

Church Massacre Survivor: Dylann Roof Is 'Evil'

The black South Carolina churchgoers who welcomed Dylann Roof to their Bible study last year thought he was a harmless young man looking for a place to pray, but a survivor of the shooting he is accused of carrying out there called him "evil" on Wednesday.

Nine people died in the massacre at Charleston's historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on June 17, 2015. Three others at the Biblestudy, including Felicia Sanders, 59, and her 11-year-old granddaughter, survived.

"There were so many shots," said Sanders, the first witness to testify at Roof's federal death penalty trial. "Seventy-seven shots in that room from someone we thought was looking for the Lord."

Sanders said she played dead as the blood of her dying son, Tywanza Sanders, 26, and aunt, Susie Jackson, 87, pooled around her.

Roof, an avowed white supremacist, faces 33 federal counts of hate crimes resulting in death, obstruction of religion and firearms violations stemming from the attack. The 22-year-old also will face the death penalty in a state murder case.

"He is evil," Sanders said. "There is no place left on Earth for him except the pit of hell."

Roof planned the attack in retaliation for perceived offenses against his race, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Richardson said in his opening statement after a jury was seated earlier in the day.

Roof scouted the church for months, stockpiled ammunition and

practiced firing the gun he bought in 2015, the prosecutor said.

On the muggy night Roof carried out his plan, he waited until parishioners stood to pray a half-hour into their meeting before firing his .45-caliber pistol, Richardson said.

His first target was the Reverend Clementa Pinckney, the church's pastor and a state senator, who had offered Roof the seat beside him at the Bible study.

"You don't have to do this. We mean you no harm," Tywanza Sanders told Roof, Richardson said.

Spouting white supremacist views, Roof then shot and killed the man, the prosecutor said.

Roof told Polly Sheppard, who was praying out loud, that he would let her live to tell the story of what he had done.

He confessed to the killings to federal agents when he was apprehended in North Carolina after an overnight manhunt.

Richardson said Roof had been spreading his message before the shootings by publishing an online racist manifesto and writing in his journal about his hopes for a race war.

Defense attorney David Bruck told jurors the facts of the crime were not in dispute and began laying the groundwork to argue for a life sentence rather than execution, asking jurors to focus on what factors drove Roof to commit an act that made no sense.

"By my count, (Roof) said, 'I had to do it' about 10 times. What does that suggest to you?" Bruck asked. "Watch carefully his dispassionate affect and ask yourself what that means."
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