



Developing a Safety Team

A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO
CHURCH SAFETY

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Ezekiel 33:1-6

33 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 “Son of man, speak to your people and say to them: ‘When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, 3 and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, 4 then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not heed the warning and the sword comes and takes their life, their blood will be on their own head. 5 Since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their own head. If they had heeded the warning, they would have saved themselves. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone’s life, that person’s life will be taken because of their sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood.’

“It is no longer an option to provide protection for the church, it is God’s word that commands us to do so. How will you respond?” Jim Howard, Executive Director, Trinity Security Allies.

DEVELOPING A SAFETY TEAM:

More than a decade ago, a church in Pinellas County, Florida began a campaign to raise money for new property it was purchasing. As funds for the project began coming in each week along with the regular offerings, church leaders took steps to keep it safe.

At the end of each service, the money was moved from the back of the sanctuary to a room in the main office where it was counted and secured for transport to the bank the following day. Because the distance from the sanctuary to the office was about one hundred yards and because of the amount of money typically collected each week, church staff and elders became concerned about the possibility of an armed robbery. In 2006, the church formed a safety team.

It didn’t take long to realize there was much more to consider than just keeping money safe. On a regular Sunday, the Safety Team who was watching an estranged parent take his kids out of the children’s ministry without permission when confronted by his ex-father-in-law threatened to beat him up. Once the Safety Team stepped in and prevented the fight it was later found out that that the estranged parent was the primary suspect in a murder case that had happened that same weekend.

It is surprising how many churches today are almost entirely unprepared for any type of major emergency. Surveys put an overwhelming majority of churches in this category. Reasons vary from a perceived lack of resources to a belief that they should simply trust in God for protection.

Many churches are not sure how to move forward regarding a safety plan that would oversee the ministry in a way God would have them. Although all of them understand that it is ultimately God’s protection that keeps them secure, they want to be faithful overseers

in this regard.

As reports of extreme violence in various churches across the United States have risen in recent years, hundreds more churches are dealing on a weekly basis with incidents involving domestic issues, attendees with mental health problems, and a host of other challenges. Church campuses also must guard against burglary, arson, and vandalism throughout the week. The devil looks to attack the Lord's house in any way he can; and with increasing frequency, he is using people who come to church with the sole purpose of causing disruption, chaos, and destruction.

To best protect their congregations, churches increasingly realize the need to organize a special group of volunteers into a safety team. Ultimately, every member of the church must be safety conscious. Someone working in the children's ministry may see something that a safety team member might not be aware of. Reporting what they see can help ensure that children and adults are kept safe. But it is still important to designate certain sets of individuals within the congregation as a "safety team" and ensure those workers are properly trained and equipped for various situations that may arise. You will want to bring in all volunteers as they each have a vital role in protecting the church.

Many times, however, a congregation is hesitant to create a safety team because of liability concerns and perceptions of how the team's presence might affect the ministry. It helps to make sure the congregation understands that the threat of violence could pose a risk to their safety, while instructing the safety team to maintain a visual presence that reflects what the ministry wants for visitors.

A safety team is about more than just guarding against the possibility of an active-shooter situation. Congregants must be prepared for medical emergencies, a lost or kidnapped child, fires, and other potential incidents that can happen within the church. When these real-world situations are brought into the discussion, the need will become more apparent. Whomever presents the need of a safety team must be prepared to answer questions from the pastoral staff and church leaders; they will need to know where to begin the process and details for the complete plan. They will want to know what the costs are going to be, how many people will be needed, and who is going to be in charge, just as with any other ministry idea that is presented. It is important to present a plan that answers these questions, although it can be a limited one at the outset.

Proper research is necessary when making the case for the formation of a safety team, including recent data to support the argument. Several resources may be found in print or online that can be a great help. But keep things simple so as not to overwhelm decision makers when making the presentation. Focusing on children's safety and medical emergencies is a great way to ease into the conversation.

The first thing that needs to be done is a strength and weakness document on the church. Take a good look at where the church is located and what the needs are based on the surrounding area. The level of crime in any neighborhood is easy to research.

Data may reveal little more than some random automobile burglaries made possible because people left their cars unlocked. On the other hand, if there are a couple of bars down the street, there will likely be some reports of assaults and other incidents. State law enforcement agencies have websites that show the location of known sexual offenders that is important information for a church to know in cases of a possible missing child. No matter how calm a neighborhood might appear to be, safety-minded people can never let their guard down.

It is also important that the church be local law enforcement friendly. The proper authorities should be included in planning so they know the church is doing everything it can to make sure its preparations are undertaken in the right way. This also builds a relationship between local law enforcement and those in your church. It becomes personal in the event of an incident.

The thought of an intentional approach to keeping the church safe is foreign to some people, even those who have spent their entire lives in church. But it is common sense, and it is biblical. God uses His people to conduct all facets of His work, and with the many scriptural admonitions related to parents guarding their families and even the role of government in protecting citizens, it is unwise for churches not to take an active role in ensuring their own safety and security in God's house.

The safety team should be considered a ministry of the church, just like any other. Thus, its members should be considered and chosen as carefully as those who lead worship or work with children. Certain ministries in contemporary churches are considered vital for attracting families or younger people, but none of that matters if attendees no longer feel safe. They will go somewhere else. The saying is, you lose a child, you lose your church.

After the church makes the decision to form a safety team, the first step is selecting the team leader. Approaching it as a ministry, it is wise to look at Titus 1: 6-9 and the requirements for an elder or overseer in the church for your person to lead the safety team:

"6 An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe [b] and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."

In the Old Testament, a detailed description of God's people taking steps to protect themselves is found in Nehemiah. 4:13-15.

13 Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. 14 After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

15 When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.

All churches have people who are gifted or equipped in certain areas. For some, it is natural to work with children, while others could not imagine themselves ever doing it. Leading the music ministry requires a definite aptitude as well as a certain amount of training. It is the same with safety volunteers. It will be natural to gravitate toward those who have a background in public safety, whether it be law enforcement or emergency medical services, as well as those with military experience. It may be that church members with expertise in these areas are among the first to volunteer anyway because they recognize the importance of their qualifications and have a desire to serve.

It is important that the safety team leader be allowed to have the deciding decision in choosing the other members of the team. A safety team leader should never be forced to take a certain person with questionable qualifications just because that person volunteered and someone in leadership in the church mandated the selection. Churches would be wise to require potential safety team members to have previously served in a ministry for at least six months so they may be observed and vetted in this way.

Any member of the church who applies to be part of the safety team should also be required to submit to a criminal background check. And background checks should be repeated every few years for existing safety team members. Each of them should have a clean record, although something in a person's past does not automatically disqualify him or her from service. A minor infraction by a person who has been serving faithfully in the church for several years may be reviewed and discussed with the applicant, and church leadership can make the appropriate determination.

As with any other ministry, serving on the safety team is a commitment. To ensure everyone is doing the job efficiently and with excellence, proper training is essential. That may begin with an in-person consultation on the church's campus with a professional who can assess the strengths and weaknesses of the property and prepare the people to do what needs to be done to protect it. Once initial team members are selected, they will need to be trained as a unit so each one knows his or her responsibilities and can support the others properly.

Some churches conduct quarterly training sessions for safety team members on a continual basis. As with any training or rehearsals with any other ministry, these should be attended faithfully by those involved. Attendance policies for safety team members

should be implemented consistently and enforced appropriately. A person's performance in any job reflects his or her training (or lack of it).

Safety team members must have strong people skills, be mentally and emotionally stable, and have a keen ability to observe people and situations. The church needs people with good judgment who are not impulsive and can adopt a survival mindset in a crisis. They must know how to respond quickly, when to call 911, and how to react when law enforcement arrives.

With active shootings on the rise, it is more important than ever to know how to respond to these types of threats before they happen. When a team is trained and prepared in advance to respond to an active shooter, they will be able to instruct the congregation to begin lockdown or evacuation procedures correctly. Having a plan that is followed by a trained safety team will reduce chaos and be far more likely to save lives than if nothing is done to prepare for such a situation. We are all keenly aware of news reports in recent years about churches being targeted, and in many of those cases, the results were tragic. Every second counts.

Churches should call their teams "safety teams" rather than "security teams" for a couple reasons. First, in many jurisdictions, anyone acting in a "security" role is subject to the laws and regulations of the private security industry. Those who are not trained and licensed but who are acting as security and calling themselves "security" can potentially face criminal charges and fines (in the same way that someone acting as and calling himself an attorney may not do so if he is not trained and licensed to do so). Since most church members are not licensed security guards or law enforcement officers, calling the team a "safety team" minimizes this possibility.

Second, a safety team's job will consist of much more than just minimizing the threat of violence. Safety teams must also be prepared for other potentially life-threatening situations, including weather-related incidents (tornadoes, hurricanes, excessive snow and ice), medical crises, and situations that originate off-campus. The safety team should always include medical personnel because a church will have more medical emergencies than any other type of incident.

Cooperation and planning for medical, weather, and other non-security-related situations are just as important as planning for a security incident. If someone is injured or has a heart attack, and a safety team member is instructed to bring the medical kit, that team member should know exactly where it is. Churches should consider keeping an automated external defibrillator (AED) on hand (and perhaps two or more, depending upon the size of the campus) and should be well-stocked with medical supplies appropriate to the church's size and budget.

In the days following the 2015 shooting where a 21-year-old Caucasian male killed nine African American attendees at a Charleston church, the Confederate flag flying outside South Carolina's state capitol building was taken down by order of Gov. Nikki Haley, leading to several days of protests. During one such gathering, in the intense heat of

summer, a uniformed officer monitoring the activity noticed an older man having trouble with the scorching temperatures and brought him inside the air-conditioned government building.

This wasn't just any uniformed officer. It was Leroy Smith, South Carolina's Director of Public Safety. He was the state's top law enforcement officer. He could have radioed another officer to assist the man, but he did it himself. Unbeknownst to him, someone took a photo.

The image of Smith, who is African American, helping this man—whose T-shirt included a swastika, among other things—went viral. Smith was soon asked why he would take such measures with a person whose beliefs were so contradictory to his own.

His response? "I consider myself like every other officer who was out there to serve and protect.

... Service is at the heart of what we do." This should be the attitude of every member of the church's safety team.

Safety team members are watchmen, always diligent, looking for every opportunity to serve and protect. The Bible says in Isaiah 62:6 "*I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest.*"

As those watchmen in Old Testament times observed the comings and goings of the people in their cities, ready to warn them or act in their defense at a moment's notice, modern-day churches must do the same. It is part of their calling and their ministry.



Trinity Security Allies started in 2015 to provide education and safety training to houses of worship, faith-based schools and non-profits who cannot afford the high cost of a security consulting firm. Trinity Security Allies believes that every organization should have access to safety education and training regardless of their ability to pay. Imagine the lives that could be saved in the event of a tragic situation if safety education and training had been provided to all those involved. With domestic violence and mental health issues on the rise, it is best to have a plan in place, and not need it, to ensure the safety of those frequenting your house of worship, faith based non-profit or school.



Jim Howard pictured here lead the charge for the safety team for that church in Pinellas County, Florida. Because of the training that he offered at what is now known as Generations Christian Church; other churches began reaching out for help; ultimately the beginning of Trinity Security Allies in 2015. Jim works with hundreds of churches in Florida and around the country.

Jim brings a wealth of knowledge through nearly forty years of law enforcement, built and currently leads a safety team for a small mega church and whose family was a victim of church shooting when Jim was just 16 years old. To learn more about Jim's background and the services provided by Trinity Security Allies, visit our website.

"Our police department hired Trinity Security Allies to conduct a church safety seminar for our area churches. I can't speak highly enough about how satisfied we were with the experience. Jim's passion and professionalism were evident. We've received nothing but glowing reviews from the attendees. I'd highly recommend him!" Captain Eric Hill, Venice Police Department, Venice, Florida.

Let Trinity Security Allies partner with you for your church safety and security needs beginning with this full presentation covering the nuts and bolts of developing a safety team. Contact Wendy@TrinitySecurityAllies.com or call 727-534-6047.

Be sure to sign up for additional resources as they are made available.