

Australian police say Assyrian church stabbing was terrorist attack

[SYDNEY \(Reuters\)](#) -A knife attack during a service at an [Assyrian church in Sydney that injured a bishop](#) was a terrorist act motivated by suspected religious extremism, Australian police said on Tuesday.

At least four people were wounded in the attack, including Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel of the Assyrian Christ The Good Shepherd Church, during a service live streamed at the western Sydney suburb of Wakeley on Monday.

The incident triggered clashes outside the church between police and an angry crowd of the bishop's followers who demanded the attacker be handed over to them.

☐☐Christians in Australia demonstrate the cross, the symbol of faith.

People stand firm for their faith.[#Australia](#) [#Sydney](#) [#AustraliaAttack](#) [#SydneyAttack](#) [#Sydney](#) [#Church](#) [#Islam](#) [#Christianity](#) [#BishopMarMari](#) [#bishopmariammanuel](#) pic.twitter.com/CzdsdRIsGu

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Police arrested a male teenager at the scene on Monday and were forced to hold him at the church for his own safety as the crowd of worshippers gathered outside.

“We believe there are elements that are satisfied in terms of religious motivated extremism,” New South Wales state Police Commissioner Karen Webb said during a press conference. “After

consideration of all the material, I declared that it was a terrorist incident.”

[“Strikeforce Katrina](#) has been established to investigate that side of the events last night and a referral has been made and agreed to by the joint counter-terrorism investigation team,” Ms Webb said.

Noting the teenager had made comments “centred around religion” when he approached the bishop, she said investigators believe the incident could be considered “religious-motivated extremism”.

Police confirmed the boy was known to police, but “not well known”. [He was on a good behaviour bond](#) after facing court for a knife crime three months ago. Police said there was “a degree of premeditation” as the male attacker travelled to the church, far from his home, with a knife. But Webb said police at this early stage of the investigation believe the attacker was acting alone.

[...a relative has revealed](#) the family’s shock over last night’s event, describing the boy as a ‘quiet teenager’ who was ‘not a terrorist or ISIS sympathiser’.

‘He’s really quiet... He’s been looking to leave school and get a job, maybe in construction. . .They are simple people, a good family, but I had to help them get some information from the police about where to go. As far as I knew [the teen] hasn’t been in trouble before, and the idea that he follows ISIS is crazy.’

The relative said the teen’s parents live ‘like ordinary Aussies’, but on Monday had become concerned when their son left home and did not return.

The boy is one of three children. His taxi driver father is a Lebanese immigrant who moved to Australia 25 years ago and the family live in a humble home in south-west Sydney.

New South Wales state Premier Chris Minns urged people to not take the law into their hands. "You will be met by the full force of the law if there's any attempt for tit-for-tat violence in Sydney over the coming days," Minns told reporters.

The teen suspect underwent surgery on Monday night for a hand injury sustained when witnesses held him down on the floor. Rumours swirled amongst the community that the boy's finger had been cut off.

Acting Assistant Commissioner Andrew Holland said: "His injuries are quite severe in his hand, he's fairly upset and fairly distraught."

In a post shared to the church's Instagram page on Monday night, a spokesperson asked the mob of angry protesters to "leave in peace" and pray for both the victims and for the teenage suspect. "We ask for your prayers at this time," a post shared to the Church's instagram just before midnight on Monday. "It is the Bishop and Father's wishes that you also pray for the perpetrator."