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By our reporter

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Killings at Kentucky store were hate crime, police say

Jeffersontown Police Chief Sam Rogers visited the First Baptist Church Sunday to tell the congregation that the gunman who attempted to attack the black church last week and then went on a shooting rampage at a nearby Kroger store was a white racist.

Gregory Alan Bush, 51, was arrested and charged in the shooting deaths of Maurice Stallard, 69, and Vickie Lee Jones, 67, who were both black. During the shooting spree, Bush made statements to the effect that “whites don’t kill whites” and he was targeting only African-Americans.

Bush had approached the church on the morning of October 24, shortly after a church service attended by some 70 people had let out. Less than a dozen people remained, and the doors had been locked. Those inside saw him on the surveillance cameras pounding on the doors and refused to let him in. Eventually he turned away. Chief Rogers told the congregation, “I won’t stand here and pretend that none of us know what could have happened if that evil man had gotten in the doors of this church.”

Ten or fifteen minutes after leaving the church, Bush walked up to Maurice Stallard at a Kroger supermarket and shot him multiple times. He then left the store and shot and killed Vickie Lee Jones in the parking lot. A bystander who was armed fired back at Bush and he fled the store. Police arrested him a few minutes later.

According to press reports, Bush had a history of both mental illness and violence, frequently accompanied by racist outbursts, many directed at his ex-wife, who was African-American. A conviction for domestic violence resulted in a judicial order

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stripping him of the right to possess firearms, but this did not stop him from regularly carrying a gun.

He was hospitalized at least twice for mental health issues, including a suicide attempt in 2000, and he had several encounters with the judicial system over violence or threats of violence: a protective order in 2001 for his ex-wife, a conviction for misdemeanor menacing in 2003, and an assault conviction for domestic violence against both his parents, then in their 70s, in 2009, after which he was sent to Central State Hospital for a psychiatric evaluation.

Bush had worked as a package handler at the huge UPS facility in Louisville until 2000, when he was fired, allegedly for sexual assault against a co-worker. According to a Facebook posting, Bush had paranoid schizophrenia and got into trouble when he did not take his prescribed medications.

US Attorney Russell Coleman said last week that federal investigators were “examining this matter from the perspective of federal criminal law, which includes potential civil rights violations such as hate crimes.” Senator Mitch McConnell chimed in with a call for application of the death penalty if Bush was convicted of the two killings.