

10 Standards for Starting a Security Program in Your Church

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Through years of study and experience in this field of security at faith-based organizations (primarily churches), I have identified what I feel are the 10 standards for starting (or improving) a security program;

1. Confirm executive support
2. Conduct a base-line readiness evaluation
3. Start with what you have...where you are
4. Keep it simple
5. Keep it legal
6. Know your insurance agent and policies
7. Network and share
8. Train & drill
9. Develop policies & procedures
10. It's Like Jazz

The following pages are individually dedicated to these standards. The intention of this document was to provide the framework from which to start or improve your program. It will not answer every question for you, but will provide the right categories for you to answer your own questions. As our friend Dave Grossman says, "There is no plan in a can" that works for everyone. You must develop your plan specific to your ministry. There is a good template for standard 9, but it too is a framework from which to build.

The website www.carlchinn.com provides *deadly force statistics* as a wake-up call for those who say, "It won't happen here." While that data divulges the worst case scenarios, programs should focus on the more likely to occur, minor concerns. Get really good at the small things and you will be better prepared for the big ones. But don't expect to be ready for the big ones having *only* prepared for the minors.

I hope everyone reading this will be a regular visitor to that website – using the resources page, and reading the "Think About it" tab on a weekly basis for team discussion, consideration, encouragement and perspective. I want you to be physically and mentally prepared for adversity.

There is little worse than being unprepared when evil strikes. But when we all meet again on the far side of the Jordan, I hope to hear you say, "Thanks for nothing." I hope you never need it.

ONE -- Confirm Executive Support

Some churches still do not have intentional security endorsed by leadership. Sometimes the thought has simply never occurred to the leadership. Others have dismissed it as an inapplicable subject of disputable value, or perceive a sensational expression against faith. Safety and security are based in faith, but managed in action. There are ways to approach your leadership to confirm their support. Settle these concepts of the first standard into your own mind first, then you will be better prepared to persuade others.

Consider the Matthew 6th chapter teachings to “not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear...”^[i] We shouldn't worry. Worry is a mild case of atheism. However, being confident in our faith doesn't mean we dismiss the responsibility for our self maintenance and social decency. Having faith doesn't mean our clothes, drinks and food are freely handed to us. Those needs are procured and managed by actions on our part.

Providing for the safety and security of others is like that. The people in our care and the amenities they have funded with their contributions require the action of intentional protection.

I Corinthians 13:6-7 tells us that, “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” Faith leaders are driven by seasoned appreciation of scriptural values. These scriptural references are not to be used to hit them over the head as gotcha clauses. If you approach it that way, they will not be persuaded. But use these and other scriptural references in your conversations with them.

Ask your leaders for their support as you focus on diversions of the primary purpose of their particular ministry. Your leaders will agree there is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.ⁱ Ask for their support. Understand there are folks pulling for other things as well. The sanctuary needs new carpet, the worship team needs new projectors and the IT group must replace a big expensive server. And it all needs to happen this year or catastrophe is sure to hit.

You could operate without executive approval. But for your program to be the most effective, it should start at the top. True leadership endorsement will make it effective. Once you are ready to present the program, ask for a date to present the program to the leadership. If thoughtful consideration is presented in the tone of this publication, it should be successful.

TWO – Conduct a Base-Line Readiness Evaluation

In any industry, safety and security professionals agree that a risk / vulnerability assessment is a must. If it is worth the time and effort to develop a safety plan, it is worth the effort to measure your readiness in light of your specific risks and vulnerabilities.

There are many options for such a study;

- Hire a professional to conduct a detailed *Risk / Vulnerability Analysis (R/VA)*. Many security professionals can do this.
- You may have a safety / security professional in your church that is a member and will conduct one for you at a discounted price, or as a member contribution.
- Use local law enforcement or fire departments. NOTE: I suggest using both. You will get noted differences between the two – take the most applicable portions from each and develop your own best points.
- Use your liability insurance provider.
- Do it yourself; This is where an *R/VA* is different than a *Readiness Survey*. Most churches (especially smaller congregations) can get more applicable solutions out of a simple *readiness survey* than a complex *R/VA*

It is better to hire a third party, but many churches cannot afford that. Whatever option you choose, develop some form of follow-up so you can measure not only how prepared you are now, but can also track your improvements. That which gets measured will be managed.

The problem with some detailed *R/VA*'s is a tendency to sit in a file drawer with no action taken because they are written (and performed) in such a way as to not make sense to the people who will actually use them. Unfortunately, I have seen some *R/VA*'s that were more of a wordy dialogue to impress the reader on the writer's understanding of advanced security, than an effort to simply point out concerns and suggested actions.

Begin with the end in mind. When you set out to conduct (or hire) an assessment (be it an *R/VA* or a simple survey) ask yourself (and the approval authorities in your ministry), "Are we willing to act on the recommendations? If so, how much of a budget are we willing to allocate?" Don't spend your whole security budget on the *R/VA* itself.

THREE -- Start With What you Have Where you are

Effective programs are started by identifying and organizing existing in-house resources of *People, Parts and Processes*. Identify and recruit the right people, then let them work through the parts and processes that are right for your ministry.

Speaking to reluctant troops preparing for the battle at San Juan Hill in Cuba, Teddy Roosevelt told them, “Do what you can, with what you have, where you are”. Battles have been won and major accomplishments enjoyed due to this concept.

Philip Crouse had repaired a door at the Arvada, Colorado Youth With a Mission facility just days before a madman attacked them. The door had not been latching and locking, so Mr. Crouse simply fixed it. A killer attacked shortly after midnight on December 9th, 2007. After killing two, he found himself back out that door in the chaos of the moment. The door latched and locked and the killer could not get back in to finish his rampage. There is little doubt that the killer intended to kill as many as he could, then die himself at that ministry. His carnage was cut short by the simple fact that he couldn't get back in. Philip Crouse saved many lives that night, but is remembered primarily as one of the two killed. Mr. Crouse simply recognized a problem with a door and fixed it.

My friend Jimmy Meeks was a Hurst, TX police officer. He tells of a night when the sergeant told all midnight shift officers that whoever brought him a report with the most unsecure doors in commercial buildings by midnight could have the rest of the shift off. Jimmy knew where he would go to find those unsecure doors. He won the contest and went home early because he found many unoccupied churches he could just walk into.

Start your improvements from the readiness evaluation from which you should have just performed. This should highlight simple things (like the door Philip Crouse repaired) that can be corrected. You may discover there is no door locking program (with redundancies) guiding staff through the week to secure the building when they leave. You may find the building key control is hopelessly out of hand, and nobody has any idea of how many building keys are floating around among past staff and volunteers.

Too many security leaders (faith-based and others) focus on the deficiencies and complain about the lack of support, funding, or acceptance. Be grateful for what you have and make certain what you do have is working right. Approach your mission with a “glass ½ full” type attitude.

Be faithful with a few things; you will be put in charge of manyⁱⁱ.

FOUR -- Keep it Simple

I have seen complex plans that spell out every detail. Those details are incredible works, and I respect the professionals who took the time to develop them. While there is value in complexity, I believe simplicity is better for safety and security operations.

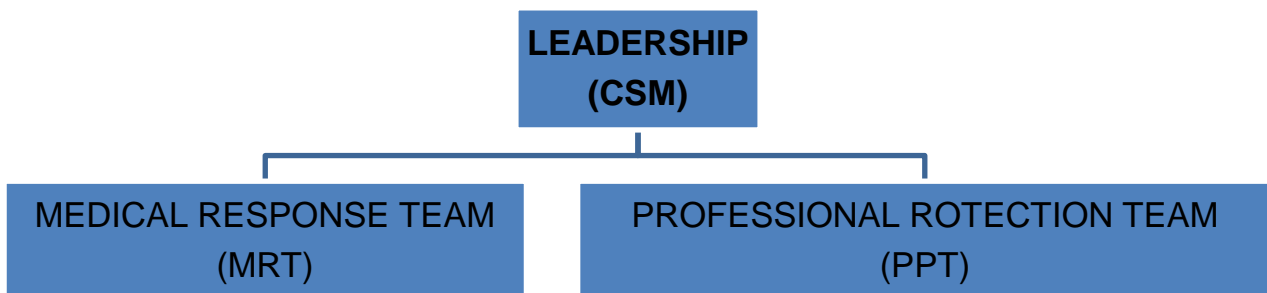
While there are mega-churches that may need more complexity, the overwhelming majority of faith-based security operators are in small churches or ministries. In small organizations the security function is not a full time job. This document is primarily addressed to those who have volunteer operations in a small ministry.

Don't launch your safety / security program by asking for a big budget. There may come a time for budget discussions, but don't start off with more than what is involved around the baseline readiness assessment. After a season of real experiences and annual follow-up readiness assessments, valid needs will be clearer. Even then, purchased items will never be the most important part of your operations. The most important part of your security operations will always be the people who make it work.

Most of those people have full-time jobs and responsibilities elsewhere. While we must be professional and effective in safety / security operations, those who serve there must enjoy and understand their service. If volunteer burn-out or spotty participation has been an issue for your operations, you must ask yourself why.

Consider the name of your team -- something like "Church Safety Ministry" (CSM). You want your team to operate more out of true ministry compassion than with the sensationalism of being an *officer* or *guard*. Consider a simple organizational chart. Where possible, fill these slots with folks who get training elsewhere (medical professionals, law enforcement, security professionals, etc.) but don't overlook other good people with care & protection in their DNA.

Don't forget the day-to-day operations as you staff the program. Many things happen in *off-event times* when there are no weekend team members present. Find existing ministry staff who are eligible and willing participants to be ready during the work-week. Plug them into the appropriate team. The ministry facilities or hospitality staff should be a part of any safety program. That in itself will help the regular office hours and after hours safety readiness need.



FIVE -- Keep it Legal

A good friend of mine was a bouncer. I realized as he shared experienced, the similarities to church security operations. He quit bouncing due to a narrow escape from a lawsuit where everything he had was at risk. He knew more about the legal applications of restraint and use of force than do many church security operators.

Many go only as far as checking if their state allows conceal carry in churches. However, state conceal carry laws are a very singular portion of what must be considered. The first thing to ask is whether you can operate as a security operation without a license.

41 states in the U.S. regulate security operations at the state level. Texas is one of the most restrictive of all states concerning security operations. Colorado has some of the most relaxed security operation regulations of any state. But in Denver the law is much like Texas. Regardless of *state* regulations, there may be local or regional regulations. Do not make the mistake of feeling safe that you won't get arrested for running an unlicensed security operation in a jurisdiction where it is required. Your Sheriff, Police Chief and County attorney may have all said won't arrest for it. They aren't the problem.

In any severe action there is going to be a criminal and a civil process. The criminal side is going to be spearheaded by your local law-enforcement community (they are your friends and probably will like what you did). Civil matters are going to be spearheaded by attorneys for the bad guy you stopped (they aren't your friends and they won't like what you did). They are going to scrutinize your operations for any deviation from law.

When they sue, your liability insurance is contingent upon you having operated within the law. Just as your Sheriff told you not to worry, your insurance agent may have said the same. But when that civil process ends with a lawsuit, the insurance directors aren't going to ask for your agent's opinion as they determine the applicability of their payout.

There is also the criminal and self-defense statutes. How you can legally deal with criminal activity (as a citizen) are described in your state statutes. For example, how does citizen arrest work in your state? If you restrain someone you better know because as a security operator your actions are governed just like any other citizen. Don't get so wound around the axle of knowing gun laws that you don't educate yourself on property laws, demonstration ordinances and arrest / detention laws. The last thing you want to happen is to put your defender in front of a jury and have the opposing civil team point out to them (after grilling your man on lesser laws) that "ABC Church can pray for you or shoot you – they aren't trained or educated on anything between."

SIX -- Know Your Insurance Agent and Policies

Insurance was my inaugural journey into safety and security. Each year, (as the building engineer) I would walk the Focus on the Family facilities with our liability coverage provider. He would want to see things like the inspections / certifications for elevator, fire alarm, fire suppression and boilers. He wanted to see the generators run some years, and other years he would want to see smoke doors or emergency light packs operate. I could never tell what he would focus on, so I was always ready for anything.

After some years as building engineer, I began to manage the safety department of our 1,300 employee ministry and began the same sort of interaction with the worker's compensation processes. The first year I considered if we had the right categories (we didn't) and the right people under the right categories (we didn't). After realigning some things, then we started focusing on intentional safety. The savings in worker's compensation premiums were significant as we began to watch our modification factor decrease approaching a "1.0" (which means you are even with others in that category).

There is nothing like working with your agent and policies to help you understand the potholes. You can't be serious about security or safety if insurance is an unknown to you. When your ministry established an insurance policy, they would have answered a survey regarding operations. Things have changed in the years since that questionnaire was filled in, and your insurance must represent current conditions and operations.

An incident is not the right time for you to get your agent's business card. Ask your ministry risk manager (typically someone in accounting) if you can meet the agent next time he or she comes to your facility. Get to know what kinds of things you can help with and work with that relationship. Get on a regular schedule for walk-throughs.

Understand the big ticket issues associated with insurance, and be intentional about minimizing those risks. The primary reason churches were in court for many years has been "sexual abuse of a minor by someone in charge (staff or volunteer) at the church". Get to know why, and what could have been done differently in those cases (see number 9, "Develop Policies and Procedures" for resources). Do not let it happen to your church on your watch.

If you have buses and / or large capacity vans at your church, you will discover the risks associated with them. Often while focusing on patrolling your buildings, providing great pastoral protection, and having great practices to keep your kids safe from abuse, your greatest risk could be untrained drivers and / or poorly maintained vehicles out on the highways away from your church. Understand everything from fire extinguisher test dates to fleet safety and all associated insurance. Just as churches are most often in court because of abuse -- large capacity vans and transportation related services are always the largest payouts of church liability insurers.

SEVEN -- Network and Share

Any 12-year-old with the ability to see, scream and point could have stopped one of the most horrific assassinations in U.S. history had they known John Wilkes Booth was about to attack Abraham Lincoln that night in the theater. It takes intentional effort to gain knowledge of, and interrupt evil. It didn't happen on April 14th, 1865 and few do it today.

Actionable intelligence is the strategic observance of useful information regarding known or developing concerns, documented and disseminated in a way that allows for preparation (if not prevention) of the concern. Those concerns can be global, regional or site specific. They can be live, structural or environmental in nature.

SITE SPECIFIC: Any organization (church, business or cartel) has within its collection of human dynamics, some that have gone bad. The security team leader(s) needs to know everyone on staff personally and regularly visit with them. This is the most effective way to discover legal protection orders regarding staff or congregants, people in the audience with emotional, mental or social instability or other brewing issues.

If concerned that knowing such things about people isn't good, understand it isn't anything new and is not wrong or illegal (but know clergy / penitent privilege, slander, libel, privacy, HIPAA and other legal guidelines & explore options for voluntary information shared by the protected). The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy regarding Alexander the Metalworker who had caused problems for the early church. He said, "You too should be on your guard against him..."ⁱⁱⁱ

REGIONAL: Beyond your own doors, there are good reasons to work with other churches & law enforcement in your area. Develop an area safety coalition starting with the largest faith-based organizations in your area. Once this group is established, request an introductory meeting with representatives from area (federal, state and local) law enforcement agencies to explore ways you may share "sensitive but not classified information" with each other.

Conmen have operated successfully in some areas because there were no tools for churches to share information with each other – they were silos of information.

GLOBAL: Many U.S. faith-based operations send or support missionary efforts in other parts of the world. If protection is worth doing here, it is more worth doing there. Become a member of the FBOWG (Faith-Based Operators Working Group) of the Overseas Advisory Council (of the U.S. State Department) if you have members in foreign nations.

Whether internal, regional or global know the others in your arena and share information.

EIGHT -- Train & Drill

The U.S. has the best law enforcement and military of any nation in the world due to training. Any sports team that rose to the top was well trained. There is no pass on the need for training for people of faith. David trained with his slingshot before he took on Goliath. If your team doesn't train and drill, you are saying, "it will never happen here."

For example, train on the adrenalin aspects, including tunnel vision and black-out. Killer kids pick up a gun and envision their attack as if it was a video game with their gun as the joystick. Their training has come through X-Box. When they face an armed, trained and confident defender, adrenalin hits in ways they were unprepared for. Violent thugs may have been to a range (most have not), and may be able to shoot well (most can't), but they probably have not been through tactical training and they lack nobility. These coward killers can't handle a confident, capable and noble defender. You will not "rise to the occasion" as these killers with a gun imagine. You will "default to your training". When responding to violence, answer with the confidence of training and end it quick.

While this is an example of the most violent form of attack, good training works well at all levels of readiness. To indicate an activity is like a three-ring-circus, conjures notions of undisciplined chaos. On more careful consideration, those who conduct or participate in a three-ring-circus are very talented folks with well-disciplined and trained coordination. The dynamics of safety and security in a church environment can be like a three-ring-circus. Good training, re-enforced with good drills will enable multiple personalities, working in dynamic congregational environments to prevent, mitigate and recover from unpredictable scenarios.

Initial training (even for deadly force incidents) doesn't have to be expensive or even cost centered but, especially if team members are armed, they should be practicing together and evaluating the environment together to maximize safety. Better training will cost, and if you can afford anything, this is a good arena to invest in. Of all the sub-categories of training to invest in, medical trauma and supplies should come before tactical training.

Drills are different than training, and just as useful. Fire safety awareness (including drills) for schools has been quite effective at preventing school fire deaths since 1959^{iv}. We should take lessons from school fire training and drill models and apply them to incident readiness for all types of scenarios at houses of worship and faith-based organizations.

Many schools have now developed security plans and drills in addition to their fire training. Get with your local law enforcement and discover what types of training and drills your area educational facilities are doing, and get introduced to the school security directors. You don't have to reinvent the wheel.

NINE -- Develop Policies & Procedures

Procedural readiness varies from having nothing written, to thick binders that few have time to read and fewer can recall when it counts. I have authored (and now regret) big binders of emergency procedures. Keep it simple, but develop effective policies and procedures.

Policies are statements about a given subject, while procedures provide a guide on handling the policy. An example of policies and procedures regarding the subject of someone pitching a tent in your parking lot (a real problem for some churches) may be something like;

POLICY: ABC Church does not allow loitering or encampment on the property.

The policy allows security operators and staff alike to simply respond when they see someone setting up camp, or living out of their vehicle parked on church property. While the policy is a statement, it does not provide guidance on dealing with the problem. This is where *procedures* come into play;

PROCEDURE: If persons are observed loitering or camping on the property, approach the party with 2 (cover and contact) security operators. Ask to see and record their driver's license information (and record it in your logs). Explain the loitering policy, but ask if they need to see a pastor and if they have a particular need. Offer to introduce them to the benevolence ministry but do not make promises that they will receive anything. If they agree to meet with a pastor or the benevolence administrator, escort the party to the meeting. The decision regarding care for the party should also include an understanding of the loitering policy with the party.

The number one thing churches should develop policies and procedures for is the protection of our children. There is no arena greater than this to start at and keep front and center for the life of your church. Great resources are your insurance provider and those listed on the CarlChinn.com website.

Policies & procedures regarding the use of force in dealing with criminal action intervention should be developed with legal and insurance interface, but you must have those documents. Consider adopting a "response continuum" (sometimes called a "use of force continuum").

The final part of the policies and procedures should be disciplined note taking. Note taking should be done by all operators, which then get entered into an electronic incident response log that is searchable and sortable. This incident log will be an important part of the seventh standard.

TEN -- It's Like Jazz...

No plan, regardless of attention to detail, will ever cover every possible scenario. The question emergency planners often hear is “what do you do with a fire evacuation during a lightning storm?”

You punt.

Emergency planning is a lot like a football huddle. You develop a plan then assign positions of who blocks where, and who will run down which sideline. But as soon as that ball is snapped, the field changes from how you envisioned in the huddle. The talents on your team should be effective enough to move towards the goal by dynamically reading the play and each other, being constantly aware of the lay of the field, their individual player strengths and weaknesses, and the capacity, historical tactics and dynamic operations of the opposition.

I heard a speaker at a U.S. military symposium describe major incident response as being more like jazz than a symphony. In a symphony, the musical piece is carefully and rigidly choreographed, structured and managed. Each musician follows the sheet music and conductor to strike exactly the correct note at precisely the right time with perfect pitch and rhythm.

In Jazz however, one talented musician leads and others join in -- sometimes one at a time -- until a sound emerges that flows. Jazz pieces are, by nature of their style, never played exactly alike in any two performances. Done well, they produce a very moving and enjoyable experience.

Security operations in any environment are dynamic. Having no plan is reckless, but over planning is futile. Somewhere in between is a good model.

Develop your game plan (performance) with a vision of success. Begin with the end in mind^v. The return to normalcy is central to all security planning -- be focused on that vision. With faith-based security that normalcy is everybody safe, with the primary purpose of our ministry allowed to continue. Sometimes that is only possible because our team has come together to face the enemy.

As a good southern pastor said about *vision*;

“If you don't see it before you see it, you'll never see it.”^{vi}

ⁱ 1 Peter 5:8

ⁱⁱ Matthew 25: 21 & 23

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Timothy, 4:15 (NIV)

^{iv} The last student death in a school fire in the U.S. appears to be on December 1st, 1958 in Chicago, IL

^v Steven Covey. 7 Habits of Highly Effective Leaders

^{vi} Message by Dr. Stephen Trammell as he was quoting a friend at the Texas Ministry Conference on 2/15/2012