



Incident Preparation & Recovery

A Spiritual and Physical Guide for Churches and their Communities

by Ted Elmore

A RESOURCE OF THE 

“THE THIEF COMES
ONLY TO STEAL, TO KILL,
AND TO DESTROY;

**but I have come
that you might have
life and have it more
abundantly”**

—JOHN 10:10

It has been said by many through the years that prayer is a barometer of what we really believe. We pray our “theology.” I believe that is true. For those of us who believe God’s Word is inerrant, should we not be among those who outwardly demonstrate our trust in God by acting upon his Word?

From Hurricane Harvey to now, the fall of 2017 and forward, has been a time of struggle in Texas. We have experienced national tragedies – Harvey’s flood, 26 killed inside FBC Sutherland Springs plus the shooter’s suicide, and 10 killed at the Santa Fe, Texas, high school. And, there were other shootings outside Texas.

What are we to do? Certainly we are called to due diligence in everything physically possible to protect our communities and stop these acts of violence.

But there is more.

I. PREPARE SPIRITUALLY

As followers of Jesus Christ and among those who believe the Bible to be the written Word of the Living God, we are offered a higher resource – our God. In Scripture, God is revealed as a warrior God (Exodus 14:14, 15:3), a protector (Psalm 5:11), a defender (Psalm 31:2), a helper (Hebrews 13:6), a fortress (Psalm 91:2), a hiding place and refuge (Psalm 57:1, Isaiah 51:16), a shield (Deuteronomy 33:29; Ephesians 6:10-18) and a victor (Revelation 2-3, promises to overcoming churches).

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My proposal is simple. The people of God should be proactive by praying specifically against the evil one and his minions who would serve his purpose of violence and destruction in our public gathering places. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal, to kill, and to destroy; but I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). I believe if we trust the Lord, he will intervene in the spiritual realm.

If we believe the biblical description of our God as a warrior (and I do); and if we believe his Word is inerrant (and it is); then why not trust him to do what he says he will do in answer to believing prayer? Is this not the very definition of faith? Hebrews 11 is the roll call of faith in the New Testament. “By faith Abraham ... when called ... obeyed; By faith Abraham was enabled” (Hebrews 11:8-12); “He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he [God] has promised, he [God] was able to perform” (Romans 4:20-21).

Faith is believing the promise of God and stepping out to obey what God has said. One of the schemes of the enemy is doing all possible to destroy the faith of the people of God. Therefore, if God has promised to be our warrior God and defender, should we not step out on those promises through prayer and stand against the schemes of the Devil? We strengthen our people’s faith when we do so.

This booklet is small and digestible. But I will give you other references if you choose to research further. I hope you will. One valuable resource is the FBI’s “A Study of the Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States.”¹ This study is well researched by top professionals with access to information most of us do not have. It is

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downloadable from the website.

In order to combat the schemes of the devil through spiritual warfare prayer, it is good to know what we are praying against. The appendix of this report (page XX) gives some guidance for developing a security plan.

As you lead your congregation, help it to understand that this is spiritual warfare. The church should be spiritually prepared for suffering of various kinds and taught to pray against what the enemy brings. As you lead the people, pray, form prayer teams and then teach the prayer teams. Let each one target certain places of public gathering and intercede for that place daily.

Ask other churches to join you. Cover the community. If you are going to pray over public places other than your church, you might consider notifying the local police so they will be aware and hopefully supportive. Pray for them as well as others.

Here are some suggested “prayer points” from the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5-7 Jesus spoke to his disciples, then the multitudes as they gathered, regarding the ethos of the kingdom of God. He also gave them “prayer points,” or as we know them, The Lord’s Prayer. Here are some suggestions from that prayer.

1. WORSHIP GOD

Worship him in his creation. Each person you see and all others are created by God in his image and loved completely by him.

2. REPENT

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you sin in your own life. Confess and repent. God uses vessels of clay, but he will not use a dirty one.

3. FORGIVE

One of the great hindrances to the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit is anger. If there are those in your sphere of relationships against whom you are holding a grudge, release them. Forgive them and pray for them. This is a reminder to pray for the families and persons of violence – those in the past and those who may be plotting such as you pray.

4. ASK

Our God is a warrior God. Ask him to provide divine protection for the public against the evil one who would cause destruction (Exodus 14:14, 15:3).

Ask him to provide divine wisdom to the authorities as they seek the best solution(s) for the common good.

Ask him to expose any plot of the evil one through any person in time for the authorities to thwart any planned act of violence.

5. TRUST

Trust God to answer prayer (Luke 11:1-13; Matthew 6:9-14).

Thank him for his provision.

6. PRAY FOR GOSPEL ADVANCE

Pray for all who go in and out of the public buildings. Pray that they would hear the gospel, believe and be saved.

7. PRAY FOR PEACE

As God instructs us in the Psalms to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem,” we can pray for the peace of your city. Take time now to pray for the peace of God to encompass your city or rural area.

Pray for your local law enforcement and first responders. They serve well. Ask God to grant wisdom as they seek to curb violence. Pray for their protection (Romans 13:1-5).

PRAYER WALK FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

Let these prayer points guide you as you look “in” at the property and “out” at the world. Remember, this is a guide, not a goal. Let the Holy Spirit lead you as you pray, and add the needs of your church security and ministry to this.

LOOKING ‘IN’ AT THE PERIMETER

1. Ask God to sanctify the church through his word as a place of unity (John 17:17, 20-21) – people and property. In the name of Jesus and through the shed blood of Jesus, declare this property dedicated to God and his eternal purpose until Jesus comes.
2. Ask God to protect the church from what the evil one (Satan) would bring from the inside (Ephesians 4:27), “neither give place [land or opportunity] to the devil.” Pray for discernment and wisdom for church leadership.
3. Thank God the resurrection life of Jesus bringing new life (revival) to the church through the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Ask God for spiritual and emotional healing of the church. Pray for God to give them the grace of forgiveness to all who have hurt them. You may not have had an incident, but in the normal course of life there will be hurt. And, as others have said, “hurt people hurt people.”
5. Pray the church would be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and fulfill the mission God has given (John 17:21-23). Claim these words on behalf of the church: “Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

LOOKING ‘OUT’ AT THE PERIMETER

1. Ask God to protect the church from that which Satan would bring from the outside. May nothing outside of God’s eternal purpose enter the perimeter. Again, in Jesus’ name and the authority in that name above every name, declare the church dedicated to the eternal purpose of the living God. Our God is a warrior (Exodus 15:3). Ask him to fight this battle with the evil one.

Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matthew 16:18).

“The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1).

2. Pray for spiritual awakening for Texas, the USA and beyond to the “uttermost” part of the earth – “Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah” (Acts 3:19-20).
3. Ask God to grant favor to the church among those outside the fellowship – “Let the favor of the Lord our God be on us: establish for us the work of our hands – establish the work of our hands!” (Psalm 90:17).
4. Pray for God to open opportunities for the church to fulfill her God-given purpose even to the “uttermost” parts of the earth. Acts 1:8 says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
5. Pray for the persecuted church around the world (Philippians 1:3-7).
6. Pray for your local law enforcement, first responders and governmental leaders. They serve well. Ask God to grant wisdom as they seek to curb violence. Pray for their protection (Romans 13:1-5).

II. PREPARE YOUR INCIDENT MANAGEMENT & RECOVERY PROCEDURE

This may seem contradictory to what was written about prayer and faith, but I believe with James that faith without works is dead (James 2:20). Therefore, a prudent spiritual leader will not only pray but will implement a process of protection for the people God has assigned him to lead. The shepherd protects the sheep. The hireling flees.

Some of this material comes from the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service's (TEEX) National Emergency Response and Recovery Training Center of the Texas A&M University System. Hank Lawson manages that section and has given permission to use their material. A day at an active shooter tabletop exercise convinced me that while denominations and churches mean well by doing security seminars, active shooter training, etc., to do so in the singular is wrong headed. While you must protect your church, you must also realize an incident will be community wide.

This document, the links provided, and the addendum are all designed to give you ample information to know how to develop a security plan for your church.

Each incident is community wide.

This truth is crucial to embrace as you develop protocols in the event of a shooting incident. These protocols could be adapted for any disaster. Your community is like concentric circles. You have the immediate crime scene (church, school or other public location), families of victims, friends of victims, employees, etc.; until in some way the entire community is engaged in the grief and recovery of the incident. Kids in church go to school with kids from other churches. Teachers are also church members.

Therefore, I believe it is short-sighted to plan for one location alone. It is good to have a security plan for your church but it is greater wisdom to include others in the community.

I recommend that you bring together a larger group of community leaders for a tabletop training. Look at those affected in the local school district and invite them to an all-day tabletop training. "Tabletop" simply means you are not going to visit any site, but will be in one room sitting at tables. Those invited will include pastors, a representative from the ISD, representatives from local law enforcement (city police, sheriff, DPS, and if possible, FBI). One way to minimize the amount of time requested of local ISD and first responders is to limit their time with you to two hours during the lunch time (11-1pm).

The goal of this day is to develop a protocol in which the local people know who is responsible for what in the event of an active shooter.

The following is not a complete exercise. It is only a summary. For information on how to schedule a complete one-day exercise, contact Ted Elmore at sbtexas.com.

The objectives of this exercise are:ⁱⁱ

1. To analyze the ability of participants to respond to an active shooter incident to protect life, resolve the crisis and perform recovery operations.

2. To demonstrate participants' understanding of their roles, responsibilities and internal coordination needed during an active shooter incident.
3. To determine the internal and external coordination and communication required between responders and the campus response teams during a crisis.
4. Identify gaps in existing plans, protocols, and policies in response to an active shooter incident.

Proactive Planning: Questions to answer before an incident occurs

In my role with SBTC, I walked with FBC Sutherland Springs and those pastors who were so instrumental in assisting others. I asked four of them, "What do you wish you had known that you did not know at the time of the event." Their replies included "resources available," "who are the spokespersons," "who are the decision makers," "how do you vet offers for help," "what counselors are available," "who can help with funeral planning," "where is a safe place for victim families to gather," "how to plan for holidays after a loss," "who are the PTSD counselors available" and others similar. Therefore, here are some suggestions that will assist you in advance planning with the prayer you never have to mobilize any of these.

Among our goals to assist is to never use any victim's pain for our gain. We are not building our own legacy on the backs of hurting people. We minister in Jesus' name for the glory of God. Our attitude should be consistent with Philippians 2:5. People who fill these roles should be people with servant hearts that are not possessive but cooperative.

- ▶ What's your command structure and who are they? In any situation law enforcement is in charge of the crime scene and they have their own command structure. But who will be liaison with them from you community/church? And what will your own command structure look like?

If you are a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention church, your convention will stand by you. Ted Elmore is that assigned person. But your convention cannot and should not take charge. We are there to assist you. Of course we will offer resources and respond to requests as possible. But the real leaders are those you choose; we work with them.

- ▶ Who will be your media spokesperson, your PIO (Public Information Officer)? The SBTC's communications department can assist you with press releases, but there needs to be someone who is the official spokesperson. Should such an event occur, it will be a major news item for days. You have two options. One is to say nothing and you will find yourself having to respond to the media's more invasive questioning. Or, hold a press conference and read a press release. The media will ask questions based upon your release and you can answer accordingly. They are not bad people. They have a job to do, so help them do it well with facts that can be released.

- ▶ How will you protect the privacy of victims' families? Who will lead this? A liaison between these families and officials is needed. A private place close to the area is needed. All of the governmental agencies will show up and need a place of privacy to interview families and assess the needs they have and resources available. Where will that be? Who will intercede between the families and the agencies to assist in caring for them? These agencies are our friends. Treat them well. Where will that be? Who

will intercede between the families and the agencies to assist in caring for them? These agencies are our friends. Treat them well.

- ▶ Who will lead the recovery team to ascertain who is safe and who may not be safe after an event? Account for all of your people. For example, if church A has an incident, could you evacuate to church B? Are there any deceased? Any in the hospitals? Any who just fled to other locations?

- ▶ In the event of a shooting, how will you evacuate the building and where will the people be taken? How may family get their loved ones and how will they know?

- ▶ Who will work with the funeral homes to know in advance the resources for grieving families? The attorney general's office may pay a significant portion of the funeral. Someone needs to coordinate between the families, the funeral homes and AG's office to help.

- ▶ Who will coordinate counseling for survivors and families and others? This is a very traumatic event and for the first few weeks it is diminishing chaos. Various ministries and individuals will show up. You do not have to invite them. They will come and many will tell you why their ministry is better than any others. While these may have the best of motives, you will have to determine who has the capacity (resources, training and infrastructure) to best assist you.

Here is why you need a coordinator. Most counseling needs are long-term. There is immediate crisis counseling, someone to pray, someone to put their arms around another for comfort – all of those are good but short term. But effective counseling needs to be done by a certified Christian professional. And they are available. There are many locally and there are many from a distance that can be accessed in cooperation with the SBTC incident preparation and recovery specialist. While other types of counselors are good in certain situations, trauma counseling is highly specialized, especially with children and teens. Good intentions are insufficient. Expertise is needed. Know your local “go-to” people. There will be victims who will not seek counseling for almost a year after the event. We all are at different places and paces.

Protect the people from these who mean well but have insufficient training to do well. Know your protocol in advance and have a gatekeeper who can withstand without being rude the overtures of those you have not previously vetted.

- ▶ Who will be the overall gatekeeper at the places selected for assisting survivors and families and counseling? You will need a team for this and team leaders. Law enforcement will assist you. There are officials who will have access to these locations, but media and all others can be kept at a distance. If you are in Texas, the governor's office will assist you in every way.

- ▶ Who will lead in planning a first responders' appreciation banquet a few months after the event? Months after the Sutherland Springs shooting, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention came alongside the pastors in the area to plan and conduct an appreciation banquet for the first responders. Only those at the scene on the day of the shooting and those who worked the first few days of the shooting were invited. This included fire and rescue, law enforcement (Sheriff, DPS, FBI), emergency room personnel who treated victims and some very few other responders. No media was allowed except for one photographer

who came by invitation. There was a dinner, light entertainment, awards given to the various departments and a lot of tears and hugs. It was a great time of healing.

Planning your own church's security

Somewhere in my background I heard it said, "It is not about being strong enough to use force. It is being strong enough not to." That is one of our goals. The design of security is to save lives, even the lives of the bad guys.

Here are two suggestions:

1. For your local church security, contact Mark Yoakum at the SBTC Church Ministries office. Mark has helped organize a number of SBTC-promoted church security conferences and can provide contact information for a security company that will provide skilled, church-centric training.
2. Please understand that local church security training and this suggested table top exercise are two different events. You need both. As you plan this tabletop exercise, coordinate with local law enforcement to gain their participation. In the event of an incident, these will be the first responders. In order to neutralize a situation with minimum loss of life, they will need to know your building. You need a close relationship with local law enforcement. Why not provide a room where there is 24-7 access to local law enforcement to get a cup of coffee and do their reports? It helps them and it does not hurt you for bad guys to see a police cruiser frequently parked at your church.

Follow Through

- ▶ Follow through by responding to needs discovered during the exercise
- ▶ Run – where?
- ▶ Hide – where?
- ▶ Engage – how? There cannot be coercion here but volunteers.

Recovery from an incident

- ▶ Who will be in charge of this?
- ▶ How will we know who was in the building?
- ▶ What will be our method of checking on the safety of each employee?
- ▶ Should the worst happen, law enforcement and/or a chaplain to minister to that family alongside their local pastor (assuming they have one)? Who will go to the hospitals? I suggest that many be prepared but specific assignments will be made by command after the incident.

There is an additional document from FEMA called "Guide for Developing High Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship." It may be accessed at https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1919-25045-2833/developing_eops_for_houses_of_worship_final.pdf

This document is very thorough and covers all emergency situations (such as fire and flood).

III. AVAILABLE ASSETS

In my research for this document, I discovered assets available through the denomination, the local, state and federal government. When an incident happens, representatives of these agencies will respond to you. That is their job. Let me summarize some of what these assets can provide.

- 1. The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (sbtexas.com)** – there are several types of resources available here. The denomination is committed to the future of the churches that make it up. In a tragedy, it is important to return to normal worship as soon as possible. Thus, providing for the pastor and the infrastructure of the church is important as well as the healing of the people after the tragedy.
- 2. The Southern Baptist Convention and local association** – denominational leaders and the local director of missions will be in contact, as will the state convention, and they will respond as opportunities and needs arise.
- 3. State Attorney General Office** – The AG office is responsible for victim relief. This includes funerals, some reimbursement for material loss and other areas. It is advisable that someone contacts the local AG office and obtains pamphlets related to their services. There is crime victims' compensation, a Texas address confidentiality program and others. You will likely need someone to assist those with needs in filling out the various application forms. Very often when someone is in deep trauma and grief they do not think as clearly as at other times. The AG office will have people onsite to assist, but sometimes needs arise after treatment for injuries, assessment of loss, etc.
- 4. FEMA** – Much can be learned from online videos. FEMA's Emergency Management Institute is helpful. Go to their website at Incident Command System.
 - (<https://search.usa.gov/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&affiliate=fema&query=incident%20command%20system>) and type in their search engine these seminars to view online. You must use only one seminar per search. They are ICS100, ICS200, ICS700, and ICS800.
 - <https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-907>
 - <https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-906>
 - <https://www.fema.gov/faith-resources>

All preparation should be done prior to an event.

Remember, our task as churches is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to Texas and beyond. We are to prepare our people to live in a world of suffering. We pray it doesn't happen, but should it happen to you, our goal is to help prepare the churches.

We know that Jesus will deliver. He will deliver from the tragedy, through the tragedy and to a new future.

APPENDIX

DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE CRITICAL INCIDENT PLAN (SBTC CHURCH MINISTRIES)

A comprehensive plan begins with a threat assessment and review of the capabilities of your church. A threat assessment is a systematic review of processes and procedures, along with security measures currently in place and can be accomplished by calling your local police department or county sheriff's office, by a state licensed security company/ licensed security consultant or by contacting the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) for assistance. The SBTC has a program to assist churches with security concerns. <http://sbtexas.com/church-ministries/church-administration/business-administration/security/> click on the "complete our help request form" and fill in the appropriate information.

Second, begin developing a critical incident management plan to address the needs of your church and community. Again, SBTC can assist with development of this important document. It will guide staff and volunteers in the acceptable procedures to follow when a critical incident develops. A critical incident is any event that negatively impacts the operations of your church. Typically, topics include inclement weather, medical emergencies, suspicious persons, lost children, bomb threats, hostile intent (active shooter), etc.

Third, begin developing a volunteer security ministry team. Begin by canvassing any volunteers that have special training or experience (i.e. current or retired police officers, private security training, former military, etc.). Determine if these church members would be interested in volunteering and would commit to attending training. Also consider including ushers and greeters in training, as additional "eyes and ears."

Fourth, schedule training with a proven, experienced organization with experience in church security. For security assessment and security team training, complete the request form at sbtexas.com/help.

The most effective step you can take to better secure your church is hiring an off-duty, uniformed police officer. If this is financially possible an off-duty, uniformed officer will be a visible deterrent, can immediately take enforcement action and can request additional law enforcement assistance if needed.

By filling out the request form on the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention's website, SBTC will provide a specialist to conduct an assessment at no cost and will pay for two hours of church security ministry team training. In addition, the SBTC hosts the EQUIP Conference each year that includes four sessions dedicated to church security. <http://sbtexas.com/equip>

Here is an additional document that may be of help. This came to me from Hank Lawson, National Emergency Response and Recover Training Center (NERRTC) of the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX). Please keep in mind this is not a

Baptist document, so some references refer to different religious bodies. However, the application is excellent and you will be able to navigate those few references to other church polity.

DEVELOPING EMERGENCY PLANS:

Acts of Violence on Church Property

All churches should engage in emergency planning so that when an incident occurs, staff and church leaders follow safe procedures. Potential emergencies can arise from acts of God (hurricanes, snow storms), accidents (electrical fire, flooding), and acts of man (violence, infectious disease). While creating a plan can seem overwhelming, breaking down an emergency plan by potential emergency and discussing possible responses can make the task less onerous.

This information piece includes suggestions to create emergency plans for potential acts of violence on church property. While much of this information is for congregations, there is also information for mid-councils who use churches and other locations for their meetings.

Who should work the plan?

Your session should form a committee that will report the final draft plan to your session for approval. The committee should include session members of the congregation who might have experience in emergency management, insurance, and law enforcement.

Mid-councils should consider emergency planning for their offices using similar resource people who work for or serve the presbytery. Such a plan might contemplate general emergency planning for offsite meetings, such as when meetings of a presbytery are held at a local church.

Sources of guidance

All councils can start by contacting their insurer. Presumably your local agent has visited your property and knows about potential risks on the property and in the local area. Ask the agent and the insurer about guidance and resources to help you create an emergency plan.

In addition, contact local law enforcement and ask them to help you think through risks in your building. Local police will know your neighborhood and its risks. Invite law enforcement to meet in your buildings and ask for opinions on high risk areas, locks on doors, security in general, and any other guidance the police can suggest. Also inquire if anyone in your congregation or presbytery works for a firm that provides security services or products to companies or consumers or are responsible for security in their workplace. They may be able to provide information for your project.

There are also some good resources to consult online. Start with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's publication, "Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship." A link to this is in the body of the main document.

You can also find resources at the Church Law and Tax website, including risk management resources, at this link: <http://store.churchlawtodaystore.com/emergencies.html>

Preparing a plan

Plans will vary from church-to-church and council-to-council based on your size, number of buildings, budgets, and other factors. There are some common elements to consider in creating a plan.

Examine your property - The first step is to examine your property and go through a checklist of questions, such as:

- Do all doors have secure locks?
- Are there alarms on some or all of the doors and are they active and functioning properly?
- If there are no door alarms, should you have alarms on certain doors to alert staff when they are opened?
- Are exits marked and are exit signs and doors properly lit?
- Do all first floor windows have locks and/or bars?
- Where are the remote sections of buildings which can be used to get access way from public and church office view?
- Where are the church's vulnerable spots?
- Do you have security cameras and what can they see?
- Which buildings and portions of buildings are used on any given day of the week?
- Where have we had issues in the past with breaches of security, break-ins, and uninvited guests?

Assess where incidents may occur - Some days of the week will present more challenges than other days. On Sunday mornings activities will likely take place in the sanctuary, Christian education areas, and nursery. On Sunday afternoon there may be Bible study and other classes as well as youth group activities. Planning for emergencies on Sunday may be different than planning for the rest of the week at an active church.

During the week staff will be in the church office. In some churches staff offices may be outside the main church office. It will be harder to secure staff when their offices are spread around your property. Meanwhile you may be hosting a daycare or church school in a separate building. During the day there may be a variety of meetings in rooms all over your property, including church committees, church groups, exercise classes, Bible study, Alcoholics Anonymous and other groups related to various addictions, Brownies, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Indian Guides, and the list goes on and on.

Give some thought to how you need to secure various locations on your property on certain days of the week. Churches often are welcoming spaces with doors open to anyone who wishes to enter—places of sanctuary. However, such openness comes at a cost. A committee considering an emergency plan should assess whether to reduce accessibility and limit egress to certain areas where visitors can quickly and easily be identified. Another issue is whether to have all guests sign in and out so that staff can control who is in the church buildings at any given time.

Assess who can help - Make lists of members of your congregation or council who may be of assistance in a crisis. Then ask those folks if they are willing to assist in the event of a crisis. These are also folks you might want on your planning team:

- Doctors, nurses, an EMTs
- Members of law enforcement
- Members of the media or people who are communicators in their regular jobs
- Employees of a security company or locksmiths

Communications by Staff: I am worried about a problem

Employees should be trained that if they hear or see something that they perceive is a problem, they should say something. Sometimes church staffers become complacent because they feel an issue is none of their business or because the business of a church is to help people, not report them to law enforcement. Remember that churches are places where people go to get help when they face tough economic circumstances (poverty, job loss), difficult personal issues (separation, divorce, loss of custody of children), and personal loss (death of a family member or friend). Even though churches seek to offer solace and compassion to people facing serious personal challenges, some people may take desperate actions toward churches or have mental health issues that can distort their view of a church and its staff and members.

Communications: Internal and External

Communications during a crisis is important and should be included in your plan. Also think about internal communications versus external communications. Internal communications looks at how to communicate with staff and volunteers in your building during a crisis. Do you have a public address system heard throughout your property? If so, you should consider a code that would warn folks of a situation that involves a shooter on property or risk of violence. If you do not have a public address system, do all staffers have walkie talkies or cell phones with that capacity? Will you send a warning text? In short, how will you notify staff and volunteers to seek shelter and go to a safe place in your building?

External communications means having contact information for a variety of third parties who you may need to call for assistance or information. That list should include local law enforcement, nearby hospitals, and other emergency services. When a crisis occurs you should have several people prepared to call 911 and report a problem so that if people get separated or one person is injured or killed you do not rely upon that one person to call for help.

Finally, you should consider point persons if an event occurs and the media contacts your church. Keep that group small. Channel all inquiries about the event to that small team. Include members of that team on your list of who to contact in an emergency.

Evacuate or shelter in place?

Security experts advise that in a case of an active shooter your plan should direct people to get out of the building if possible, but if not, to shelter in a safe place and be still. A factor to consider in your plan is evacuation routes (including alternate routes if primary

routes are blocked) and where staff can shelter safely in place during a crisis. Emergency responders and law enforcement can help you select the best evacuation routes. It is useful to post those routes so that in an emergency people can look quickly at a diagram and know where to go. Security experts advise that there are some areas where people should not shelter with an active shooter in a building: near windows, in doorways, hallways, stairways, and elevators. (Information provided by Securitas Security.) Your plan should include diagrams of your property and buildings, including names of rooms. It should identify church offices with names of staffers. If there is a daycare or school it should indicate which rooms they occupy. It would be useful to include in the plan a church calendar, which should be updated regularly, so emergency personnel can quickly determine what meetings, events, and activities are happening on your property.

Once law enforcement arrives

Remember that when law enforcement arrives, officers will be looking for the person who is causing a problem or is an armed aggressor so that they can neutralize the threat. Train staff and volunteers that when officers arrive they should keep their hands visible and empty and they should identify themselves to the officers. Then they should share any information they have about the crisis. What happened? Where did it happen? Describe the person causing the problem.

Next, law enforcement will seek to rescue victims and provide medical assistance to anyone who is injured. Finally, if there is an active shooter or criminal in your building, it is a crime scene and law enforcement wants to preserve and secure it. (Information provided by Securitas Security.)

Threats of violence

Whether or not you have a plan in place, you should report threats of violence from any source to law enforcement. No matter what you think of the credibility of the threat or its source, law enforcement can help you assess credibility and assist in a response.

Of course, actual incidents of violence, damage, burglaries, arsons, graffiti, and other property crimes should be reported to police. These may not be isolated incidents in your neighborhood and reports may help police identify and catch those responsible.

Failure to report and respond to past incidents may create liability for your church. For example, if someone repeatedly enters your buildings and makes threats or behaves in an unusual manner and no one reports the disruptive behavior to law enforcement, if that person returns and harms someone, it could be argued that your church was on notice of this dangerous person and failed to act. The injured party may bring a lawsuit on the grounds of negligence and argue that the actions of the person who caused the injury were foreseeable and preventable.

Training and sharing

Having a plan is useful, but without training it is merely a document that likely will not be adequately implemented when an emergency unfolds. So, share your plan with all church/council staff and allow them to ask questions. Then, train staff on how to respond

in case of an emergency. Hold an annual discussion at staff meetings to remind staff of the plan and to make sure all staff members know the plan of action. Just as you might hold an annual fire drill to know how to exit safely in a fire emergency, consider a similar drill for an emergency involving potential violence on your property.

For possible incidents in the sanctuary, train your greeters and ushers on the plan and recommend responses.

If you have any weekday operations in your buildings, such as daycare or church school, share your plan with the leaders and staff of those operations. Discuss with them what to do in case of an emergency and where to go to safety. Include someone from those operations on your planning committee that creates the emergency plan.

When you share the plan with your session or presbytery for approval, discuss it thoroughly so that your leaders know how to respond in an emergency. Bring out the plan once a year to discuss at a meeting. Make your congregation or council aware of the plan and where to find it.

Mid-councils often meet in churches under their jurisdictions. Have the plan available for such meetings. When your congregation gets a request to use your church, include in your planning process time to discuss your emergency plan, including the plan for active shooters.

Mid-councils who use churches and other buildings should build into their planning time to discuss what to do in case of an emergency—not only in an active shooter situation, but also weather (hurricane, tornado) and other emergencies. While working with church, school or other location to plan a meeting, ask for a copy of their emergency plans and discuss them with someone who can share information about the plan and the building. Take time to locate safe places in each building and emergency routes and exits.

Finally, congregations should make local law enforcement contacts aware of their emergency plan and ask if the agency wants a copy.

Where to locate the emergency plan

Maintain the emergency plan in two formats; electronic and hard copy. All staff members who have computers should have access to both formats and those who do not should have access to a hard copy near their work area. In that way, when an emergency occurs, all staff members can quickly find the plan and use it.

Give copies of the plan to key staff to keep at home, such as the pastors or executive presbyter. In the event someone contacts them at home in an emergency, they can refer to the plan and provide instructions. This may prove useful if a pastor or executive presbyter is offsite when an even occurs.

Multiple hard copies of the plan, including diagrams, should be kept in various locations on your church property. In that way, if and when law enforcement comes during an emergency, you can give the officers a copy of the plan and diagrams so they can quickly assess the property and where staff, volunteers, and others might be found.



The fall of 2017 and forward has been a time of struggle in Texas. We have experienced national tragedies—Harvey’s flood, the 26 people killed inside FBC Sutherland Springs, and the 10 people killed at the Santa Fe, TX high school. And, there were other shootings outside Texas.

What are we to do? Certainly we are called to due diligence in everything physically possible to protect our communities and stop these acts of violence.
But there is more.



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