

Church Safety & Security Team Resource Guide

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Overview of Church Safety and Security

Ensuring the safety and security of faith-based institutions is paramount in today's world. While attacks on churches are relatively rare, the impact of such incidents can be catastrophic. It is essential for churches to have a comprehensive security plan that strikes a balance between creating a safe environment and maintaining the welcoming nature of the congregation.

By learning from past tragedies and being proactive in security preparedness, churches can better protect their members and visitors. The following case studies underscore the importance of vigilance and readiness in safeguarding faith-based communities:

- **Covenant Christian School Shooting (2023)** – This tragic incident serves as a stark reminder of the necessity for proactive security measures and well-rehearsed response protocols.
- **Sutherland Springs Attack (2017)** – The devastating attack at First Baptist Church highlights the vulnerabilities that exist in open-access worship spaces and the critical need for enhanced security.
- **West Freeway Church of Christ (2019)** – The swift and effective response by an armed church security team member in neutralizing an attacker underscores the value of having trained personnel on-site to mitigate threats.

By staying informed, remaining vigilant, and investing in robust security measures, churches can create a safe and secure environment for worship and community gatherings.

Legal & Insurance Considerations for Church Safety

- It is highly recommended that all members of the safety team obtain personal self-defense insurance to protect themselves legally in case of any incidents where self-defense actions are required.
 - Churches should verify that their liability insurance policies extend coverage to include security volunteers to safeguard against any potential liabilities that may arise during security-related activities.
 - Seeking guidance from legal experts is crucial to guarantee that all safety plans and security measures are in full compliance with the applicable local, state, and federal laws. Legal professionals can provide valuable insights and ensure that the church's security protocols are legally sound and protective of all parties involved.
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Team Selection & Vetting for Church Security

- Introducing voluntary background checks for all team members is a fundamental step in ensuring the safety and security of the church community. These checks can help identify any potential red flags or concerns that may compromise the effectiveness of the security team.
- Conducting in-person interviews with prospective team members is essential to evaluate their temperament, rationality, and ability to work effectively in a team setting. This process allows

church leadership to gauge the candidate's suitability for the role and assess their interpersonal skills.

- When recruiting volunteers for the security team, prioritize individuals with relevant backgrounds such as military experience, law enforcement training, emergency medicine (including nurses, EMTs, and paramedics), and security professionals. These individuals often possess valuable skills and knowledge that can enhance the security team's capabilities.
- It is crucial to emphasize the importance of de-escalation skills, conflict resolution techniques, and maintaining a calm demeanor under pressure when selecting and training security team members. These qualities are essential in diffusing potentially volatile situations and ensuring the safety of everyone within the church premises.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) for Church Security

- Ensuring that parking lots and entryways are well-lit is a crucial aspect of CPTED to deter criminal activities and enhance the overall safety of the church premises. Adequate lighting helps improve visibility, reduces hiding spots for potential perpetrators, and creates a sense of security for visitors and members.
- Installing security cameras and emergency communication systems is essential for effective surveillance and rapid response to security incidents. These technological tools not only act as deterrents but also provide valuable evidence in the event of criminal activities or emergencies.
- Strategic use of landscaping and barriers can help control access points and guide the flow of traffic within the church property. By carefully planning the layout and design of outdoor spaces, churches can prevent unauthorized entry, enhance natural surveillance, and create a more secure environment.
- Locking unused doors and limiting entry points are practical measures to improve monitoring and control access to the church facilities. By restricting access to specific areas and maintaining a clear understanding of entry and exit points, churches can better manage security risks and prevent unauthorized individuals from entering restricted areas.

Training & Preparedness for Church Security

- Regular training sessions are essential for ensuring that the church community is well-prepared to handle various emergencies. It is crucial to conduct and document training on the following key areas:
 - **Natural Disasters:** Training should cover protocols for responding to natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, and other environmental emergencies. Church members should be educated on evacuation procedures, sheltering options, and communication strategies to ensure their safety during such events.
 - **Situational Awareness and Behavioral Threat Detection:** Teaching situational awareness skills and recognizing behavioral cues that may indicate potential threats is vital for early detection and prevention of security incidents. Training individuals to stay vigilant and report suspicious activities can help mitigate risks and enhance overall security.

- **Medical Response:** Providing training in basic medical response, including CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation), AED (Automated External Defibrillator) use, and trauma care equips church members with life-saving skills. In emergencies where immediate medical attention is required, having individuals trained in these areas can make a significant difference in outcomes. Churches should incorporate "Stop the bleeding" training from an authorized/certified provider into their preparedness efforts. It is advisable to contact local hospitals and government agencies as they may offer this training at no cost.
- **Fire Extinguisher Use and Fire Evacuation Procedures:** Educating the church community on fire safety practices, including how to operate fire extinguishers and evacuate safely in the event of a fire, is crucial for minimizing fire-related risks. Training should focus on fire prevention, early detection, and swift evacuation protocols to ensure everyone's safety.
- **Active Threat/Shooter Response:** Prioritizing life safety in active threat situations is paramount. Training individuals on how to respond to an active shooter incident, including lockdown procedures, evacuation routes, and communication strategies, can help minimize casualties and protect lives. Emphasizing quick decision-making and effective coordination during such crises is essential for a swift and coordinated response.
- Role-playing emergency scenarios during training sessions is an effective way to enhance response readiness and test the effectiveness of security protocols. By simulating various emergency situations, church members can practice their roles, improve coordination, and identify areas for improvement in their emergency response plans.

Process Security & Entry Control for Church Safety

- Securing all external doors that are intended to remain locked is a fundamental aspect of maintaining process security. By ensuring that these doors are properly secured, churches can control access to the premises and prevent unauthorized entry, enhancing overall safety and security.
 - Directing churchgoers through designated entry points helps streamline the entry process and allows for better monitoring of individuals entering the church. By guiding attendees to specific entry points, churches can manage the flow of people, maintain order, and enhance security by focusing attention on key access areas.
 - Welcoming attendees warmly while discreetly observing their behavior is a critical practice in maintaining a welcoming yet vigilant environment. Greeting individuals with warmth and hospitality while discreetly monitoring their behavior can help identify any unusual or concerning actions, enabling early intervention if necessary.
 - Utilizing radios or discreet signals for team communication is essential for coordinating security efforts effectively. By using communication devices or discreet signals, security team members can relay information, coordinate responses to incidents, and maintain situational awareness without causing alarm among church attendees.
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Emergency Responder Coordination for Enhanced Church Safety

- Inviting local police, fire, and EMS personnel for facility walk-throughs is crucial for fostering effective emergency responder coordination. By familiarizing these agencies with the church's layout and potential risks, first responders can better navigate the premises during emergencies, leading to quicker and more efficient responses to critical situations.
 - Sharing the church's floor plan with emergency agencies is essential for ensuring that responders have access to vital information in times of crisis. Providing detailed floor plans enables emergency personnel to locate key areas, such as exits, utility shutoffs, and congregation gathering spaces, swiftly and effectively, enhancing overall response capabilities.
 - Establishing identification protocols for safety team members during crises is paramount for maintaining order and clarity during emergency situations. Clearly identifying safety team members through designated attire, badges, or other means helps prevent confusion and ensures that their roles are recognized by both church members and emergency responders, facilitating coordinated efforts and response procedures.
 - Building strong relationships with local law enforcement agencies is critical for establishing enhanced security partnerships and promoting a collaborative approach to church safety. By fostering positive relationships with law enforcement, churches can benefit from valuable resources, expertise, and support in developing comprehensive security plans, responding to incidents, and addressing security concerns effectively.
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Special Events & Increased Security Measures for Church Safety

- During high-attendance services or special events, churches should contemplate the option of hiring off-duty police officers to provide a visible security presence. The presence of law enforcement personnel can act as a strong deterrent to potential threats, reassuring attendees and deterring individuals with malicious intent.
 - Strategically positioning uniformed personnel at entrances can further enhance security measures during special events. Uniformed officers serve as a visible deterrent, helping to maintain order, control access points, and provide a sense of security for those attending the event.
 - Prior to major church functions, conducting comprehensive risk assessments is essential for identifying potential security vulnerabilities and implementing appropriate mitigation strategies. By assessing risks associated with the event, churches can proactively address security concerns, enhance preparedness, and ensure the safety of all participants and attendees.
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Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) for Comprehensive Church Safety

Developing detailed "If This, Then We Do This" checklists for various emergency scenarios is essential for ensuring the safety and security of church members and visitors. Below are expanded guidelines for creating effective emergency action plans:

- **Natural Disasters:** Prepare specific response protocols for natural disasters such as tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, and severe weather events. Include evacuation routes, shelter locations,

and communication procedures to ensure a swift and coordinated response to these emergencies.

- **Power Outages:** Establish procedures for dealing with power outages, including activating backup lighting systems, communicating with attendees, and ensuring the availability of alternative power sources for critical equipment.
- **Medical Emergencies:** Identify medical personnel within the congregation, designate AED locations, and outline steps for responding to medical emergencies promptly and effectively.
- **Disruptive Behavior:** Develop de-escalation techniques and intervention protocols to address disruptive behavior within the church premises while prioritizing the safety and well-being of all individuals present.
- **Vandalism & Theft:** Implement reporting mechanisms, documentation procedures, and prevention strategies to safeguard church property and address incidents of vandalism or theft.
- **Suspicious Persons:** Define engagement procedures and reporting guidelines for handling situations involving suspicious individuals, emphasizing the importance of vigilance and timely communication with security personnel or authorities.
- **Violence Response:** Create comprehensive plans for responding to violent incidents, including evacuation procedures, lockdown protocols, and strategies for dealing with armed threats to ensure the safety of everyone on the premises.
- **Protests & Civil Unrest:** Establish guidelines for managing protests and civil unrest peacefully, emphasizing communication, de-escalation tactics, and cooperation with local law enforcement to maintain a safe and non-confrontational environment.
- **Missing Children Response:** Develop lockdown protocols and search strategies to respond effectively in cases of missing children, including procedures for alerting authorities, conducting searches, and coordinating efforts to locate the child.
- **Fire Safety:** Include fire prevention measures, evacuation routes, fire drill procedures, and guidelines for using fire extinguishers to address fire-related emergencies.
- **Severe Weather Preparedness:** Establish protocols for severe weather events such as hurricanes, thunderstorms, or blizzards, including sheltering procedures, communication plans, and monitoring weather alerts.
- **Communicable Disease Outbreaks:** Develop strategies for managing communicable disease outbreaks, including protocols for infection control, isolation procedures, and communication with health authorities.

By creating comprehensive emergency action plans that address a wide range of potential threats and emergencies, churches can enhance their preparedness, protect their community, and respond effectively to unforeseen circumstances.

Legal Review and Yearly Review for Church Security

- It is imperative to ensure that all security protocols implemented by the church adhere to relevant laws and regulations. By conducting regular legal reviews, churches can confirm that their security measures are in compliance with legal requirements, minimizing the risk of legal issues and ensuring the protection of all individuals involved.

- Defining use-of-force policies in alignment with state statutes is essential for establishing clear guidelines on the appropriate use of force by security team members. By aligning these policies with state laws, churches can ensure that the use of force is justified, reasonable, and legally defensible in various security situations.
- Maintaining compliance with firearm laws is crucial if security team members are armed. Churches must stay up-to-date with firearm regulations, licensing requirements, and training standards to ensure that armed personnel operate within the bounds of the law and promote safe firearm handling practices.
- Establishing liability protections for volunteers and the church is vital to safeguard against potential legal liabilities arising from security-related activities. By implementing liability protections, such as insurance coverage and legal agreements, churches can mitigate risks and protect volunteers, staff, and the organization from legal challenges.
- Developing an annual review process is essential to ensure that changing conditions and security needs are continuously addressed and updated. By conducting yearly reviews of security protocols, risk assessments, and emergency response plans, churches can adapt to evolving threats, identify areas for improvement, and enhance overall preparedness to maintain a safe and secure environment for all.

Establishment of Safety Board/Committee for Church Security

- Ensuring transparency and accountability in church security practices involves establishing a dedicated safety board or committee. This committee should convene regularly, at least annually, to review and assess the effectiveness of safety protocols, ensuring they are reasonable, effective, and aligned with the values and culture of the church community.
- Facilitate open communication and collaboration among committee members to discuss and address security concerns, share insights, and make informed decisions regarding safety measures.
- Encourage active participation from a diverse group of individuals within the church community, including security personnel, church leaders, volunteers, and members, to provide varied perspectives and expertise in enhancing security protocols.
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities for committee members, outlining specific tasks, objectives, and timelines to ensure accountability and efficient execution of safety initiatives.
- Regularly review and update the church's security policies, procedures, and emergency response plans based on feedback from the safety board/committee meetings and evolving security needs.

Final Thought:

This PDF is offered as a resource to evaluate or begin a church safety program that must be tailored for your location, facility, resources, and church culture. Emphasizing the importance of a well-organized church safety team in enhancing security and preserving a welcoming environment is crucial for faith-based organizations. By prioritizing mitigation strategies, preparedness efforts, and coordinated responses to potential threats, churches can create a safer worship space without adopting a militarized appearance. Striking a balance between vigilance and warmth is key to effectively safeguarding congregations while maintaining a sense of community and openness within the church environment.