

Tiller's murderer faces life in jail: Scott Roeder found guilty

by [John Dart](#) in the [February 23, 2010](#) issue

A man who by his own testimony sought chances to kill Dr. George Tiller, one of the few U.S. physicians who perform late-term abortions, was quickly convicted of murder in a Kansas trial. The outcome was welcomed by pro-choice groups and by most established pro-life groups.

Scott Roeder, 51, an airport shuttle driver from Kansas City, was convicted of first-degree murder January 29 by a Wichita jury after only 37 minutes of deliberation. He faces life in prison. Sentencing is set for March 9.

Members of the Reformation Lutheran Church, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, testified that they had seen Roeder at the large brick church several times prior to May 31 when he shot Tiller point-blank in the head. On that Sunday, Tiller was serving as an usher and standing in the foyer as his wife was preparing to sing with the choir.

In his testimony January 28, Roeder told the jury that his only chance to kill Tiller and to stop what he considered the killing of more babies was at the church. Tiller's clinic was bombed in 1986 and a shooting in 1993 left the doctor wounded in both arms. As a result, Tiller lived behind high walls, wore a bulletproof vest and traveled in a custom armored car, often with a bodyguard.

"It was the only window of opportunity that I saw where he could be stopped," Roeder testified.

After defense lawyers finished their case, Sedgwick County District Judge Warren Wilbert ruled that he would not allow the jury to consider a charge of voluntary manslaughter, which under state law would require that Roeder be judged to have acted in honest though unreasonable belief he was stopping imminent, unlawful harm.

“There’s no imminence of danger on a Sunday morning in the back of a church, let alone unlawful conduct,” Wilbert said. “In the state of Kansas, abortions are legal.”

In a post-verdict statement, the doctor’s widow, Jeanne, and the Tiller family expressed hope that “George can be remembered for his legacy of service to women, the help he provided for those who needed it.”

Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, implored abortion opponents to temper their “inflammatory rhetoric and tactics that inspire this kind of violent action from the most extreme factions of the anti-choice movement.”

Antiabortion activist Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, attended the trial and said, “I don’t condone what Scott Roeder did, but I cannot condemn the consistency of his logic.” Terry told reporters the verdict was “a miscarriage of justice.”

However, Frank Pavone, national director of Priests for Life, issued a statement from New York contending that “violence is antithetical to the pro-life movement, which is why Priests for Life is part of the vast chorus of pro-life groups condemning the killing of George Tiller.”

ChristianPost.com, an online news service, noted that Southern Baptist seminary president R. Albert Mohler Jr. said after the killing that “violence in the name of protesting abortion is immoral, unjustified, and horribly harmful to the pro-life cause.”

Since 1993, eight people associated with abortion clinics have been killed in attacks; Tiller is the fourth doctor to die.

Dr. Warren Hern of Boulder, Colorado, among the few physicians who still perform late-term abortions, said he was furious that the Kansas judge even allowed the defense to argue for voluntary manslaughter during testimony. “The judge gave this assassin a national platform for [Roeder’s] inflammatory propaganda,” Hern said, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

The pastors of Reformation Lutheran praised the district attorney’s office for its clear presentation and the judge for providing clarity during the weeklong trial. Though activists on both sides of the abortion issue crowded into the courtroom, no protests were staged at the church, said senior pastor Lowell R. Michelson. “I’m grateful . . .

that it's over and we can start the next part of our healing phase," associate pastor Kristin M. Neitzel told ELCA News Service.

"We pray that all places of worship will be sanctuaries—places of reconciliation, peace and hope, setting the pace for a fractured world that so desperately seeks unity with God and one another," said the pastors on behalf of the congregation.