



## Church Security Recommendations

Security is becoming increasingly important for churches. From acts of violence and vandalism to disruption of church services, there has been a steady uptick in security threats to churches across the country.

That's why it is important for every church to plan ahead and think carefully about security. There are resources on the web such as the [National Organization of Church Security and Safety Management](#) that can help a church develop a plan from ground up, if need be. Try taking a [church security assessment test](#) to see how prepared your church is currently, and that will help you determine how much work you still need to do.

In the meantime, here are some general guidelines to keep in mind.

- **HAVE A PLAN**

Church leadership should have a basic plan in place for dealing with security issues, whether that involves disruption of a service, violence, natural disaster, or a medical emergency. It's important to be able to identify, evaluate, and control the situation to the greatest extent possible. This plan should involve clearly defined procedures to handle a variety of situations.

- **HAVE SOMEONE IN CHARGE**

One person should be in charge of overseeing security as part of his or her defined duties at the church. This person should have the ability to command and control the response with instant communications by using two-way radios or similar equipment.

- **USE SURVEILLANCE**

Surveillance and observation are critical to avoiding and minimizing harassment and threats. Ideally, church staff or volunteers would confront any potential issue in the parking lot rather than inside the church building. Having members or staff in charge of keeping aware of potential threats can be very effective in minimizing problems. Video systems are also very helpful. Cameras not only act as a deterrent, but they also preserve crucial evidence for later prosecution and analysis. The more camera angles, the better. Video of the service itself can also be very crucial and is highly recommended.

- **USE MULTIPLE LAYERS OF SECURITY**

In addition to any professional or volunteer security, you can also train other members to be a component of your security plan, including ushers and greeters. Greeters being

cognizant of potential threats and/or members volunteering to watch parking lots can be very valuable in recognizing security threats early. Ushers should know and greet members also, and be trained on how to handle threats.

- **CONDUCT TRAINING**

All of your security personnel, including ushers and other volunteers, should be trained in knowing how to recognize and handle security threats or harassment. If your congregation has members who are sworn peace officers, they can be very helpful in training and helping with security. Make sure those involved in security know each other and have a common plan. In general, training on how to intercept people aggressively, yet politely, is important. You can also call your local police department to see if they have an officer or other representative who will speak to your church staff and security personnel about precautions you can take.

- **BE READY TO LOCKDOWN CHILDCARE**

Have procedures in place for lockdown of sensitive places, such as childcare areas. Procedures should be in place for notifying the child-care coordinator immediately of any potential disruption or security threat. The coordinator should immediately lock all entrance doors into the childcare area, allowing no one entry until the threat has been resolved.

- **HAVE A CHECK-IN SYSTEM FOR CHILDCARE**

You should have a tested and effective system for child-care check in and check-out, and allow no deviations from it.

- **CONDUCT BACKGROUND CHECKS**

A very good preventative step is to conduct background checks on all employees and volunteers. It's important that this is done through an experienced firm. One potential resource for background checks is "[Sheppard's Watch](#)", which conducts searches in partnership with LexisNexis Risk Management.

- **HAVE MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS**

Keep a list doctors and nurses in your congregation who would be willing to help in a crisis. Also, keep track of generally what service those individuals attend.

- **CALL 911**

Don't hesitate to call 911 immediately upon any threat. One person should be in charge of making the call, and should stay on the line to help coordinate the police response. The manner in which the call is made and the information conveyed will often dictate how quickly police respond, so do not downplay the event. The more detailed and accurate the information you give to police, the better able they will be to respond. Once police arrive, make sure that they retrieve identifying information from all of the

suspects. Obtain copies of the police reports and contact your local prosecutor to ask what action they plan to take. Remember, prosecuting violators helps to protect your church and every other church in your town, and will help to discourage acts of violence and harassment against churches generally.

For church disruptions, here are a few particular points to keep in mind:

- **ISOLATE OR REMOVE DISRUPTORS**

Churches have the right to remove disruptive individuals. Nonetheless, states have differing standards on the use of force to remove these individuals, and you should be familiar with your state's requirements for what constitutes reasonable use of force. Also, remember that your actions may be viewed by thousands of others and the media, so protect your reputation by being controlled and measured in your response. Verbally communicate to the disruptors that they are trespassing and that they must leave the premises. If they refuse to leave, it may be best to keep them contained but wait for the police to remove them, unless they pose a physical threat. To the extent possible, move congregants who are in close proximity to the protestors to another part of the church sanctuary.

- **KEEP POTENTIAL DISRUPTORS OUT**

Several courts have held that churches have the right to keep people out of the church, even though church services are generally open to the public. An individual does not have a legally protected right to enter and remain on your private property. So if you know a person is a security threat or potentially disruptive, you have the right to keep that person from entering the church. If necessary, you can ask a court to issue a restraining order barring a disruptive individual from church premises.

- **ACT QUICKLY AND CALMLY**

Church security and/or ushers should become visible as soon as possible, placing themselves between the disruptors and those in the congregation. This will help people in the sanctuary to remain calm, and will help isolate disruptors early and prevent them from moving freely within the church. Someone on church staff should reassure the congregation that the situation is being handled by security, and that the service will resume momentarily.

After you contact police, call ADF's legal intake at (800) TELL-ADF. An attorney will review the situation and advise you whether civil legal action may also be appropriate.