

Too few churches have security and emergency plans

Incident showed the church needed a response system to security threats.

It was a warm Saturday afternoon, and we were heading to a beautiful outdoor wedding to celebrate the joy of two people joining their lives together. We were about ready to leave when the phone rang; the number on the caller ID was that of our facility team. I knew that something had taken a turn from the normal activity of the day.

The voice on the other end of the line began to tell me of a carjacking that had taken place in our parking lot resulting in a shooting on the church property; the man who had been shot had made his way inside the main building, where a memorial service had just concluded. The family was still gathered for a meal and would not be permitted to leave for some time.

Emergency personnel wanted to set up a command center in our facility and planned to be on campus well into the evening. I began asking what seemed to be a litany of questions to get myself focused.

The police and emergency personnel were on scene, the entire facility and a four-block area around our campus were completely shut down; no access to our campus was going to be given for the rest of the day. As I hung up the phone, my mind ran through the scheduled campus activity, including a Saturday night worship service that was scheduled to begin in just a few hours.

Scenarios such as these fortunately do not happen every day, but that day we were reminded of the need for a security and communications plan.

Security plan needed

Out of this situation, we later stepped back and began to review our security plan. What if this had happened on a Sunday morning with several hundred people on campus? Would we have a clear plan of action. Would our teams know what to do? We looked at service interruptions, emergency medical response, and communication with parents in an emergency, lock down procedures, child safety issues, including our check-in and pick up procedure for children's ministry.

Through the review process, we took the time to look at each of these areas, knowing that we had some plans in place. The question then became whether we needed a security team? Yes, we understand that events like this don't happen every day and we cannot simply react to one event, but we need to be prepared for emergencies. People expect us to take reasonable steps to insure their safety.

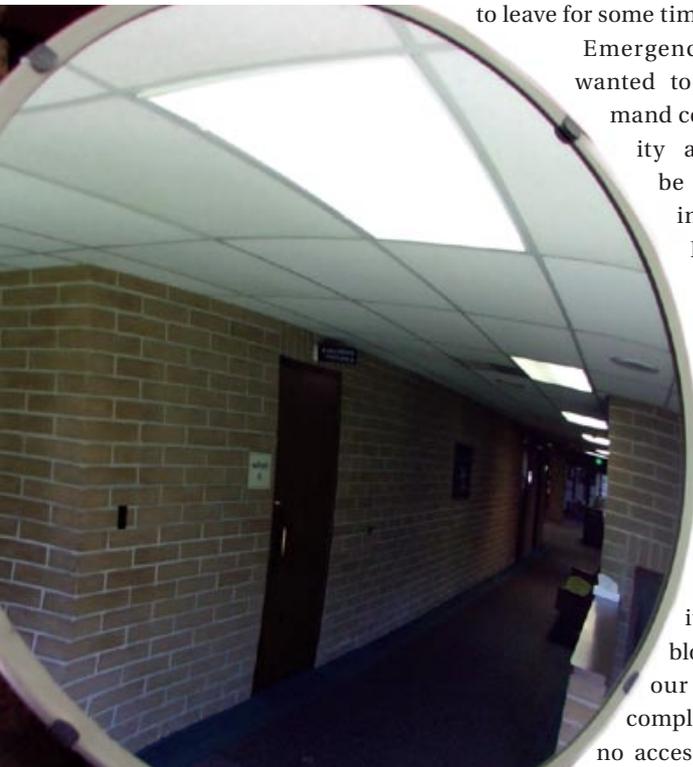
We learned only 22 percent of churches in the United States have active security and emergency plans in place. Clearly many churches still believe it's never going to happen to them.

Few churches prepared

In our research, we found there are many resources available to assist in creating a security plan. Our insurance carrier had many resources available to assist us in developing a plan.

The first step for us was addressing communication issues on a campus with multiple buildings, which for us means we needed a team of trained eyes and ears moving throughout the campus. Having a way to communicate was critical—eyes and ears are not enough, we needed to know that we could respond to each situation.

The use of radios is very inexpensive, and immediately allow a team to take necessary action quickly and effectively. These “eyes and ears” are trained;



WHEN WE HAD A LOCK-DOWN ON CAMPUS

Many churches operate a day care or preschool and will need to address other safety procedures. The responsibility and privilege of having children on campus every day presents situations in the facility unique to day-to-day operations. One area we considered with our local law enforcement is the need for a "lock-down" procedure.

Being only blocks from one of the high schools in our community, we once received a call from emergency services that a bomb threat had been called in the school and officers were pursuing a suspect. We were advised of the situation and instructed to secure our facility.

That incident caused us to review the safety of our campus, and a "lock-down" procedure was established. This procedure has two levels.

Precautionary: A threat is near the campus/outside the campus. All doors will be locked. Lights and activity will remain normal. Blinds will be closed. No outside activity is allowed. Individuals who need to enter the building are screened.

Direct Threat Lockdown: A threat is in the building or on the campus. All doors will be locked. Lights will be turned off. Blinds will be closed. Staff and children outside or in the hallway will quickly enter the nearest classroom for lockdown. Green/Red sign will be placed in the door window. Green meaning we are safe. Red meaning we are missing a child, have an intruder, or there's an injury in our classroom. Staff and children will move to a safe location in their classroom out of the line of sight of a window. Once locked down, no one will be allowed to enter the classroom. No one should open any door until the lockdown has been lifted.

In a lock-down situation, the staff role is to notify (by radio or intercom system) the primary contact of any missing people or injuries. A coding system is used for wording. The primary contact will notify the staff when the campus is safe by using a code word over the radio/intercom system.

Our lock-down ended without incident. Our parents were informed when they picked up their children; many had heard news reports and had called the Child Care Center to check on the status. Everyone was safe and thankful for the prompt communication and action of our leadership. **-LK**

they understand our campus usage; the team knows our campus layout and identification. To be part of this team each person must complete an application process with includes background check and references. This team is identified with photo ID that itself presents a measure of safety.

Safety and security of our campuses is vital, and no longer can we assume that the church is a safe place. Bad things really are happening in churches across the country. Violent acts are senseless and unpredictable. Not all are preventable, but we can take steps to prepare for the possibility of dangerous situations, and strive to protect all who are on our campus. CE

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