

After Charleston Massacre, Should Pastors Start Packing Heat?

For seven years, Geof Peabody – owner and instructor at Peabody's Shooting Range – has been teaching his fellow church members how to use guns.

Peabody said interest in his class has been growing among the faithful, as they feel a need to be prepared in case of an attack.

The shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina Wednesday that left nine black parishioners dead is reinforcing that feeling, and some church members' belief that they may need to pack a gun when they go to worship.

Dylann Roof, the white 21-year-old suspect of the Emanuel killings, sat with the church prayer group for about an hour before he allegedly yelled racial epithets and then opened fire at the group.

"We need protection," Debbie Caudle, member of Green Valley Community Church in Placerville, Calif., said. "People that go through classes and get licenses and stuff to carry a gun. I fell like we need this in our lives. We need it in church and in our businesses."

Caudle has taken the introductory handgun class for ministers.

"I never had held a handgun before in my life and I wanted to be comfortable with it," said Caudle, who is white.

Peabody starts training in a classroom where ministers learn about safety. Then, they move over to the shooting range to get hands on practice.

He said the purpose of the class is not only to learn how to shoot, but also to know how to stop someone else from shooting.

“One person that takes the training in this class, if they never touch another gun in their life, they can still interfere with a revolver or a semi-automatic and make it stop operating,” Peabody said.

Peabody said he has trained over 400 ministers, but even within their churches not everyone is supportive of the idea of people carrying weapons at church.

“Many people have a problem with somebody in ministry – or even a Christian in general – having anything to do with fire arms,” Cavalry Chapel Senior Pastor Dominic Triveri said. “But firearms are just firearms and what is done with them is up to the individuals who use them.”

The ministers said the idea is not for everyone to have a gun at church, but they believe the more they know about weapons, the better equipped they will be to respond to gun violence.