

Slain Pastor's Church Says 'God Is Not Surprised'

✖ **March 9, 2009** – An Illinois pastor was killed Sunday when a gunman entered the church and opened fire during the first of three morning worship services.

The Rev. Fred Winters, pastor of First Baptist Church of Maryville, deflected the first of four bullets with his Bible, causing pages to fly “like confetti,” witnesses told the Associated Press. After four shots, the man’s .45-caliber handgun jammed, and he stabbed himself with a knife and injured two other church members when they tackled the man. One remains hospitalized, while the other has been treated and released.

The gunman, identified by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* as 27-year-old Terry Joe Sedlacek from Troy, Ill., is hospitalized and in police custody. In a previous *Post-Dispatch* report, Sedlacek claimed to have lyme disease, which he said was a cause of his mental illness.

Church members said they did not recognize the gunman.

Winters, 45, became senior pastor of First Baptist Church in 1987. Since then the church has grown from 32 members to more than 1,200. Winters was also an adjunct professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a past president of the Illinois Baptist State Association. Winters is survived by his wife, Cindy, and their two daughters.

The Baptist association’s current executive director, Nate Adams, said Winters was “a wonderful, gifted, leading pastor in Illinois, and a dear friend.

“Our great God is not surprised by this, or anything. That He

allows evil and free will to have their way in tragedies like this is a mystery in many ways,” Adams said in a statement Sunday. “But we know we can trust Him no matter what, and draw close to Him in any circumstances. Let’s draw closer to Him and to one another during this terrible tragedy, and renew our faith and obedience to His purposes for however many days we have remaining to serve Him.”

Leaders at First Baptist asked those “who believe in the power of prayer” to intercede for the congregation as they cope with the loss of their pastor.

“In this day, where uncertainty seems to abound creating an environment in which people are vulnerable in doing things they might not do otherwise, one thing is certain, we, as human beings need a foundation upon which we can live our lives,” worship pastor Mark Jones said. “We at First Baptist Maryville, along with other Christian believers, share this conviction: that foundation is God’s Word. In the pages of the Book we call the Bible, we find the pathway for peace, hope, and a quality of living life despite what circumstances we find ourselves in.

“To those who believe in the power of prayer, we covet your prayers right now.”