

Standard online reader survey



Q: Do you like the idea of arming teachers with guns?

YES or NO

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Churches must work to protect their flock

It is sad that church security and parishioner safety have come to this, but a keynote speaker at the recent training forum at Waterville Baptist Church spoke of the need by quoting the Scriptures.

Dewey Woody, a special agent with the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security, chose two passages from the Bible to defend the cause of protecting houses of worship. They include:

- Ezekiel 44:14: "And I will appoint them to guard the temple for all the work that is to be done in it."
- Ezekiel 44:15: "The Lord said to me, 'Son of man, look carefully, listen closely and give attention to everything. I tell you concerning all the regulations and instructions regarding the temple of the Lord. Give attention to the entrance to the temple and all the exits of the sanctuary.'"

In today's words, it means protecting our houses of prayer — and all within — is as important as the very concept of freedom of religion. Such safeguards have been in place for centuries, and not just during these recent days of tragedy.

From Woody's perspective, "Guards have been appointed to guard the temple since man has been in existence." That which has changed has been the type of weaponry used, and the brand of violence.

Regardless of the size of congregation — from a tiny neighborhood assembly to

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one of our community's largest like First Baptist or North Cleveland Church of God — members and visitors must feel secure.

Such security, Woody explains, is provided best by a multi-layered safety system.

For instance — and yes, it sounds extreme but remember those Ezekiel passages — some members can be armed for Sunday services. Likewise, pastors, deacons, door greeters and ushers, among others, can be trained to keep a watchful eye for anything, or anyone, out of the ordinary.

Woody also spoke to the need for safeguarding all facets of operations within a church. It's not just a matter of providing layered security for Sunday services, but all church functions: Wednesday night services, Bible studies, dinners, homecoming services on the ground, concerts, trunk-or-treats, weddings and funerals, as well as others.

Indeed, these are trying days and dangerous nights. Churches must find ways to protect their flocks.

Few could have imagined that society could devolve into this. But it has.

For this reason, our houses of worship must rise in their own defense — with a Bible in one hand, and a willingness to act in the other.



This is no laughing matter

After special counsel Robert Mueller indicted 13 Russians for undermining the integrity of the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump tweeted: "If it was the GOAL of Russia to create discord, disruption and chaos within the U.S. then, with all the Committee Hearings, Investigations and Party hatred, they have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. They are laughing their asses off in Moscow. Get smart America!"

For once, Trump is absolutely correct. They are indeed "laughing their asses off in Moscow." But their hilarity is caused by the president, not congress.

They are guffawing AT Trump, not with him. They are positively giddy with the realization the American president is swallowing Moscow's propaganda line. And instead of "making America great again," he is weakening national security and damaging democracy.

Moscow is laughing because the president denies what his own national security adviser calls "incontrovertible evidence" the Russians tried to manipulate the election in favor of Trump.

Moscow is laughing because the president accepts the word of Vladimir Putin, a ruthless dictator, over his own intelligence and military advisers.

Moscow is laughing because the president refuses to take measures that could protect future American elections from Russian tampering, even though that tampering is certain to happen.

So it's not surprising that when two political scientists asked 170 of their

colleagues to rank the 44 presidents in terms of "greatness," Trump came in dead last, scoring 12 out of a possible 100 points. Lincoln was first, with 95. Sure, many academics are liberals, but even Republican scholars ranked Trump in the bottom five.

No issue is more central to American democracy than the right to vote, but Trump has long stood for eviscerating that right, not protecting it. He insisted fraud cost him the popular vote against Hillary Clinton when no evidence of fraud existed. Then he appointed a committee to investigate

those fallacious misdeeds, which was so ill-conceived that it dissolved in disarray.

The president appointed as attorney general Jeff Sessions of

Alabama, the Senate's prime critic of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that protects black voters throughout the old Confederacy. When a key section was gutted by the Supreme Court, Sessions hailed the ruling as "good news ... for the South."

When special counsel Mueller issued a 37-page indictment that detailed numerous examples of Russian electoral mischief, Trump said not a single word — not one — criticizing the Russian campaign or vowing to protect the American system against future incursions, which are certain to occur.

There's only one word to describe Trump's attitude toward Putin and Russia: crazy. And that's no laughing matter.

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Should we arm our teachers?

President Donald Trump says our school teachers need to pack heat.

In response to our latest school shooting, and perhaps the loudest call for gun control in our nation's history, President Trump has proposed arming our teachers with guns and giving them bonuses for undergoing gun training.

Said the president referring to school shooters, "These people are cowards. They're not going to walk into a school if 20 percent of the teachers have guns. It may be 10 percent or it may be 40 percent. And what I'd recommend doing is the people that do carry, we give them a bonus."

It's easy to see how such a proposal could be effective. A shooter bursts into a school and begins taking aim. Instead of running away or hiding in locked classrooms, teachers emerge with loaded guns and return fire.

Thanks to these teachers, the shooter is killed or incapacitated before the death toll climbs. Instead of 17 deaths, there may only be three.

The plan certainly has potential to work. And I'm sure if this is the plan America adopts moving forward, there will be a scenario where gun-toting teachers kill the school shooter and save lives.

But I have to question the wisdom of voluntarily bringing more guns onto school property. For every mass shooting that might be minimized, there would be a daily threat posed by guns in the classroom. And there would certainly be a death toll from that.

Think of a teacher walking down the hall to use the bathroom only to return to class to find a student has gained access to the gun and shot two classmates. Guns can be locked away securely in a safe, but there's always a key or a combination somewhere that can be found.

Instead of having to obtain a gun and bring it to school, this proposal removes those two steps for a school shooter. There would be guns in classrooms everywhere.

The most simple logic to always remember with guns is this: More guns mean more gun violence. It's so simple, yet so true.

Right here in America, the states with some of the highest percentages of gun ownership — Alaska, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama — have the highest gun deaths, according to the CDC and Injury Prevention.

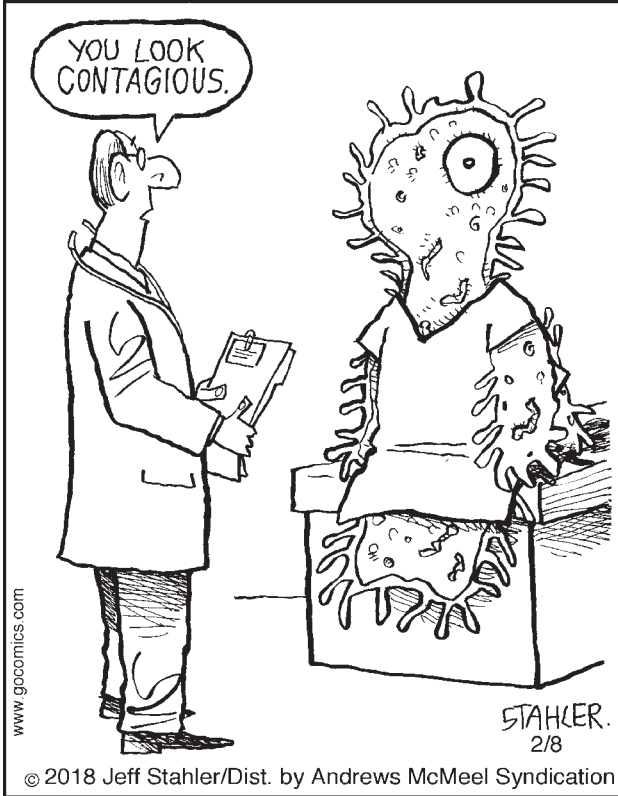
The states with some of the lowest percentages of gun ownership — New York, Rhode Island, New Jersey and Connecticut — have the lowest gun deaths.

When considering industrialized countries around the world, America has by far the highest percentage of gun ownership and the most gun deaths.

Japan, Poland and Singapore have the lowest percentage of gun ownership and the fewest gun deaths.

Using this simple equation as a guide, adding more guns to school campuses will only increase the amount of gun violence. It might one day minimize a school shooting, but statistics show it would create more problems than it would solve.

Standard editor James Clark can be reached at 473-2191.



Oklahoma was shrouded in grief after the deaths of 168 people — including 19 children — in a home-grown terrorism attack at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City in 1995.

President Bill Clinton spoke at the memorial service. So did Gov. Frank Keating. But everyone knew who would deliver the sermon and face the hard questions. That was a job for the Rev. Billy Graham.

"The Bible says ... there is a devil, that Satan is very real and he has great power," said Graham, focusing on the 9,000 mourners in the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds Arena. "It also tells us that evil is real and that the human heart is capable of almost limitless evil when it is cut off from God and from the moral law."

"I pray that you will not let bitterness and poison creep into your soul, but that you will turn in faith and trust in God even if we cannot understand. It is better to face something like this with God than without Him."

In the wake of his death this week, at age 99, diplomats, scholars and journalists will struggle to describe Graham's impact via preaching, TV, radio, books and other writings. It's hard enough to do the math when discussing his 417 crusades in 185 countries, along with countless other gatherings ranging from presidential inaugurations to tiny youth rallies after his 1938 ordination as a Southern Baptist preacher.

To be blunt, it can be argued that Graham spoke — in person — to more people than any other leader in world history. Rice University sociologist William Martin put it this way:

Graham was the "most powerful evangelist since Jesus." In his final decades, Graham focused on supporting new evangelists around the world, while others obsessed over the question, "Who will be the next Billy Graham?"

Part of Graham's legacy was the ability to preach "with a sense of appropriateness," even when facing the queen of England, he said. Graham didn't think it took courage to do his work — anywhere.

"Billy didn't leave people with doubts about what he believed as a Christian evangelist. ... But he also knew how to be a healing figure," said Martin. That's exactly what Graham was trying to do in Oklahoma City.

"Today it's my prayer that all Americans will rededicate ourselves to ... working together to solve the problems and barriers that would tear us apart," he said. "But there is also hope for the future because of God's promises. As a Christian, I have hope not just for this life, but for the life to come."

Late in life, Graham said that he was ready to leave the public spotlight and that he didn't plan "to die in a pulpit someday," refusing to pass the torch to others. But it's impossible, he told me in 1987, for a minister to fully retire.

"When you are called to proclaim the Gospel, you're doing that until the day you die," he said, at his old log home high in the North Carolina mountains. "I'll be proclaiming the Gospel — on my death bed."

Terry Mattingly is the editor of GetReligion.org. He lives in Oak Ridge.

ON RELIGION

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