

Georgia church releases statement after member is suspected in massacre that left eight people dead

MILTON, Ga. (BP and local reports) – The elders of Crabapple First Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Ga., are expressing grief after a church member was arrested and accused of committing a series of Atlanta-area shootings March 16 that left eight people dead.

In a statement released March 17, the elders of the church affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention said they were “heartbroken” and praying for the victims and their families as well as the family of the alleged shooter.

Robert Aaron Long, 21, has been charged with multiple counts of murder for the shootings at a massage parlor in Cherokee County and two more massage parlors in northeast Atlanta.

In a news conference, law enforcement officials said Long has admitted to the killings. Jay Baker, a spokesman for the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office, said Long told them he targeted the massage parlors, which he said he frequented, because he had a sexual addiction. Baker said Long called the massage parlors “a temptation he wanted to eliminate.”

Although six of the victims were Asian women, Cherokee County Sheriff Frank Reynolds said the attacks did not appear to be racially motivated. “We asked him that specifically and the answer is no,” Reynolds said.

Crabapple First Baptist Church converted its website and its other online platforms to private shortly after Long’s name

was revealed, but released the following statement attributed to the church's elders:

"We are grieved to hear the tragic news about the multiple deaths in the Atlanta area. We are heartbroken for all involved. We grieve for the victims and their families, and we continue to pray for them. Moreover, we are distraught for the Long family and continue to pray for them as well."

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Crabapple First Baptist Church statement

Law enforcement officials said Long's parents helped police capture their son, contacting them after security images of the shooting suspect became public, according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. A GPS tracker on the Hyundai Tucson that Long was driving allowed police to capture him without incident the same day of the shootings on Interstate 75 in Crisp County, 150 miles south of Atlanta.

Baker said Long told investigators he was headed to Florida, which Long viewed as a hub for the pornography industry and "an outlet for something he shouldn't be doing." It is unclear where he was going in Florida or what his intentions were.

When captured, Long was in possession of a 9mm firearm, according to police. He had purchased the pistol from a Cherokee County gun store earlier on March 16.