

New Arkansas Law Regarding Concealed Handguns on Church Property

All Arkansas United Methodist congregations are encouraged to prohibit the carrying of handguns on church property. This is consistent with 2016 General Conference of the United Methodist Church Resolution 3428 "Our Call to End Gun Violence," which calls for measures to help end gun violence, including displaying signs that prohibit carrying guns onto church property.

Summary of Recent Changes in Arkansas Law

Under previous law, if a congregation did not want to allow handguns on its property, it had to take affirmative steps to specifically allow them. Most Arkansas congregations took no action, thus effectively disallowing guns on church property. Under the new law, however, a church must take affirmative steps to disallow handguns on its property. In other words, even for those congregations who have always disallowed handguns on church property, affirmative steps are now required to keep the status quo.

The new law requires a congregation that chooses to prohibit concealed handguns on its property to do one or both of the following no later than September 1, 2017:

1. Signs

- Place written notice at each entrance of the church
- Each sign must be clearly readable from a distance of at least ten feet
- Each sign must use the words, "carrying a handgun is prohibited."

2. Notice

- Give written or verbal notice to concealed carry licensees that they are prohibited from possessing a concealed handgun at the physical location where a church meets.

Steps a Congregation Should Take to Prevent Handguns on Church Property

1. Establish a local church policy prohibiting the carrying of handguns on church property.
 - The policy might include the language, a) "With the exception of on-duty municipal, county, state or federal law enforcement personnel, carrying a handgun on the property of _____ United Methodist Church is prohibited" and b) "Signs bearing the words 'carrying a handgun is prohibited' that are clearly readable from a distance of at least ten feet shall be posted at each entrance to church property" and c) "The fact that 'carrying a handgun is prohibited' on any church property will be set out on the church's website and weekly in the church bulletin."
 - Other language may be added if deemed necessary.
 - A sample resolution is attached

2. Post a sign at each church building entrance.
 - A simple picture prohibiting guns is not sufficient. The sign must use the words, “carrying a handgun is prohibited” but can include other language if desired. For example, a church might choose to use a sign that says, “Carrying a handgun is prohibited in this place of worship” or “For your safety, carrying a handgun is prohibited” or other similar language.
 - The sign itself may be designed to fit the general character of the building. There is no particular color or font requirement. A church may therefore choose to create signs that match other external church signage. Remember that whatever the design, the sign must be clearly readable from at least ten feet away.
 - For places without roadway entrances (like unoccupied land parcels) the notice may be placed anywhere on the premises, with additional notices posted within every three acres of the property.

3. Give verbal or written notice that handguns on church property are not allowed. For example a church might:
 - Print an ongoing notice in a newsletter, bulletin or website that “carrying a handgun is prohibited” on church property, or
 - Tell or write a letter to an individual known to possess concealed carry permits that “carrying a handgun is prohibited” on church property.
 - While the law allows notice to be accomplished through entrance signs or notice to all concealed carry licensees, since it is practically very difficult for many congregations to ensure that they have provided notice to all licensees who may be present at any church related event at any given time going forward, entrance signs that are expected to be regularly seen by all visitors and newcomers are recommended over providing other types of notice.
 - If signs are placed at each church entrance, additional notice is not required.