

SAFE & SECURE CHURCH GUIDEBOOK

A Step-by-Step Ministry
Approach to Security



**BROTHERHOOD
MUTUAL**

Shepherd's Watch®
Safe and Secure Church Guidebook
A Step-by-Step Ministry Approach to Security

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CHAPTER 1 ●●●●●●

Safety and Security in Churches

Understanding and responding to the need



The Time Is Now

DEVELOPING A SAFETY AND SECURITY MINISTRY

These days, the news is all too familiar. Another tragedy at church.

A man waits in the sanctuary for his estranged wife and shoots her as they argue in the church's parking lot. A church's secretary is viciously beaten during a robbery at the church office. A child is taken from a Sunday school class by her non-custodial parent. A Christmas Eve service is disrupted when two armed robbers are found hiding among the worshippers and are forcibly removed by police. A woman suffers a heart attack during a funeral service at church.

When you hear of such tragedies, do you wonder what would happen if the same thing occurred at your church?

If your church has a safety and security program in place, you are better prepared to respond to these types of situations. If you don't have a safety and security program, your church is likely among the many that are unprepared to respond.

Being unprepared is no longer an option. Holding on to the idea that "It won't happen to us" is a dangerous mindset.

"We live in a broken and fallen world, and bad things can happen to good people—even to God's people," says Reverend Jerry McConnell, director of the ministry outreach division of the Center for Personal Protection and Safety in Spokane, Washington. "Jesus warned us that in this world we will have trouble. And we have learned in the twenty-first century that the church is not immune to the evil in the world. The church doesn't get a pass, and we don't have a bubble of protection over us that keeps us from experiencing trouble."

As the world breaks, broken people come to church. Some come to seek peace, while others come to vent their anger and frustration. Churches are a reflection of the world around them. The people who come to church—congregation members, visitors, friends, and strangers—bring their issues with them. When the front doors are open and the welcome mat is rolled out, churches have to be prepared for who, and what, walks in.

Lessons from the Secular World

The concept of establishing safety and security plans for public places is not new. Schools have evacuation plans as well as shelter-in-place plans so students and staff know what to do and when to do it. Malls have security teams and protocols. Hospitals regularly deal with intensely emotional people and issues while continuing to serve and protect. These organizations meet the safety and security challenge with solid plans, well-trained teams, policies, and procedures.



People bring their issues with them to church. When the front doors are open and the welcome mat is rolled out, churches have to be prepared for who, and what, walks in.



People today expect reasonable measures to be in place to protect them and their families whether they are at work, at school, or at church. They may be shocked to know that many churches are not prepared to protect them. As more and more churches come to understand that they are as vulnerable to safety issues as other public places, the call for formalized safety and security programs grows.

“The members that attend any church—our church, your church—are not oblivious to what’s happening in society today,” says Bob Johnson, safety and security director at Christ’s Church of the Valley in Peoria, Arizona. “Society has changed. It’s more violent. People expect that when they come to church, we’re going to protect them and their families on Saturday or Sunday, just as they expect the school to protect their kids Monday through Friday.”

Churches can look to the experiences and best practices of the secular world for a perspective on developing safety and security plans. While a church and a hospital may have operational aspects in common, the church’s focus is different. It’s ministry. Churches need to protect their people and, at the same time, minister to the broken and hurting. For a safety and security program to fit within a church, it must function as a ministry of the church.

A Commitment to Ministry

At Saddleback Church, the security team is a ministry just like the missions team, the children’s team, and the maintenance team.

“Each one plays a role in making it all come together,” says Kevin Robertson, safety and security manager at Saddleback Church. “I tell our team members that every person will be treated in a Christ-like manner. In our ministry, we deal with some difficult situations and people. However, one day that person may open up and let God in to soften their heart. We have no way of knowing when. Only God knows the timing of that.”

Often people come to church because they don’t know where else to go. They’re hurting. They’re in need. A ministry-focused safety and security team’s job is to be vigilant and aware while maintaining the church’s welcoming environment.

“We had an individual who was mentally ill and, by choice, off his medication,” Robertson recalls. “He chose not to work and was living on the streets. He’d been offered help by many at our church and had always refused it. Off and on for about a year, our security team members would find this man on our campus late at night and let him know he could not stay there. He was always offered local shelter information but wasn’t interested. One night he was found, along with two others, inside one of our classrooms. They had a jug of wine, a carton of cigarettes, and a small barbeque they planned to light a fire in for heat. We escorted him and the others off campus, and again we did it in a Christ-like way.”

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“Many months later, on a Sunday morning, I saw this gentleman on campus. This time he looked different,” remembers Robertson. “His long hair was clean and brushed, his clothes were clean, and his overall look was different. He walked up to me, extended his hand and said, ‘I want to apologize to you and your team. I was a real headache to you this past year. I’ve gotten back on my meds, got a job, and have an apartment.’

“Reflecting on this, what if after the umpteenth time of escorting him off campus, we’d lost our patience and were heavy-handed?” says Robertson. “Would it be out of the realm of possibility that this man might have thought, ‘Well, if that’s the way Christians are, I sure don’t want any part of them?’ But we didn’t. We knew that God had His timing and He’d work on this man’s heart. Sure enough, He did. Isn’t that what ministry is all about?”

Children First

The very characteristics of a church community that appeal to parents are the same ones that present some of the greatest safety challenges with their children: openness, acceptance, caring adults, lots of activity. Job one for every safety and security ministry is to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

“Ask 100 people from 100 different churches, ‘What’s the number one concern in safety and security in your church?’ Every one of them will say, ‘The children come first. Go protect the children.’ That’s where we need to start,” says Johnson. “How? You put policies in place, regardless of the size of your church, to make sure that the right person is picking up the right child. And you have a process in place to make sure that you’re watching. Watching that there isn’t someone there, someone nearby, who could take one of your kids.”

The person who wants to take one of your children is not likely to be a stranger. A non-custodial parent who knows that Mom or Dad takes the child to church every Saturday evening or Sunday morning is more likely to try to pick up his or her child. Beyond the policies and procedures for protecting the children’s ministry, the safety and security team will need to be aware of the legal orders that affect the children and youth in their care. At a minimum, safety and security experts recommend churches establish check-in, check-out procedures and follow a comprehensive screening process with everyone who works with children and youth.



Refer to the **Protecting Your Children and Youth DVD** for tips and best practices for keeping your children and youth safe.



Start Today

The time for church safety and security is now.

Your church is more likely to experience a medical or weather emergency than a violent act by an armed person, or even a homeless person setting up residence in one of your classrooms.

Regardless of the nature of the issue, you don't want to find out after an incident that you have a safety or security gap you haven't addressed. Nor do you want to leave your church's safety and security to chance or to untrained people who may do more harm than good. It's better to be prepared to protect and minister rather than just react in the moment.

A safety and security mindset does not just happen. It takes someone who is passionate about creating a program that is focused on ministry. It takes coordination with leadership and other ministries. It takes planning. And it takes a team.

"My philosophy is to trust in God and know that I need to do my part," says Robertson. "God entrusted us to care for His people, and one day we'll have to give an accounting to Him as to how we shepherded His flock. Providing as safe an environment as possible is part of that responsibility.

"Don't get discouraged if you don't get full support from your church leadership in the beginning," says Robertson. "It's a journey, and it will take time. Church safety and security is a foreign concept to many people. Know that all things happen in God's time. With prayer, perseverance, and patience, it will happen.

"My pastor refers to crawl steps, walk steps, and then run steps," says Robertson. "Give it a great deal of prayer. God will let you know how to start this ministry. Suggest baby steps to your leadership, just a crawl step at first. As time moves on, you can nurture them into a walk step and so on. It may take years, but in the end you can look back and see all the progress that has been made, and God will be pleased."

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Do you have five minutes?

Try these ideas for making the most of your micro moments:

- **Identify weaknesses.** When you think about safety and security at your church, what area needs immediate attention?
- **Think children first.** If you could change one thing in your children's area to increase safety and security, what would it be?
- **Examine past incidents.** What events have made your members or leadership anxious?
- **Take a look around.** How is your church affected by your community? What safety and security issues do other churches face?
- **Assess preparedness.** Are you ready to address the issues that people bring to church?

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The concepts shared in this guidebook are intended to increase awareness of safety and security issues that could arise in your church or ministry organization and to provide a starting point for developing a safety and security program. Individuals within your ministry, in consultation with local legal counsel and security professionals, are in the best position to effectively address your individual safety and security concerns.

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