

Security at the Church: a Primer

SETUP, BEFOREHAND, ALL THE TIME

+ Pray for safety and protection, not in front of the crowd to scare them, but on staff and with leadership.

+ Know who the “Point Person” is on staff, and the volunteer “Ministry Manager.” This is the head usher in some churches, but it seems best to have someone majoring on just plain security. Usually behind the scenes. Certainly it is the staff leader for the members of the church staff.

SPECIFIC AREAS OF NEED

+ In the hallways: I know of one Sunday where a stranger walked into the building with a backpack on, heading toward the sanctuary. Pray tell, who is going to welcome him but also ask about the pack and check it.

+ In the children’s area: security, security, security. It does not have to be on signs, or loud, or as if there is a bomb scare or fear that kidnappers attend the church! Just in my small world, there have been two times when a divorced parent took a child who had come to church with the other parent. That for sure can be called kidnapping. There are nice directors of kids’ ministries who think security is not an issue. The pastor better.

Surely this would include these:

- a check-in system so you know who is there and where
- a way to contact parents when they are in the worship or ABF class (Panera has extra buzzers sometimes☺)
- a check-out system, so you know who can pick the child up
- medical information
- security person around the halls in a sizeable church
- awareness of where a doctor or a nurse is located in the building
- a way to summon a medical person

+ In or next to the money-counting room:

I coach churches, and find that there are still some where one person counts the money! Or a husband and a wife together!

But the other question here is related to being sure there is someone who knows when the money is in “that room” and has connection with security.

+ In the sanctuary:

--If the pulpit were “rushed,” who (what two people) are down front and trained to know what to do? At Akron, I always felt good that, even when we had five services, there were at each service two ushers front and center who knew what their responsibility was. And that they liked me.

--Where is the security person or head usher when the sermon is on, the longest time on one event?

- If the church is over 800 or 1000, should there not be a uniformed officer around and visible? If your church gathering is one of the largest places to “make a name or make a scene for yourself” in town (thinking in wild man ways), should you not always have a plan?
- Who finishes the sermon if you get sick in the middle of it (not because of it)? Who takes charge?
- Should anyone have a concealed gun? Thousands of churches have had that debate since Newtown.
- Is there a way to locate medical personnel and call them, the ones in the building?
- Who has the phone for emergency personnel to be called?
- Have the staff and platform people discussed which emergencies in the pews stop the service and which they try to work around?
- Do you know who to go to when someone threatens you or the worship service?

+ Outside:

- What is the plan to watch cars? Are you aware than many churches have experienced car break-ins during the times of worship services, which are pretty predictable as to length?
- At what size church do you have a security car driving though the parking lot with a flashing yellow light?
- Ancillary question: Has your insurance policy been checked recently as to how all of this is covered?

+ In the office area and during the week:

- Do you have clear policies about meeting people one on one? Especially about the opposite sex?
- Whom do you tell if you get a threatening or spooky letter or email? Do you understand that love covers a multitude of sins but also is often naïve about people who can lose their balance or be violent?
- When was the last time you had a fire drill?
- In a large church where someone has a lot of visibility in the city, is there a clear way to summon security during the week?
- Are there clear ways to help street people but also guidelines about one on one and cash?

+ Youth and children’s ministries:

- Do you do security or background checks on all volunteers? Some churches stay away from that because one of their veterans said, “We trust each other here.”
- Do you know why no sponsor or staff member is allowed to have a sleep-over or anything resembling that, without multiple adults there?
- Would you know whom to call if you ever heard rumors of any sexual abuse by someone from the church?
- What kind of liability insurance do you have for church staff or even volunteers, related to counseling or misconduct?
- Are there clear guidelines for staff and volunteers about meeting with teens or taking them home after a church event?

+ The building itself

- Who gets keys? Are there still keys owned by people who got mad and left?
- Is there a security system and adequate fire-alarm system?
- When was the fine print in the insurance policy checked last? By whom?

+ Other financial questions

--Are there really two signatures required for checks?

--A good requisition system?

--Do you get audits regularly from outside official auditors?

--Are there clear policies about spending over budget, for lines and department budgets?

--Do you know how strict the government and auditors are about records for and purposes of reimbursements?

--Do you understand why many pastors do not touch cash that belongs to the church?

--Do you have clear policies about "intellectual property" – if the pastor writes his sermons on church time, who gets the money when he sells them? Or the song that was written? Practices and policies need to be on paper.

IN SUMMARY AND IN GENERAL:

--Would it be good to go through these and other questions with clear-thinking and savvy people in your leadership?

--Can you help anyone understand that trusting our Lord does not preclude any of these concerns any more than trusting Him would mean you did not bother with speed laws or dangerous areas at night or insurance coverage?

--Do you know how strong parents' feelings are about areas of security for their children?

--Do you know the ancient saying, "If not you, who; if not now, when?"