DOES YOUR CHURCH
REALLY NEED A SECURITY TEAM:
The “Why” and “How” of Church Security

Thirty percent of all churches experienced a threat or other emergency in 2008. Seventy-five percent of churches had no security plan in place. (Source: Christian Security Network) Today’s churches simply must be prepared for a variety of threats and emergencies. It is our hope that the following topics will provide you and your congregation with information to help you think about preparing for potential problems.

What does Today’s Churches Look Like?
The following statistics compare church profiles of 1998 to today:
- The median congregation size of 75 has remained the same.
- Churches with a web presence have increased from 17% to 44%.
- Churches that use email to communicate with congregations have increased from 21% to 59%.
- The use of drums and/or visual projection equipment has increased while the use of traditional choirs has decreased.
- Congregations without recent immigrants dropped from 61% to 49%.
- Catholic churches led by an African-American or Hispanic pastors increased from 1% to 13%.
- The median age of the head clergy has increased from 49 years old to 53 years of age.
- There was drop in congregations being led by someone 50 years of age or younger.

(Source: “National Congregations Study” Church Executive Magazine, 2009)

The Basic Church Security Conflict
There are always two sides to every argument. However, it can sometimes be difficult to convince a congregation for the need to worry about church security. Some of the most common questions are: Won’t God protect us if we are in His house? Why not just rely on local police and medical response teams in case of an emergency? Won’t congregants think that a security team is a “Gestapo group”? It is not practical to erect metal detectors at all entrances, so how can we be secure?
Throughout the Old Testament God depended on his warriors to fight the battles and protect the people (Neh. 4:9) Look at the headlines. There are numerous church incursions every year. I believe that God expects us to be prepared and protect ourselves. Below are some of the counters to the above questions:

Most local police have very lengthy response times due to being overwhelmed with calls. In times of an emergency, you cannot count on police being able to be there in a timely manner, as seen in incidents such as the Virginia Tech massacre.

Initially congregants may view your team and security measures as being extreme, but all it takes is one incident and you will not have many naysayers. After the team is established, the congregation will grow to rely on your team to expand into more areas of responsibility.

Metal detectors are not the end-all of security. One inner city church in Fresno, California, had metal detectors and was facing a lawsuit because ushers were untrained and manhandled an unruly congregant. It is possible to have a good security system without metal detectors.

**Targets of Opportunity (Weak Spots)**

It my 31 years of law enforcement experience in dealing with criminally-oriented individuals that they will pick a “target of opportunity”, if at all possible. They will go for the target that is the “easy picking” over a difficult or challenging target. They try to avoid targets that might increase their chances of being apprehended. The job of a church security team is to make your church a difficult and high-risk target for criminal activities. Always keep this mindset when doing any church security planning.

To insure total security for your congregation you need to have 100% coverage for 100% of the time. A thief or intruder can find an opening just one percent of the time and be successful in disrupting services, causing injury, or stealing property from the church or congregants. The pressure is always on the security system/team of your church. You must constantly look at your church through the eyes of an intruder/criminal. Ask the question, “Where are we vulnerable”. You will always find weak spots and areas that need improvement.
Areas of Concern in Today's Churches

As in any public forum, there will be a variety of people with a variety of problems and agendas. They may attend your services armed with dangerous weapons, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and/or having mental illness issues. Being able to recognize a threat is as important as responding to that threat. Only with proper and frequent training can a security team be truly effective.

A good security team needs to plan and prepare how to deal with the above issues, as well as any potential bomb threats, unruly demonstrators, necessary evacuations or medical emergencies. Dealing with disruptive behavior, such as shouting, cursing or trying to take control of services, must be dealt with quickly and with as little disruption of the service as possible. Earthquake, tornado or fire safety practices and evacuation procedures along with who will implement them needs to be established. A security team must train and practice in advance for such events.

Parking lot security is as important to prepare and train for as inside security. Visitors to your church need to feel confident that their cars and property will be safe and secure while attending your church. The parking lot security person ideally would be the first to observe any potential threats entering the church grounds (possession of weapons, unruly demonstrators, irrational behavior).

Other responsibilities for a security team can include protection and monitoring of any children and youth areas, maintenance of First Aid kits and emergency equipment, as well as providing security for special events.

Security Teams and Liability Concerns/Insurance Costs

One of the major costs for churches today is the cost of covering their liability (usually with a major insurance policy). All of the insurance sources that I have spoken with stated that by instituting and maintaining an adequate security/safety team, insurance costs could be stabilized or even reduced.

Churches that file numerous claims will pay significantly higher premiums. The following includes areas of highest liability for churches:

1. Buses and/or motor homes: Usually older and in poor repair.
2. Day Care/Schools: Not just accidental injuries but the ever present possibility of molestation.
3. Funerals: Usually older folks most of which have not been in your church before and not familiar with physical layout. More likely to sue than regular attendees.

4. Weddings: Usually younger folks, most which have not been in your church before and may be more boisterous with possible inebriation and/or bootlegging of alcohol. More likely to sue than regular attendees.

5. Special Events: Events that bring in large numbers of people on campus who are not regular church attendees. More likely to sue than regular attendees.

6. Youth on Campus: Making sure that youth attending the campus leave as directed and make it home safely.

7. Outside Organizations: Have a “Building Use Agreement” stating they assume responsibility for any damage or injury resulting from their use.

Major savings may result from hiring an independent adjuster in case of a major claim by the church. Insurance company adjusters work for their company and their goal is to minimize their company’s losses.

Does your church have financial ability to self-insure and carry only a major catastrophic policy? This may offer much lower rates (possible savings of $10,000-50,000 per year). The pitfall is that often you won’t have any local agent to deal with. This is an ideal situation if your church has the financial capacity to set aside a large sum for minor insurance issues.

Security Teams and Is the Law Behind You?

California has written into its Penal Code laws the provision for you to protect your church and congregants. This law which is seldom invoked and most law enforcement officers are not even aware of it. Please check with your state or local penal codes to see if you have similar protection.

**CALIFORNIA PENAL CODE SECTION**

302(a) Every person who intentionally disturbs or disquiets any assemblage of people meeting for religious worship at a tax-exempt place of worship, by profane discourse, rude or indecent behavior, or by
any unnecessary noise, either within the place where the meeting is held, or so near it as to disturb the order and solemnity of the meeting, is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars ($1,000), or by imprisonment in a county jail for a period not exceeding one year, or by both that fine and imprisonment.

**Preparation for a Security Team in your Church**

In most cases, adequate training and security planning will take 6 to 12 months. Don’t rush implementing a program until personnel are trained and an adequate plan is in place. Think “liability issues”.

Pastors, elders, and senior staff will need to make a long-term commitment to training, funding a team, and supporting a team through the developmental stages.

Once the implementation phase starts, it will be necessary for pastors and staff to “run interference” until the congregation has time to realize the benefits of such a program. Once the actual concepts are implemented, there usually is a phase where certain congregants will be resistant to having security at their church.

Church bulletins and newsletters need to advertise the function and need for the team. Make sure the senior staff or pastor assigned as the team overseer is “in sync” with the leader and goals of the security program.

Select a team leader with peace officer experience, if at all possible. The qualified team trainer should know the limitations of dealing with church security (go outside the church for information, if necessary).

Make sure team members are aware of their roles as ambassadors with the congregants (being a campus information source is an important function of the team). Every effort should be made to keep your team low-profile while covering inside the sanctuary.

Maintain training standards and adjust procedures according to the needs of your church.
**Why Do We Need a Trained Security Team?**

Here are just a few possible scenarios that a team needs to be prepared for:

- A child is taken from your children’s area by non-custodial parents.
- Two hoodlums decide to rob your church of the tithes and offerings.
- A vicious dog comes on your campus and is attempting to bite congregants.
- During worship services several skateboarders zip around your campus and knock down a senior congregant who suffers serious injuries.
- You have three insurance claims against your church during a one year period and your church is classified as a “dirty church” (insurance wise).
- An extremist brings a bag with an explosive into your church, sets it down, and leaves.

**Keys to Effective Church Security**

A well prepared security plan, with a variety of contingencies, needs to be established by the staff and security team. Once a plan is in place, a team can be formed. The team will need the support of both staff and congregants.

The security team will need a good leader who can develop a coherent team with spirit de corps environment. The team leader or assigned defensive tactics trainer will also need to teach appropriate defensive/reactive tactics and techniques to team members.

I recommend setting the **P.R.I.D.E.** concept as the basic strategy of setting up a team:

- **P. Prevention:** Preplanning for emergencies, closing gaps in your security, spending funds for safety equipment.
- **R. Recognition:** By proper training and developing an alert and suspicious mindset, you can recognize and be prepared to deal with intrusions and emergencies.
- **I. Interdiction:** Utilizing proper strategies to allow security personnel and equipment to intervene and insulate your congregation from disruptions (violent or otherwise).
- **D. Disruption:** By using all of the above, you may be able to disrupt, interrupt and/or forestall an attack on your church.
- **E. Emergency response:** Even after implementation of all of the above, there will be situations that you have not planned for, or
situations where you will need trained emergency personnel. There is no such thing as a perfect defense and an “emergency response team” should be trained and ready to provide the best response possible.

Assessing your Church’s Need for a Security Team

It is very important to perform an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of your church in regard to liability, safety, and security. The following are a few of the questions we ask on our six-page church security assessment prior to seminars.

Personnel Issues:
- What is the size of your congregation? Anticipated growth? What days and hours is the church in use?
- How many pastors and staff do you have? What are their assigned areas? What is the level of specialized training of the pastors (family and/or marriage counselors, etc.)? Do they perform marriage, family, divorce recovery, children’s, addiction or sex counseling?
- What is the training level of non-pastoral staff?
- Training level of ushers and greeters?
- What background screening is done and on whom is it done?

Campus Assessment:
- Church signage or lack thereof (no skating, etc.)
- Any known problems with your campus’ layout, accessibility, surrounding neighborhood?
- Church lighting around the church and parking lot?
- Fencing (or lack of fencing) around parking lot areas, children’s play areas?

Parking Lot Assessment:
- Note the best area for your “stationary position” for the parking lot security assignment. Can the main entrance be easily seen?
- Any theft or damage of vehicles in past two years?
The Most Often Asked Questions About Churches and Security

The following is a transcript of an interview that I gave recently to Your Church Magazine, November 2008. I hope the interviewer’s questions will raise questions about your church’s security issues:

“Interview of the Church Security Services Founder” (Dale Annis), by Lee A. Dean.

**Q. What are the unique security needs of churches?**
A. You cannot routinely search or neither “pat down” individuals nor can you normally use metal detectors or other intrusive measures to enhance the security of your church.

**Q. Who are the kinds of people in churches that can be considered dangerous? What types of behaviors make the list? What scenarios are the most common that pose a danger?**
A. A) Individuals who are off their anti-psychotic medications, illegal drug users, over-medicated individuals, alcoholics, domestic disputes and abusers, paranoid individuals, anti-Christian/anti-religion extremists, radical Muslims, to mention a few.
B) Anyone coming into a church and exhibiting bizarre or suspicious behavior.
C) Three examples are: 1) An individual comes into the church carrying a large brown bag and keeping their hand in the bag after they are seated.
2) In warm weather, a person comes into the church wearing a long coat, dark glasses, and appears furtive while watching people around him.
3) An individual comes into the service and goes up to the stage and takes over the podium and starts yelling at the congregation.

**Q. How real is the threat to churches overall and to any given church? Are there general risk factors to be taken into consideration? Should we know who these people are? If so, how do we find out who they are?**
A. In most cases the congregants will not recognize these subjects until they are already in the service. It is the function of security personnel to recognize these threats at an early stage and monitor and/or react to these threats. Most congregants do not go to church expecting trouble.

**Q. What the major legal and ethical concerns involved in finding out who these people are?**
A. It is important to understand that church security is totally different from other types of security or law enforcement. Most churches do not want intrusive security or extreme measures to keep out threats. We need
to remember that the goal of our churches is to reach out to the “lost” at all levels of society and bring them into church. We cannot routinely screen out “undesirables”. As church security, we must develop non-intrusive and low-key planning and techniques.

Q. What, if anything, should be done to protect the entire congregation?
A. Each church should develop a security/emergency plan which is based on a congregation-based security and emergency team. This team should plan for emergencies by dangerous intruders, natural disasters, explosions, and medical response needs. The team should also be an information source for newcomers and insure that your church is safe for children and a safe place to park your vehicle.

Q. Who are the personnel in a church that need to pay the closest attention to this issue?
A. Church pastors, administrators, staff, and elders/board members should become educated in the security/emergency needs of your church. Unless the above church leaders are fully supportive of a security/emergency response program there is really no point in starting up a program.

Q. What are the special problems and needs of large churches, medium-sized churches and small churches?
A. Large churches: Most of these churches do not have the monetary constraints of the smaller church and often will choose to hire professional security staff that will develop an adequate program. Surprisingly, I have knowledge that many large churches depend on a sporadic security arrangement dependent on off-duty peace officers who happen to be attending a particular service. The size of a larger church may discourage some intruders but it attracts others (demonstrators, etc.)
Medium and small churches: These churches often bear the brunt of church intruders and theft due to their not having any organized security program. Often they do not set aside any funding for security/emergency planning. Whatever funds are available are spent elsewhere. Church security is not a priority in most churches.

Q. How do you measure the needs to provide redemption and forgiveness to someone who has sinned with the need to protect the congregation?
A. Common sense should prevail. We are to spread the Gospel to the entire world but we do not need to expose our families to unnecessary
risks. If someone comes into the service carrying a machete, should we ignore an obvious weapon and hope he will not attack our congregation? Or do we develop a plan to deal with this type of situation? We have to have a balance between security and preaching the Gospel.

**Q. What, if anything, should be done to protect the rights of people in a congregation who have a troubled history?**

A. Again, common sense should prevail. People with a troubled history should not be excluded unless their prior history is a threat to the safety and security of the congregation. For example: 1) A child molester is attending church but wants to work in the children’s ministry area; 2) A person convicted of grand theft wants to work as a financial administrator; 3) Individuals, who you know are being treated with anti-psychotic medications, should be monitored while being allowed to attend services; or, 4) Someone who has been convicted of rape should not be left unattended with vulnerable females. Your security director should set guidelines when dealing with high-risk individuals.

**Q. If your church wants to start a ministry to reach out to these people, what steps should be put in place to provide boundaries and protection to staff members and volunteers who work with them?**

A. Same as the above answer.

**Q. What legal liabilities do churches assume by openly providing counseling and support to groups of people with high-risk behavior?**

A. Unless the church sets strict guidelines and routinely does criminal record checks, it is going to be susceptible to extreme liability exposure. Having a trained security team and a fully implemented security/emergency response program your church will save money on insurance costs over the long run.

**Q. What do you do if you find out or suspect that someone already on staff or a volunteer is a dangerous person?**

A. Your church should have a thoroughly signed and witnessed application, background, and interview process. Often churches fail to call references or do background checks. If after due diligence the person is hired, your application should indicate that he has lied on this form. This should be adequate grounds for termination.

**Q. Can you identify a church that has successfully dealt with this issue? Or one who has learned the hard way and who is willing to share what it has learned with our readers?**

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A. I have found that most churches do not want to share openly on these issues. This is a very “touchy” legal and ethical issue for most churches. In our society most companies and churches are “gun-shy” when it comes to disclosure of information to any news source and/or potential law suits.

Note: After this interview, I attempted to find a church that was willing to share and they declined.

The following are questions posed to Church Security Services. I regularly receive questions are from all types of churches from all over the United States.

Q. What is a good time to train personnel, ushers, etc.? What do you say about stun guns? (M.W. of Durham, N.C.)

A. If you have multiple services you can schedule training during early or late services and train one-half of the team and do the other half during the opposite hour or during services on the following week. You can set training during your regular mid-week service or choose an alternate night during the week. Another possibility is after church occasionally for one hour. I do not recommend scheduling numerous training sessions on Saturdays. I have found that most men have more than enough to do on Saturdays.

I do not advocate the use of stun guns for church security teams. I believe that there can be liability and misuse issues associated with stun guns. I believe stun guns are fine for a personal defense weapon, but arming a whole team would be problematic. My opinion is based on my experience with some police departments that have carried these weapons.

Q. Do we need guard cards to set up a security team? If we are correctional peace officers is that sufficient? (F.C. of McFarland, CA)

A. Guard cards are only necessary if you are a security company and would be working off your campus for others. You have a right of self-defense on private property. As a peace officer you would be off duty and would only have peace officer powers as to an inmate or parolee of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. You have all the rights of a regular citizen to make a citizen’s arrest if someone is breaking the law. I strongly advise to make sure any security team is fully trained before undertaking any duties at your church due to liability issues.
Q. When security makes a decision to arrest someone how do you know that your local pastor will back and support your decision? Angry and disruptive people sometimes make threats to officials. (T.L. of Charleston, S.C.)

A. I strongly recommend that you make sure that your pastors, staff, and elder board “sign on” to the training and development of your team. If you do not have a commitment from these key people I would not be involved with the team. The responses and intervention by your security team should be agreed to by your church leadership before your team is operational.

This church wrote a concern that is common to most churches: We will take heavy casualties with a single shooter; but, if it is a coordinated attack carried out by trained terrorists, we have a near impossible job. …behind public grade schools, large Christian churches are number one on their lists. (J.A. of Springfield, MO.)

**Team Building Problems**

- Recruitment of personnel (never ending problem):

  This one of the most difficult to solve as many people today do not want to volunteer for anything, let alone a security team.

  You will need a minimum of 3 people for a team; hopefully adding one person for each 100 people above 100 congregants. For example, a five hundred congregant church should have at least seven team members.

  Recruiting is not easy and you just have to keep your eyes open and make the team as attractive as possible, e.g., frequent team dinners and yearly awards create an esprit de corps atmosphere. Active or retired peace officers are especially valuable team members.

- Church members (or staff members) who are negative towards any type of security on your campus:

  This is one of the disheartening things you will almost certainly have to deal with. Prepare your team for this occurrence. This best way to handle it is to smile and ignore it. As soon as you have an incident on campus these people will be the first to expect your team to handle it. Most people get used to new things within 6 months.
Keep all team meetings, etc. open to all congregants. Invite doubters to participate in your team training sessions. Keep incident reports and route them to key church leaders.

- Limited support from your pastors/staff:

Unless these key people and your elder board are fully behind a team, do not even start one. It will be a battle each step of the way. Many churches do not believe that they will ever have a problem and do not want to expend money or volunteer time on something that seems so “non-Christian”. Unfortunately, churches tend to be reactive, not proactive.

- Recruiting the right Team Leader:

Someone with peace officer or military background could be an excellent pick. This position will take a lot of energy and require several hours to be invested each week. Look at the person’s small team leadership ability, energy level, character, and experience.

- Let your team leaders develop and train your team:

The pastors/staff should not over-manage your team development. Consultation and suggestions are fine, but you need to trust the team leaders that are chosen.

- Pick a team trainer who has some athletic/organizational skills:

This is an important pick because you should have an ongoing and well organized training program.

- Background/criminal checks for everyone who is going to be on the team:

This is an expense but if you have any problems later on it is well worth the expenditure. Anyone with recent background/record checks could be excluded. Anyone licensed by your state or county will have had record check prior to their employment (teachers, commercial drivers, peace officers, security officers, etc.).
What tools do we need to help start and maintain a security team?

After you have the blessing and support of your pastors and staff to start a security team, you need to get good information and guidelines about setting up a team. Church Security Services has tried and tested everything put into our guidebooks at our own home church. Our guidebooks are continually updated with the best information available and we’re available for support and advice by e-mail or telephone, free of charge.

- How to set up your security team guidebooks:

  Church Security Guidebook
  After Hours Church Security
  Ushers and Greeters Guidebook
  Church Parking Lot Control and Security

- Team training guidebooks:

  Church Security Guidebook
  Practical Defensive Tactics Manual
  Sanctuary Security Techniques