

Preparing a safe and secure ministry

“The most open and loving thing a place of worship can do is to make every square inch of space and every penny given, and every second spent there, safe and secure for every person, all the time.” - Tina Lewis Rowe



The ministry of the church can be seriously compromised by a failure to appropriately and effectively respond to an emergency situation. Emergencies can present themselves in all shapes and sizes; such as medical emergencies, environmental hazards (i.e. fire, earthquakes), and immediate threats to health, safety, and property. Developing and maintaining effective emergency operations plan for local churches and establishing a security team to implement the plan has become a vital part of ministry.

Planning is the core of readiness; if we have made preparations to respond effectively then mitigation has already begun. This not only serves to protect the members of the congregation but also to protect the organization from unnecessary liability. There is a legal aspect of emergency preparation that must be considered in order for the church to mitigate the dangers of litigation. These dangers can stem from incidents that occur during church sponsored events and on church property.

In June of 2013 the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA released a guide for developing emergency operating procedures for houses of worship. This was in response to a substantial increase in deadly force incidents occurring in places of worship. In 2002 there were 10 deadly force incidents nationwide in houses of worship; that number grew sharply and by the end of 2012 there had been 115 deadly force incidents nationwide in a single year. Since 1999 there have been over 470 violent deaths on church and faith-based property in the United States.



Where to start and what is the priority?

The answer is that you have already started if you have accepted that the need exists. This document is a brief outline of what a Safety and Security Ministry Program can encompass. The goal of the Safety and Security Ministry should be to effectively protect the people, property, and resources of the church. This should occur with very little negative impact to the various church ministries. It should be noted that the information contained in this

document outlines a developmental process. There is no specific timeline implied as there should be flexibility in development. Additionally, the depth of the program is determined by the leadership of the church, not all aspects of the program are required, but they are recommended. Ultimately the program should be tailored to fit church life as a whole, while maintaining program effectiveness.

Program Components:

- *Safety and Security Committee*
- *Security Response Team*
- *Emergency Medical Response Team*
- *Safety Liaisons*
- *Emergency Operations Manual*
- *Education and Training*

Table of Contents

<i>Safety and Security Committee</i>	2
<i>Security Response</i>	2
<i>Medical Response</i>	2
<i>Safety Liaisons</i>	3
<i>Security Assessment</i>	3
<i>Development of an Emergency Plan</i>	3
<i>Education and Training</i>	4
<i>Special Event Planning</i>	4

“If your ministry is on the move there are weapons being fashioned against it.” - Carl Chinn

Safety Committee or Church Life Committee

Having a “Church Life” or appropriately-named committee or team ensures a whole-church approach. It leads the way for the congregation by providing oversight of activities, developing procedures and plans and making recommendations to church leadership. Under the Church Life Committee there may be:

1. Security Response Team (or a similar title).
2. Emergency Medical Response Team (or a similar title).
3. Safety Liaisons (or a similar designation).

How the committee functions will depend upon the size of the place of worship, its needs, and the preferences of church leadership. Among the most common functions:

•**Ongoing status assessments and surveys:** Reviews reports, makes recommendations and follows-up.

•**Develop activities and encourage participation.** The more the program is seen as an integral part of church life, the more effective it will be. A goal should be to involve as

many people as possible in activities that interest them.

•**Produce materials, conduct training, and coordinate security-related tasks and purchases.**

•**Continuity planning.** This kind of planning allows the place of worship to keep functioning during interruptions of any kind. This is a complex process that will require a great deal of input. Ongoing assessments of the People, Places, Property, Programs and Processes of the place of worship can assist tremendously with this planning.

•**Promote acceptance, participation and the success of the overall program.** The role of the committee is to keep a well-balanced, appropriate, reasonable and practical approach to safety and security activities. This will require the committee to be active and informed and willing to intervene if needed to keep the balance that is needed.

It is possible for a place of worship to prevent many safety and security concerns and protect people, places, property, programs and

processes from harm. A safety and security committee can have a strong leadership role.

By using a Security Response Team, Emergency Medical Response Team and Safety Liaisons, safety and security can become an integral part of the stewardship of the place of worship.

“Ministries and faith-based organizations of all sizes already have most of what they need for safety and security.” - Carl Chinn

Security Response Team

This group is sometimes called the Emergency Response Team, Safety Response Team or some other term to clarify its role. It works best as a sub-group of the Church Life Committee, because this team is usually focused on emergency responses rather than the whole-church program.

Common Functions of a Security Response Team:

- Usually given specific assignments: Provide security during and after services, patrol parking lots, check halls, maintain a post in the sanctuary, etc.
- Respond to various emergencies (safety, security, weather, mechanical and medical) and call for 911 assistance when needed.

- Assist during and after building evacuations.
- Work with greeters, ushers and others to observe at entrances, in the sanctuary, throughout the building, parking lots, etc.
- Evaluate situations to determine the level of threat and response needs.
- Handle non-violent disruptions through intervention, communication, containment or diversion.
- Respond to violent incidents based upon training levels and capabilities of the team. For example, police and military members or an armed person or team, may intervene directly while calling for assistance. Those without those capabilities may call for assistance, then assist as many people as possible.

- Use safety equipment, flashlights, AED devices, first aid kits, etc.

Medical Response Team or Safety Team

The Medical Response Team has the potential to be a tremendously effective part of the Church Life Committee and can serve a wide range of functions, according to the needs of the church.

Safety Team: Some churches do not have members who can or will serve on a medical team. A *Safety Team* can provide basic assistance until emergency help arrives. This group is not a Medical Response team, but can be prepared to provide help or serve as a resource in other ways--assisting someone who is feeling unwell in the restroom, helping on the playground, etc.

Functions of the Medical Response Team:

- Provide stand-by assistance prior to the arrival of emergency responders.
- Provide first aid and assistance in the event of minor accidents or illnesses.
- Evaluate potential activities or situations that might present medical or safety concerns for participants and make recommendations about them.
- Work in coordination with security team members and others at special events, providing oversight of conditions. Ensure the presence of adequate first aid supplies and equipment.

- Provide training and information to staff members and teachers about a variety of illness and accident related topics.
- Ensure proper safety measures are taken about body fluids or other bio-hazards.

Add to the overall church outreach and safety and security program.

- Provide an increased level of comfort and assurance to the church family and to guests, if they are present during special events.

Safety Liaisons

One of the best ways to ensure that the safety and security program becomes an integral part of church activities is to assign a Church Life Safety Liaison for every event, other than main services in which the Security Response Team will most likely be present.

A one or two sheet set of instructions can provide information needed by the Safety Liaison in the case of a wide range of emergencies. This can include event-specific information developed by the Church Life Committee such as:

- Contact phone numbers for maintenance or mechanical, electrical or plumbing emergencies.
- Information about unlocking and locking-up the building or rooms, setting alarms, etc. Reminders to make sure outside doors are kept locked if there is no one present to observe them.
- Safety requirements for starting electrical

equipment, using the kitchen facilities, playground, social hall, etc.

- Instructions to contact the police if a crime or potential crime is reported, rather than waiting to notify a staff member or others.
- Evacuation instructions and the safest direction in which to leave and gather.
- Other information needed to be prepared in the case of an emergency.

Off-Site events: A Safety Liaison is particularly helpful for events away from the church facility, to ensure that everyone is alert and careful and that someone is ready to get assistance if needed. In some cases it may be desirable for the Safety Liaison to go to the location ahead of time to see if there are specific needs or concerns.

For events involving youth and children: There must be constant supervision and over-

sight. No unsafe or inappropriate activities should be allowed. Any that are observed will be stopped immediately. If the situation is severe it should be reported to church leadership or the Church Life Committee, for follow-up.

Large events: More than one Safety Liaison may be needed at some events. The Security Response Team may need to be involved—but scheduling is not always possible on weekdays or in the evening. The Emergency Medical Response Team may also be able to help.

“Be alert and ready for the moments that change everything.”
- Tina Lewis Rowe

Security Assessments

A security assessment is an inspection of a person, place, property, program or process to evaluate the current condition of safety, security, overall well-being, and preparedness for an emergency.

It considers risks, sources and nature of threats and criticality of harm.

It considers the factors that would enable: prevention, protection, detection and response.

It includes a report (from a memo to a larger document) containing findings, opinions and recommendations.

A thorough security assessment will in-

clude reviewing and inspecting:

Safety (accidents, illness, injuries, potential harm to people or the organization.)

Security (crimes, violence, loss or damage or related harm, from any cause)

Emergency preparedness (response and recovery related to any harmful event or situation of any kind. This may also include plans to be a resource for assistance if an emergency occurs in the community.)

Continuity planning (preparedness to continue services and programs of the place of worship, without significant interruption.)

The overall status of each component of a safe and secure place of worship. (anything

related to the place of worship or its assets and activities that can be inspected, reviewed, inventoried or evaluated.)

In this material, the term security assessment incorporates all of the terms sometimes used to describe the concepts of site surveys, audits, safety inspections, and emergency preparedness assessments.

“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”
- Theodore Roosevelt

Developing an Emergency Plan

One of the benefits of plans, apart from using them to train people about how to respond in emergencies, is the process of planning, in its own right. That is why many people should be part of the planning. It helps everyone think more clearly about all the details that are required for effective emergency responses.

Staff who are present in a mechanical, weather or medical emergency may not have access to computers, so the plans should also be in hard copy format and tabbed for easy reference and review. Consider having most security plans in a binder that also contains phone numbers and other information that may be

accessed often, so staff are more likely to have them handy.

Copies should be distributed to all church leaders and regular volunteers. Every church member should at least have material that applies to them and their activities.

Among the plans and information that should be part of a church security program are:

1. General guidelines and information about safety and security in every aspect of activities, processes and programs.
2. Instructions and plans for specific people, leaders and volunteers.

3. Evacuation plans
4. Bomb threat or other threat plans
5. Emergency medical plans
6. Fire and smoke
7. Response to violence

Education and Training

Education and training are vital to emergency response, in that each person must understand their role during an emergency situation and prepare to take action for the team to be effective. Primarily, the training aspect applies to the response teams and staff as they will most likely be the first line response during an emergency. This can include off-site training such as seminars, on-site training to address procedural concerns, and special training for handling violent incidents. Training can also include reoccurring training such as CPR training, lock-down/lock-out procedures, or evacuation training.

The education aspect should include everyone at some level, this can be as minimal as safety instructions prior to the beginning of a service, or formal group training on personal safety and awareness. Again, the depth of the program is dependent upon that which the leadership feels is important to the safety and wellbeing of the church as a whole. That being said, if it is important enough to do, then its important enough to do right

The Five C's: Procedures must be **COMMUNICATED CLEARLY** and there must be a **COMMITMENT** that they will be implemented **CONSISTENTLY** and **CONTINUOUSLY**. This is rarely emphasized enough at the beginning and it results in most of the problems of major events--not only in the area of security but in every other aspect.

Special Event Planning

Special events take place outside of the normal ministry activities and therefore require planning and preparation above and beyond the routine.

A plan is simply a collection of scheduled activities, assigned responsibilities and preventive and response procedures, policies and guidelines. They are a logical part of having a smooth, well-run, successful event.

If the plans are not written, discussed and trained about, they may not be implemented consistently—and consistency is crucial for safety and security activities.

Plans can be used like a checklist. In the area of safety and security they can ensure that all that is reasonably possible has been done to keep people and property safe.

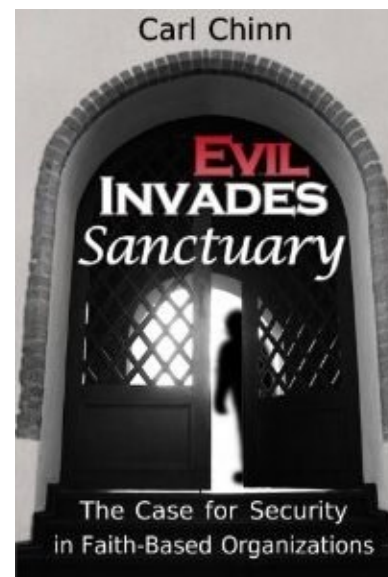
When there are written plans that are followed consistently, even a negative event can be reduced in severity. At the very least the church is less likely to be considered at fault for not planning at all or not planning enough.

It is probable that plans will start as vague and imprecise concepts—they will become

more precise as the whole event is scheduled and planned. This is one value of planning—it encourages people to consider potentials and options.

Remember: Plans and procedures don't have to be lengthy, complex or harsh and repressive. The most important attribute is that they are complete so volunteers or staff people have guidelines for action regarding situations that might affect safety or security.

“In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless but planning is indispensable.”
- Dwight Eisenhower



This book is highly recommended reading for those who wish to educate themselves about church security.

Reference Material

Chinn, Carl. (2012) *Evil Invades Sanctuary*. Monument, Colorado. Snowfall Press.

DHS/FEMA. (2013). *Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship*. Washington, DC. Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Grossman, Dave Lt. Col. (Ret). (2008) *On Combat*. Warrior Science Publications

Rowe, Tina Lewis. (2008) *Worship Without Worry: Safety and Security for Places of Worship*. Retrieved from tinalewisrowe.com

The information presented is a compilation of the listed reference material and my own training and experience. For further information and/or assistance please contact Chris M. Olsen at cjolsen1993@gmail.com