

Elderly Man Accidentally Shoots Himself, Wife in Church During Conversation About Gun Violence

An 81-year-old Tennessee man, who said he carried a gun everywhere, accidentally shot himself and his wife during a conversation in church about gun violence at houses of worship, a police chief said on Friday.

The shooting on Thursday at the First United Methodist Church in Tellico Plains, about 45 miles (70 km) southwest of Knoxville, took place as church elders discussed a local sheriff's "weapons and worship" seminar, following the massacre of 26 people at a rural Texas church earlier this month.

"During their discussion of this, one of the gentlemen said, 'I carry a weapon with me everywhere'" and pulled a loaded Ruger .380-caliber pistol from his back pocket, Tellico Plains Police Chief Ross Parks said by telephone.

The man removed the magazine and cleared the chamber to show the pistol to the others. He then reloaded it, put a round in the chamber and put it back in his pocket, Parks said.

When another person asked to see the pistol, the man took it out of his pocket, and his finger accidentally hit the trigger. The bullet struck his right hand and then went through his 80-year-old wife's abdomen and right forearm, according to the police chief.

The bullet missed the woman's vital organs, and the couple was listed in stable condition at a hospital, he said.

Schools within 15 miles (24 km) of the church were locked down after a woman in the church's kitchen called police thinking the shot was an attack.

Parks declined to name the couple, citing a request from their son while relatives were notified. He said no charges were pending. {eoa}

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