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First responders block the crime scene following a shooting at Annunciation Catholic School in Minneapolis Aug. 27. Officials say three people are dead, including the suspected shooter, and 17 are injured, 14 of them children. (OSV News/Reuters/Tim Evans)



by Camillo Barone

NCR staff reporter

View Author Profile
cbarone@ncronline.org

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Two children, ages 8 and 10, were gunned down as they prayed during the opening Mass at a Catholic school in Minneapolis on Wednesday morning, killed by an assailant who sprayed bullets through church windows. Seventeen others were wounded, and all but three were children, the police chief said.

The assailant, dressed in black and armed with a rifle, shotgun and a pistol, died by suicide in the parking lot behind Annunciation Catholic Church, said Police Chief Brian O'Hara during a news conference mid-morning in Minneapolis.

"These kids were literally praying," Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said. "It was the first week of school. They were in a church. They should be able to go to school or church without the risk of fear or violence."

The suspected murderer was identified as Robin Westman, 23, of a nearby Minneapolis suburb, and authorities are still investigating possible motives. Westman left behind a video with a manifesto, timed to post on YouTube after the shooting, that was a melange of rambling statements and references to his depression and thoughts of suicide.

The material seemed to show the shooter "at the scene and included some disturbing writings (and) that content has since been taken down with the assistance of the FBI," O'Hara said. The videos were removed at the request of law enforcement.

FBI Director Kash Patel said on X social media that the shooting was being investigated as a hate crime against Catholics.

O'Hara described the grim tableau at the school.

Two more children remain in critical condition, and 14 of the injured are children, according to O'Hara. He described the attack as an “incomprehensible” act of cowardice.

"During the Mass, a gunman approached on the outside, on the side of the building and began firing a rifle through the church windows towards the children sitting in

the pews at the Mass," O'Hara said.

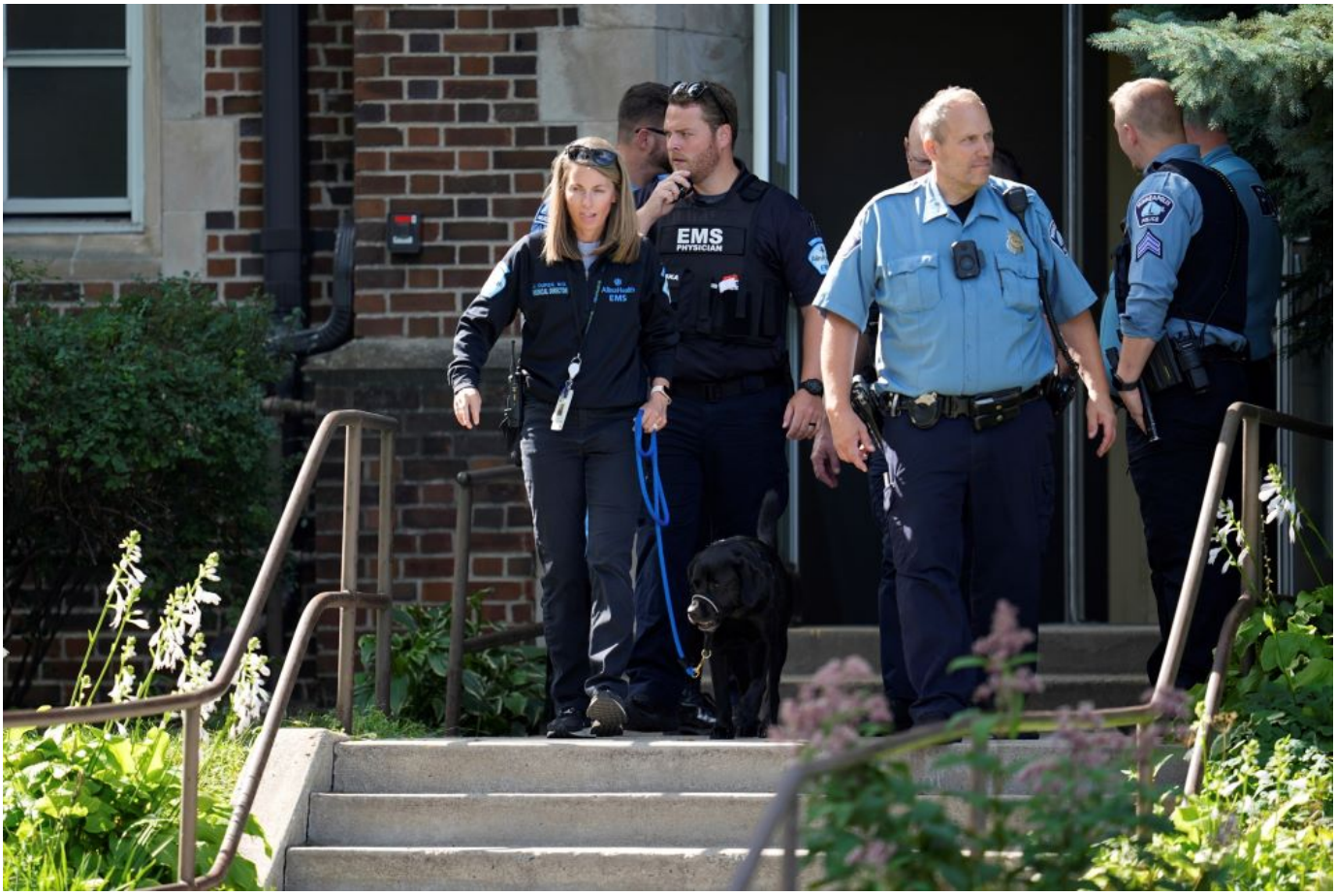
> 'These kids were literally praying. It was the first week of school. They were in a church. They should be able to go to school or church without the risk of fear or violence.'
> —Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey
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Frey added: "Children are dead, there are families that have a deceased child. You cannot put into words the gravity, tragedy or absolute pain of the situation.

Minneapolis Auxiliary Bishop Kevin Kenney of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, told KSTP-TV that the shooting occurred during "the opening school Mass." Speaking with a reporter outside Hennepin County Medical Center, Kenney said families were "of course in shock, asking 'Why? Why?' "

"It’s horrific to think that a guy is shooting school children in a Mass," he said. Many of the families are "in shock, disbelief," Kenney told the Star Tribune in a separate interview.

At the news conference, Frey said, "There are no words that can capture the horror and the evil of this unspeakable act. Children are dead. There are families that have a deceased child. You cannot put into words the gravity, the tragedy or the absolute pain of this situation."



Law enforcement officers gather outside the Annunciation Catholic School as they respond to a mass shooting Aug. 27 in Minneapolis. Officials say there are up to 20 victims and two people are dead, including the shooter. (AP/Abbie Parr)

A person answering the phone at Annunciation School confirmed that students were being evacuated, as reported by NBC News. Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents, local and state police, and other authorities converged on the school grounds.

No one at the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis returned calls or emails from the National Catholic reporter seeking comment.

Jeff Day, a reporter for The Minnesota Star Tribune said he was in his south Minneapolis yard with members of his family when he heard a sustained rhythm of gunfire reverberating through the neighborhood lasting at least 45 seconds. He called 911 at 8:27 a.m., the Star Tribune reported.

Medics reported transporting a 10-year-old boy with a gunshot wound to the head, the Star Tribune said, attributing it to emergency dispatch audio. "We have two patients with gunshot wounds to their head," according to dispatch audio. "We have a critical [victim] in the rear of the church."

Democrat Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota said on MSNBC that she spoke with a longtime aide whose three children were inside Annunciation Catholic School during the shooting.

The senator called the exchange with the mother "one of the most upsetting things I've ever heard." She said the woman's seventh-grade daughter witnessed friends being struck by gunfire.

According to Klobuchar, the students had gathered for an all-school Mass when shots rang out. "Several of her friends [were] shot — one in the back, one in the neck," she said. The children then took cover under the pews. The daughter was not wounded, but Klobuchar said she was the one who told a father at the church that his own child had been shot.

Klobuchar also said injured children had been taken to a nearby children's hospital as well as other hospitals in the area. She said that she did not yet have precise figures on the number of victims.

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Dating to 1923, the school serves pre-kindergarten through eighth grade students. Its website listed an all-school Mass for 8:15 a.m. Wednesday. The first day of school was Monday (Aug. 25), and social media photographs from that day showed children in green uniforms at bicycle racks, greeting classmates and smiling for cameras.

President Donald Trump said he has been "fully briefed on the tragic shooting" in Minneapolis.

"The FBI quickly responded and they are on the scene," Trump said in a post on Truth Social. "The White House will continue to monitor this terrible situation. Please join me in praying for everyone involved!"

The Department of Homeland Security said it was also monitoring the situation. Secretary Kristi Noem posted: “We are in communication with our interagency partners, and will share more information as soon as it becomes available. I am praying for the victims of this heinous attack and their families.”

Minneapolis police were already investigating three deadly shootings in the city within the previous 12 hours. According to the department, one person was killed and six wounded Tuesday afternoon outside a high school. Two more people died in separate shootings hours later. "The level of gun violence across the city within the last day is deeply unsettling," the department said in a release. The attack at Annunciation was the city's fourth deadly shooting in less than 24 hours.

Ken Martin, chair of the Democratic National Committee and former head of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, said from Minneapolis: "There is an active shooter here in Minneapolis right now, an unknown amount of victims at a church and school. EMS has requested mass casualty. … If any of you are doctors or otherwise first responders that could help — it seems to be a fairly significant shooting."

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said he was "monitoring reports of horrific violence in South Minneapolis," and noted that the emergency response team had been activated. "We will share more information as soon as we can," he wrote. "Please give our officers the space they need to respond to the situation."

On social media, the city advised residents to stay away from the area "to allow emergency personnel to help victims."

The FBI said it was aware of the shooting and that agents were en route. "FBI is aware of the reports coming out of @FBIMinneapolis and our agents are en route to the scene," Deputy Director Dan Bongino wrote. "We will provide more updates as able."

Annunciation Catholic School describes itself as a place for "Christian values and civic-mindedness." Its website says: "You’ll find teachers, parents, staff and students who truly value education and faith-based learning, and you'll see those values in action in each of our classrooms."

St. Thomas More Catholic School in Minneapolis, about 12 miles from Annunciation school, announced that students and staff would remain indoors "pending further

details about this developing situation."

In a statement posted on Facebook, the school said: "Our hearts and prayers are with the students, teachers, and community at Annunciation Catholic School in South Minneapolis."

This story appears in the **Minneapolis church shooting** feature series. View the full series.