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# Sunday Morning:

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR?

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*” Our Ministry is Your Church’s Safety”*

## **SUNDAY MORNING: WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR?**

On December 29, 2019 a man walked into a small church in White Settlement, Texas. The subject was dressed in a long coat and toboggan wearing a fake wig and beard. During the whole time he was inside the church members noticed that he appeared to be holding something with his left hand inside his long coat. Members in the church described the suspect as acting suspicious causing several members to move away from where he was sitting in the worship center. Because of his odd demeanor and dress, security placed one of the cameras used for live streaming the worship service to be specifically focused on the individual.

During the worship service the suspect went to the bathroom and stood up during communion only to sit back down. At one point the suspect got up and appeared to be asking one of the deacons a question when a person on the safety/security (safety) team stood up causing the suspect to draw a shotgun and shoot both the safety team member and the deacon. As the suspect turned to head toward the front of the church he was shot and killed by the safety team leader.

Monday morning quarterbacks will look at this video and question why a person wearing a fake beard and wig would be allowed to come into church without being spoken to. Why didn't someone from the safety team go to the person and talk to him despite noticing him to the point of recording his actions? Why were local police not contacted as soon as the suspect walked into the church?

These are questions that we will be discussing in this church safety training booklet, "Sunday Morning: What Do You Look For?" We give a breakdown of why a situation like this that happened at the White Settlement church should never happen. The first thing to understand is there will always be evil in the world, and Christians understand this better than most. But we have to go on living our lives—trusting God and acting wisely.

A church member who observes his congregation on Sunday morning will typically see people from all walks of life gathering for worship. Congregants generally fall into one of three categories:

- People who are there to worship God and encourage one another
- People who are seeking help
- People who are wolves in sheep's clothing

The Bible says in Nehemiah 4:15, "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." God's people had returned to Jerusalem and were building the wall, but they faced opposition. People against them thought they would sneak in and cause major trouble, but when they discovered God's people were ready for them, their plans failed.

That is the kind of preparation needed in churches today. Church leaders must have situational awareness and be prepared to protect their congregations from those who would seek to bring them harm.

One of the courses the U.S. Marine Corps uses to instruct its troops is titled “Profiling and Tactical Tracking.” Most people see the word profiling and immediately think negatively because of the how the term is used in the media and elsewhere, especially in a racial context. But profiling is not necessarily a bad thing. People do it every day.

When a teenage boy knocks on a girl’s door and encounters her father who has never seen him before, the father begins profiling him from the moment he sees him. It is what any protective parent would do.

People are vigilant when it comes to their loved ones. Churches today need to be just as vigilant when it comes to the safety of their congregations. That means identifying every person who comes through the doors according to the aforementioned categories and dealing with the latter two prayerfully and efficiently.

The U.S. Marine Corps define Combat Profiling, as a combination of time-tested, current-trend profiling and behavior analysis. Through our training we are going to change the name from Combat Profiling to Threat Profiling. Threat Profiling is a method of proactively identifying possible threats through human behavior pattern analysis and recognition. Though it sounds complicated, the actual methodology is not, and much of it is based on common-sense principles most people already recognize. No matter the threat, there will be certain characteristics that can be observed and measured.

A man is seen sitting down with his head in his hands, massaging around his eyes with his thumbs. What is the observer’s conclusion? He is probably stressed about something.

Someone makes hand motions to and from the head—a typical sign of anger—almost as if he is trying to pull the anger out of his head.

A person walking into your church with a noticeable disguise on.

These are examples of basic behavioral cues people give that let others know something is not right. Maybe they are no danger at all; maybe they are just looking for help and hoping to find it at church. But safety team members must be aware of the surroundings and who is there.

Failure to pay attention to what is going on can lead to tragedy. People celebrating Bastille Day in the French city of Nice in 2016 were basking in the party atmosphere after an evening of fireworks, walking back to their cars, when they heard screaming. Some of them ignored the sound because everything had been so loud all evening. By the time they realized something was wrong, a man driving a cargo truck was right on top of them, mowing them down on the sidewalk. A total of eighty-seven people lost their lives that night. Some of them were having the vacation of a lifetime only to see it turn deadly in a moment.

Attackers are always looking for targets of opportunity—what are often called “soft targets.” They look for places with maximum payoff for the terror they wish to incite. In the case of a church, they might do surveillance work or even a trial run before an actual attack. Some churches have

captured such an exercise on their own surveillance video and have contacted law enforcement to report it.

When a gunman killed twenty-six people on a Sunday morning at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, it was not the first time he had been on the property. He had shown up the previous Wednesday and was dressed in black tactical gear. Survivors of the Sunday shooting now believe that he was there the first time to scope out the church.

Four people were shot in June of 2017 at a ballpark in Alexandria, Virginia where Republican members of Congress were practicing for their annual charity baseball game. The investigation revealed that the gunman sat in the parking lot waiting because he knew who would be there. When he got out of his van he asked someone, “Is this where the Republicans are?” That person replied in the affirmative without thinking anything was amiss. The fact that no one was killed except the shooter is due primarily to the fact that members of the Capitol Police were in the ballpark when the shooting occurred. They were prepared.

Analysis of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando in 2016 reveals that the gunman had visited the club multiple times before the night he attacked and killed forty-nine people. He knew when customers inside would be the most distracted—during last call, with music blaring—just before club management called it a night and closed the doors. He knew no one would notice him until it was too late.

What can be learned from all these incidents? Church leaders need to notice who comes and goes in their facilities and why they are there. If a person visits a Sunday service but seems distant—doesn't want to participate or learn anything about the ministry—someone needs to approach the person and engage him in conversation. Safety team members should seek to establish a baseline with persons like this.

Safety team member should examine their church's campus and look for their baseline formed by several different aspects. They should review the parking situation, for example, and how people come and go. Some churches have separate parking for visitors and try to direct first-timers to that location. While dedicated parking for visitors is a courtesy meant to show people that they are loved and that their attendance is appreciated, it also gives the safety team a great opportunity to observe people coming to the church for the first time.

One church in particular has a policy of engaging visitors three times before they come into a service. When they drive into the parking lot, an attendant leans into the driver's side window and asks, “Is this your first time visiting us?” If the answer is yes, they are directed to the visitor parking area.

As they get out of the car, someone is there to say, “Hello. Do you have any questions?” A separate greeter meets them at the door to ask if he or she can direct them to a particular area such as the nursery or a Sunday school class. The parking area is arranged so that most of the members of the church come into the building from another side so the safety team knows that most of those entering from this side are visitors. That is a simple way to establish a baseline.

Another baseline involves the dress code. Many churches today have a “come as you are” policy regarding dress. Other churches are more formal. While visiting a church wearing khakis and a casual shirt, I noticed most of the members were in a coat and tie or a dress. A greeter at the door welcomed me and immediately advised me that the balcony was open, and I could sit there, not knowing that I was there in an official capacity to make a site assessment and safety presentation.

I moved freely around the church all morning. I even moved down to the front row for a while, and no one spoke to me. Immediately after the service I was able to walk right up next to the pastor and lingered for a few moments. Later, during my presentation, I demonstrated how many handguns I was able to carry into the building without being noticed. The pastor watched the presentation in stunned silence.

The bottom line is that if someone comes into your church acting like he knows his way around the campus but no one in the church knows him, that person is someone needs to be approached and spoken to. He is an anomaly—a deviation from the baseline—someone who likely should not be there.

Everyone has a baseline—how they normally act and react. Nearly every church has an elderly man or woman who is always in the same spot and who greets friends with a hug upon arrival. When he or she is not there on a given Sunday, people wonder why. An experienced safety team leader will walk around the building looking for things that are out of place and people who may be out of sorts. It is all about looking for that deviation, that one thing that is out of place.

Every person has a preconceived mindset, like a file folder that contains specific information. Sometimes the information changes over time. For example, in the 1970s, a person with a tattoo was assumed to have been at some point in the military, with a motorcycle gang, or in prison. Today that is not the case, as many people from all walks of life have embraced that particular style of body art. People’s mindsets have changed.

But if a person comes to church and seems out of place, it is a good idea to find out why. After observing and assessing any anomalies, the safety team member must decide how to react. If someone is loud and disruptive in the service or goes into the children’s ministry section with no apparent reason, then there is no time for analysis. Action must be immediate.

Some anomalies may need a second opinion. A man came into a church building one Sunday wearing bib overall shorts and wading boots, after which a safety team member quickly asked the team leader to take a look. He noticed the man with his back against a pillar in the lobby, which he identified as a defensive position where no one could get behind him. One of the pastors spoke to him and learned that he was visiting with his sister, after which he would go straight to work on a concrete job. There was no threat, just an odd wardrobe choice for church. The safety team responded thoughtfully and correctly.

Notice that the first person to speak to this man was not a safety team member but a pastor. The safety team should not be the first contact with a visitor unless a threat has been identified.

Suppose a man comes into the Sunday morning service disheveled and smelling of alcohol. He is sitting in the sanctuary by himself when he is approached by a safety team member. This visitor is not armed and has done nothing to suggest an immediate threat. He just needs help; maybe he lost his job on Friday and things are not going well at home so he slept in his car all weekend and had too much to drink. He sees the safety team member's earpiece and thinks, "I just got here and they put one of their watchdogs on me." Not a good first impression.

On the other hand, if the visitor does not identify the safety team member and just thinks he is a friendly church member, the visitor may open up and start talking about his problems. Once a person starts talking in that situation, he usually does not stop until he tells everything. Once that happens, the safety team member is out of position, and if he gets a call and has to walk away abruptly, there is little hope the visitor will open up to anyone else.

If an anomaly is spotted but does not appear to be an obvious threat, the best action is for a safety team member to stand by and listen as a minister talks to the visitor. If the minister indicates that he has control, the safety team member can move away while still keeping an eye on the situation.

Often a single anomaly about a person does not constitute an actual threat, but if multiple anomalies are identified, a member of the pastoral staff should be notified and the safety team should keep the subject under surveillance.

Sometimes a visitor will hide in plain sight and test church members to see how they react. A young man showed up at church on Easter with a shirt that had obvious inappropriate writing on the front and back. All who saw it would have been concerned about his intentions. The man was asked to turn the shirt inside out or put it in his car. He professed ignorance but was wearing other things that suggested he knew exactly what he was doing.

A woman walked into church one Sunday and one of the members who is a paramedic immediately went to a safety team member. "That woman has been beaten up by her husband," he said.

"How can you tell?"

"Watch her arms."

She wore a sundress, and some marks were visible on her upper chest; but when she raised her arms, it was obvious that someone had grabbed her hard enough to bruise her. It was a cry for help—most domestic violence victims try to cover up these kinds of marks.

When men approached the couple, the husband grabbed her and did all the talking. He was not going to let her say anything. The safety team made a note of this in case the couple came back, but they never did.

In another church, a safety team member saw a man taking photographs of a little girl and asked if he knew the child's family. "Oh, yes," the man said. "They're good friends of mine."

The man then started for the door. The safety team member saw the parents and asked if they knew the man; they said they had never seen him before. The safety team moved quickly toward the parking lot, took the phone from the man, and deleted the photos.

In situations like this, especially involving potential threats to children, the safety team should become the paparazzi—taking multiple photos of the perpetrator, following him to his car, getting a photo of his license plate, and contacting local law enforcement. An Android phone has a feature that allows the user to turn on the camera instantly. Safety team members should be taught to turn on the video recorder and place the phone in the front lapel pocket, so it records a conversation with the subject without his or her knowledge. (Note that the laws vary from state to state when it comes to recording someone without his or her consent. Church leaders should be certain they know what is legal in their jurisdiction.)

Engaging a visitor and asking a few simple questions can accomplish much. If a visitor comes in alone and immediately asks for directions to the balcony, that is a red flag. Someone should ask him why he wants to go there. If he says he is meeting his girlfriend, he may be doing exactly that. If his responses make the questioner uneasy, a call for help is in order.

A great deal can be inferred from proxemics, which is how people react according to their proximity to others. This can be subconscious. For instance, a person can walk into a room and often tell whether a man and a woman are in a relationship or if two people are family members by how they sit next to each other.

This is important because of what is known as a “proxemic push”—when a person becomes uncomfortable and backs away or pushes back from someone else. It’s the same reaction someone might make when encountering a snake in the yard or when driving through a bad neighborhood and instinctively speeding up to get out of there. In contrast, a “proxemic pull” happens when someone reaches out to shake a friend’s hand and that person moves forward to reciprocate.

These signals can say much. If a man approaches a woman and she pushes away, it might just be bad breath. If the same thing happens with more than one woman, it is likely that the man’s conversation makes them uncomfortable and he needs to be watched.

If a pastor is talking to someone and takes a step back, it could be because he is listening intently to what is being said. But if he moves defensively, it will tell those nearby that something is not right. This can be noticed even by someone not standing right next to him. It is every human’s natural instinct to move away from a threat.

On the other hand, a visitor may act in such a way as to draw a person in closer, and this is not always good. A person who starts lowering his head and speaking more softly is trying to pull someone in, and an unsuspecting listener who gets too close could be hit. It is always better to observe a potential threat at a distance, taking a step back and saying, “I’m sorry but I can’t hear you. Can you speak up?” An unfamiliar person should be compelled to make eye contact during a conversation; if he does not want to look up, something is typically not right.

Atmospherics can also be very telling. If children are making noise at home while parents are watching television and suddenly it gets quiet, what does a parent do? He or she tries to find out what the kids are up to or if one of them got hurt. A sudden change in noise altered the atmospherics.

In any location, if it goes from noisy to quiet in a few seconds, there is a reason. Individuals can do this during a conversation. Why did that person get quiet all of a sudden while someone was talking to him?

Atmospherics change in a church service when a person interrupts the pastor as he is preaching. Often a disruptive person can be taken out of the situation by a safety team member asking him to go outside and talk. An attempt to handle the situation right there in the sanctuary can cause the entire audience to become disengaged. But the individual should not just be yanked out, as that may cause quite a scene, especially if the subject has mental health challenges.

Safety team members should be trained how to identify persons with obvious mental challenges as well as persons who may be using narcotics. For example, if the color of a person's pupils cannot be detected, that person likely is on narcotics. Someone who is bouncing off the walls one week and sitting perfectly still the next is likely on some type of medication. Talking a mile a minute but taking a long time to answer a simple question usually indicates the presence of a mood-enhancing drug.

Of course, much can be learned just by having a conversation. When talking to a person who seems out of place, it is important to repeat what he says and show interest in what he is saying—respect without judgment.

A good starting point is to ask him if he is a first-time visitor. This is especially relevant if the church has multiple services.

“What brought you here? Your best friend is a member? What is his name? Have you been going to another church? Which one?”

These are simple questions, but someone attempting to be deceptive will be evasive when answering. Those answers can help determine if there is a threat.

Occasionally someone will come to church solely to cause trouble. But many of the people who walk through the doors each week, especially the ones who are not recognized or have not been seen before, are there because they are hurting and looking for help. A safety team member may recall having been in the same situation many years ago when it led him or her to seek a church home. What may look like a tense situation at first can turn into an opportunity to minister to someone in need.

Churches must realize that Safety Teams are an important ministry in any church. Its main focus should be the same as the church's, the expansion of the Kingdom of God. Safety Teams must recognize the three types of people that come into the church and utilize the tools mentioned here

which can help them observe and respond in a way that keeps everyone safe while giving maximum opportunity to minister to those who are hurting.

### **About Trinity Security Allies**

For more information on our organization, or to see how affordable training can be for your church, visit [www.TrinitySecurityAllies.com](http://www.TrinitySecurityAllies.com).

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 us know how we can be of help. Visit Trinity Security Allies for more information.