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## **What Is Wrong with Guns in Churches?**

**by Scott McPherson**

If you're going to talk nonsense, the best strategy is to talk it loud, often, and to as many people as possible. Thanks to the editorial board at the *Springfield (Missouri) News-Leader*, there was no shortage of nonsense being spread around on February 19. That day, on the paper's website, [a short commentary](#) by Curt Brown added another load to the dung heap of anti-gun hysteria.

The Arkansas state legislature recently passed a law which makes it legal for holders of concealed-carry permits to carry their guns in church, and Brown is upset about that. "I don't know about you," he writes, "but that sounds like something we would expect from Arkansas." I beg to differ. Recall that Arkansas's former governor, and recent presidential candidate, Mike Huckabee, wanted a nationwide ban on smoking. A state whose former chief executive happily promotes such Nanny State ideas seems an unlikely place for libertarian sensibility on firearms policy.

But it is precisely that kind of sensibility that is being attacked by Brown. "I understand that about 20 states already allow people to carry guns to church, which really seems strange to me." Really? A church is a publicly accessible piece of private property, like Wendy's or Wal-Mart. I don't wish to trivialize the experience; ours is a nation of churchgoers, and clearly the event is quite important to each and every one of them, different from grabbing a burger. My point is that, as far as risk assessment goes, there is no reason why a person who carries a gun for self-defense would arbitrarily draw a line at his church's door.

As a matter of fact, the act has some history on this continent. In pre-Revolutionary America, the colonies of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Georgia all had laws requiring the carrying of guns ... to church. Writes historian Clayton E. Cramer, in his essay "Colonial Firearm Regulation" (*Journal on Firearms & Public Policy*, Fall 2004), "The earliest mandatory gun carrying law [in British colonial America] is a 1619 Virginia statute that required everyone to attend church on the Sabbath, 'and all suche as beare armes shall bring their pieces, swords, poulder and shotte.'"

Brown has singled out religious carriers for special criticism, but my suspicion is that what he's really upset about is that anyone would carry a gun — anywhere, anytime. According to the award-winning research of criminologist Gary Kleck, Americans use guns to defend themselves and others about 1.5 million times each year, in all kinds of scenarios and locations. One example of this comes from the state of Colorado, where in 2007 an armed security guard killed a rampaging gunman ... in a church. Those who carry handguns wish to be able to defend themselves, and their family and friends — anywhere, anytime. Given the number of attacks on churches in recent years — a Google search using the words “gunman attack church” returned about 482,000 hits — it is not unreasonable that some gun owners concerned about the safety of themselves and their family would want to slip a pistol behind their waistbands on the way to worship.

We should keep in mind, however, that under principles of private property, the churches themselves are free to establish their own policies on guns in church. If a particular church decides to ban guns, then people who attend services there must either comply with the policy or go elsewhere.

There are literally millions of Americans from about 40 states who have been issued a license to carry a concealed handgun, and they consistently show themselves to be decent, peaceful, law-abiding people. Vermont and Alaska don't even require a license; one need only be a U.S. citizen to carry a gun. These states are typically the least crime-prone in America.

Curt Brown would have us believe that the new Arkansas law will lead to bloodshed. Quite the contrary. People with violent designs will now know that there are people in church fully capable of defending themselves, which operates as a powerful disincentive to their pursuing their murderous plans. It is no slight on the sanctity of a church to be prepared to repel evil there.

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