

Texas church, scene of worst mass shooting in Southern Baptist history, to remove building to make way for new memorial on site

SUTHERLAND SPRINGS, Texas (BP and local reports) – Members of First Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, voted 69-35 on Aug. 22 to demolish the 100-year-old building that had been preserved as a memorial to the 2017 massacre that killed 26 worshippers and wounded 25 others.



Pomeroy

“We as a church have voted to remove the old enclosed memorial facility and replace it with an open air facility that will have 24/7 access,” said Pastor Frank Pomeroy, who was not present on the day of the massacre but lost a daughter in the shooting. “Whereas an appointment was needed previously to go in, now it will be fully open.”

In an Aug. 24 interview with Baptist Press, Pomeroy said, “We as a body decided this was the best way to honor the lives that were lost that fateful day and also the survivors that still have to go by the old facility and be reminded of the tragedy.

“This will give opportunities of worship and prayer at all

times to everyone who desires to pay their respects and honor the martyrs of that fateful day.”



WORSHIPPING ANEW – First Church in Sutherland Spring, Texas, dedicated its new facility on May 19, 2019. The new facility replaced the original church building that was the scene of the 2017 shooting spree that killed 26 people and wounded 25 others in attendance. (Photo credit: North American Mission Board)

Moving ahead with the plan is being done with as much sensitivity as possible. “This decision was loaded down with so much emotion on both sides that we agreed that no more conversation would be had until we voted to see what the future held for the memorial corner so as not to ruffle anything that would not have had future bearing anyway, so the next conversation will be about when and how to remove the facility,” the pastor said.

“Most, if not all of those that wanted the enclosed facility to stay, [were] for historical purposes of the 100-year-old building, so I have asked them to try and find someone who would disassemble and reassemble [the building] elsewhere for posterity’s sake,” he said. “At the present time no one has come forward, but that would be the optimum solution in my opinion.”

Since 2019, the congregation has worshipped in a new facility

constructed under the leadership of Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board with gifts made through the Cooperative Program and assistance from many generous benefactors.

The tragedy has led to continuing litigation. Among recent court rulings, a U.S. district judge deemed the federal government 60% responsible for Devin Kelley being able to buy the AR-15 style rifle used in the massacre from an Academy Sports + Outdoors store, because the U.S. Air Force failed to report conduct as required by law that led to his discharge and would have disqualified him from purchasing firearms.

In June, the Texas Supreme Court ruled the store that sold Kelley the rifle he used in the massacre could not be held liable because Kelley's name was not in the proper database.

The Sutherland Springs massacre is the deadliest mass shooting in modern Texas history, the deadliest church shooting in the history of the nation, and the most fatalities ever suffered by a Southern Baptist church in a mass shooting.