

# RECENT TRAGEDIES IN US

On November 5, 2017, a gunman entered the First Baptist Church in the small Texas town of Sutherland Springs and proceeded to fire upon a Sunday morning church service that was in session. This attack left at least 26 people dead and 20 others wounded.

Even with attacks becoming more and more frequent, some people are still not used to these sudden acts of violence and have a myriad of reactions.

"I was like 'Wow, someone would actually go to a place of worship, a place of God, to do this,'" Ronitra Wilson, senior at Richland Northeast whose father is a pastor at an Orangeburg AME church, said. "It should be a safe haven."

In addition to Wilson's surprise and shock, Ellen Fowler Skidmore, the senior pastor at Forest Lake Presbyterian Church, voiced her thoughts on the event.

"Truthfully, not again... How much more can we take? How many of these do we have

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RONITRA WILSON  
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to sustain before something changes?" Skidmore said.

Lindsey Lyerly, North Columbia Baptist Church pastor and physical education teacher concurs.

"I heard and read pieces about it and it really hurt," Lyerly said. "It really broke my heart."

With many people taken aback by the violence during a Sunday morning church service, the question of if it could have been prevented has been raised.

"It could have been prevented if the military had reported the domestic violence charges, checked his place of work,

and having more reasonable gun control laws," Skidmore said.

Wilson's opinion on if the Sutherlands Springs shooting could have been prevented is one similar to Skidmore's.

"From a political standpoint, the way you can access weapons and guns so easily, that could have been one of the ways it could have been prevented," Wilson said. "It's way too easy to get your hands on guns."

However, in contrast to the views of these two, Jasmine Bess, senior at Richland Northeast, believes otherwise.

"I don't think he would have been stopped because he was going to do what he was wanting to do," Bess said.

With attacks happening in places normally seen as holy or "safe havens", Wilson and Bess feel that the general sense of safety appears to be diminishing.

"For someone to go there [the church] to kill someone, it took my sense of safety away," Wilson said.

Bess also said that she "absolutely" feels more concerned in normally safe places and is looking towards the future.

"I'm a senior and I'll be going off to college, I am going to have to be more aware of my surroundings than I have been and observe others," Bess said.

Lyerly agrees with the prospect of being prepared.

"You always think it'll never happen to you and that it happens to everyone else," Lyerly said. "However, you always want to have a plan in place."

Bess seems to feel similarly, being that she also has taken steps to prepare in case of an emergency.

"I've had several talks about anything that would happen like this. My parents tell me to stay low and always keep my cell-phone on me," Bess said. "A big thing they've said was keep gas in my car and don't let it get too low so I could flee to

safety."

Both individuals and churches have taken preventative measures in the event that something like Sutherland Springs happens again.

"After the Emmanuel Nine shooting, my denomination, the AME church, started having security inside the sanctuaries," Wilson said. "Now the pastors and the laity go through certain trainings in case something like this would happen again."

Lyerly newly became the pastor of his church this summer and soon got to work in discussing preparation.

"We've talked about about putting

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by Max Petersen

implements in case something like this were to happen," Lyerly said. "Right now we do; when I came in, we did not."

Some believe that despite having an idea of what to do, they would not follow through if the occasion arose.

"If this were to happen [to me] I think I would be hopeless and scared," Wilson said. "It could happen to anyone and it gets scary everytime a shooting comes up because what if your church is next?"

Bess has a similar train of thought.

"I just think about what would I really do in that situation. In that moment, would I actually think before I do something or would I be scared and not do anything?" Bess said.

Nonetheless, despite the church shootings and other recent attacks on the public, Lyerly has a different mindset.

"I'm not going to stop what I do," Lyerly said. ✕

Art by Omina Tukhtasunova