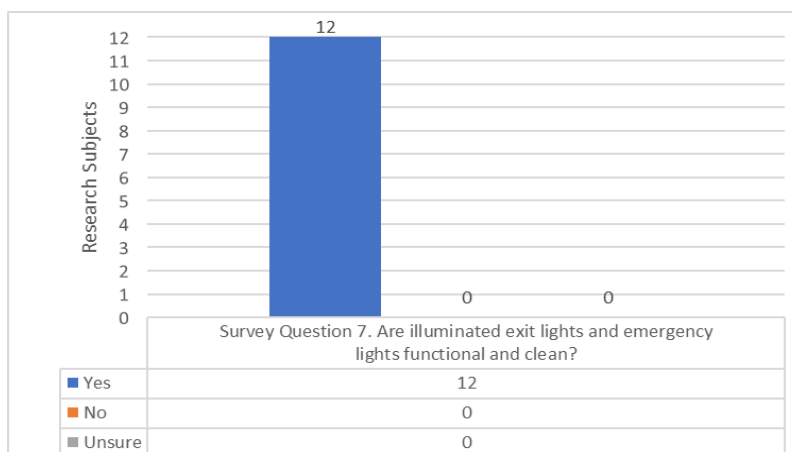
***Congregation Active Shooter Drills***



*Note:* Figure 10 displays the survey question about congregational active shooter drills. All 12 Research Subjects stated they do not include the congregation in active shooter drills.

**Figure 11**

***Emergency Exit Lighting***

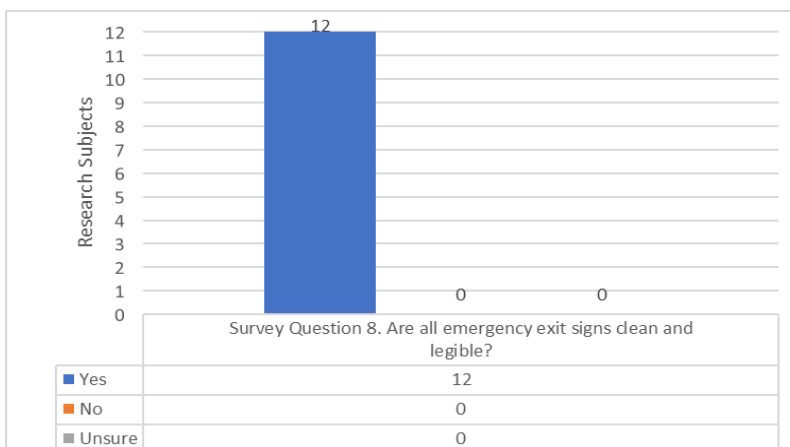


*Note:* Figure 11 displays the survey question about the emergency exit lighting demonstrating leadership attention to exit areas of the research subject's home church. All 12 Research Subjects

stated their home church had illuminated exit lights, and the exit lights were functional and clean.

**Figure 12**

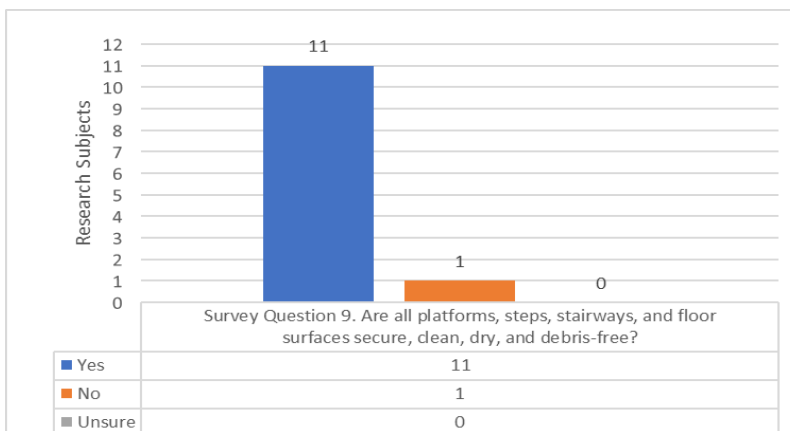
***Emergency Exit Signs***



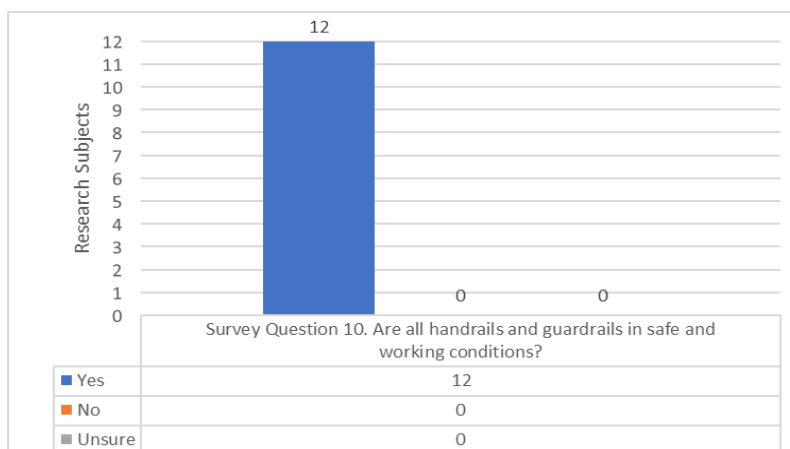
*Note:* Figure 12 displays the survey question about clean and legible emergency exit signs. All 12 Research Subjects stated their home church has clean and legible emergency exit signs.

**Figure 13**

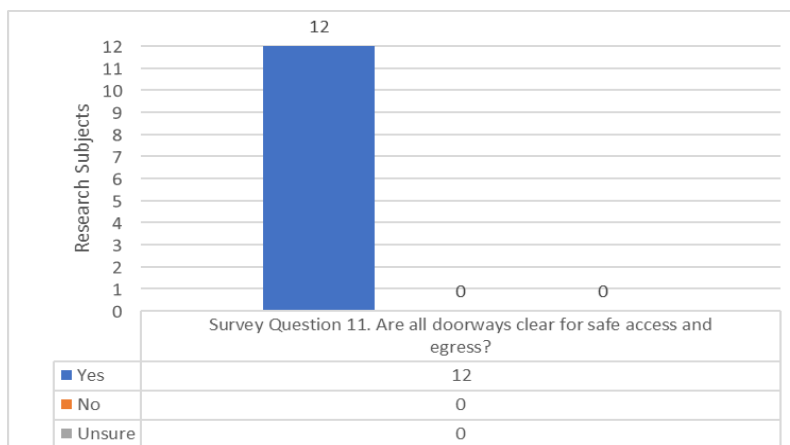
***Platforms, Stairways, and Floor Surfaces***



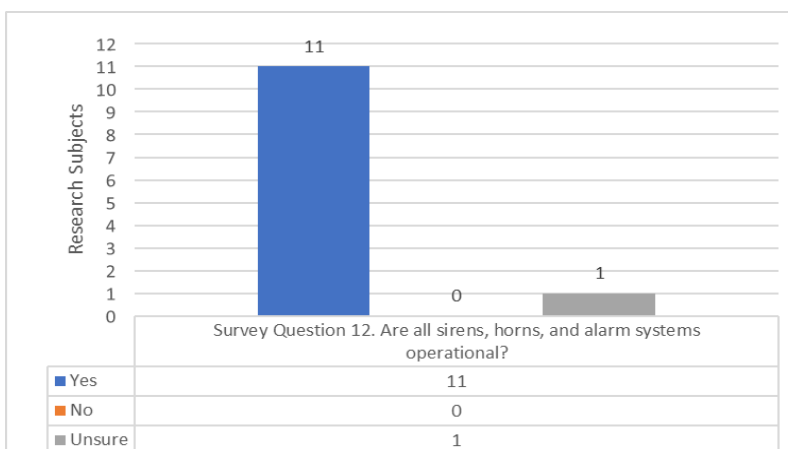
*Note:* Figure 13 displays the survey question about the platforms, stairways, and floor surfaces being secure, clean, dry, and debris-free. Of the 12 Research Subjects, 11 stated their home church platforms, steps, stairways, and floor surfaces are secure, clean, dry, and debris-free.

**Figure 14*****Handrails and Guardrails***

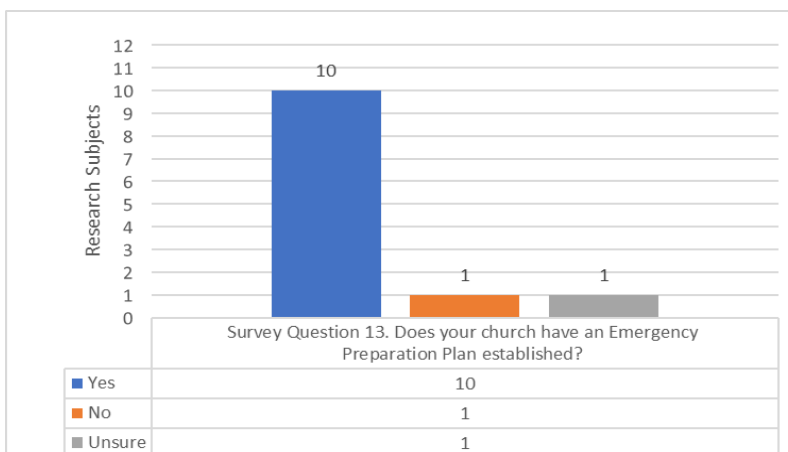
*Note:* Figure 14 displays the survey question about handrails and guardrails being safe and working conditions. All 12 Research Subjects stated their home church handrails and guardrails are in safe working condition.

**Figure 15*****Doorways Clear for Safe Access and Egress***

*Note:* Figure 15 displays the survey question about the clear and safe doorways and demonstrates leadership attention to access and exit areas of the research subject's home church. All 12 Research Subjects stated their home church doorways were clear for safe access and egress.

**Figure 16*****Sirens, Horns, Alarms***

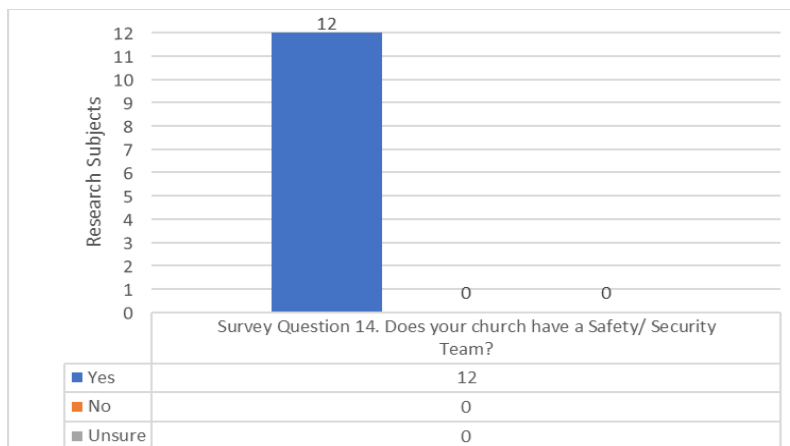
*Note:* Figure 16 displays the survey question about the sirens, horns, and alarms being installed and operational in the research subject's home church and identifies the ability of the leadership to provide emergency warnings to the church members in the event of an emergency. Eleven out of 12 Research Subjects stated their home church had sirens, horns, and alarms installed and operational.

**Figure 17*****Emergency Preparation Plan***

*Note:* Figure 17 displays the survey question about an Emergency Preparation Plan of the research subject's home church. Ten out of 12 Research Subjects stated they had an emergency preparation plan; one stated they did not, and one was unsure.

**Figure 18**

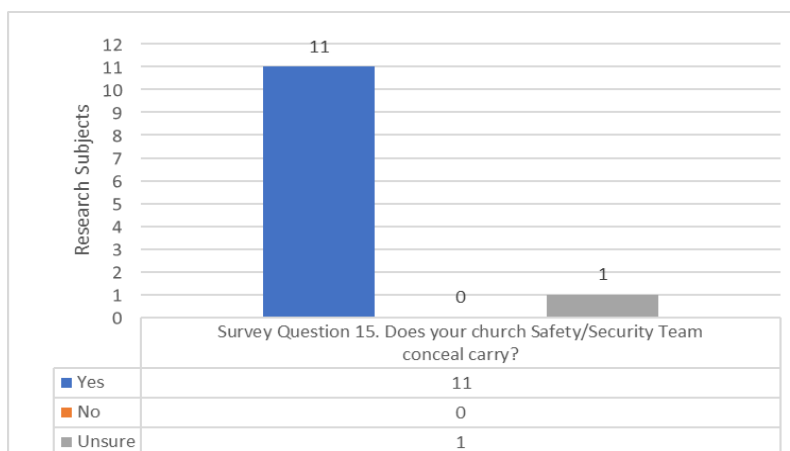
***Safety and Security Team***



*Note:* Figure 18 displays the survey question about the safety/security team established in the research subject's home church. All 12 Research Subjects stated their home church had an established safety/security team.

**Figure 19**

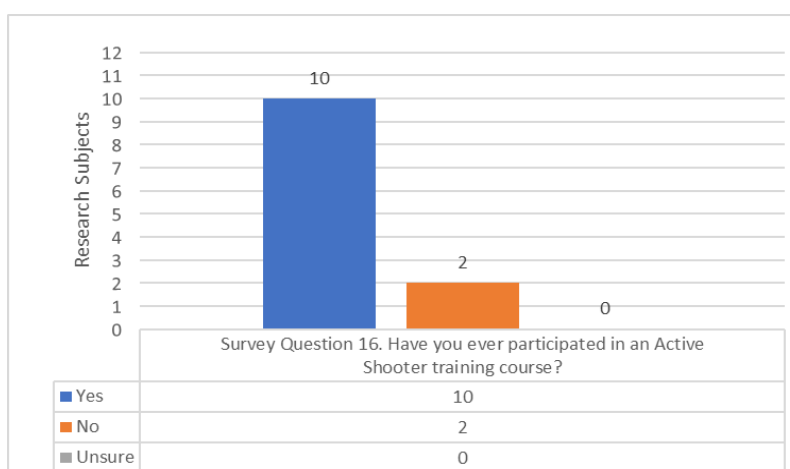
***Safety and Security Team Conceal Carry***



*Note:* Figure 19 displays the survey question about the safety/security team carrying concealed weapons and identifies if the church leadership provides the safety/security team with the means of protecting the congregation from active shooter incidents. Of the 12 Research Subjects, 11 stated their home church safety/security team is allowed to conceal carry. One research subject was unsure if his team carried concealed.

## Figure 20

### *Active Shooter Training Course*

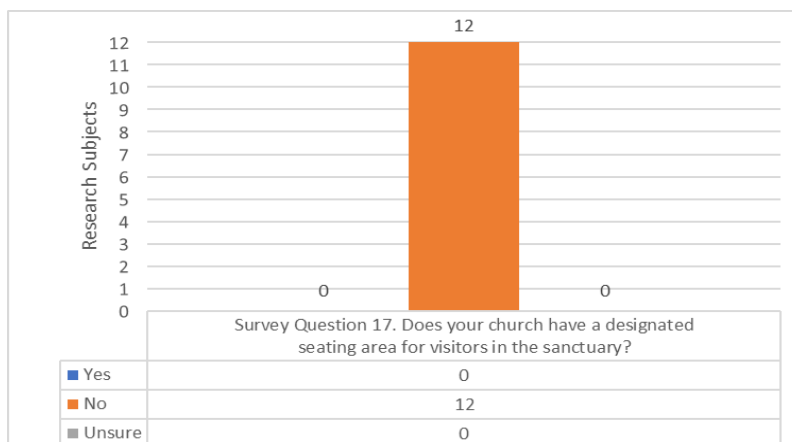


*Note:* Figure 20 displays the survey question about the research subject's participation in prior active shooter training courses. Of the 12 Research Subjects, 10 stated they had participated in such a training course, and two Research Subjects had not.

## Figure 21

### *Designated Visitor Seating Area*

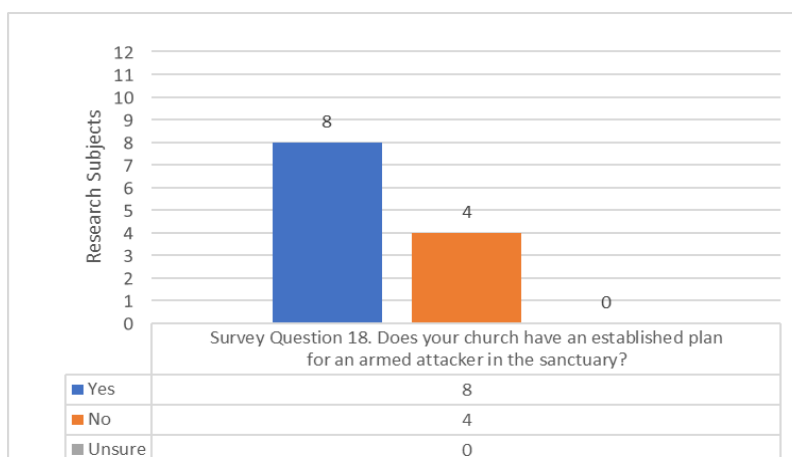




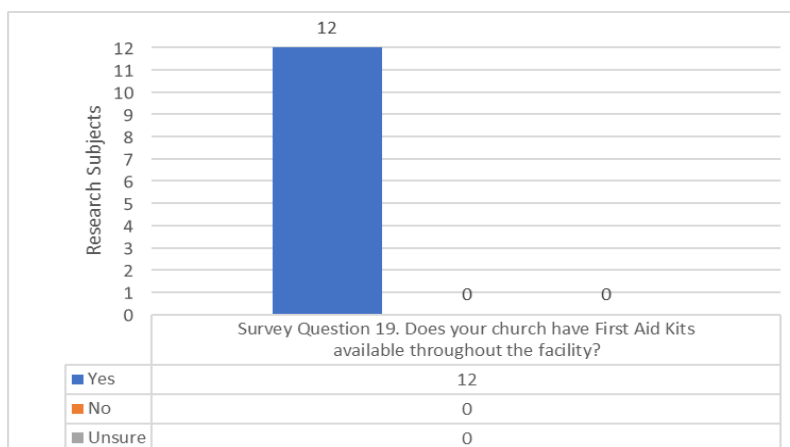
*Note:* Figure 21 displays the survey question about designated visitor seating areas of the research subject's home church and identifies if church leadership provides a special place for visitors to sit in the church as well as providing overwatch or the ability to observe any visitors that may seem to be of concern to the church safety. Also, designated seating for visitors could increase the response time when a tragedy strikes. None of the 12 Research Subjects stated their home church provides designated visitor seating areas.

## Figure 22

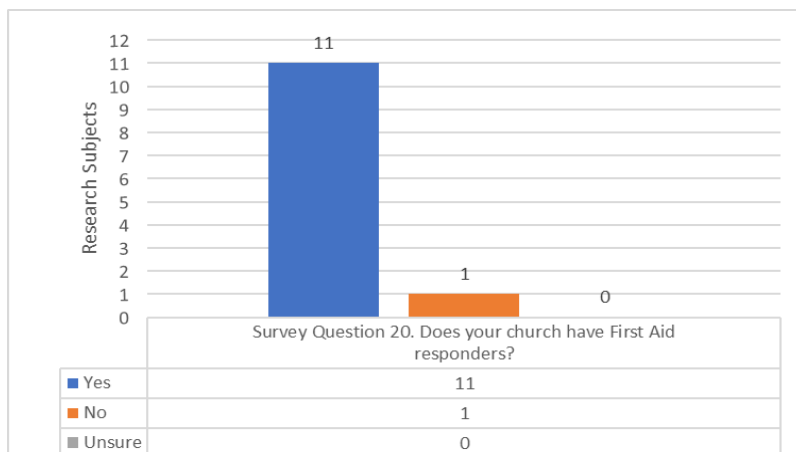
### *Sanctuary Plan for an Armed Attacker*



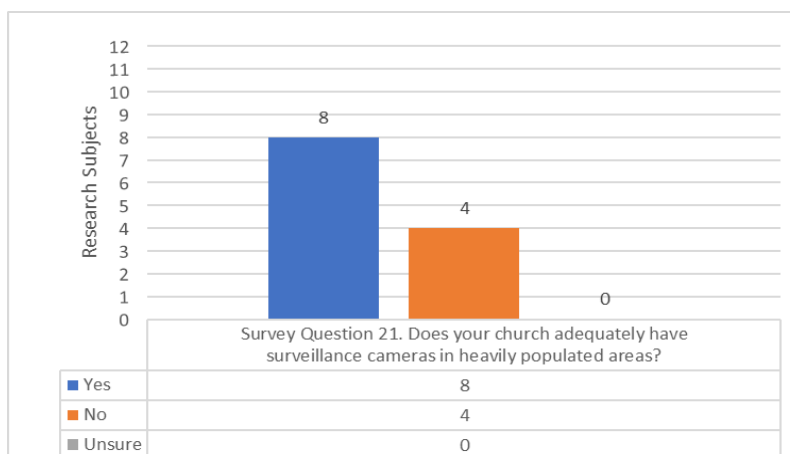
*Note:* Figure 22 displays the survey question about the sanctuary plan for armed attackers of the research subject's home church. Eight of the 12 Research Subjects stated their home church had an established plan for an armed attacker in the sanctuary, and four did not.

**Figure 23*****First Aid Kits***

*Note:* Figure 23 displays the survey question about the availability of First Aid Kits at the research subject's home church, and it gave this research information about whether the church leaders provided the church members with First Aid Kits for use by the membership in an emergency. All 12 Research Subjects stated their home church provides First Aid kits.

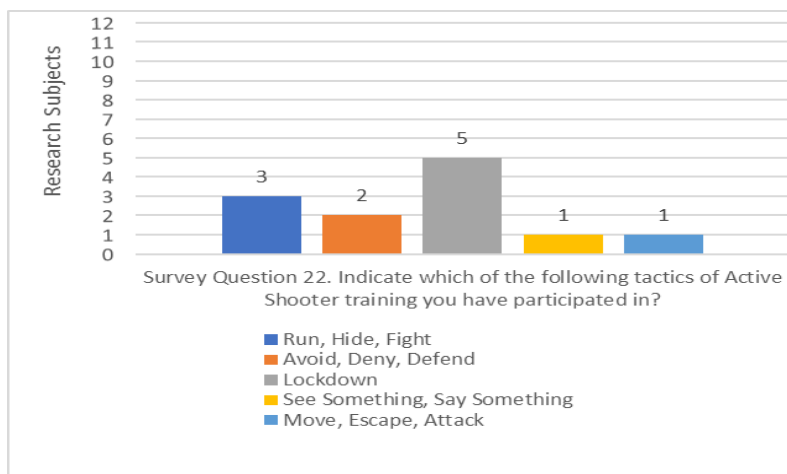
**Figure 24*****First Aid Responder***

*Note:* Figure 24 displays the survey question about First Aid responders' availability at the research subject's home church. Of the 12 Research Subjects, 11 stated their home church provides First Aid responders, and one did not.

**Figure 25*****Surveillance Cameras***

*Note:* Figure 25 displays the survey question to determine if the Research Subject's home church is adequately equipped with surveillance cameras in heavily populated areas. The survey question about the surveillance cameras of the research subject's home church identifies the preparation of surveillance of the leadership provided to the church. The availability of surveillance cameras could provide the safety/security teams with the means of monitoring individuals for violent, erratic behavior. It could allow the direction of police and emergency responders to locations within the church where emergencies may occur. Eight of the 12 Research Subjects stated their home church had surveillance cameras, and four did not.

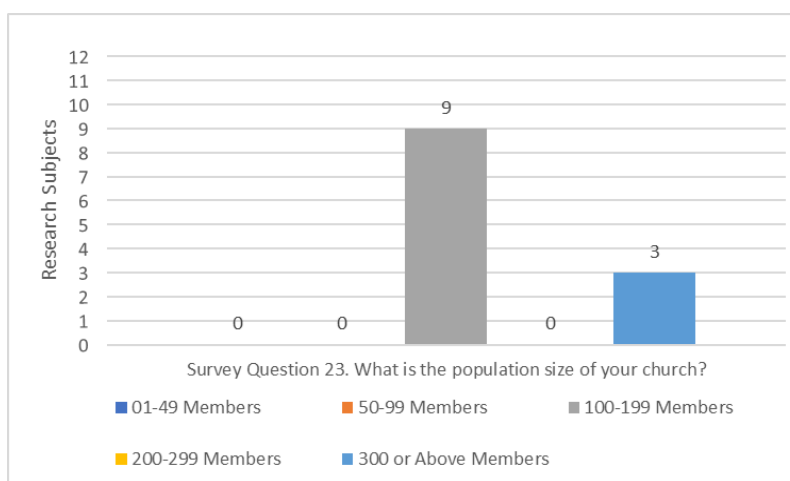
**Figure 26*****Tactics for Active Shooter***



*Note:* Figure 26 displays the survey question about training the research subject in tactics for Active Shooter Incidents and identifies experience throughout the study. The research indicated that less than half of the Research Subjects have participated in tactics of Active Shooter training. This data type could assist future research in concentrating on other areas where this research is limited.

## Figure 27

### *Church Population*

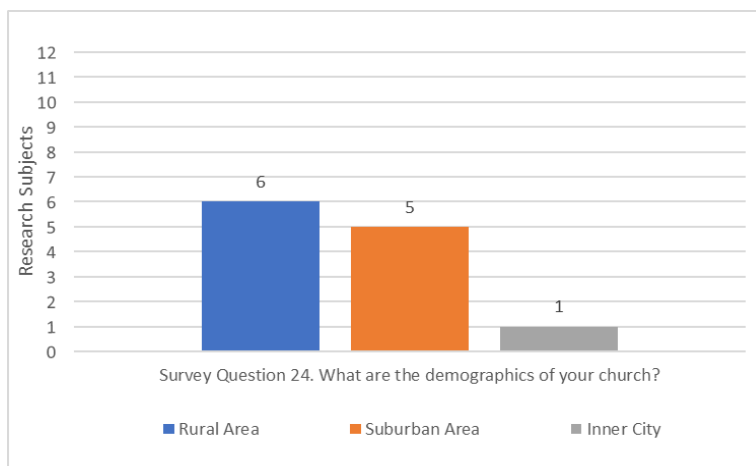


*Note:* Figure 27 displays the survey question about the population size of the research subject's home church and identifies the membership numbers where research data had been received. The Research Subjects in this study had at least one hundred members in their church. This data type

could assist future research in concentrating on different church populations where this research is limited.

**Figure 28**

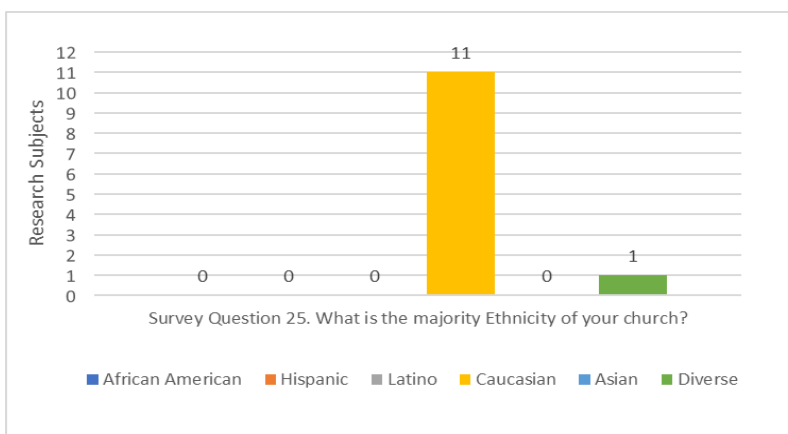
***Church Area Demographics***



*Note:* Figure 28 displays the survey question about the research subject's home church demographics and identifies locations throughout the state where research data had been received. Most of this research studied church leaders from churches in rural and suburban areas; only one research subject was from a church in the inner city. This data type could assist future research in concentrating on other areas where this research is limited.

**Figure 29**

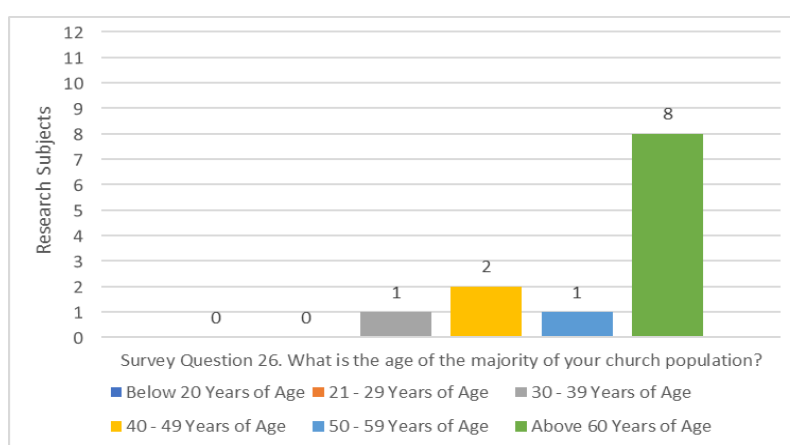
***Church Ethnicity***



*Note:* This qualitative descriptive study was not limited by ethnicity; however, figure 29 displays the survey question about the ethnicity of the Research Subject's home church and identifies the majority of the ethnicity where research data had been received. This researcher did not limit the study to one individual ethnicity. However, through randomization, 11 of the 12 of the Research Subjects were church leaders, with the majority of the membership being Caucasian.

**Figure 30**

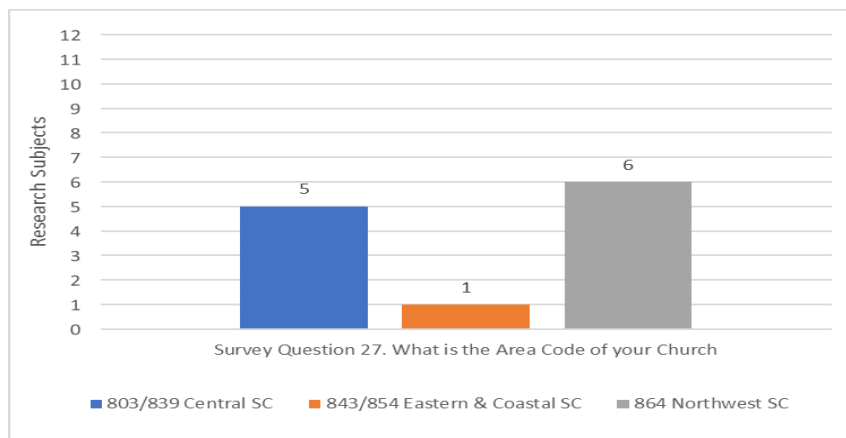
***Church Population Age Majority***



*Note:* Figure 30 displays the survey question about the church population age and provides this researcher with data about the congregational membership ages of the studied population. The majority of the church population was over the age of 60.

**Figure 31**

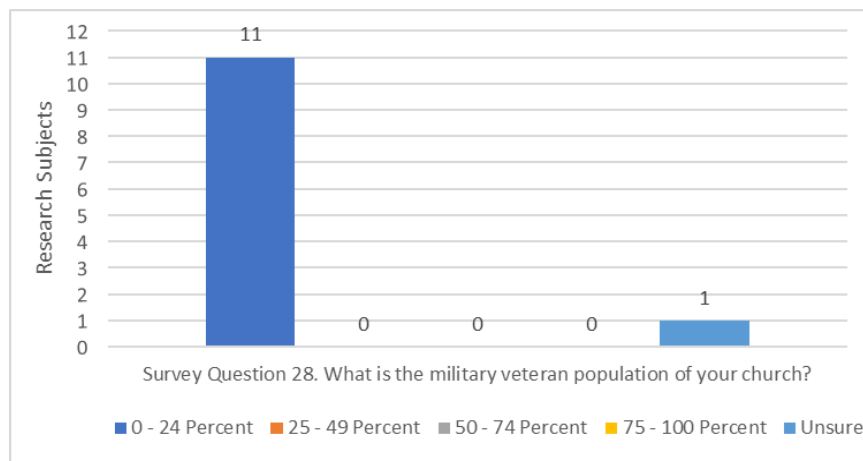
***Church Area Code***



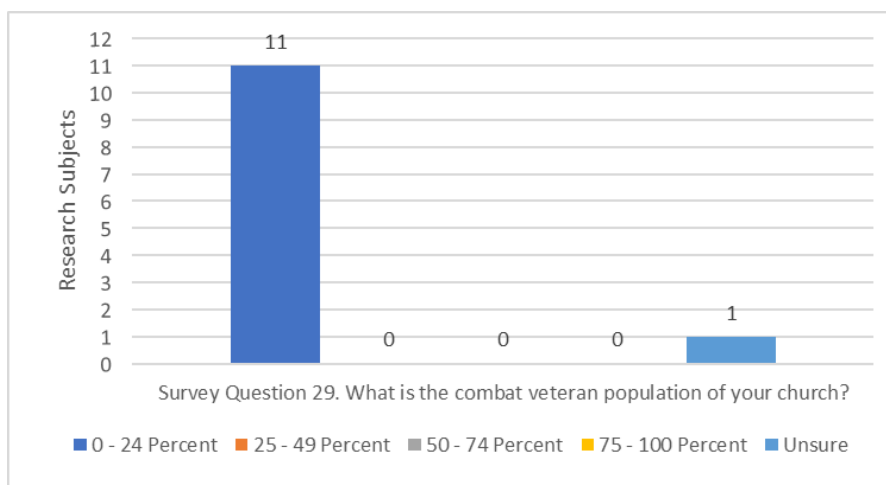
*Note:* Figure 31 displays the survey question about area codes and allowed this researcher to identify locations throughout the state where research data was received.

## Figure 32

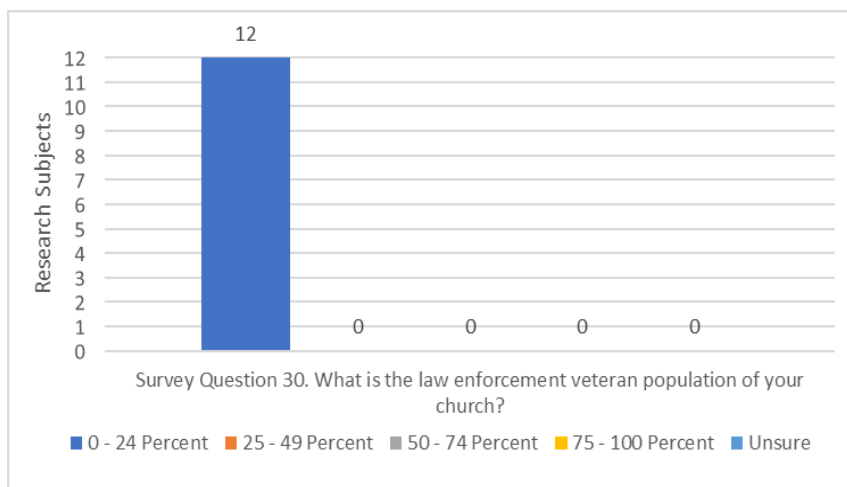
### *Church Military Veteran Population*



*Note:* Figure 32 displays the survey question about the population of military veterans, adds information about the church military veteran population, and allowed this researcher to identify if there is a possibility the data could be skewed based on military training and experiences.

**Figure 33*****Church Combat Veteran Population***

*Note:* Figure 33 displays the survey question about the combat veteran population, adds information about the church combat veteran population, and allowed this researcher to identify if there is a possibility the data could be skewed based on military training and experiences in active shooter situations. Of the 12 Research Subjects, one was unsure of the combat veteran population of his church.

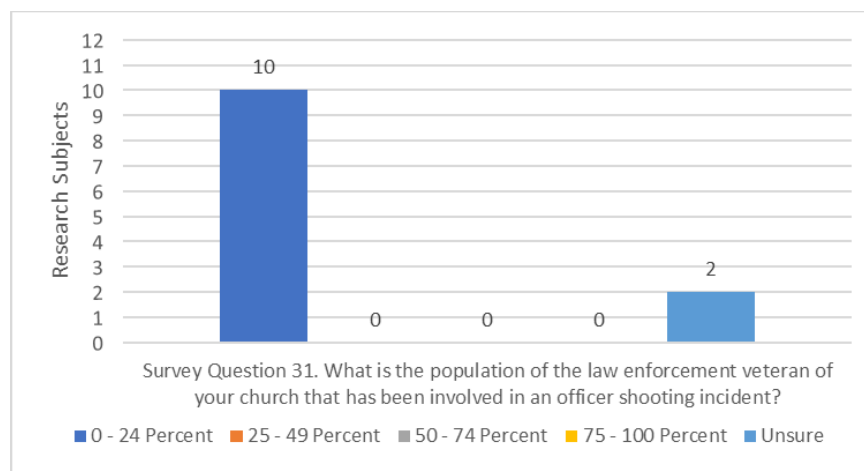
**Figure 34*****Church Law Enforcement Veteran Population***



*Note:* Figure 34 displays the survey question about the population of law enforcement veterans, which allowed this researcher to identify if there is a possibility the data could be skewed based on law enforcement training and experiences.

**Figure 35**

***Church Law Enforcement Veteran Involved in Officer Shooting Incident***



*Note:* Figure 35 displays the survey question about church law enforcement veterans who may have been involved in an officer shooting incident and allowed this researcher to identify if there is a possibility the data could be skewed based on law enforcement training and experiences in active shooter situations.

**Table 5**

***Frequency and Averages of Survey Responses To Question 3 - 21***

Questions	Yes(2)	No(1)	Unsure(0)	Average
3. Are you a church leader serving in a South Carolina Southern Baptist Church?	12	0	0	2.00
4. Do you have an emergency contact at your church? "Emergency Contact means the resident director or any other staff member responsible for the well-being of program participants" (Law Insider, 2020).	10	2	0	1.83
5. Does your church conduct fire and evacuation drills with your congregation present?	0	12	0	1.00

6. Does your church conduct active shooter drills with your congregation present?	0	12	0	1.00
7. Are illuminated exit lights and emergency lights functional and clean?	12	0	0	2.00
8. Are all emergency exit signs clean and legible?	12	0	0	2.00
9. Are all platforms, steps, stairways, and floor surfaces secure, clean, dry, and debris-free?	12	0	0	2.00
10. Are all handrails and guardrails in safe and working conditions?	12	0	0	2.00
11. Are all doorways clear for safe access and egress?	12	0	0	2.00
12. Are all sirens, horns, and alarm systems operational?	10	2	0	1.83
13. Does your church have an Emergency Preparation Plan established? “An ongoing plan for responding to various potential hazards. An EOP describes how people and property will be protected; details who is responsible for carrying out specific actions; identify the personnel, equipment, supplies, and other resources available” (FEMA, 2023, p. 4). Emergency Operation Plan (EOP), Emergency Action Plan (EAP), and Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP) are interchangeable terms.	2	10	0	1.17
14. Does your church have a Security Team?	12	0	0	2.00
15. Does your church Security Team conceal carry?	10	0	2	1.67
16. Have you ever participated in an Active Shooter training course?	8	4	0	1.67
17. Does your church have a designated seating area for visitors in the sanctuary?	0	12	0	1.00
18. Does your church have an established plan for an armed attacker in the sanctuary?	8	4	0	1.67
19. Does your church have First Aid kits available throughout the facility?	12	0	0	2.00
20. Does your church have first aid responders?	10	2	0	1.83
21. Does your church adequately have surveillance cameras in heavily populated areas?	4	8	0	1.33

*Note.* Table 5 displays averages for each question were calculated by multiplying each response value by the corresponding response value, summing the results, and dividing the results by the total number of research subject responses to the questions. The closer the average is to “two,”

the more likely the answer is yes; the closer the answer is to “one,” the more often the answer is no, and an average near “zero” indicates primarily unsure responses.

### Interview Findings

The interviews were conducted with church leadership from Southern Baptist churches with an average membership of 100 or greater in South Carolina. This researcher gathered data by using qualitative interviews. The interviews were conducted virtually with 12 Research Subjects via Microsoft® Teams® video conferencing. The interviews demonstrated what the Research Subjects believed about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship.

**Table 6**

#### *Themes and Frequency Codes from Interview Data*

<b>RQ</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Interviews</b>
RQ1 (Involve)	1. The Logistical Process to Inform the Congregation.	Talk about/discuss how to involve the congregation.	35
		No present model to follow.	3
		Maintaining an open environment/welcoming/fearful.	3
		Priority and placement of time to inform.	12
RQ2 (Prepare)	2. Installation of Alarm/ Warning Systems.	What type of alarm system, visual or audible?	3
RQ3 (Train)	3. Deciding if the congregation is prepared.	What priority is it to prepare the congregation?	26
		Should professionals train the congregation?	5
RQ4 (Equip)		Planning for the time.	11

	4. Importance of Equipping The Congregation.	Congregational sense of security.	12
	5. What is equipping? Physical or Mental?	Providing knowledge to the congregation by discussion.	3
		Providing knowledge to the congregation through active drills.	6

*Note:* Table 6 demonstrates the codes as they relate to the Theme and the Themes as they relate to the Research Questions (RQs). Figure 38 also displays the number of times the codes occurred in the interviews of the Research Subjects.

### **Interview Results**

This researcher conducted interviews with 12 Research Subjects from a pool of 2,008 Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. First, notes were made of various words or phrases related to the study throughout the interview, and specific quotes that supported the codes were identified (Claxton & Michel, 2021).

As this researcher coded each transcript, he combined and categorized the codes into themes based on similarity. By doing this, this researcher reduced the codes into smaller categories to be analyzed for themes. As reported in Table 2, various qualitative data themes were identified. The theme aligned with research question 1 (RQ1), “The logistical process to involve the congregation.” The theme associated with research question 2 (RQ2), “Installing alarm/warning systems.” The theme united with research question 3 (RQ3), “Deciding if the congregation is prepared.” The themes align with research question 4 (RQ4), The “importance of

equipping the congregation” and “What is equipping? Is it physical or mental?” Table 2 shows how each code aligns with a respective theme.

RQ1 asked, “As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, how essential is it to involve the congregation in training for active shooter incidents?” One significant theme developed from RQ1 was “The Logistical Process to Involve the Congregation.” Four codes were developed from RQ1: They are “Talking about/discussing How To Involve The congregation,” “No present model to follow,” “Maintaining an Open Environment/Welcoming/Fearful,” and “Priority and Placement of Time to Inform.” The theme from RQ1 addressed the concern Research Subjects had about having the logistical assets to conduct any training involving the congregations. Research subjects expressed that their primary logistical concerns included time and attendance. The Research Subjects did not believe there was enough time to involve the congregation in training. Matthew said, “We only gather three hours a week, and it is difficult for me to consider giving up that time for something not expressly Biblical, and I have never seen that done before.” Matthew also said he would have a “hard time doing” training “on a Sunday.” Timothy argued that “the time we have together is the only time we have for worship.” Timothy said, “I do not know, logistically, how in the world we would accomplish” training involving the congregation.

However, Isaiah said, “If we could find the time, it would be beneficial to conduct training involving the congregation.” Matthew expressed concern about logistical support and said, “Maybe the South Carolina Convention would find some way to underwrite or encourage” the involvement of church congregations in training for active shooter incidents. Matthew said, “We lack good models to hold up or emulate.” James expressed concern about conducting training with the congregation involved because he said, “There are guests that come, and they

may not be comfortable with that training.” The presence of “guns and things” may make the congregation uncomfortable. The Research Subjects realized there is a great deal to consider in prioritizing time when they only have the members for a few hours a week, and 11 of the 12 Research Subjects expressed they would focus on Spiritual things rather than conduct active shooter training.

RQ2 asked, “As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to prepare congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?” One significant theme developed from RQ2 was “Installation of Alarm/Warning Systems.” RQ2 developed one code, “What type of alarm system, Visual or Audible?” Timothy and John both stated they had not “prioritized” getting alarm systems for their church and did not see a “need to have alarms to inform the congregation” if the security teams were “properly trained and informed.” Timothy stated that he was “not sure what the congregation needed and logistically, how would we implement such an alarm system?” All Research Subjects realized they did not understand what is needed to prepare their congregations for active shooter incidents. They also realized they may not understand what alarm or notification systems could or should be used in their church setting.

RQ3 asked, “As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to train congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?” The significant theme developed from RQ3 was “Deciding if the congregation is prepared,” and from there, RQ3 developed two codes, “What priority is it to prepare Congregation?” and “Should Professionals train The Congregation?” As to “Deciding if the congregation is prepared,” Matthew stated, “We do not have a solid model to reference or compare our congregations to.” Paul said, “The only way to really know if the

congregation is prepared is to train them and see how they respond to a drill, but that has not been a priority since we only have them for a few hours per week. Isaiah said, “We should conduct drills to grade the congregation on the level of preparedness they are at, but would they participate if we scheduled the drill?” Isaiah also said, “If they scheduled a drill, should it be a surprise or planned?” Paul said, “If the drill was a surprise, would there be a problem with someone that reacts as if it were real, and if it is scheduled, would you get full participation?” Paul said, “If planned, many may not attend, so the reality would be the results would be skewed. Luke said that “professionals should come to the church and evaluate the congregation, but the priority to have a professional come is very low.” Luke also stated, “if professionals came to evaluate the congregation’s preparedness, many in the congregation may feel scared if they are told they are not prepared and many may not return.” All Research Subjects realized that they do not understand what is needed to train their congregations for an active shooter because they do not have a “model to emulate” or to compare to.

RQ4 asked, “As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to equip congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?” RQ4 Developed two significant themes, “Importance of Equipping The Congregation” and “What is equipping? Physical or Mental?” RQ4 developed four codes, “Planning for the Time,” “Congregational sense of Security,” “Providing Knowledge to Congregation by Discussion,” and “Providing Knowledge to Congregation by Active Drills.” Research Question 4, when asked of the Research Subjects, ten out of 12 stated that they had never thought about equipping the congregation. The research found that 11 of the 12 Research Subjects stated that “Knowledge” was the best thing to equip the congregation. John said, “Informing the congregation about the plan for an active shooter is important.” John said,

“Knowledge is equipment.” James said, “We want to make sure they (the congregation) are educated where there is no question about them being safe.” Isaiah said, “Equipping them with knowledge will make them feel safer.” Ten out of 12 Research Subjects said they never “prioritized equipping” the congregation because the security teams should be able to handle anything in the sanctuary. Titus said, “We need to talk about it and discuss it with the members because that will equip them with knowledge and provide some self-assurance they are safe. Daniel said, “I consider the safety of our people of very high priority, and so this serves as a great reminder that I...need to make sure that we put some extra effort into helping our people see how important” it is to know what to do in an emergency. The Research Subjects realized equipping congregations is not just about providing material products to keep the members safe but also about providing knowledge about the church staff’s plans, preparations, and capabilities to provide a safe environment to worship.

### **Evaluation of the Research Design**

This qualitative descriptive study utilized a phenomenological design that focused on describing the lived experience of individuals about a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Using the qualitative descriptive design, this researcher applied and compiled protocol and measurements, collected demographic and sample data, and performed data analysis.

The lived experience being examined was what South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter in the church. The phenomenological design was appropriate to this research because it provided deep, rich data through a survey and detailed interviews. Creswell (2014) argues that a phenomenological design “culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals



who have all experienced the phenomenon” (p. 14). The Research Subjects were questioned about their knowledge and understanding of the safety preparedness of their congregations.

This researcher experienced difficulty in recruiting Research Subjects and utilized “snowball sampling (a.k.a., chain sampling), which involves asking existing Research Subjects to refer or recruit other individuals (e.g., acquaintances or colleagues) who also have experiences and knowledge relevant to the topic under study” (Leedy & Ormond, 2015, p. 242).

### **Summary**

In Chapter Four, this researcher provided the data analysis and the findings for this qualitative descriptive study about what South Carolina Church Leaders believed about congregational active shooter preparation. In Chapter Four, this researcher explained the specific interview protocol and provided the demographic information of this researcher's subjects and their churches. Chapter Four concluded with the evaluation of the research design.

This researcher safeguarded the Research Subjects' personal information by storing the data on an encrypted computer hard drive that only he could access with a password. This researcher did not begin the recording during the interview process until introductions and administrative information were complete. Before beginning the recording, this researcher provided the research subject with the pseudonym that would be used for that research subject. This researcher continually focused on the safety of the Research Subjects and protecting their beliefs and responses. The conclusions of this research study are covered in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS**

### **Overview**

In conclusion, some may question why a doctoral candidate in a school of Divinity would pursue a degree in Christian Leadership Ministry by researching the preparation of a church congregation for an active shooter. However, before December 2023, the reality of what the data has revealed in this study is there has not been a Church Leadership priority on preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter in the church. The purpose of the study was to explore what South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter in the church. In Chapter Five, this researcher reviews the purpose, survey, interview questions, implications, and applications, suggests further research, and presents his interpretations of the data and how it impacts South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders regarding preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. By doing this, this researcher discovered what South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders believed about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for security threats like active shooter incidents. This researcher also discovered what South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders believe the possibility of an active shooter is in the case of their church and the top ten things church authorities believe will enhance the church's security. This researcher used the same survey and questionnaire for all 12

South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders. Using the same survey and questionnaire for all 12 helped this researcher determine how many church leaders in this study are preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter situation. Due to time limitations, cost, and travel requirements, the data collection for this study was via virtual meeting software and personal interviews. For this study, a church leader is a position held by an individual or individuals in formal leadership positions at the executive level, including associate pastors and lead pastors of biblically-based Southern Baptist church organizations in the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association.

A qualitative interview methodology was used to collect the data identifying the Research Subjects' beliefs about preparing, training, and equipping congregations in this study. This researcher's experience guided this study to discover the thoughts and beliefs of 12 South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders. This researcher's experiences include assembling with multiple congregations, mainly because of his United States military obligations to relocate. Those experiences include observing unprepared, untrained, or unequipped congregants in the area of an active shooter in a house of worship. This researcher drew his conclusions based on 12 South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders' opinions about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for the possibility of an active shooter event and what they believe should be done to prepare for such an event.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, how essential is it to involve the congregation in training for active shooter incidents?

**RQ2.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to prepare congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

**RQ3.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to train congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

**RQ4.** As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to equip congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

### **Themes and Patterns**

This researcher used Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) suggestion to use the themes obtained from the data analysis to summarize and develop an understanding of critical reoccurring comments from the Research Subjects. This researcher observed common themes that emerged throughout the survey and the interviews. For example, this researcher discovered that many Research Subjects had not prioritized any consideration for planning, training, or equipping the congregation for an active shooter. In several cases, they did not believe it was logistically possible to include the congregation in training for an active shooter because they had very little time to dedicate to such a subject. The prominent theme was the lack of time to prepare, train, and equip congregations.

This researcher observed several patterns emerging from the interviews. The most prevalent pattern was that the Research Subjects discussed their belief that they lacked time for preparing, training, and equipping congregations. The pattern of lack of time was apparent in all four research questions, where the Research Subjects expressed the belief that there was just not enough time to do anything more than what they were doing at present with the congregation, and that was preparing, training, and equipping congregations with spiritual guidance and knowledge.

This researcher noticed another pattern: how the Research Subjects compared their experiences in public schools where they were trained for natural and manmade disasters since

the Research Subjects compared the time training in public schools to their churches and stated that the school systems have the children five days a week while the churches may have them two days a week.

### **Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications**

#### **Research Conclusions**

This researcher was able to answer the four research questions that guided this study based on the analyzed data. Twenty years before this research, a study examining how South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders prepare, train, and equip congregations for security threats like active shooter incidents would have been unimaginable. This researcher discovered what the South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders believe the possibility of an active shooter is in the case of their church and what the top ten things church authorities believe will enhance the church's security.

#### **Research Question 1. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, how essential is it to involve the congregation in training for active shooter incidents?**

Based upon this researcher's observations from the answers the Research Subjects provided for research question one, the central theme was that the Research Subjects were concerned about the logistical process of informing the congregation about what to do in an emergency such as an active shooter. Research Subjects believed they needed to discuss how to involve the congregation in planning and preparing for an emergency with the church staff. This researcher found that 11 of the 12 Research Subjects believed they needed to inform the congregation of any plans that are in place to protect them in emergencies such as an active shooter. However, they would have to discuss with the staff how to inform the congregation with

the limited time the congregation was available and how to keep from instilling unnecessary fear into the members.

All 12 of the Research Subjects believed they did not have a model to follow to establish procedures for involving the congregation in emergency situational training. The Research Subjects discussed their concern that they were not provided a model by anyone either in literature or by those in the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association. All 12 of the Research Subjects believed the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association should develop a model for all the churches to use and follow. This theme supports the lack of information and coordination available to churches to guide how to inform congregations and involve them in preparing for an active shooter incident.

All 12 Research Subjects wanted to maintain an open and welcoming environment while informing the congregation about actions to take in an emergency, such as an active shooter, without instilling fear. The Research Subjects believed that discussing events such as an active shooter would instill fear into the congregates, would not maintain an open, welcoming environment, and may cause some, if not many, to leave the church and not come back or cause others not even to visit.

Of the 12 Research Subjects, ten believed they did not know how to prioritize the time to inform the congregation about what to do in an emergency. The Research Subjects were concerned about what program they would have to take time out of to inform the congregation. Most Research Subjects believe they did not have the time to give to informing the congregation because they considered it a low priority compared to informing the congregation about Spiritual things such as the Gospel of Christ. Many only have the members for about three hours a week, with approximately one of those three hours where most are in the sanctuary for worship service.

Research Question 1 revealed that the Research Subjects believed it was essential to inform the congregation about what to do or what the church leaders have established in an emergency, such as an active shooter. However, this researcher found that the Research Subjects were concerned about the logistical process of informing the congregation because they believed they had limited time available to inform the congregation about plans and procedures established by the church leaders. The Research Subjects were concerned about how the members would feel or react to discussing anything about an emergency, such as an active shooter. All Research Subjects indicated they could take time from the worship services to involve the congregation in preparing for such emergencies; however, the majority believed they were more responsible for the spiritual well-being of each member.

**Research Question 2. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to prepare congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?**

Based upon this researcher's observations from the Research Subjects' answers to research question two, this researcher found the central theme of alarms and warning systems. The Research Subjects had not considered what type of alarm or warning systems they could install in their home church to prepare and provide visual or audible alerts to the congregation in an emergency. Of the 12 Research Subjects, eight stated that they had not considered installing or providing such systems to alarm or warn congregates of an emergency. Research question two also provided that the Research Subjects believed it would be a good idea for the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association to provide information about what would be an effective alert system for churches to install and use.

Research Question 2 revealed that the Research Subjects had not considered installing an

alarm/warning system to alert the congregation or prepare them for an emergency. This researcher found that 11 of the 12 Research Subjects did not believe all the congregation members would be prepared for an emergency.

**Research Question 3. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to train congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?**

Based upon this researcher's observations from the answers the Research Subjects provided for research question three, the central theme was the need for the Research Subjects to decide if the congregation was prepared. And if they were not prepared, they would decide to train the congregation. Another concern 11 of the 12 Research Subjects expressed was training the congregation. Should they be trained by professional law enforcement agencies or by church safety/security team members?

The finding of Research Question 3 implied to this researcher that the Research Subjects were unsure if the congregation was prepared for an emergency. However, 11 out of 12 Research Subjects stated that the congregation could always be better prepared if adequately trained. All of the Research Subjects were concerned about what type of training and when the training would be conducted, along with who they would get to conduct the training.

**Research Question 4. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to equip congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?**

Many considered Research Question 4 the most intriguing and thought-provoking interview questions. The Research Subjects commented that they had not considered "equipping" congregations before the interview. This researcher found that the Research Subjects expressed



their newfound thoughts about equipping as physical and informational. When asked about equipping, the Research Subjects initially discussed what physical items would be needed to equip the congregation. As the interviews continued, 11 of 12 of the Research Subjects began to consider information as something that could be used to equip the congregation. The importance of knowledge about what to do in case of an active shooter incident was mentioned by every one of the Research Subjects.

Based upon this researcher's observations from the Research Subjects' answers to Research Question 4, this researcher found that the Research Subjects had not considered the importance of equipping the congregation. The Research Subjects were concerned about planning the time to equip the congregation with physical items and information to prepare them for an emergency such as an active shooter. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2013) guide for houses of worship states that planning is essential and that "the leadership of the house of worship should initiate and support planning efforts to ensure engagement from the congregation...regardless of the size of the house of worship" (p. 3). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2013) guide encourages houses of worship to include the "whole house of worship community," which "includes regular attendees, guests, and staff, including those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs" (p. 3). Another concern of the Research Subjects was whether physically or informationally equipping the congregation would give them a sense of security or fear. The finding of this research question implied to this researcher that the Research Subjects never considered equipping the congregation with physical items or knowledge before.

### **Research Implications**

In Chapter One of this dissertation, this researcher described the significance of the study

for use by leaders in houses of worship. South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could evaluate this researcher's findings and their positions regarding these findings. Handling active shooter situations could involve preparing, training, and equipping congregations. This researcher studied the theoretical and theological support for preparing, training, and equipping congregations in the event of an active shooter or other disasters. This study is essential because Biblical Scripture states that "the end of all flesh comes before me: for the earth is filled with violence" (King James Version, 1798/2017, Genesis 6:13).

This researcher's study expands the knowledge base on active shooter training in houses of worship and why preparing, training, and equipping congregations could be needed. The number of studies about active shooter training in houses of worship was so limited that this research filled the gap in the literature of the studies that have been conducted, such as the research by Auten (2021), Rainer (2017), and the FBI (2016).

This researcher organized the data using the ten-step blueprint provided by Leedy and Ormrod (2016, pp. 292-297). The authors summarized their blueprint as follows: 1) convert data into usable electronic form, 2) broadly organize data, 3) identify categories for data coding, 4) divide data, 5) apply initial coding, 6) finalize codes/sub-codes, 7) rate codes through triangulation, 8) identify patterns, 9) examine contradictory data sets, and 10) interpret data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, pp. 292-297). This researcher's data analysis fills a gap in the existing literature that extends a biblical perspective on the need to equip and prepare the followers of Christ Jesus within the sanctuary.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

In Chapter Two, this researcher discussed how active shooter incidents have significantly increased fear in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the available literature is limited to public schools

and government facilities. In 2023, the gap in theoretical literature references the background, capabilities, and process to secure houses of worship and protect congregations from emergencies such as an active shooter. This researcher also discussed the deficiency in literature to provide leadership with reasons to prepare, train, and equip the congregation for such incidents.

Though a gap existed in the literature about preparing, training, and equipping congregations at the time of this study, this study adds to the literature by providing what church leaders believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations. This researcher observed that many Research Subjects believe that the priority is to prepare, train, and equip congregations for their Spiritual well-being, and the physical well-being of the congregation has not become a priority at the time of this study. Church leaders are to prepare, train, and equip congregations for their Spiritual well-being and provide places of worship that are free of danger. As Chapter Two discusses, the church should also be prepared to protect the members from natural or manmade disasters as a shepherd for his flock.

### ***Biblical Implications***

In Chapter Two, this researcher discussed that evil exists and places of worship are not immune from harm (Nelson, 2022, p. 1). And it is crucial to understand evil acts are the works of Satan. Murder has existed since the early times of creation and was seen when Cain murdered his brother Abel (: King James Version, 1798/2017, Genesis 4; Ice, 2009, p. 3). Violence is due to the fall of man when Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden (King James Version, 1798/2017, Genesis 3; Ice, 2009, p. 2). South Carolina Southern Baptist church leadership could protect those attending worship services as a shepherd protects the flock. As the Gospel of John demonstrated, Jesus spoke about protecting His followers. He said, “While I was

with them, I protected them and kept them safe” (New International Version, 1973, John 17:12). Jesus prayed that God would not take His believers “out of the world, but that (God) protect them from the evil one” because “they are not of the world” (New International Version, 1973, John 17: 15-16). Jesus asked His Father to protect them as they went through evil events. Jesus could have asked His Father to remove his believers from evil, but He did not. Jesus taught His followers to pray, and in that prayer, He told them to ask God to lead them “not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (New International Version, 1973, Matthew 6:13; Towns, 2005, p. 105).

As discussed in Chapter Two, some scholars suggest that individuals need to be aware of their surroundings and that there are three types of people in the world: good guys, bad guys, and the clueless (Horne, 2012, para. 1, Cooper-White, 2023, p. 9). The good guys do not harm others. Bad guys are those who harm others. Clueless people do not know what others do good or bad. All 12 of the Research Subjects indicated that they believe there are good, bad, and clueless individuals in their churches. Churches are not immune to the three types of people in the world, and therefore, this researcher observed that eight out of the 12 Research Subjects believe some people may someday come to inflict harm on the members of the church. Even someone perceived as a “good guy” could be a perpetrator of evil. If there are individuals clueless about the possibility, then those individuals could be the ones who may be more prone to injury or death.

### ***Practical Implications***

This researcher observed that none of the Research Subjects identified the risk of an emergency as a priority. Chapter Two discusses risk identification as the first step in the Protective Action Decision Model (PADM). The risk identification is the same as what Lazarus

& Folkman (1984) call “primary appraisal” (Lindell & Perry, 2012, p. 621). Lindell & Perry (2012) say that the PADM indicates that the threat people perceive leads to risk identification. In emergency responses, the individuals at risk “must answer the basic question of risk identification: ‘Is there a real threat that I need to pay attention to?’” (p. 621). South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders could identify the risk of an emergency by using the PADM.

This researcher observed a difference in planning and preparing schools and businesses for emergencies such as an active shooter than in planning and preparing churches. The differences observed in this study were the time available, the resources available to the church, and the age and health of the church members.

This researcher observed the Research Subjects' concerns for standard practical training provided to schools and businesses. The run, hide, fight theory being taught to schools, businesses, and some churches is a concern for many of the Research Subjects who have congregations that consist of members who are elderly or physically impaired (Howard, 2019). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2013) explains that the “demographics of a congregation often mean that children and the elderly are present and may need assistance” (p. 1). The training given by many professionals and discussed in the majority of the literature available says to teach members to run at the first sign of danger. Unfortunately, as observed by this researcher, many churches do not have members who can run far, if at all.

All 12 of the Research Subjects were church leaders of churches with at least 100 congregates in each service, and the sanctuaries would typically only have two to six exit doors. Another practical implication Research Subjects believe is that getting the number of individuals in church services out of the few doors leading to the outside and away from emergencies such as an active shooter would cause chaos and confusion.

This researcher observed practical implications from this study when Research Subjects discussed the lack of time to prepare, train, and equip congregations for emergencies such as an active shooter. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2013) guide for houses of worship encourages church leaders to “familiarize congregants with the plan” (p. 3). The Research Subjects in this study indicated they did their best to provide the congregation members with spiritual knowledge and guidance in their available time. Still, they do not see how logistically they can prepare, train, and equip congregations for physical emergencies.

This researcher observed that the Research Subjects would benefit from a model to follow and examples to emulate when preparing, training, and equipping congregations in emergencies such as an active shooter. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has created a model Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for houses of worship. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (2013) Emergency Operations Plan Model is a guide that “provides a process, plan format, and content guidance that is flexible enough for use by all house of worship emergency planning teams” (p.3).

The research found that many Research Subjects believed that training with other church safety/security teams would enhance preparation and training to ensure better protection of the congregation and to see examples of how others conduct training and prepare for emergencies. The Research Subjects' beliefs about training with other churches could also provide the South Carolina Southern Baptist Association with a basis to develop a model that the Research Subjects believe is needed. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Protective Action Decision Model (PADM) is a “multistage model based on research findings on people’s responses to environmental hazards and disasters ” (Lindell & Perry, 2012, p. 616).

## **Research Applications**

As a result of this researcher's study, the South Carolina Baptist church leadership has a resource to refer to and better consider. South Carolina Southern Baptist church leadership could be committed to safety, allowing time to prepare, train, and equip congregations for natural and manmade emergencies, including active shooter incidents. By allowing such time, the church leadership could provide better survivability for South Carolina Southern Baptist congregants if they are prepared, trained, and equipped. Areas within this research indicated the need for further studies about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship.

In 2023, many activities worldwide, such as the rumors of wars and the turning away from Christian values, have convinced many of the Research Subjects that harm may come to the church very shortly. They discussed that they should begin considering how to prepare, train, and equip congregations for emergencies such as an active shooter. Jesus said there would be "wars and rumors of wars," and those would rise up against God's people (King James Version, 1798/2017, Matthew 24: 6-10). Many Research Subjects discussed their belief that the time is near when local churches will not be immune from violence. This researcher observed that many of the Research Subjects believe that they sometimes fall into the attitude that "it will not happen here." Eight out of 12 of the Research Subjects stated that this research has made them reconsider the possibility of violence occurring in their home church. All 12 of the Research Subjects stated they would consider the possibility of prioritizing how to prepare, train, and equip congregations for emergencies such as an active shooter.

## **Research Limitations**

This researcher focused on the Southern Baptist Churches in South Carolina and on the

preparedness of the church readiness and emergency management protocol to minimize the threat of an active shooter incident. The study highlighted Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, enabling this researcher to use his desired methodology of using a survey and interviews to reach participants in South Carolina.

This researcher followed the advice of Creswell (2005) when he argued that “representative refers to the selection of individuals from a sample of a population such that the individuals selected are typical of the population under study, enabling you to conclude the sample about the population as a whole” (p. 145). This researcher delimited the study to a population of South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders. The population consisted of Southern Baptist Church Leaders whose congregations did not primarily consist of combat veterans. This researcher limited the study to Southern Baptist churches that are members of the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina.

This researcher understands that future research could include those churches not associated with or not members of the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina. Another delimitation included by this researcher was the population must consist of Southern Baptist church leaders who follow Southern Baptist doctrine and share similar spiritual beliefs. This researcher further delimited the research population to participants eighteen years of age or older without delimiting race or gender. Finally, the population of this study was not stratified.

The South Carolina Southern Baptist Association provided a list of 2,008 Southern Baptist Churches in South Carolina, where only 415 churches met the study qualifications. Of those 415 churches, there was a random selection of 65 churches as candidates for participation. This researcher contacted 65 churches, and 12 agreed to participate in the study. Though this researcher found the lack of Christian leaders willing to participate in this study disconcerting,



the Research Subjects were open, honest, and willing to participate with zeal. Geographical distance from potential participants was another limitation where technology helped, but the one-on-one personal connection to the candidates was also missing. Therefore, this researcher had to rely on email and phone calls, which could have been screened by the administrative staff, where the information may have been prevented from reaching the church leader. Relying on emails and calls as the initial contact method prevented this researcher from contacting the possible participants in person and providing them with a better understanding of the study and its importance without explaining it to administrative personnel.

### **Further Research**

While this study yielded valuable data to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship, future research could provide additional insights related to the limit of the sample area, expansion of the sample base, expansion of the sample size. Further research in the area of preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter in the church throughout the world could be considered to prevent and minimize the threats that may come against houses of worship.

### **Limit the Sample Area**

Future research could include each researcher's local area, where he or she could physically visit the church leadership to invite them to participate in such a study. Limiting the sample area to the local area of each researcher would produce valuable data about what local church leaders believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations.

**Expand Sample Base**

Future research could include churches not associated with or not members of the Southern Baptist Association of South Carolina. Future research could also be conducted on other denominations within South Carolina or other states.

**Expand Sample Size**

Further research could consider replicating this study but not precisely duplicating the study with the same sample. Perhaps further study could widen the research population to include all the churches the Southern Baptist Churches in South Carolina. This expanded sample size would provide even more diversity or validation of this study.

**Divinity Education Institutional Emphasis**

Further research could include the study about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter in the church while emphasizing the application as a study for theological seminaries as part of completing a Divinity program. Divinity programs could institute this as a form of safety preparedness and part of the curriculum. Further studies about the institutions that provide safety preparedness could assist state and local associations to provide the model for plans, procedures, and processes to prepare, train, and equip congregations for emergencies. Divinity education institutions could develop the appropriate model for church leaders to emulate. Safety preparedness could be a core subject in all seminaries and Biblical educational institutions.

**Training Availability of Congregates Compared to the Availability of Students in Public Schools**

The research revealed that 11 out of 12 Research Subjects believed they had no time to prepare, train, and equip congregations for emergencies. Research subjects compared the time

available to the public schools for training for emergencies such as fire, natural disasters, and manmade disasters such as active shooters. Further research could include comparing the time available to train congregates and the time available to train students in public schools.

### **Church Insurance Emphasis**

Further research could include what church insurance companies believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter in the church. Also, further research could study what church insurance companies are doing to develop resources for church leadership through training materials and incorporating what church insurance companies provide as guidance to policies and procedures for safety/security teams.

### **Time Allotment Studies**

This researcher documented the voices of 11 of 12 Research Subjects who believed they did not have time to prepare, train, or equip the congregations for active shooter situations. Further research could include a time allotment study to delegate training to appropriate church members or use church funds to hire outside training. The study could assist church leaders in managing time and assets to prepare, train, and equip the congregations for active shooter situations.

## **Summary**

Chapter One presented research concerns. This researcher stated that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, schoolhouses and houses of worship should be places of safety and peace; however, they have not been immune to gun violence. In Biblical Scripture, Jesus said the world would change before His return (King James Version, 1798/2017, Luke 21:25). In Chapter One, this researcher explained that gun violence could happen at any time and during any gathering, including houses of worship. Chapter One provided the research assumptions and delimitations of the research

design and the summary of the design. Chapter Two reviewed the literature, and this researcher discussed the literature gap. In Chapter Three, this researcher presented the research methodology and design. Chapter Four presented this researcher's analyzed data findings. Finally, Chapter Five describes the conclusions.

This researcher listened to and documented the voices of 11 of 12 Research Subjects who believed they had no time to prepare, train, or equip the congregations. The Research Subjects believed they only needed a safety/security team in place, and that team should be able to handle any emergency. This researcher and the trained observer (Dr. Spearman) observed many of the Research Subjects, stating that they should start thinking about prioritizing preparing, training, and equipping congregations for possible emergencies such as an active shooter. As the Research Subjects continued in their virtual interviews, this researcher observed how they would begin to discuss the need to focus on the congregation's preparation. The majority of the Research Subjects believed the best preparation would be to help the congregation become more knowledgeable about the plan and procedures the church leaders have in place in case of an emergency.

This researcher concluded that this study fills a gap in the existing literature, adding to the research by Auten (2021), Rainer (2017), and the FBI (2016). Though a gap existed in the literature about preparing, training, and equipping congregations at the time of this study, this study adds to the literature by providing what church leaders believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations.

However, further studies are needed to refine the subject. Jesus stated that His people should "know this, that if a goodman hand is known in what watch, the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not suffer his house to be broken up" (King James Version,

1798/2017, Matthew 24:6-10). Ten years before this study, the data would not seem pertinent. Jerry Sparks of AGFinancial Insurance (2024) argues churches should create policies and procedures and “put them in place, including ongoing training for those involved” because, unfortunately, “there is no way to completely eliminate the risk of a shooting incident in your church, you can put protections in place” (Sparks, 2024). However, houses of worship that do not implement a plan in the event of an active shooter could see devastating circumstances for houses of worship, as can be witnessed from a web search of photos of family members who lost lives to an active shooter in churches in the past five years. Church leaders could design plans to protect congregations, which could save lives in the future.

Further studies could add to state and local associations' hands-on education models and suggestions about how to structure training from within and without regulatory church insurance regulations and monetary confines. Research Subjects discussed how local churches could partner and assist each other in preparing, training, and equipping the safety/security teams. Further research could include comparing methods for the local churches to unify and assist in reviewing plans, processes, and procedures. After combined training, they could conduct an after-action review (AAR) to discuss what went well and what needs improvement.

Biblical Scripture tells church leaders they should protect their congregates as a shepherd protects his sheep. “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” (King James Version, 1798/2017, Acts 20:28). Church leaders do not know how members “will respond to an active shooter situation until” they experience it and live through it, a “live simulation will give” them an opportunity to find out where improvements are needed (HSI, 2024).

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**Appendix A**  
**Recruitment Form**

[Date]

South Carolina Southern Baptist Church Leaders

Dear Church Leader,

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 Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, and a church leader in a formal leadership position at the executive level, including associate pastors and lead pastors of biblically-based Southern Baptist church organizations in South Carolina whose congregations do not primarily consist of combat veterans. Participants will be asked to take an online survey and take part in a one-on-one, audio- and video-recorded, in-person interview. It should take approximately 1.5 hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please complete the attached survey and return it by email to [REDACTED]. Please contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED] to schedule an interview. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you to schedule an interview. I will work with you to schedule a time for an interview.

An information sheet is provided as the first page of the survey and will be emailed to you if you meet the study criteria one week before the interview. The information sheet contains additional information about my research.

Sincerely,

Charles (Chuck) D. Watts, Jr.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University

## Appendix B

### Information Form

#### Information Sheet

[Date]

**Title of the Project:** A Qualitative Descriptive Study: What South Carolina Church Leaders Believe About Congregational Active Shooter Preparation

**Principal Investigator:** Charles (Chuck) D. Watts, Jr., Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and a church leader in a formal leadership position at the executive level, including associate pastors and lead pastors of biblically-based Southern Baptist church organizations in South Carolina, whose congregations do not primarily consist of combat veterans.

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.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a questionnaire about safety preparedness (30 minutes).
2. Participate in an audio- and video-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour to complete.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include information about safety preparedness and protocol to plan, train, equip, prepare, and react to a gunman's threat against the church. This research will assist in filling the gap in the literature covering security procedures for South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders to prepare, train, and equip congregations to ensure that all of their community is safe from harm due to violence.

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The risks involved in this study include the possibility of psychological stress from being asked to recall and discuss prior trauma related

to active shooter events. To reduce risk, I will mitigate the risks by monitoring participants during the interviews and discontinue the interview if requested.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

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 this researcher will have access to the records.

Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

Interviews will be conducted in a location determined by the participant, where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

Data collected from you may be shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.

Data will be stored on a password-locked computer external hard drive and in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

Recordings will be stored on a password-protected external hard drive stored in a locked file cabinet for three years and then deleted. This researcher and his doctoral committee members will have access to these recordings.

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision 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.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact this researcher at the email address/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.

The researcher conducting this study is Charles (Chuck) D. Watts Jr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED] or email him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact this researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Arlyne Perley-Huebscher, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than this 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](mailto: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.*

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Follow-Up Letter

[Date]

Dear Church Leader,

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 Doctor of Philosophy degree. Last [week/two weeks ago/etc.] an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to [complete the survey/contact me/sign and return the attached consent document] if you [would like to participate] and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [You are welcome to leave the date blank and update it once your study has been approved.] [Date].

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, and a church leader in a formal leadership position at the executive level, including associate pastors and lead pastors of biblically-based Southern Baptist church organizations in South Carolina, whose congregations are not primarily combat veterans. Participants will be asked to take an online survey and take part in a one-on-one, audio- and video-recorded, in-person interview. It should take approximately 1.5 hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please complete the attached survey and return it by email to [REDACTED]. Don't hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED] to schedule an interview. If you meet my participant criteria, I will contact you to schedule an interview. I will work with you to schedule a time for an interview.

An information sheet is provided as the first page of the survey and will be emailed to you if you meet the study criteria one week before the interview. The information sheet contains additional information about my research.

Sincerely,

Charles (Chuck) D. Watts, Jr.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University

**Appendix D**  
**Permission Request**

[Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

South Carolina Baptist Association

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

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 Doctor of Philosophy degree. The title of my research project is “A Qualitative Descriptive Study: What South Carolina Church Leaders Believe About Congregational Active Shooter Preparation.” The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. I am writing to request your permission to utilize your membership list to recruit participants for my research.

Participants will be asked to online survey/take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, and virtual interview. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval.

A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Charles (Chuck) D. Watts, Jr.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University



## Appendix E

### Permission Response

Please provide this document on official letterhead or copy and paste it into an email. Permission response letters/emails should be returned to Chuck Watts at [REDACTED].

[Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

Dear [Researcher's Name]:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled A Qualitative Descriptive Study: What South Carolina Church Leaders Believe About Congregational Active Shooter Preparation, [I/we] have decided to grant you permission to [Select the appropriate phrase:] [access our membership list/contact our faculty/staff/other and invite them to participate in your study]—OR—[conduct your study at [name of district/school/church/etc.]]—OR—[receive and utilize [name/description of archival data] for your research study]—OR—[other].

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

[I/We] will provide our membership list to Chuck Watts, and Chuck Watts may use the list to contact our members to invite them to participate in his research study.

[I/We] grant permission for Chuck Watts to contact [description of potential participants] to invite them to participate in his research study.]

[I/We] will not provide potential participant information to Chuck Watts, but we agree to [send/provide] his study information to [description of potential participants] on his behalf.

The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

[I/We] [am/are] requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[Official's Name]

[Official's Title]

[Official's Company/Organization]

## Appendix F

### Survey: Safety Preparedness

1. What do you believe the overall rating of your church's knowledge of safety preparedness is?

Likert Scale: 0-5 (Circle response)

1 2 3 4 5

2. How familiar are you with the evacuation protocol in your church?

Likert scale: 0-5 (Circle response)

1 2 3 4 5

3. Are you a church leader serving in a South Carolina Southern Baptist Church?

a. Yes

b. No

4. Do you have an emergency contact at your church? “Emergency Contact means the resident director or any other staff member responsible for the well-being of program participants” (Law Insider, 2020).

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

5. Does your church conduct fire and evacuation drills with your congregation present?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

6. Does your church conduct active shooter drills with your congregation present?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

7. Are illuminated exit lights and emergency lights functional and clean?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

8. Are all emergency exit signs clean and legible?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

9. Are all platforms, steps, stairways, and floor surfaces secure, clean, dry, and debris-free?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

10. Are all handrails and guardrails in safe and working conditions?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

11. Are all doorways clear for safe access and egress?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

12. Are all sirens, horns, and alarm systems operational?

a. Yes

- b. No
- c. Unsure

13. Does your church have an Emergency Preparation Plan established? “An ongoing plan for responding to various potential hazards. An EOP describes how people and property will be protected; details who is responsible for carrying out specific actions; identify the personnel, equipment, supplies, and other resources available” (FEMA, 2023, p. 4). Emergency Operation Plan (EOP), Emergency Action Plan (EAP), and Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP) are interchangeable terms.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

14. Does your church have a Safety/Security Team?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

15. Does your church Safety/Security Team conceal carry?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

16. Have you ever participated in an Active Shooter training course?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure

17. Does your church have a designated seating area for visitors in the sanctuary?

- a. Yes
- b. No

c. Unsure

18. Does your church have an established plan for an armed attacker in the sanctuary?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

19. Does your church have First Aid kits available throughout the facility?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

20. Does your church have first aid responders?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

21. Does your church adequately have surveillance cameras in heavily populated areas?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

22. Indicate which of the following tactics of Active Shooter training you have participated in.

a. Run, Hide, Fight.

b. Avoid, Deny, and Defend.

c. Lockdown.

d. See Something, Say Something.

e. Move, Escape, or Attack

f. None of the above

23. What is the population size of your church?

Congregation Size:

a. 1-49

b. 50-99

c. 99-199

d. 200-299

e. 300 and above

24. What are the demographics of your church?

a. Rural Area

b. Suburban Area

c. Inner City

25. What is the majority ethnicity of your church?

a. African American

b. Hispanic

c. Latino

d. Caucasian

e. Asian

f. Diverse

26. What is the age of the majority of your church population?

a. Below 20

b. 21-29

c. 30-39

- d. 40-49
- e. 50-59
- f. Above 60

27. What is the area code of your church?

- a. 803 / 839, which serves central South Carolina, including Columbia
- b. 843 / 854, which serves eastern and coastal South Carolina
- c. 864, which serves northwest South Carolina

28. What is the military veteran population of your church?

- a. 0-24 percent
- b. 25-49 percent
- c. 50-74 percent
- d. 75-100 percent
- e. Unsure

29. What is the combat veteran population of your church?

- a. 0-24 percent
- b. 25-49 percent
- c. 50-74 percent
- d. 75-100 percent
- e. Unsure

30. What is the law enforcement veteran population of your church?

- a. 0-24 percent
- b. 25-49 percent
- c. 50-74 percent



d. 75-100 percent

e. Unsure

31. What is the population of the law enforcement veteran of your church that has been involved in an officer shooting incident?

a. 0-24 percent

b. 25-49 percent

c. 50-74 percent

d. 75-100 percent

e. Unsure

## Appendix G

### Interview Questions

#### OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS INSTRUMENT

1. How long have you been a church leader at \_\_\_\_\_?
2. What prior experience, if any, do you have as a church leader in previous churches?
3. What is your current faculty/staff/administration count?
4. What is your annual budget?
5. Does your church have a safety team? Does your safety/security team carry concealed?
6. Do you carry concealed while on church property and during services?
7. What percentage of your annual budget is assigned to the safety team?
8. What role did you have, if any, in the decision-making process of establishing the safety team?
9. What role do you have in staffing the safety/security?
10. What role do you have in training the safety/security?
11. What role do you have in equipping the safety/security?
12. What type of security systems does your church have in place? (i.e., cameras, radio communications assets, alarms systems, alert systems, locks)

#### Open-Ended Interview Questions

RQ1. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, how essential is it to involve the congregation in training for active shooter incidents?

1-1. Does your church involve the congregation in training for emergencies such as fire, tornado, etc., in your house of worship?

1-2. Based on your personal experience, how essential is it to involve congregations in training for emergencies such as fire, tornado, etc., in your house of worship?

1-3. Does your church involve the congregation in training for active shooter incidents in your house of worship?

1-4. Based on your personal experience how essential is it to involve your congregation in training for active shooter incidents in houses of worship?

RQ2. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to prepare congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

2-1. Based on your experience, what do you personally believe about preparing congregations for emergencies in houses of worship?

2-2. Based on your experience, what do you personally believe is needed to prepare congregations for an active shooter event in your house of worship?

RQ3. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to train congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

3-1. Based on your experience, do you believe your congregation is prepared for an active shooter event in your house of worship?

3-2. Based on your experience, what do you personally believe is needed for YOUR congregation to be prepared for an active shooter event in your house of worship?

RQ4. As perceived by Christian leaders from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, and based on their experience, what is needed to equip congregations for an active shooter event in their house of worship?

4.-1. Based on your experience, what do you believe is needed to equip a congregation for an active shooter event in a house of worship?

4-2. Based on your experience, what do you believe is needed to equip YOUR congregation for an active shooter event in your house of worship?

## Appendix H

### Open-Ended Interview Questions Pilot Test Form

[Date]

#### Feedback Form

1. Which questions, if any, were confusing?

How so?

2. Which questions, if any, appeared to be biased?

How so?

3. What are your suggestions about the wording of the existing questions?

4. Which questions should be added or deleted?

## Appendix I

### Interview Questions Feedback Letter

\_\_/\_\_/2023

[Recipient]  
[Church Name]  
[Church Address]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Christian Leadership in Education Program of the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The proposed title of my research project is “A Qualitative Descriptive Study: What South Carolina Church Leaders Believe about Congregational Active Shooter Preparation.” The purpose of my research is to establish a baseline of understanding what experiences South Carolina Southern Baptist church leaders have in active shooter training and what they believe about preparing, training, and equipping congregations for an active shooter incident in their house of worship. I am writing to invite you to participate in the pilot test of my study.

As a former church leader, please consider participating in this pilot study. If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to review the questions that will guide the interviews and provide feedback regarding the questions. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete the procedure listed above. I will then contact you to discuss your feedback as needed. This conversation will take an additional 20 minutes. Your participation will remain confidential, and no identifying information or personal data will be used in the dissertation.




To participate, please respond to this request via [REDACTED]. I will then provide a document containing the proposed questions and a feedback form. I will also arrange a 20-minute virtual interview to review your feedback.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely in Christ,

Charles (Chuck) D. Watts, Jr.  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University

**Appendix J**  
**CITI Certificate**

		Completion Date 15-Aug-2022 Expiration Date 14-Aug-2025 Record ID 50529425
This is to certify that:		
<b>Chuck Watts</b>		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
<b>Social &amp; Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher</b> (Curriculum Group)		
<b>Social &amp; Behavioral Researchers</b> (Course Learner Group)		
<b>1 - Basic Course</b> (Stage)		
Under requirements set by:		
<b>Liberty University</b>		Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
Verify at <a href="http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w399214bf-a02a-4dbf-85e7-17d86c68276e-50529425">www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w399214bf-a02a-4dbf-85e7-17d86c68276e-50529425</a>		