

## **HOW TO ASSESS THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP**

© 2009 Tina Lewis Rowe.  
Permission is given to copy  
and distribute this material,  
but it may not be sold.

Courtesy attribution for the entire document or significant portions:  
Tina Lewis Rowe ([www.tinalewisrowe.com](http://www.tinalewisrowe.com))

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Pastor Don Haymon II, of Calvary Apostolic Church in Denver, Colorado, ([www.cacdenvver.org](http://www.cacdenvver.org)) whose proactive approach to safety and security training for some of his key members led to the development of the first document I developed about security for places of worship: *The Greeter and Usher Role In Church Security*.

Through the power of pastor-to-pastor sharing, the Internet, viral marketing and search engines—and the fact that it was free!—that twenty-three page document has been distributed to well over 3,500 churches world-wide.

\*\*\*\*\*

As always, I gratefully acknowledge the support and assistance of my long-time friend from long-ago high school days in Arkansas City, Kansas, Jeff Adams, Ph.D., pastor of Kansas City Baptist Temple, Kansas City, Missouri. ([www.kcibt.org](http://www.kcibt.org)) ([www.drjeffadams.com](http://www.drjeffadams.com)). He's a modern day Apostle Paul in his travels, message and mission!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>Page</b>
Introduction	3
Definition of a Security Assessment	4
Focus and Balance (Macro/Median/Micro)	5
The Security Assessment Team	7
Identifying and Using Other Resources	9
Assessment Variations	11
A Pre-Assessment Analysis	16
Supplies and Materials	19
Assessing Spaces and Places	20
Assessing Processes and Programs	23
The Assessing Report and Follow-up Plans and Procedures	26
Organizing the Assessment	27
Focus Points For Assessing	30
Perimeter and Parking	30
Building Exterior	35
Main Entrance/Foyer	38
Sanctuary/Auditorium/Main Worship Areas	39
Offices of Clergy and Staff	42
Classrooms	44
Kitchens and Social Areas	46
Childcare and Nursery	47
Other Rooms and Spaces	48
Mechanical Systems	48
Processes and Activities	49
Emergency and Continuity of Operations Plans	54
Summary about Security Assessments	59
The Role of Greeters and Ushers	60
About the Author	84

## INTRODUCTION

### **This material was developed to:**

1.) Give you the information, ideas and guidelines you need to conduct an effective assessment of your place of worship, as it relates to people, places, assets, processes and programs, as well as emergency planning and continuity planning.

2.) Encourage a focused and balanced approach to safety and security planning.

- There are so many variables in places of worship that no resource is applicable in every way. However, this information can be adapted to services, activities and situations in almost any place of worship.

- You will find ideas here that you may not find elsewhere, because I wanted to share some tips and techniques that fit my approach and style—and might fit yours as well.

- Even if your place of worship has a formal security team, they may be more involved with threat analysis and response than with assessing and evaluating the facility, programs and processes. You can use this to supplement their work. Or, if you are part of a security team, this can add to your material and your efforts.

- Do not let the scope or details of this material discourage you. When you put it into practice you will find it to be a very logical and easily handled series of tasks, especially when working with others on your team.

- I often say (with a smile) that security assessing is not a sacrament and there are no commandments about how it must be done. There *are* requirements for the final product if you want it to be optimally effective. But, how you get to that point is up to you, your team and your church leadership. This material can help you develop something that works perfectly for your situation.

**To make the material easier to use:** If you receive this in an electronic file format, consider printing it out and placing it in a binder. The binder can become an excellent resource document for many other copied or scanned items.

**Secure the material.** Keep completed assessment materials in a secure location or in a computer file. A logical place to keep it is near the folders for insurance papers and similar information.

Best wishes to you in your safety, security and preparedness efforts!

Tina Lewis Rowe, Aurora, Colorado

2009

## HOW TO CONDUCT A SECURITY ASSESSMENT OF YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP

**A *security assessment* is an inspection of a person, place, asset, process or program, to evaluate the current condition of safety, security and preparedness for an emergency.**

- **It considers risks, sources and nature of threats and criticality of harm.**

- **It considers the factors that would enable prevention, deterrence, protection, detection resistance and response.**

**A thorough security assessment will include reviewing and inspecting:**

- **Safety** (accidents, illness, injuries, potential harm to people or the organization.)
- **Security** (crimes, violence, loss or damage from any cause)
- **Emergency preparedness** (response and recovery related to any harmful event or situation of any kind—including plans to be a resource for assistance if an emergency occurs in the community.)
- **Continuity planning** (Preparedness to continue services and programs without significant interruption.)
- **The overall status of each component of a safe and secure place of worship.** (Anything related to the place of worship or its assets and activities that can be inspected, reviewed, inventoried or evaluated, as designated by church leaders.)

In this material, the term *security assessment* incorporates all of the terms sometimes used to describe the concept: site survey, audit, safety inspection, and emergency preparedness assessment.

# FOCUS AND BALANCE ABOUT RISKS AND THREATS

The security program of a place of worship is ongoing, with priorities based on factors affecting the specific place of worship and concerns of church leaders. A thorough assessment can't be done in a day, a week or a month—it must be part of a continuous series of activities.

### The Macro/Median/Micro Focus

There are reasons to be concerned about many potential problems. However, it isn't necessary to be in a lock-down mode to be reasonably secure and prepared. This material can help you keep a foundation of balance and focus.

Your security assessments and the entire security program will benefit from keeping a three-way view all the time:

- 1. **Macro:** The big picture, the overall situation.
- 2. **Median:** A segment of that big picture, a manageable portion for inspection.
- 3. **Micro:** Close up inspection of the details that keep the big picture safe and secure.

It is also helpful to keep a sense of balance about threats and risks. When tragic or frightening events occur there is a justifiable sense of urgency to prevent *that* thing from happening. However, there are often more immediate threats to safety and security that also need attention.

### People, Places, Assets, Processes and Programs That May Be Harmed Purposely or Inadvertently

Considering the potentials, historical data and the current situation in your community and elsewhere can help you establish priorities and have an effect on your responses and plans.

#### Threats and Risks

- Crimes against people and property
- Crimes against children.
- Violent actions (Shootings, bombs, assaults, etc.)
- Attacks by terrorists, gangs or groups.
- Attacks by individuals.
- Vandalism.
- Natural disasters and weather.
- Mechanical and utility failures and emergencies.
- Accidents, injuries and illnesses.
- Fires (And water and smoke damage).
- Loss due to robbery, theft or fraud.
- Threats (Phone, mail or in person)
- Disruptions: Intentional/unintentional.
- Vehicle damage or theft.
- Stalking of pastors, staff or members.
- Attacking pastors, staff or members.
- Domestic quarrels or other conflict, erupting at church.
- Staff issues.
- Anything else that affects the operation of the church or the safety and security of staff, members and visitors

People who purposely or accidentally cause harm may be strangers, guests, members of the congregation, former members, families of members, regular visitors, staff, volunteers or employees. The causes and motives are many:

- Criminals
- Vandals
- Pranksters
- Terrorists
- Protesters
- Mentally unstable
- Angry
- Grieving
- Sexual predators
- Resentful
- Suicidal or homicidal
- Vengeful
- Attention seekers
- Litigious people
- Domestic violence
- Addicted
- Custody disputes
- Gangs
- Hate
- Frauds
- Embezzlers
- Carelessness
- Negligence
- Inattentiveness
- Lacking information, knowledge or ability
- Miscommunication

That long list of potential human sources of harm reminds us to not make assumptions about people or situations when we consider safety and security.

**Concern is helpful, obsessive fear or worry is not.** An effective assessment team or security team will look for risks and hazards everywhere, while creating a more confident environment for the church family and visitors. One way to do that is to consider risk and threats while also considering prevention, deterrence, protection, response and recovery. Keeping the overall picture in mind will help keep a realistic approach and reduce unnecessary fear.

## **Safety and Security in Places of Worship**

**A balanced macro, median and micro focus on people, places, assets, programs and processes results in:**

**Safety, Security and Stewardship**

## THE SECURITY ASSESSMENT TEAM

**Assessment teams may be comprised of all-volunteers or may be coordinated by a church leader or a full or part-time security coordinator. Security assessment teams work most effectively when each member is:**

- 1. Knowledgeable about the place of worship.** If you are using non-church volunteers to help you (police officers, firefighters or others) brief them through written material or an interview about anything that is unique to your form of worship, the nature of services, and what might increase risks and threats.
- 2. Knowledgeable and generally familiar with what is desired for safety, security and preparedness.** Strong expertise in security matters is not as important as focus, balance and a commitment to the process. Most people with reasonable thought processes can assess and make recommendations effectively if they have some general guidelines to consider.
- 3. An effective and open communicator.** Discussion about concerns is a major part of the process. Even those with expertise in some aspect of security should be willing consider the concerns and ideas of others and avoid taking over the process.
- 4. Balanced in approach and not excessive about any one aspect of the process.** Each team member is likely to have a special area of interest or concern. This can be valuable as long as they can work with others and keep a reality-based approach.
- 5. Able to do the tasks required and to schedule the time needed.** Security assessing takes several hours in several sessions, at a minimum, and requires walking, careful observation, effective communication and a positive attitude. Those who cannot assist directly may be able to help in other ways: Word processing, phone surveys of members, reviewing reports, Internet research, etc.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- 1. Share tasks to avoid over-loading a few people.** Volunteer assessors have limited time and can't do it all. Tasks need to be shared and support teams may be needed. It can also be helpful to do some parts of the assessing with a series of questionnaires and checklists for people responsible for the areas or activities being assessed.
- 2. Schedule several assessing sessions.** Schedule the areas to be assessed into workable portions or sections (median focus) based on priorities, locations and time available. Sessions can be as short as an hour up to a full day or multiple days. Two to four hours seems to be the time span that is most effective for volunteer teams.
- 3. Have a plan.** There are many approaches to the process, based on your unique situation and your assessment team. It will help to have a schedule, a plan of action, the supplies you need, and a process to follow that ensures you assess everything effectively.

**4. Designate a leader or co-leaders.** The team works better when everyone has equal status. However, someone needs to coordinate, schedule, lead the way during the assessment and make sure the paperwork is done.

**5. Keep each team small.** Whatever the total number of people involved with safety and security, the actual assessing process works best with only three or four people.

If you have many people interested in assessing, create multiple small teams and assign projects for each of them. Or, break up a larger team into smaller ones and start at opposite ends of an area.

**6. Be thorough.** The way to prevent harm to people and property in the future is to consider potential problems as well as immediate concerns. That kind of thinking takes focused observation, purposeful inspection and enough time to be thorough.

**7. Take useful notes.** Take the time to write full sentences in a clear, orderly manner for ease of reporting and typing. Develop forms or adapt those you find in this material or other resources, to make the task easier.

**8. Guard against team conflicts.** The most common problems seem to be:

- Excessive hurrying by some and excessive time by others.
- Being excessive or unreasonable either about concerns or solutions.
- Losing interest and not participating.
- Focusing on being the first to find problems, rather than on helping the team assess both weaknesses and strengths.
- Considering assessment findings as criticisms of self or others.

**9. Take action about what is observed.** If something is a serious problem, fix it right then if possible or call someone to do it. If it requires other action, designate someone to get started on it and ensure it is done. If it requires approval or further research, designate someone to follow-up over time. Don't just make notes about something that should be corrected immediately.

**10. Do the paperwork after the assessment.** Take thorough notes and type a very brief report for church leaders, with a copy for security files. It should contain:

- Risks and problems observed.
- Positive observations if something specific was noted.
- Overall observations, opinions and comments.
- Recommendations and timelines if any.

## IDENTIFYING AND USING OTHER RESOURCES

There are many *friends of the church* who may not attend your services but who want to keep places of worship safe and secure. You probably would not ask these people to help with an assessment, but they are good resources within their areas of expertise.

**1. Law enforcement, the military and similar resources:** You may have police officers in your congregation who would like to assist with security efforts. Your police or sheriff's department may have a Community Resource Officer or Crime Prevention Officer who provides information. Or, the chief or sheriff in your jurisdiction may wish to assign officers to provide assistance. Ask about what resources are available.

Even though most officers are not trained in security assessments, they can apply their experiences and insights to the process. They also may be able to provide information about crime patterns in your area or about incidents involving places of worship locally or in other communities.

Another good approach is to call the area police or sheriff's department and talk to a commander or supervisor. Ask to meet some of the officers who patrol your area. Get to know them and work with them about parking issues and traffic after services as well as about crime and safety problems.

**2. Fire department:** Your community fire codes may require regular inspections by the fire department. If not, contact them (or a member who is a firefighter) and ask them to visit your place of worship and provide insights about fire safety and suppression and the best responses for small fires after calling 911.

At the same time, they may be able to check fire extinguishers and exits and provide other information. Fire safety is vital in churches, so their expertise and experience is crucial.

**3. Emergency medical assistance:** The provider of emergency medical care or the fire department's Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) program is also a source of information and assistance, as well as providing training about CPR and first aid.

If you have a large number of members with specific medical conditions (on oxygen, with heart conditions, having diabetes, in wheel chairs, etc.) ask emergency medical technicians if there are special precautions or responses about which volunteers need to be trained. (Members with those conditions should keep others informed about special needs and responses.)

**4. Red Cross and other emergency providers:** If your place of worship is in an area that is hit by storms, floods, fires or other natural hazards, get to know the Red Cross officials with whom you might be working if an event happens. You may be able to prepare to assist, as well as having information about who to contact if assistance is needed.

**5. Trades and craft professionals:** Your location and situation may make it possible to have professionals give you an assessment related to their trades: Locksmiths, doors, plumbers, electricians, burglar and fire alarm companies, HVAC technicians, safes, etc. If you have a security alarm the company may provide security material.

**6. Utility providers:** Often electricity and gas providers offer energy assessments as well as other assessments. It may be beneficial to have them look at your place of worship to see if repair or replacements will likely be necessary in the future.

**7. Your insurance provider:** Every place of worship should be insured to the extent that is reasonable. Insurance companies nearly always provide information about safety and security measures.

**8. Other places of worship within your faith or denomination.** Use your network of friends in other congregations to find out what they have done about safety and security issues. If they conducted an assessment ask them about specific problems they discovered and how they fixed them, or ask to see a sample page or two, to help you decide about an effective format.

**9. Other places of worship within your community.** Perhaps you can develop a network within other places of worship in your community or state. Church facilities have very similar concerns, no matter what the faith or group within that faith. Ministerial Alliance groups are effective and so are groups focused solely on safety and security. Perhaps you can help form such a group!

**10. Commercial and online resources:** There are many websites and books that offer information. Private consultants and companies specializing in church security can also be useful resources.

**11. Your church members:** Consider using a questionnaire or survey or simply make an announcement, to identify those who have knowledge and skills in areas that could be helpful. They may not want to donate large amounts of time and labor, but might be available to give opinions or information.

**12. Expand your own ability to be a resource.** When you have developed a good process for assessing, consider contacting someone in your network and asking if you can provide assistance or share materials.

## **Assessment Variations**

### **VARY ASSESSING TIMES**

Most security consultants and most volunteers in a place of worship, assess the facility one time--often on a weekday--and call it done. A thorough assessment requires assessing during varied times and circumstances. This is another advantage of having several teams involved and breaking the process into manageable portions.

Plan on assessing at least part of the facility and some of the programs on weekends, at night, during the week, during services and during selected special events. Also plan on assessing in varied seasons and during holiday times. Each of those present different hazards and concerns.

### **WEEKDAY ASSESSMENTS**

1. Interview staff and employees. Often the employees who are there every day have noticed security and safety issues but not shared them. You can also use the time to ask them about their emergency response plans.
2. Assess areas that are open to the public but have limited people present most times.
3. Observe the impact of weekday traffic, foot traffic around or through property, bus and school bus stops, staff parking situations, door security, pre-school, school or day care.
4. Meet with other resources who work during the day—fire, police, maintenance resources, etc.
5. Thoroughly examine most of the facility and perimeter in full light.

### **WEEKEND AND MAIN SERVICE ASSESSMENT**

1. The most common weekend assessing time seems to be Saturday morning. If services or activities are not in progress, this time can allow more access to every area.
2. Occasionally conduct a security assessment before, during and after a main service on Saturday or Sunday. This provides opportunities to see the security of equipment , people and activities that you could not observe otherwise. The movement of people throughout the place of worship is much different around service times than any other time and it is helpful to observe related problems.
3. Assessing around service times also provides the opportunity to talk with those who participate in various functions involving visitors and members—greeters, ushers and hospitality workers—while they are actually involved in the work.

4. Assess during services to closely focus on potential risks and hazards involving the clergy, music teams, special activities, and problems, hazards and risks for the congregation as they arrive, participate and leave, etc.

### **NIGHT TIME ASSESSMENTS**

This is a great experience! You can see the outside of your place of worship as it will be seen by vandals, criminals or those who are looking at access or exits. You can also check the interior of the building in different ways than in the day time.

Consider notifying law enforcement patrols that you are doing maintenance work in the building and that lights may be off and on at intervals. Or, consider putting a note on the main doors: "Maintenance testing in progress. Call (cell phone number) if needed."

- Start during a service or activity. This allows you to see the parking situation, where lights might be needed, places of concealment and even how the services affect the neighborhood at night. If you have lights outside, consider turning them off to simulate conditions if lights were purposely broken or simply burned out.

- If your place of worship has a full or part-time custodian, that person is a good resource about almost every aspect of the building and the systems in it.

### **ASSESS IN THE DARK**

Switching off lights lets you see what it would be like if there was a fire with heavy smoke or if power went off or was turned off intentionally for any reason. The experience can help you consider ways to respond more safely in those situations.

Be cautious, to avoid accidents and injuries to assessment team members. (This is not the time to be joking or purposely frightening someone!) Everyone should have a flashlight and should stay together.

- Think like a visitor to your place of worship, someone with limited mobility or children separated from parents. Consider the choir or orchestra area, child care and nursery or other areas in which pastors, staff, volunteers or members and visitors might be if the lights went out or visibility was limited.

- Go to classrooms and see how adults, children and youth would be able to get out of the building or get to a safer location. See how easy it would be to find a fire extinguisher if that was needed, or to find flashlights or other emergency equipment.

- Check for blocked exit doors, chairs and tables that people might stumble over or anything else that would reduce safety.

- Check emergency lighting and battery operated back-up, if any. This may require turning off power at the fuse box. Have maintenance staff assist with this and use every safety precaution about shutting off the power and turning it back on. If you have a large

building this should be done in zones and your utility company should be notified, to avoid a power surge.

•Occasionally turn on the lights or a flashlight so you can keep the reduced vision aspect of your assessment.

### **SPECIAL EVENT AND ACTIVITY ASSESSMENTS**

Assess special events with a focus on risk and threats for people and assets, liability concerns or problems of any kind. This could include:

Holiday celebrations

Camps

Cook-out or picnics

Athletic events or field days

Special ceremonies and services

Conferences

Weddings, showers, funerals

Vacation Bible School

Open House

Fund Raisers

Any use of the building or any off-site activity sponsored by the place of worship is the responsibility of church leaders. An assessment of special events and activities should be part of a full security assessment and program.

### **SPECIAL FOCUS ASSESSMENTS**

In these assessments the team focuses on a specific kind of threat or concern and how people in each part of the place of worship might respond if it were to happen. (Or, more effectively, *when* it happens.) Or, it might involve focusing on a specific asset or group or assets or people, and how they could be vulnerable as well as better protected.

These focused assessments may involve:

A fire

A shooting situation

A dangerous weather emergency

A medical emergency

A disruption

An explosive device or explosion

An intruder

Burglary resistance

Condition of hardware and windows

A list of high value assets

Specific concerns such as childcare, money handling, etc.

## ROLE AND FUNCTION ASSESSMENT

The document, "The Security Role of Greeters and Ushers", which now is an addendum to this document, was developed for the specific roles those volunteers can have in emergency situations. Similar specific instructions could be helpful for many of the leadership and support roles of a place of worship.

Issues such as the training received, supplies provided (walkie-talkies, identifying clothing, flashlights, etc.), the courtesy and appropriateness of their approaches, and the overall security readiness of the team, can all be assessed and trained about.

Similar focused assessments are appropriate for all the many regular roles and assignments in services or activities.

Clergy and Assistants	Bus or van drivers
Directors/Board members	Parking assistants
Congregational Leader	Maintenance team
Educational Director	Hospitality team
Business and Administrative staff	Bookstore or thrift shop staff
Teachers	Kitchen workers
Music Director/Cantor	Chaplains
Deacons	Counselors
Trustees	Youth Leaders
Greeters and Ushers	Community outreach
Praise team/choir/vocalists	Even the security team can be assessed!
Orchestra/Band/Instrumentalists	Others in your place of worship
Offering collectors	
Nursery staff	
Technological staff or volunteers	
Child or youth workers	

**The value of assessing roles and functions:** One of the great values of assessments is the personal communication with those involved in the many tasks of a place of worship. For some, the interview by the assessment team is the first time they have been given the opportunity to discuss their concerns or explain their work.

From the viewpoint of church leadership, it may also be the most effective way to provide or review standards for conduct, safety and security activities and requirements for reporting problems and other issues.

•**A two part role assessment:** It is usually most effective to do each role assessment in two parts. The first part involves the initial interview (fifteen to thirty minutes is usually enough for an individual, with a little more for a group.). The second part involves follow-up, either personally or through written material, about any changes, requirements, compliments or plans, related to the work of the individuals or group involved.

More time may be used if briefings or training are held (as they likely will need to be.)

•**Issues to be assessed:** The nature and scope of the interview and assessment by the security team will vary according to the setting, potential threats or hazards, recent concerns, the people involved and other issues. However, some basic concepts can be adapted.

Any recent events locally or elsewhere, related to the role  
The concerns of those being interviewed, related to safety, security, and emergency responses.  
Suggestions by those being interviewed  
Usual activity before, during and after services

Guidelines and directions as they are understood by the person or group  
Sample scenarios and sample responses  
Concerns of church leaders  
Recommended responses

### **ASSESS WITH AND WITHOUT NOTIFICATION.**

Usually people who are responsible for classroom and other spaces should be notified of assessment plans. This often results in correcting a few problems before the assessing team reviews the area. (Open windows, safety hazards, etc.)

However, there are times when assessments can correctly be viewed as inspections and should be unannounced and conducted during routine activities or after hours.

### **ASSESS WITH APPRECIATION**

The safety and security program of any organization requires cooperation and positive relationships. That is best achieved through a positive approach and sincere thanks for efforts to be balanced, focused and effective about safety and security.

**A security program is done *for* the people  
in a place of worship, not *to* them.**

# A PRE-ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS

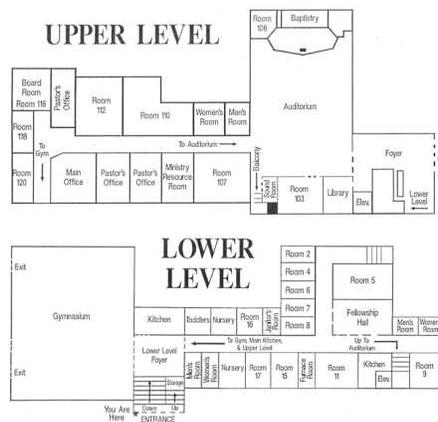
## CREATE LISTS OF ASSESSING NEEDS

Security assessments nearly always involve lists and notes—sometimes many of them. Fortunately, the first major assessment is the most time consuming. Before the first assessment, create a list of all the places, people, processes and programs that need to be inspected, assessed, audited or reviewed.

You will not be able to assess all the areas of risk at once or even in several sessions. But, it is helpful to see the big picture of what needs to be considered. You will probably add to the list as you and others go along.

### Adapt the following information for your place of worship

**1. Develop an assessing plan and a way to ensure you don't miss any area.** The best way to do that is prepare a sketch or graphic of the facility with doors and windows marked. For multiple storied buildings draw a separate graph for each floor. Blueprints are often too confusing and difficult to read, and a simple sketch or graphic is just as useful. (Your place of worship may be too complex for this. However, it nearly always can be done in segments and is helpful.)



**2. Develop a list of the usual purposes of an area, room or space, including closets and equipment rooms.** One way to do that, in addition to using a church schedule if one is available, is to consider the activities and events each day through the week. Then, add special events and activities or mark the rooms in which those are usually held. (Youth party room, baby showers, club meetings, etc.)

**Off-site:** List activities that occur off-site that are sponsored by the place of worship.

**3. Prepare a highly secured list of especially vulnerable people or situations and the risk factors involved.** These may include crime concerns, medical issues or known problems of some other kind. (The material should be kept highly secured, of course.)

One way to develop that information is through a mental review of members and frequent visitors and their situations or talk to church leaders or Sunday School teachers about people of whom they are aware.

Another way is to occasionally remind members to keep church leaders or the security team informed about the status of the health of members and their families, any potential concerns, any recent problems or conflicts that might erupt at church.

**Domestic violence and restraining orders:** Members of the church family should be asked to let church leaders or security team members know if they have placed a restraining order against anyone or if there are issues related to child custody, business conflicts or similar situations that might erupt into violence at the place of worship. If the member is assured of confidentiality except on a need-to-know basis this is usually understood as a reasonable request.

New member packets should have general security information as well as a request for the new member to keep key members or staff informed about important issues that might affect safety or security.

**Clergy security:** Detailed notes may be compiled about the schedules of clergy and worship leaders, or any special concerns related to their roles, media attention or other issues. This information should be secured and maintained by the main security coordinator.

**Special items in the place of worship:** Worship objects, artifacts, silver, historic items, etc., require special attention. If the list itself is not secured do not describe them fully, since it could provide information to those with criminal intent. They *should* be fully insured and perhaps a strong security program will reduce insurance costs.

**Examples of notes about increased risks and special concerns:** (The following examples demonstrate how each site has unique needs.)

- Increased risk: Two local cases of church burglaries in the last year. Both of them involved vandalism and taking computers and other electronic items. Entry and exit through classroom windows. (Info from Officer Walker, PD.)

- Increased risk: Rev. Beck is well known in the community and has been photographed for the newspaper twice. He runs in the park every morning from 6-7. On Sunday he stands at the front for Altar Call and is closely surrounded by members and visitors. Music and singing are high volume and there is a lot of movement in the congregation.

•Special concern: Golden Girls and Guys Lunch, Fridays in Dining Hall, 11:00-1:00. Average attendance, 30. Many use oxygen. Several have extreme medical concerns. (Don Kent is very frail.) Westland Nursing Home sends a van with 6-8 people and one assistant. We need to make sure the server team knows how to respond.

**4. Develop a plan and a schedule for assessing.** This can be done in any order that works well, as long as everything is assessed over time and in a timely manner. Even though it can't all be done at once, it should be completed in a reasonable to ensure that safety and security has been evaluated and improvements made if needed.

### **OPTIONS FOR PATTERNS FOR ASSESSING A BUILDING**

Weather conditions, available time and recent concerns will usually be part of the decision. Some options:

1. Start with the exterior, roof, parking areas and buildings and objects outside.
2. Start at the front door, on the outside, and work inward.
3. Start at most vulnerable door and work inward.
4. Start inside at the sanctuary or auditorium and work outward.
5. Start in basement and maintenance areas and work upward.
7. Include one of each type of area in each assessing session:  
Public areas, classrooms, side rooms.
8. Identify priority concerns and assess the areas in which those might occur, then move to second level priority, etc.
9. Assess one process or program, one space and one function, each session.

### **SECURITY ENVELOPES**

It is sometimes helpful to think of people and assets as being in envelopes of safety and security, one inside another.

- The parking lot, grounds and architectural barriers to the building are one layer,
- The building itself is another.
- Within the building are more security envelopes, with perhaps several layers around valuable equipment, worship items, child care, money and other assets.
- Each section of the building is enclosed in secure spaces by using doors, lockers, closets, safes and procedures such as sign-in requirements.

This concept can provide ideas for making valuable assets (people, foremost) more secure, by enveloping them in additional ways. For example, hallways into classroom areas may be renovated to provide a door that can be locked if needed; artifacts may be enclosed differently; intercoms may be used before opening doors during non-service times.

The envelope concept may be a way to keep a median focus—to look at segments of your place of worship, then having a micro-focus to inspect.

## Supplies and Materials

- 1. A flashlight.** Each person should have one if possible.
- 2. A full size flathead screwdriver.** There are often situations where it is handy to have something with a point or tip that won't easily be damaged and with a handle that can be gripped.
- 3. Three ring binder and pen.** This is better than a clipboard or a legal pad, because you can flip back and forth through pages as needed. Contents can be plain paper or prepared questions and forms to document your work.
- 4. Digital camera.** You should be able to take many basic close-up photos. Have a fully charged battery with a spare.  
  
A camera with an optical viewfinder (not only an LCD screen) allows easier viewing in a variety of light conditions. Many relatively inexpensive digital cameras work just fine and probably someone on the team has one or can get one.
- 5. Keys or other access.** You will need to be able to open up every door and space, unless it is a private office space. (The occupant of offices can use a checklist to assess the space if that is preferred. Have all the keys or have a maintenance person on the assessment team. Key control is a process that needs to be assessed as well.
- 6. A copy of any emergency plans or procedures for the space.** This is often overlooked as an item to have during assessment, but it is very important. Any directions, advice or suggestions to users of the space should be checked during the assessment to see if they appear to be valid and appropriate.
- 7. Cell phone and contact numbers in case there is a need for notification or questions during the assessment.**
- 8. Moist hand wipes.** These are very convenient and needed more than most people would realize. Thorough assessing can be very dusty or dirty work!

## Assessing Spaces and Places

**1. Look at the space from the viewpoint of people who want to commit a crime, or disruption, attack people violently, or exploit people or the situation in some way, as well as from the view of someone who may inadvertently cause harm.** This list was shown a few pages earlier, but is worth reviewing.

- |                    |                        |                   |                                    |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| •Criminals         | •Resentful             | •Addicted         | •Careless, reckless                |
| •Pranksters        | •Suicidal or homicidal | •Custody disputes | •Negligence                        |
| •Terrorists        | •Vengeful              | •Vandals          | •Lack of information and knowledge |
| •Protesters        | •Attention seekers     | •Gangs            | •Miscommunication                  |
| •Mentally unstable | •Litigious people      | •Hate             |                                    |
| •Angry             | •Domestic violence     | •Frauds           |                                    |
| •Arsonist          |                        | •Embezzlers       |                                    |
| •Sexual predators  |                        | •Violent          |                                    |

**2. Look at the space from the viewpoint of all the people who might be in it, at any time, whether authorized or unauthorized.**

- What ages are they?
- How many might there be?
- How will they be using the space?
- What might they do, accidentally or purposely, to cause harm?
- What are risks to them and threats to others?

**3. Look at the space with the thought of what is beneath it, around it, in the walls and overhead, according to the area involved.**

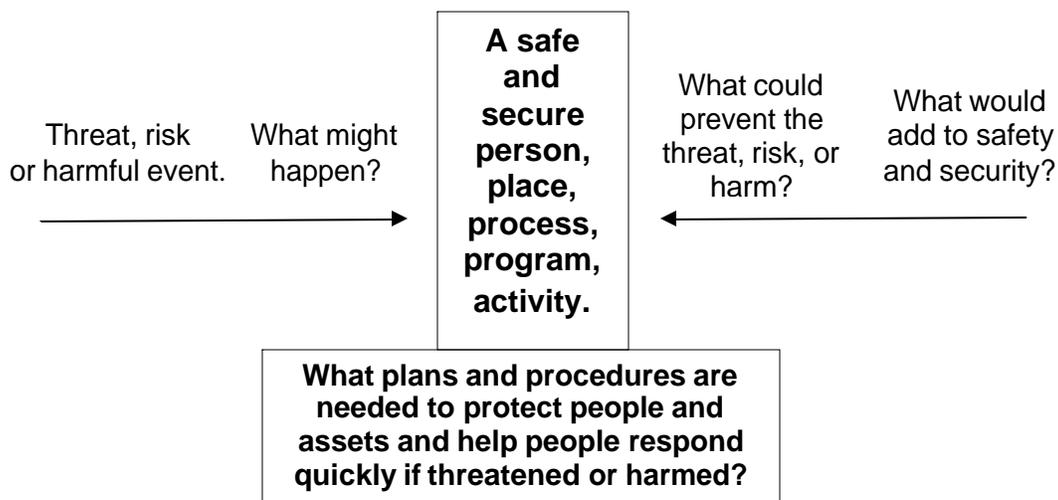
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| •Geological, water and weather possibilities.              | •Vents, outlets, receptacles, pipes, wires, cords.   |
| •Streets, driveways, alleys.                               | •Plumbing, pipes, water heaters, faucets, fixtures.  |
| •Parking, parking lots, illegal parking.                   | •Stoves, flames, fumes, burners, coils.              |
| •Fire hydrants, fire dept. access.                         | •Floors, walls, windows, doors, roofs.               |
| •Trees, bushes, rocks, moveable or stationery objects.     | •Machines, equipment, appliances.                    |
| •Barriers, barricades, items affording protection.         | •Items that can fall, break, flood or contaminate.   |
| •Things attached to the building, on top of it, beside it. | •Situations that cause accidents, injury, illness.   |
| •Access from roof, basement, doors.                        | •Conditions that are unsightly, unhealthy or unsafe. |
| •Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC).         | •Items with expiration dates, warranties, batteries. |

**If you combine Lists #1, #2 and #3 you will have a picture of a wide range of potential problems.** The purpose of your security assessment, in whatever way you conduct it, is to identify areas that need to be improved and to develop recommendations. Those lists will ensure you don't overlook anything.

**4. In each space you assess, stand or sit and thoroughly look at each aspect of the room—floor to ceiling, all around. Consider obvious and not so obvious risks, threats and responses.** You may find it helpful to have each team member observe and write, then share thoughts and notes. (Suggested issues to consider are listed at the end of this document.)

- Most of the time you will not find dramatic security failures or flaws, only a few things that might seem unsafe or that could be secured better. (Often you will observe “housekeeping issues” more than any other situation.) When all are combined throughout the place of worship, they present a picture of weak and strong areas.

- You will probably find the most useful thinking is done about “what if” discussions. These will help you consider emergency responses and how to make sure people know what to do, and do it.



- How is the space used? When?
- Who is responsible for the area?
- What harmful thing might happen?
- What could prevent it from happening?

- What actions might reduce the harm even if the event occurred?
- What emergency responses should be taken if the event occurs?
- Who needs to be trained or informed? How?

**Take the *immediacy* approach. Rather than wondering *if* something will happen:**

What should people in or near this room do *when* \_\_\_\_\_ happens?  
 How will they know to do it? Can it be done given the current situation?

**5. Make notes about each space.** (The following suggestions might not be appropriate for your place of worship or your security policies, but are generally applicable and can be adapted.)

(1.) *Potentially problematic conditions observed.* Is there a hazard that could result in injuries? Does some aspect of the space increase the risk of crime or other harm? Could some aspect of the space, equipment or other thing lead to problems of any kind that could affect the place of worship?

(2.) *Actions suggested to correct or reduce a problem that is observed.* These will probably be fairly obvious. They are always subject to discussion and approval later, so any reasonable suggestions should be considered.

(3.) *What written procedures might be useful for routine situations or emergencies?* Is training or information needed? By whom? How could it be provided? This kind of thinking about emergency preparedness takes time and will probably not be accomplished fully during the assessment. However, assessors are better able to consider situations when they are in the exact space being discussed.

(4.) *Other issues or concerns?* Is there something about the space, its maintenance, condition, the value and security of equipment or items, or any other situation, that should be brought to the attention of leaders, decision-makers or those responsible?

(5.) *In a violent, hazardous or threatening situation, is there an area that would offer increased safety?* Could the room be evacuated without using the door? Could the door be locked from the inside or barricaded, without increasing danger to occupants? Could fire suppression devices help if occupants were trapped inside? Are there supplies or equipment to assist in various emergencies?

(6.) *(If people are using the room during the assessment)* Are concerns observed about room usage, risks or other potential or actual problems?

**6. Take photos.** These can be used to document problems, for insurance purposes or to have as a record of assessing. Take an overall photo from the door or inside the room, as well as of problem areas or situations. Photograph items for insurance purposes, if that is desired.

Tip: Put a paper sign with an identifier in the first photo for a space, so the files can be more easily recognized when downloaded. (Many classrooms look alike.)

**7. Before you leave the space:** Make sure you can say you have looked at every wall, surface, item and aspect of a space before you move on. Do not rush, even in apparently obvious situations. Walk along each wall, look down, up and around.

- Have you considered all the potential hazards and threats when the room is being used or when it is vacant?

- Have you made notes about what is needed to improve the situation, especially if procedures or plans need to be discussed with the primary users of the space?

## ASSESSING PROCESSES AND PROGRAMS

The processes and programs that are fundamental to church functions are rarely assessed—with the exception of financial records, which are more likely to be audited or reviewed. Other processes and programs often are established and continued with almost no review to see if there are liability concerns or safety or security issues to be considered. Page 49 has additional material about assessing processes and programs.

**Challenges:** The processes and programs of a place of worship are usually coordinated or directed by one or a few individuals. By its nature assessing is a critique—and that can create conflict and discomfort for most people. The following guidelines can make the assessing process be viewed as a positive activity.

•**Limit assessing to the factors that relate to the scope of the security program.**

The key areas of assessment discussed in this section should be the main focus of assessing. Other concerns can be conveyed to church leaders, but are outside the area of security assessing.

•**Work in partnership with leaders and coordinators:** Use the gifts, knowledge and skills of staff and volunteers who are involved with the program all the time. They often have concerns or ideas they have not expressed, and certainly want their part of church activities to be safe and secure.

•**Be caring, respectful and positive.** The safety and security program of a place of worship should be done *for and with* everyone involved. The actions of the security assessment team should be focused on serving others. This is especially true when assessing programs and processes.

### HOW TO ASSESS PROCESSES AND PROGRAMS

**1. Develop a list of the processes and programs to be assessed *in areas related to safety and security*.** These may include:

Worship service activities	Community outreach or charitable functions
Money handling procedures	Kitchen activities
Key control	Events, planning and production
Security of equipment and files	Social functions
Counseling protocols	Building and grounds maintenance
Policies for working with youth and children	Anything that might have a safety, security, emergency response or continuity of operations need, now or in the future.
Training staff and volunteers	
Vehicle operation and maintenance	
Ceremonies and special services	
Nursery protocols and worker training	
Youth activities, on-site and off-site	
Camps, conferences, athletics	
Social functions	

## **2. Interview in person or in writing, those in charge of the process or program.**

Ask those in charge what areas they think have the potential to be problems or that have been problems in the past. This interview or survey can be guided with some basic structure and questions, based on the process or program involved. You might also want to interview some who have participated in the program in the past or who are regular participants.

The following are not necessarily the actual questions you would ask, but are examples of the types of things you need to know. You may have others, based on your knowledge of the programs of your place of worship.

### **•All programs:**

What are the threats and hazards that could cause harm? (What might go wrong?)

What are the highest risk times or situations?

What plans, procedures, rules or protocols do you use as guidelines now? Are they in writing?

If you were going to train someone for your work, what are the main rules for safety and security you would tell them? (Equipment and supplies, people, participants, other volunteers, activities, risks and hazards, potential threats, worries you have had, etc.)

What has happened in the past here, or other places of worship?

What would you do if .....(provide a few potential crisis or emergency situations to discuss—without making it sound like a test!)

What is usually happening in the rest of the building while your program is taking place? Are doors open or locked?

Do you know how to get assistance from staff, maintenance or others, in an emergency?

**•Programs involving money:** How can we ensure money is accounted for and kept in a safe place? How can we avoid even the appearance of mismanagement or wrongdoing?

**•Programs involving people:** What emergencies might happen?

Considering the rooms or spaces you use, is there anything in them that could be harmful either normally or if misused?

How can we make sure everyone is safe and secure at all times during the activity?

How can we make sure no one causes harm to others or the facility?

What methods are used for discussing safety and security issues with participants?

**3. Be present during the process or program activities.** It is very difficult to assess something you have not seen in action. It can be done by using the information provided by those in charge, but it is preferable to see how a program or process works.

The assessing team can be divided into sub-groups or individuals can be assigned to observe. Notes should be shared with the person in charge, to dispel concerns about the assessment focus.

#### **4. Keep the three way focus:**

- The big picture of this process or program:** How does it look from an outsider's perspective? Is there a potential for harm or problems that should be considered? What worries you, as someone who is focused on safety and security?
- The mid-range focus:** Break the process or program into segments that work for the situation—the timeline for activities, different activities during a program, moving people from one area to another, what it takes to make the program or process work.
- The micro/close-up focus:** What could cause harm? What if an emergency happened? What could protect the program or people?

**Look at the place, the space, the people and the potentials to consider if there are ways to improve safety and security or to be better prepared for an emergency.**

**5. Prepare the assessment report.** The information in the next section provides an overview of the assessment report. However, an assessment of processes and programs may be somewhat different than for a space or place.

A structure for a report might involve the following issues:

- Description of the process or program
- People usually in charge (may not be a specific person)
- Who is usually involved as a participant?
- Potential threats and hazards. These might be stated in general terms, but should also include specific issues that assessors or those in charge want to mention. This should include safety and security as well as liability concerns any other situation that could bring harm to the place of worship, in any way.
- Criticality of harm: What are the most negative results that could happen if there were to be a crime, accident, injury, disruption, or accident or error involving this process or program?
- Concerns noticed during the observation assessment.
- Positive issues noticed during the observation assessment.
- Emergency preparedness. Based on your questions and the statements of those in charge, does it seem there would be effective responses to most emergencies? Have any plans or guidelines been given to those in charge? Do participants have information they need for safety, security and emergencies?
- Continuity of Operations. Does this program need to continue immediately, even after emergency disruption? If so, are there plans for making that happen?

### **THE ESSENCE OF A PLACE OF WORSHIP**

Most people think of major emergencies, violence or crime by strangers when they think of safety or security. However, worship, fellowship, service and administrative aspects are the essence of a place of worship, because these are the things that affect people. Give them the attention they need during safety and security assessments.

## THE ASSESSMENT REPORT AND FOLLOW-UP PLANS AND PROCEDURES

After you have completed an assessing session, prepare the report as soon as possible to ensure you can still read your notes and recall the information and ideas discussed.

**1. Keep it brief:** You and others will find the report more useful if you avoid lengthy introductory statements and long paragraphs (such as those you find in this material!). Simply report the basics:

- A list of problems, concerns, negative observations or potential problems.
- The opinions and concerns of your team about anything you noticed.
- Recommendations and suggestions about ways to make an area more safe and secure.

**2. Be thoughtful and reasonable about your comments and recommendations.**

This document could be reviewed by others for a variety of reasons. Keep the well-being, reputation and liability issues of your place of worship in mind as you write it, while still being truthful.

For example, do not use phrases that indicate the current status of the building, processes or programs are so unsafe as to be reckless to continue them. If you believe that to be true, take action through personal conversation about it.

One way to approach suggestions is to list the optimal solution then what would be a possible option. For example, it might be optimal to install an alarm system but an option would be to secure areas with valuables better or to install brighter lights.

**3. Not all problems have immediate solutions.** Your team may discover a problem situation that does not have an easy or immediate solution. For example, the kitchen may be in an open area that is not able to be locked. As a result, the appliances and water are accessible to anyone, presenting a possible hazard as well as a problem about misuse or vandalism. However, that situation will probably not be changed unless renovations are done.

It is still worthwhile to mention as a concern, with a commitment to consider ways to make the area more secure.

**4. Most observations will involve “housekeeping” or general safety matters.**

Almost every security assessment discloses concerns about such issues as extension cords stretched across an area, food that attracts insects, dirty bathrooms, wasted supplies, evidence of people being in places they should not be, and similar situations.

These are valid subjects for assessment because they address issues that lead to lack of care and maintenance for the facility and the potential for other negligence. They also

often disclose severe safety issues and issues effecting the reputation and welfare of the place of worship.

**5. Suggest plans, procedures and rules that might be needed.** Emergency response plans and safety and security guidelines do not have to be extensive, but they should be in writing and they should be reviewed with leaders, staff, volunteers, teachers, and others who would need to assume a leadership role. Some aspects of plans—those involving emergency responses, for example--can be copied for every church member.

- Church leaders working with the security assessment teams should develop a basic checklist of safety and security actions and requirements in the event of an emergency or a violent situation, for distribution to staff, volunteers, teachers, group leaders and others.

Suggestions for emergency responses can be developed by police, fire or military resources, or security team coordinators or members, or found through on-line sites, books and other resources for places of worship.

- There may be a need for rules to prohibit certain actions. (For example, two non-relatives must be present when money is counted. Or, no candles capable of being lit are allowed in classrooms unless an adult is present and the candle is doused before leaving.) Excessive rules will probably not be received well, but there are nearly always requirements with which everyone should comply, for the safety of all.

**6. The report should ensure follow-up.** Not all suggestions will be implemented immediately—if ever—based on time, money, practicality or the decision of church leaders. However, some basic actions can be done fairly easily. Consider assigning specific team members to follow-up on each item.

**7. Report as each assessing session is completed.** If the security assessment is going to be conducted in several sessions, it may be helpful to make brief reports about priority areas or situations. The important thing is that action items are considered as soon as possible, rather than waiting until all assessing is completed.

**8. Create a security file and locker.** If you and others keep a file for your materials and supplies you will be ready to assess and it will be more likely that you and your team will assess often. Make security assessments a frequent and ongoing activity, rather than an infrequent event that requires a lot of time and effort just to get organized.

## ORGANIZING THE ASSESSMENT

### QUESTIONS TO HELP ORGANIZE THE ASSESSMENT

This section includes potential questions and concerns for rooms, areas and spaces in a place of worship. Some questions and answers will apply to every space and may only need to be considered once, at the beginning of the assessment. Others will require close inspection in each space.

You may wish to create a list, spreadsheet or word processed table or form that each assessor can use to structure the assessment, while one assessor makes notes for the report. Some assessors find it just as convenient to simply write notes and transfer them to a typewritten copy.

**Keep a record:** The important issue is to have a record of your observations and notes, and to structure it in such a way that it forces you and other assessors to be thorough about:

- Every area or room.
- Features of the space.
- Items or group of items in each area.
- Mechanical and utility elements, hardware and other “invisible” features.
- Potential hazards or concern.

**An effective approach during the assessment: How could this space, item, process, program or the people using it be harmed to any degree, minor or critical?**

Consider how the space, the people in it or the entire place of worship could be purposely or accidentally harmed because of:

- Vulnerabilities of the area or the people using it.
- Weaknesses in the condition of safety and security features or compliance.
- Hazards based on any current or potential factor
- Actions by people—purposely or inadvertently—that could cause harm.

### CONSIDER THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF PEOPLE WHEN ASSESSING

What are the concerns when this space is empty? What if it is full? What if only one or two people are present? Those questions help you consider a variety of risk factors, preventive measures and responses.

•For example: A parking lot presents a different set of concerns at night, in the day time, when only parked vehicles are present, when only one person is present or when several people are present.

•Another example: There is a different risk if a criminal leaves an area when a person enters, compared to if the criminal is purposely concealed and waiting for someone. Considering both situations can help in the assessment process as well as in planning to prevent a crime.

Consider a room or space in your place of worship from these perspectives:

<b>Source of Harm</b>	<b>When no one is present</b>	<b>Usual occupants</b>
Burglar, thief, vandal or other criminal.		
A sexual criminal or sexual predator, or sexual activity.		
Litigious person (Looking for a reason to sue or complain.)		
People who are violent, angry, homicidal, suicidal, unstable, addicted.		
Situations involving the curious or snoop, loiterers, or clandestine activities.		
People who are careless, reckless, negligent, preoccupied, untrained.		

Other questions:

1. Is there an obvious condition that seems to be unsafe, insecure or not correct for some other reason?
2. Now or when the space is in use, what items or issues are/will be a special safety or security risk? For what reason? Are reasonable changes or improvements possible now or over time?
3. Is something present or lacking that is a violation of a church policy, rule, requirement or expectation?
4. Is there any aspect of the space, activity or situation that does not present the place of worship in the correct way or that is a negative element for some other reason?
5. Does it appear there are items or issues that, while acceptable now, will need to be improved, replaced or changed in the future? What and how?
6. Is the safety and security of this space or situation acceptable, exceptionally good, somewhat lacking or insecure/unsafe? Status of other issues being assessed?

## FOCUS POINTS FOR ASSESSING

### PERIMETER AND PARKING AREAS

**Goal:** These areas should be clean, lit sufficiently at night (with either steady lights or motion activated lights) to prevent concealment, with clear markings and helpful signs, and they should be as free of hazards as possible, with continually open access for emergency vehicles and personnel.

*Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)* is well researched and should be considered for work on existing areas as well as new designs.

- Multiple security assessments should be conducted to reflect status changes with time of day, day of week, season, and as the number of vehicles and pedestrians change.
- Look for evidence of loiterers or inappropriate or unsafe activities. (Cigarette stubs, cans, bottles and litter in areas that could be used by vagrants, graffiti, litter, rags, blankets, odors, paraphernalia, etc.)

The lack of evidence shouldn't completely eliminate a concern, but the presence of evidence gives additional reasons to enhance security for an area or item.

**Within reason for the specific setting and situation of a place of worship, the following elements are preferred:**

- The property line should be clearly defined with signs, fences or other indicators.
- Effective seasonal maintenance of driveways, sidewalks, trees, shrubs and other elements of the grounds, perimeter and parking.
- Within reason, there should be no items that could block vision for vehicles or pedestrians or allow concealment of people or hazardous items.
- The area should have enough lights to light up the perimeter, parking spaces, exterior of the building, doors and areas of potential concealment.
- Sheds or storage should be kept locked, even if maintenance staff or others are gone for only a few minutes.
- Maintenance items, liquids, seasonal chemicals, etc., should have safety labels, and safety signs should be posted.
- There should be no hazards to traffic flow, vehicles or pedestrians.
- Signs assisting visitors and emergency responders are beneficial: Arrows to main entrance, contact numbers, parking row or section identifiers, etc.
- No illegal parking by members or guests should be allowed. Overflow parking should be directed to legal parking areas.

## POTENTIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT PERIMETER AND PARKING

### 1. Surrounding area

Are there any aspects of the community, neighborhood, terrain, geology or other issues that might affect the safety and security of the place of worship?  
(Rivers, weather patterns, crime in area, traffic, threats, etc.)

Are there preventive or protective devices or elements in place specifically for any of those, if beneficial? (Earth barriers, walls, shelters, water channels, alarms, pumps, graffiti resistant paint, removal of elements that attract vagrants, etc.)

### 2. Surveillance or patrol of area

Overall status?

•Cameras? Operable? Located optimally?

Who monitors and when?

Is this program effective?

•Patrol?

Can the parking area be viewed from inside the building or must patrol be done on foot or by vehicle?

Who conducts patrol?

Hours of patrol?

Training? Documentation?

Is this program functioning effectively and without liability concerns?

### 3. Parking

Status and condition?

•How many vehicles can be parked in marked parking spaces?

•On average, how many are present during services?

•Lines and markings clear?

•Signs as needed? (Emergency reminders, phone numbers, directions to entrance, etc.)

•Pedestrian risks?

•Risks to children? (Are there play activities in parking area at other times?)

•Snow/ice removal status?

•Any parking spaces more risky than others for any reason?

• Are staff or pastoral vehicles obvious to strangers? (Note: This may be acceptable or not, according to the situation.)

•Parking assistance?

Who is in charge? Training? Documentation?

Is this program functioning effectively and without liability concerns?

#### **4. Lighting for perimeter and parking**

Overall status? (Type and location)

- Are most parking spaces reasonably illuminated at night?
- Lighting controls secure?
- All lights operable and at reasonable brightness level?
- Are they tamper resistant and appropriate for weather?
- If lights are motion activated are they set for effective distance and movement?

#### **5. Driveway(s):**

Overall status? (Location and number)

- Visual barriers or distractions?
- Traffic concerns expressed by members or visitors or by motorists?
- Issues that might cause vehicle damage or impair movement?
- Emergency vehicle access marked if needed?
- Fire hydrants clear?
- If exit is into alleys or similar throughways, are signs needed to encourage caution about pedestrians, motorists, limited sight, etc?

#### **6. Fences, borders, walls, other perimeter markings**

Overall status?

- Is the perimeter of the property clearly defined?
- Are fences and walls well maintained and free of damage or graffiti?
- Is there some reason the height or material in fences creates a concern?

#### **7. Outbuildings, sheds, items**

Overall status?

- Are they in use? Empty? Used for storage but not accessed often?
- Potential hazard for children, others?
- Secured so not accessible to anyone other than authorized staff?
- Electricity in the sheds? Is it safe and operable?
- Propane or other fuel tanks? How are these secured? Can they be used as a place of concealment?
- Air conditioning units and fans and similar equipment: Condition? Safety factors?

#### **8. Grounds care**

Overall status?

- Are grounds well cared for seasonally to give the appearance of attention not neglect?
- Are items locked up or stored in a secure manner?

- Are all items inscribed with identifying information?
- Fuel or other liquids in safe containers?
- Safety signs and labels as needed?

#### **9. Trash receptacles other bins, cans or containers**

Overall status?

- Away from buildings?
- Fire resistant?
- Any combustible hazards anywhere on the grounds?
- Do dumpster or bin contents create potential problems?
- Are dumpsters or other containers located to make it difficult to get behind them?

#### **10. Decorative items (Flags, banners, statues, symbols, crosses, etc.)**

Overall status?

- Potential hazard for children or others?
- Updated and well maintained?
- High value? Could they be replaced with lower value items if they are unique and thievery is a concern?
- Off-season items. Are they secure and protected from damage?

#### **11. Trees, bushes, shrubs and other landscaping features**

Overall status?

- Trimmed to avoid blocking views, windows, doors, and to prevent easy concealment under or in them?
- Are tree branches trimmed for reduced weather damage or falling on buildings or vehicles?
- Any features that present hazards or potential for crime, vandalism, etc.? (Water, rocks, planters, etc.) Can they be made more secure?

#### **12. Vehicle barriers, barricades and access**

Overall status?

Are there natural, decorative or other barriers to prevent vehicles from crashing into doors or windows, driving into pedestrian areas, blocking doors, driving up close to allow quick crimes and escapes?

#### **13. Parked vehicles**

Overall status?

- List routinely parked vehicles such as busses, vans, carts, other fleet vehicles. Who is responsible for their care and maintenance?
- Locked at all times when no driver is present?
- Maintained: Clean inside and out, equipment working, operable, parked safely?

- If not used often, are they checked at least weekly?
- Long-term parked vehicles (List and list reason for having them in the parking area.)

Kept clean and maintained to prevent an unsightly abandoned appearance?

Locked at all times?

Trunks filled to prevent children from getting inside? (The trunks should be locked, not just have the locking mechanism removed.)

#### **14. Sidewalks and stairs**

- Are stairs and sidewalks to all entrances well-maintained and lighted?
- Are stairs clear on either side or without concealment areas?
- Railings in good repair?
- Stairs going into basement areas lit, clean and safe?
- Wheelchair ramps clear and lighted?

#### **15. Playgrounds, basketball courts, etc.**

Overall status?

Are these on areas that are also driveways? What precautions are used?

Are these easily observed to provide security for children and others?

Is it well lit, if it is used at night with church approval?

**16.** What other issues about the perimeter, grounds, parking or the general area, should be inspected? Any other areas of concern?

## BUILDING EXTERIOR

Among the issues regarding safety and security are: building age, architectural features, patterns of use and the design and materials of the exterior. Many of the following questions can be adapted to fit the specific features of your place of worship.

**Goal:** All buildings should be well maintained, locked and lighted in a way that deters crime and unauthorized access and increases safety at entrances and exits. It may be appropriate for exteriors to be strengthened against hazardous weather conditions for the area or to have extra protection at doors and windows for other reasons.

- Doors and openings to buildings should all be able to be locked and usually should be locked between services and activities, unless there are other customs in your place of worship.
- Private entrances or other access points should be locked after every use, even between short intervals of use. No doors should be propped open.
- Devices such as peepholes and intercoms may be helpful, to allow screening on appropriate doors.
- As few entrance doors as possible should be unlocked and used any time.
- Entrances not used should be as well lit and maintained as those that are used often.
- Easily visible signs should direct people to preferred entrances.
- Windows and doors should be locked and able to be seen by patrols.
- Alarm systems should be obvious and working, and should be tested on a schedule. (Alarms are not always a practical answer for securing an entire place of worship. If they are used, consider having a mechanism for having flashing lights to accompany the alarm, to attract more attention.)

Hiring a locksmith or other repairman (or enlisting the help of a knowledgeable member of the congregation) to evaluate doors and locks may be helpful if the equipment is old, has not been well maintained or maintenance records are not available.

### Potential Questions about the Exterior

#### 1. Overall appearance and condition?

Are any portions damaged to the extent that it could be a hazard? (Loose stones, splintered wood, nails showing, sections missing, loose decorative features on roof or gables, etc?)

- Are drain pipes, trellis, decorative letters and symbols and other attachments to the exterior solidly attached?

## **2. Roof**

How can the roof be accessed? Can it be secured?

- If access is gained, what is on the roof that could present a hazard to the person accessing it or to those in the place of worship?
- Is there anything to be stolen? (Copper, conduit, etc.)
- Are skylights and transom windows closed and locked?
- What is the status of vents, electrical equipment, HVAC installations, loose objects? (Check for repair needs or any apparent tampering.)
- Status and condition of roof? Water or wind damage visible? Fire hazards?

## **3. Generators, fuse boxes and other equipment**

Compliance with codes and safety regulations?

- Locked when allowed by code? Inspection records maintained?
- Evidence of tampering?

## **4. Lights**

• At doors: Are they tamper resistant? Sufficiently bright?  
Are they steady burning or on sensors?

• Other lights: Are there enough of them to help reduce risk to windows and doors? Are they placed correctly to be effective for their purposes?

## **5. Doors**

(Starting at one point and working around the building, at each door)

- Condition of door, parts and hinges as to repair, sturdiness, maintenance?
- Locking mechanism: According to the type of lock being used, is it workable, in good repair? When it locks, does the door lock solidly?
- Condition of door frame?
- Are emergency exit doors clear and operable?
- Is the timing of automatic and handicapped accessible doors appropriate for all times and conditions? (Should be long enough to allow exit, but not so long that the doors stay open after the person using the door has left, if others are not present.)
- Is there a method of knowing and controlling who has keys and how they are used? Have there been any concerns about key use or control?

## **6. Windows**

Inspect all ground level windows, including those that cannot be opened or that are decorative.

- Are there indicators that anyone has tried to gain access? (Keep window frames repaired to make this more obvious.)
- Bathroom windows or other small windows locked when no one is present?

- Window coverings prevent seeing in when rooms aren't being used?
- Upper level windows secured and unable to be accessed or opened?
- Basement windows secured and in good repair?
- Are window wells clean and covered?

7. Any other aspect of the exterior that needs to be assessed?

## MAIN ENTRANCE/EXIT AND FOYER AREA

Places of worship vary considerably in configuration of entrances/exits, foyers, waiting areas, and other architectural features. Adapt the following suggestions:

**Goal:** The interior of foyers and lobbies should be well-lighted when the doors are unlocked and the building is in use. Candles and décor should be displayed in a safe, secure manner.

**Items of value:** Many places of worship have displays, furniture or décor that are either costly or have historic or emotional value. Members may be so accustomed to them they do not realize their appeal to collectors or criminals. Vandalism is also a threat to these items.

- Items on display should be in easily observed, well-lighted locations and as secured as possible, or in a way that would make removal attempts obvious.
- Consider replacing real items (antique bibles or books, art work, chalices, silver candle holders, tapestries and other artifacts) with facsimiles or photographs.

**Emergency preparedness:** Issues for the main entrances and exits might include:

- Are light controls in a protected area or disguised?
- A procedure established for opening all front doors in the event of an emergency.
- Is there a procedure for quickly locking-down the building to prevent an attacker from entering? (While not creating a safety hazard in the event of fire or panic.)
- Consider the size, weight and location of furniture and fixtures that could be used as protective barriers if needed. Ushers and greeters should be aware of what areas might provide the best cover or be most easily secured in the event of a violent situation.
- Consider having a cabinet or nearby closet with emergency equipment: Flashlights, first aid kit, air horns and anything else that would be appropriate for the setting in potential emergencies. (Consider having enough flashlights to be able to distribute some to the congregation if needed.)
- Fire suppression items? Who is trained to use it?
- Are doors and hallways leading into private areas locked or kept closed if they must be kept unlocked? (Consider self-closing doors or doors with buzzers to alert staff.)
- Plants, furniture or other barriers may be useful to prevent people from standing next to large expanses of glass. This may be helpful in a weather emergency or if the glass is broken in any other way.

Assessing at varied times, days and seasons is the best way to fully consider the safety, security and emergency preparedness factors of the space.

## SANCTUARY/AUDITORIUM/ OTHER WORSHIP AREAS

**Goal:** The main worship area and other areas used for worship should be maintained in a safe and secure manner during and between use, and emergency response options should be known by members. The space should be evaluated for hazards or concerns, maintenance issues, exit in case of emergency and for areas of protection in the event of harmful situations.

**Features that do not change:** Some general information may not change over time: Maximum occupancy, average attendance (or, actual attendance if the assessment is being conducted during a service) location of exit doors and location of light and temperature controls. However, having those items on the assessment list or form reminds assessors to evaluate current concerns about each of them.

### Potential Questions for Main Worship Areas:

#### 1. Overall space and seating:

- Maximum occupancy? Average attendance (or current attendance)
- Is the layout of the space or the placement of any item likely to be hazardous during an emergency exit? (Musical instruments, people standing or sitting in aisles, etc.)
- Status of light controls, thermostats, electrical outlets, etc.?
- If seating is on levels, are all levels able to be observed by ushers or others? Concerns?
- Hazards related to steps, furniture, candles, activities, large numbers of people, etc?
- Handicapped area status? Clear route to emergency exits?
- Seating: Condition of seats or pews and in and around seats. Status of books, materials, cards, etc. and holders. Hazards, concerns?
- Are there hazards related to clear movement (carpet condition, kneeling rails, etc.)? How can those be limited or eliminated?

#### 2. Use and status of space

How is the space used on a daily basis, other than main worship times--daytime or nighttime? Have assessments been done during those times?

•If the space has other functions, is there a process for clearing and securing it between uses, if that would be beneficial?

•If the space is open for other purposes when few people are present:

Are emergency exits clear and open during that time?

Is there a way to contact staff quickly in an emergency? (Buzzer, intercom, etc.)

Are valuable items secured?

•Other concerns about how the space is used?

### 3. Entrances and exits to auditorium:

- Are side rooms or hallways locked to prevent the auditorium from being entered without the being observed?
- Are emergency exits lighted and marked and the path cleared?
- If emergency exit doors lead to other hallways or rooms, then to outside exits, are those doors and paths clear?
- Can doors be locked from either or both sides? If so, what is condition of lock, frame and hinges?

### 4. Windows

Overall status?

- If entrance could be gained from outside, are they locked, with locks and frames in good repair?
- If windows are decorative, are they firmly in place and in good repair?

### 5. Choir, musician waiting areas, etc.

Overall status or potential hazards?

- Are waiting areas secured to prevent access by unauthorized people?
- Are valuables secured?
- Are musical instruments secured?
- Fire suppression and other emergency equipment available?

### 6. Rooms or spaces adjacent to sanctuary or auditorium

Overall status?

- Are these rooms secured to prevent unauthorized access, or cleared after use?
- Are there areas that could easily offer concealment for people or items?
- Fire hazards?
- If the door is not always locked, when is it locked and how?
- Windows locked?
- Other issues of concern about the space or room?

### 7. Platform, pulpit area

Overall status of area?

- Is the area free of potential safety hazards (cords, loose rugs, steep steps, etc.)?
- If there are potential hazards have they been protected against in an effective way (located away from movement area, covered, barriers, warning signs, etc.)
- Are candles maintained safely? Is fire suppression equipment nearby?

- Is the path clear from the platform or pulpit to an emergency exit?
- Is an emergency exit available for choir, musicians, others on the platform?
- Is there an area of concealment or protection for leaders or others, if needed, either on the platform or in a side room?
- Have those who are on or around the platform during services, been briefed about potential responses in various emergencies (Review the Emergency Plan as part of a process assessment.)

#### **8. Offering Collection**

- Is there an effective protocol for collecting, removing and counting the money? (This can be reviewed under assessments of processes and programs.)

#### **9. Areas for special activities during services: (List each)**

This may include baptismal areas and altars as well as activities such as communion, prayer groups, altar calls, children's church, etc.

Possible hazard or other concerns, either during services or when the sanctuary is not in use?

#### **10. Emergency Preparedness**

- Is there an Emergency Plan that provides suggested responses to a variety of emergency situations (Fire, medical emergencies, accidents, violence and other crimes, weather emergencies, mechanical and utility emergencies, etc.) that has been distributed to key people and about which adult members are familiar?

(Review the Emergency Plan as part of a process and program assessment.)

- Is there someone present at all services who could provide CPR or other life saving actions? Are there guidelines or schedules for these people?
- Are there designated helpers for children and those with impaired mobility?
- Are ushers, greeters or other observers usually present during services, with designated emergency response assignments?
- Can ushers or others observe people who enter before or during services?
- Is there a security person or team designated to observe the pastor or pastoral team, and provide protection and assistance if needed? (Review the procedures through a process and program assessment with those in charge.)
- Are there any specific aspects of the service that increase threats or hazards?
- Is there a written plan about responding to emergencies that is reviewed regularly at least by the pastoral and worship teams or key members and leaders?

## **OFFICES OF CLERGY AND STAFF**

These offices are prime targets for crime and should be assessed with a view to a wide variety of concerns. Usually the regular occupants want to be present when their personal space is assessed. During nighttime assessments you can limit your assessing to checking doors and windows, unless there is some aspect of their work areas that need to be checked more thoroughly. Then, perhaps they can be present for this unique perspective!

While assessing staff offices it is convenient to assess the overall safety and security program of clergy and staff. They are mentioned in the section on assessing special functions and some information will be provided here.

During this assessment you may also recognize liability concerns, concerns about some aspects of their work or a need for more oversight or accountability as it relates to money or some other function. Work with church leaders to be effective in these areas.

### **Concerns about offices:**

- The presence of electronic equipment, office supplies, petty cash, a safe for large amounts of money, furniture, art, books and personal items is a temptation for burglars as well as for those who might commit a crime of opportunity.
- When the offices are occupied there may be purses or other valuables left out in the open.
- The clergy and staff may be vulnerable to attack or harassment.
- Often they are in more isolated parts of a building and may not be aware of intruders or visitors.
- The cars of staff are usually parked in obvious locations, which can signal how many are present.
- Places of worship are often visited by those who want financial assistance or those who have other problems. If assistance isn't available (or even if it is) they may react violently.
- The staff are more likely to be present if a mechanical failure occurs during the daytime and may not know what to do about it unless they have been trained.
- Visitors and others may seek assistance and not be able to contact staff persons if business areas are locked to prevent intruders. (Which is why they are often not locked.)

Assess with a view to vulnerability of people and items, as well as potential access to the rest of the building. Consider the space when people are present, after hours, during services, during special events, and all the other times when the offices may be at risk.

## **WAYS TO HELP KEEP CLERGY AND STAFF MORE SAFE**

Consider how to make office areas more safe and secure against intruders during the day time, while still allowing required activities.

- Among the best methods are to have buzzers and intercoms (even very basic portable ones can work) and peepholes.
- Guidelines should be developed for who can be allowed in and under what circumstances.
- There should be sign-in sheets or other ways of letting staff know if teachers, kitchen workers or others are in the building. This will not only avoid nerve-rattling surprises but also allows the staff to know who is present in the case of a fire, medical emergency or other emergency situation.
- Staff should be trained about the mechanical and utility systems of the place of worship in case there are no maintenance staff or others present to do an emergency shut-off.
- Parking areas and doorways should be well lighted and staff members should avoid going to cars alone after dark in settings that may be hazardous.
- It is usually advisable to not mark parking spaces as belonging to specific people. This avoids the use of a name to gain further information and also prevents targeting cars.
- Clergy and staff should have a code word or phrase to help them communicate a need for assistance if they do not feel comfortable doing so openly.
- Prevention of intrusion is focused mainly on doors and windows. Window coverings that prevent people from seeing the contents of offices should be used after hours.
- All staff members should be aware of how to help visitors and others get to a shelter-in-place in the building, in the event of a weather emergency or a threatening situation of any kind. A safe room or area should be identified and supplied with emergency items, including flashlights, walkie-talkies, weather radios if that is needed, water and first aid supplies, among others.
- All emergency plans should be maintained in hard copy in staff offices. Computer files may not be available in an emergency and staff people should be able to grab a binder, leave, and have names and numbers of key contacts, as well as recommendations for responses in a variety of emergencies.
- Staff cell phones should have key contact numbers for maintenance, emergency response and church leaders, programmed into them.
- Whether or not staff members should have a non-lethal weapon such as pepper spray, may be part of the guidelines provided by church leaders. Everyone having them should be trained to use them correctly and they should be aware of the potential results. For example, the results of using pepper spray in a small space should be discussed.
- The business and church functions of each individual staff person should be evaluated to ensure safety and security. For example, the person who takes money to the bank, the person who stays late to lock up after meetings, etc. Often those people already have concerns as well as ideas for making the situations more safe.

## CLASSROOMS

**Goal:** These rooms are used for bible study, church school and similar programs, usually for designated age groups. For those reasons they may present special concerns and those responsible for them should be briefed about how to keep them safe and secure.

Classrooms should be orderly and free of safety hazards. They must also be kept secure between use, since classroom windows are often closed for sound control and windows are opened for ventilation. Everyone should be aware of exit paths and teachers should be prepared to provide leadership in the event of an emergency.

### POTENTIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT CLASSROOMS/MEETING ROOMS

#### 1. Overall space

- Who usually uses this space (and does that present specific safety and security issues?)
- Who is responsible for opening/lock up or other security related to the space?
- Maintenance and appearance: Anything noted for improvement or change?

#### 2. Doors and windows

- Windows locked, whether or not entry could be gained through them?
- Are locks in good condition? Can windows be moved on their tracks even though locked?
- Any aspect of areas outside windows that present hazards or threats?
- Do windows have screens if appropriate?
- If there are window coverings, are they kept closed when classes are not being used?
- Are doors able to be locked? Who has the key?
- Are doors locked when the room is not in use, if that is protocol?

#### 3. Materials and furniture

- Are papers and materials orderly, off the floor, away from heating vents and not covering areas or items that need to be visible?
- Are scissors and similar items secured or out of reach by children?
- Are all walking areas free of any obstructions or items?
- Are all parts of furniture in good repair? (Do drawers have safety catches to avoid having them pulled out all the way? Are trims and metal solidly attached?)

#### **4. Closets, storage**

- Are doors locked when not in use, if there is equipment or valuables? Who has keys?
- Are valuables inscribed or labeled?

#### **5. Fire and other hazards**

- Are electrical appliances, cords and outlets in good repair?
- Are appliances unplugged if no one is in the room?
- Are extension cords rolled up and put away or at least not draped or stretched on or through areas where someone could trip on them or pull the appliance off a counter or shelf?
- Is any item that is capable of creating heat kept secured when no adult is present?

#### **6. Emergency preparedness**

- Is there a method for getting emergency assistance? (Buzzer, members use cell phones, phone in room, near other classrooms, etc.?)
- Is there a flashlight for emergency use?
- Is there an Emergency Plan and does the teacher or leader know his or her role in the event of an emergency? (Review the plan as part of Process Assessment.)
- Could the room be locked from the inside if necessary? If so, are there ways to prevent them from being locked in normal circumstances?
- If regular emergency exits could not be used, is there another way out? If so, is that way clear of obstructions and is it marked in some way?
- Upon leaving the room, are emergency exit routes to the outside clearly marked?

**7.** If there are protocols for opening and locking up the area, are those posted clearly to avoid mistakes?

**8.** If the space is occupied during the assessment, are there any concerns based on activities, classroom control, security or safety, etc.?

**9.** Are there written protocols for rooms used by children, with regards to such issues as leaving only with adult supervision, not allowing unplanned pick-up by non-custodial adults, etc.?

**10.** Are there other observable concerns about the space or use?

## **KITCHEN AND SOCIAL AREAS**

**Goal:** These areas are gathering places during planned functions and often at other times. The areas should be kept as secured as possible between use to avoid accidents, removal of items, or purposeful damage, especially if there are electrical appliances and sinks or many food items or valuables.

### **POTENTIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT KITCHEN AND SOCIAL AREAS**

1. Who is responsible for maintenance and use of the area?
2. Are there written protocols and requirements for those who use it?
3. Are there sign-in or scheduling requirements and are those maintained?
4. Are there clean-up protocols and are those posted?
5. Are cabinets and storage areas that contain valuable items or supplies locked?
6. Are there items or areas that would be particularly hazardous to children or those who do not know how to operate the equipment? If so, are those secured?
7. Are there ample fire extinguishers and are they in working order?
8. Are there several flashlights available in case of power outage when many people are present?
9. Are written instructions posted or readily available for using appliances or turning on electric or gas ranges or refrigerators?
10. Are chemicals or cleaning items kept secured?
11. Are cabinets organized sufficiently to avoid spillage when doors are opened?
12. Is the area free of rodents and insects? If not, are there specific efforts being made to control the problem?
13. Is the refrigerator clean, without spoiled or old food?
14. Are all cords and plugs in good repair?
15. If there are hot water heaters or other systems in the area, what is their status as to maintenance, age and condition?
16. Is all furniture clean and in good repair?
17. Is there a way to get emergency assistance? (Buzzer, cell phone, regular phone?)
18. Are exit doors unobstructed? Are exits marked clearly?
19. Is there a protocol that doors to the outside will not be propped open for ventilation if it will allow unsafe conditions? (This can prevent assaults on kitchen workers as well as unauthorized access to the rest of the facility when staff is not present.) Look for propping devices by the doors.
20. Are windows and doors secure?
21. If people are present during the assessment, are there circumstances that indicate a concern about safety and security for people or the facility?
22. Are there other concerns about the space?

## CHILDCARE AND NURSERY

**Note:** The issue of protecting children and youth is a tremendously important one for places of worship and involves much more than the scope of this document. The following material is limited to assessing the spaces used by childcare and nursery workers, rather than advising about check-in and check-out policies, approving childcare workers, medical emergencies and similar issues.

**Goal:** To have a space that is clean, well maintained and free of hazards, and for which there are protocols and requirements related to safety and security. The same issues assessed in other spaces generally apply to these.

1. Overall status of space: Is the area clean appearing and smelling, free from litter and with floors and surfaces clean and orderly? Is all furniture clean and in good repair? Are all fabrics clean and repaired? Is trash and litter handled appropriately, especially soiled items? If there are municipal regulations regarding childcare, are these being followed?
2. If children are present during the assessment are there any issues related to their care or safety that should be corrected?
3. Are exit doors clear of obstructions and marked?
4. Can lighting be made bright for clear observation of infants and children and their status?
5. Are all electrical appliances, cords and outlets secured or childproofed in some way?
6. Are there methods in place to prevent children from leaving the area without adult knowledge?
7. Are supplies and valuables kept in secured areas when no one is present?
8. Are there fire extinguishers and are they operable?
9. Is there a flashlight for each worker?
10. Is there a first aid kit or appropriate first aid items?
11. Are windows locked when the area is not in use?
12. If windows are unlocked or open for ventilation, could someone enter easily? (If so, can this risk be reduced by making the window open only part way?)
13. Can emergency assistance be obtained easily? (Buzzer, cell phone, regular phone or intercom?)
14. Are there other aspects about the nursery or child care area that needs to be corrected or considered?

## OTHER ROOMS AND SPACES TO ASSESS

Every room, closet and space should be looked at and evaluated as to safety, security, potential problems or how it could be used in the event of an emergency. Do not neglect to review every area in your assessment.

- Some places of worship have specific areas for worship items, artifacts and art, sacred documents or items, musical instruments, special rooms for counseling, worship or administering sacraments or rites, etc. The safety and security of these areas should be closely inspected, since they often attract the attention of the curious as well as those who want to harm people or property or to steal items.

- In very small places of worship there are few rooms, but those are often multi-purpose rooms that are used by many people and not always maintained safely or securely. It is especially common to have children return to their unlocked Sunday School classes when they are there during the week.

- Any rooms, areas or buildings that are historic or that contain art or artifacts are made more vulnerable because visitors may enter ostensibly to view the item or sanctuary or to take photos, but may also take anything that is in the open and can be concealed before they leave.

## OTHER ASSESSMENT AREAS

### MECHANICAL AND UTILITY SYSTEMS

The scope and nature of inspections and assessments will vary based on the complexity of the systems. Custodians or maintenance staff may be the point of contact for these systems, however the overall facility is still the responsibility of church leadership and oversight and assessment is appropriate.

**Inspections by professionals:** These should be conducted on a schedule to ensure the systems are well maintained and present no safety hazards. The areas in which equipment is maintained should be clean, easily accessible and well lit.

- Operating information, warnings, emergency shut-off information and repair information should be posted clearly, with a flashlight nearby for reading in darker areas. The same information should be maintained in security plans elsewhere, in case an emergency prevents getting close to the equipment.

- Systems should be secured as effectively as possible, in compliance with zoning and fire and building regulations, to prevent unauthorized access.

- Optimally, there should be restrictions on who can operate, adjust or maintain the systems, and there should be a log of activities and access.

- Instructions should be provided to those who regularly use the building about how to respond to various situations, including smelling a gas leak, finding a hot water heater or pipe that is broken and flooding an area, or observing some other system failure or problem.

## **PROCESSES AND PROGRAMS**

Every place of worship has different needs based on their services, ceremonies and routine and activities involving members as well as the community. Consider a routine week as well as special events, to determine a list of situations that might present risks and hazards.

The following material is not meant to provide all the safety and security guidelines needed for these processes and programs. It is meant to be a discussion starter about assessing them, recognizing concerns, and working with others to develop ways to improve safety and security.

### **1. MONEY COLLECTION**

A protocol should be established that ensures safe and secure handling of cash and checks and immediate accounting of funds, as well as safe storage of funds and safe transport to a bank.

What is considered safe will vary according to the location and the people available. This is a situation in which most people can use intuitive thinking to evaluate concerns and develop at least a degree of improvement. Resources provided by insurance companies, banks and others, can be helpful.

### **2. BOOKSTORES, THRIFT STORES, WELFARE FUNDS**

These programs can be a temptation for visitors or members, since money is often collected hurriedly and not kept secure. Protocols should be established that require using receipts, having two people present when funds are counted, and keeping an inventory when practical. Those in charge are often most able to develop policies and procedures. However, the programs should be audited and evaluated by others, to ensure objectivity.

### **3. CEREMONIES AND SPECIAL SERVICES**

Any function that involves potential risks such as filled baptisteries, candles, unusual worship items or artifacts, dimmed or darkened areas or similar situations should be assessed prior to the activity and occasionally while a ceremony is being conducted, to see if there are obvious security needs.

- Special concerns will include accidents, injuries, fires and crimes of opportunity.
- During special events children often are more likely to play in around the building and in side rooms. This is a hazard for them as well as for church property.
- Purses, equipment and other valuables should be kept secured. For example, keyed lockers or a storage closet in rooms used by wedding parties are ways to protect items that are often left in the open during ceremonies.
- A specific individual or group should be given responsibility for monitoring the safety of any potentially harmful aspect of a ceremony or service.

## 4. COUNSELING

Programs such as counseling for couples and individuals should have protocols established to prevent justified or unjustified accusations about the actions of counselors or clients. These might involve requiring other staff to be present in the area or to only conduct counseling during business hours or with two counselors present.

Counselors themselves are usually the best sources of knowing what might be of concern and how those concerns could be reduced. However, church leaders or the ministerial team can also determine guidelines based on those used in other places of worship or specific issues for the locale.

## 5. YOUTH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

These are among the most potentially problematic of all programs. Among the issues to consider are the requirements for adult supervision of all activities as well as selection and training of youth leaders—who are often young adults themselves. The well-being of youth, leaders and the place of worship depends upon oversight and caring but concerned control.

It may be helpful to have the youth participants assist in developing guidelines and emergency response plans, since they are often more aware of potential problems than their leaders might be. Problem areas may include:

Transportation safety	Criminal acts by participants or by strangers against participants.
General safety in the environment (such as at outdoor activities).	Conflicts, arguments, relationship issues.
The presence of inappropriate or unwanted items or substances.	Actions that could potentially bring discredit to the place of worship.
Inappropriate or unwanted activities of any kind.	Accidents, injuries and illnesses.
	Getting separated from the group.

### **Among the ways to reduce hazards and risks in youth activities:**

- Youth should receive written instructions about safety and security before significant events, especially those involving large crowds or unusual settings.
- The group should stay together.
- Leaders must be notified when someone leaves the area and when they return.
- A leader should generally not be alone with individual youth.
- Both youth and the leaders should receive clear guidelines about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in many areas of concern.
- Leaders should provide a strong leadership role and observe closely to ensure safe, secure actions by youth, as well as to be prepared for emergencies.

The best way to assess these processes is to occasionally be present to observe or to occasionally conduct interviews of youth and youth leaders.

## 6. TRANSPORTATION

Busses, vans and cars used to transport anyone involved with church activities should be well maintained and driven safely, with ample time for rest for the driver on longer trips.

A review of accidents involving such vehicles, as well as information from other churches, automobile associations and insurance carriers, will provide many ideas for guidelines for both vehicles and drivers.

Everyone who transports people on behalf of the church should be approved using reasonable criteria focused on driver experience, history and acceptance of church requirements or prohibitions for the situation.

## 7. OFF-SITE ACTIVITIES

Conferences, camps, special events, concerts and retreats, are all areas of responsibility for church leadership if the events are sponsored by the church. These events and locations vary tremendously, but some general guidelines can help you develop detailed ones for specific events.

When assessing off-site activities consider these issues to decide what might improve the safety and security program.

•**Safety and Security Coordinators:** One or more people should be assigned to coordinate safety and security activities for off-site activities. Their responsibilities should be clearly defined and they should be prepared to focus their attention on issues related to their roles:

- Awareness of the overall environment
- Identification of potential threats or hazards or safety or health threats
- Knowledge of basic precautions related to concerns
- The general location of participants at all times
- Being available for regular contact and making status reports
- Having emergency contact information for participants and for church leaders and local assistance if available

•**Leaders, counselors or other volunteers:** These people represent the place of worship and should be well known by church leaders or approved through a process that ensures they are dependable and trustworthy.

They should receive written material about their responsibilities, including concerns to be alert about and responses to them. When possible they should be contacted by security coordinators ahead of time, so their concerns and those of the church leadership can be discussed.

•**Participant information and responsibilities:** Participants should be briefed verbally and receive written guidelines or information ahead of time about safety and security during the event. In the case of children and youth, a separate communication should go to parents. Information may include:

- The role of security coordinators and other leaders
- The overall environment of the locale or event
- Threats or hazards related to the event or location
- Precautions related to concerns
- Their responsibilities for conduct and for reporting problems
- Any prohibited items or conduct.
- Contact information to give to family or others

•**General safety and security guidelines:**

The following guidelines do not cover every setting and may not apply to all off-site activities, because the situations vary so much. However, it can provide a starting point for further discussion by leaders in your place of worship.

- Guests who are not well-known to staff should be observed for problems as well as being given extra attention and assistance to ensure they feel safe and secure.
- At indoor events everyone should be made aware of exits and hazards related to the venue.
- At outdoor events or in camps or similar settings, no one should leave the immediate area or go outside cabins or tents without the knowledge and permission of leaders or coordinators. This is particularly important with children and youth. Even seemingly benign walks in the dark can have harmful results in unsupervised settings.
- In outdoor nighttime settings, coordinators should have several flashlights as well as access to first aid items and a way to get emergency assistance.
- Buildings, dorms and tents should all be inspected for safety and security. Fire safety is crucial, but so is safety regarding fumes from generators and heaters, electrical systems that may be subject to damage during off-seasons, structural damage, fire pits near buildings, and stairs, railings and balconies that need repair.
- Kitchens and bathrooms or toilets should be checked for cleanliness, safety regarding chemicals, fixtures, appliances in need of repair, and other factors that are often neglected in facilities that are not used by the same people frequently.
- The best way to assess these activities is to visit the site well in advance of use if possible. If that is not possible, try to find a way to be present during at least one similar activity elsewhere, to observe concerns there. Or, contact others who have had activities in that location.

Another way to assess is to prepare a checklist for self-assessment by participants and coordinators after the event. Unfortunately, this may happen after the harm.

## **8. SPECIAL EVENTS**

These may include special services, music programs, bible conferences, guest speakers, large dinner, awards banquets, seasonal programs, holiday programs, and other functions that may attract attention, be attended by large numbers, or are open to the public.

- Develop a list of special events and schedule time for safety and security planning as well as assessing. Assess during these events, as a way to be better prepared for the future and to see if there are problems that need to be corrected at the time.

Among the security activities that may be helpful:

- Someone specific to assist in the event of a medical emergency should be on-site at all times when possible.

- An announcement may be made to point out exits in the event of an emergency.

- Greeters and ushers should be particularly observant to note visitors or strangers who exhibit unusual behavior, and be ready to get assistance if needed.

- Areas of the building that are not being used as part of the program should be closed to public access if possible.

- Parking lots should be patrolled or checked often to prevent break-ins.

- Exits should be kept clear of people, musical instruments or other items.

- As with all services, the pastor or leader of the service should have someone specific who is responsible for observing and responding to assist if the pastor is threatened or needs help in some other way.

- Any large event usually means there will be activities and situations that are unexpected, and that systems and people will be pushed to the maximum. There is a temptation to eliminate some security or safety requirements as too difficult to follow. This is the very time when those requirements are most important.

For example, when items are being brought into the building, rather than propping doors open, someone should stand and hold the door, or the door should be relocked each time it will be left unobserved.

Discussing safety and security with coordinators of events may reduce problems and help everyone stay more safe and secure.

## **9. OTHER PROGRAMS**

Get information and schedules from several sources to ensure that every program is reviewed for potential problems and safety and security needs, as well as emergency response plans. Use the guidelines on page 23 to assist you.

## Emergency and Continuity of Operations Plans

One of the benefits of plans, apart from using them to train people about how to respond in emergencies, is the process of planning, in its own right. That is why many people should be part of the planning. It helps everyone think more clearly about all the details that are required for effective emergency responses.

There are many joking comments about having plans that are never read or used. That situation usually occurs when there is no requirement or encouragement to read or use them. A review at least three months is helpful and may be part of staff meetings, deacon meetings or special briefings before or after services, according to the nature of the plans.

Staff who are present in a mechanical, weather or medical emergency may not have access to computers, so the plans should also be in hard copy format and tabbed for easy reference and review. Consider having most security plans in a binder that also contains phone numbers and other information that may be accessed often, so staff are more likely to have them handy.

Copies should be distributed to all church leaders and regular volunteers. Every church member should at least have material that applies to them and their activities.

**Among the plans and information that should be part of a church security program are:**

**1. General guidelines and information about safety and security in every aspect of activities, processes and programs.**

Over time there should be guidelines developed for leaders and participants in all of the major activities of the place of worship. This takes time, and it may be that the information is needed before the planning is completed. That is why a routine focus on safety and security is so valuable. Even without written guidelines, people are more likely to have given some thought to their personal emergency responses.

**2. Instructions and plans for specific people, leaders and volunteers.**

These instructions may be general or very specific, according to the tasks being done by the people involved. For example:

In the document that follows this, “The Security Role of Greeters and Ushers” a suggestion is made to use a code word, name or phrase, so Greeters and Ushers can communicate the need for assistance if a suspicious person is nearby.

There may be a schedule established for a pair of observers to patrol the building during services, or to check the bathrooms at regular intervals, or similar inspections that need to be assigned specifically.

Those on the platform may all be instructed to be prepared to yell directions about evacuations or to shout at people to get down and get out, in the event of an emergency.

### **3. Evacuation plans:**

- What would be the cause of an evacuation? How will notification be made?
- What should parents do about their children, if they are in another building or area?
- Where should people go after they leave the building?
- Who will assist visitors and those who are less able to assist themselves?
- If primary routes are blocked, what exits could be used?
- Will there be a method for notifying people when or if they should return?
- Who will be coordinators for various locations where people will gather? What is that person's role?
- Will weather have an affect on how evacuation takes place and where people should go for safety?

### **4. Bomb threat or other threat plans:**

There are several governmental and internet resources with information about responding to phone threats. A plan should include guidelines for the call taker as well as for who makes the decision to evacuate, especially if the call appears to be a hoax (a child's voice, for example). There should be information about where to evacuate and how far away should everyone stay after evacuation.

If the threat involves someone saying a device is hidden in the building, someone may need to assist responders by identifying suspicious items.

### **5. Emergency medical plans:**

- Who can provide emergency medical help until regular help arrives? Will there be training provided for those people if they are not professional medical responders?
- Have non-professional medical responders been given guidelines?
- Is there equipment available and who has access to it?
- Are there specific medical needs that should be identified?

**6. Fire and smoke:** These are routine plans that generally call for evacuation and emergency notification. However, such plans might also involve notifications to church members, special instructions for specific areas, assignments for specific individuals to notify others in the building, etc.

**7. Response to violence:** In these situations there is usually no warning and there may be no way to prevent the event from happening. However, having a core group of people who have thought about responses may lessen the harm to many people.

A plan for responding to an violent attack, especially if weapons are involved, should focus on getting people down to avoid gunfire or the attention of the attacker, and out of the building if possible.

Even if the police are called to the scene, it may be many minutes or many hours before they enter the building. Leaders and security team members may need to support,

assist and comfort people or provide medical care throughout that time. This is at least somewhat easier to do if there is a feeling that responses have a purpose.

**A violence response plan might include:**

- Guidelines for when doors should be shut to keep individuals or groups out.
- Lists of safe areas for concealment or furniture that could provide short-term barricades.
- Guidelines for locking off areas of the church and assignments for doing so.
- The location of safe rooms or areas that can be secured quickly and with extra reinforcements.
- Advice for those who have a leadership role in safe rooms.
- Assignments for leaders and members about specific areas of responsibility, or specific people or groups to assist. Assignments should be reviewed regularly to ensure everyone is aware of their roles.

**Weapons and other responses:**

- An individual or group may decide to confront an attacker directly, no matter what the threat to their own safety. However, others may decide to try to stay concealed or help people to safety. The situation will usually dictate the options and available responses.
- Whether or not weapons, including non-lethal weapons, should be carried by members other than police officers is a decision to be made within a specific place of worship and based on the law in that location.

It is likely that some members may carry concealed weapons (guns, knives, pepper spray, etc.) without approval from church leaders. The risks and liability involved should be discussed openly enough to alert those people to the concerns.

Firing a weapon in close quarters can result in unintended death or injuries to innocent people or may not be justified for the situation. There is tremendous moral and legal liability associated with the wrongful use of a deadly weapon. On the other hand, using a weapon against an assailant may stop him or her from further deadly action against the congregation.

If a decision is made to specifically approve having some members carry concealed weapons, strict precautions should be taken about the legality of the action, who is involved, the training they have received, and the knowledge others have of their armed status.

Some places of worship have members who are active or retired law enforcement officers. Church leaders have varying views about whether they feel more comfortable with the officer in uniform or not. Those issues should be discussed by everyone involved.

**8. Weather and natural emergencies:** These will vary according to the setting, but might include:

Shelter-in-place information

Supply lists

Instructions for moving some items to safer places in the facility

Call lists to alert members who can respond to help

Similar information according to the nature of weather and natural emergencies in the area.

**9. Mechanical emergencies:** As was mentioned in the section about mechanical systems, it is worthwhile to have contact and emergency shut-off information in a binder or manual away from the potentially hazardous system and also posted near the system itself.

Directions should give step-by-step instructions for turning water, utilities or other systems off or on, as well as contact phone numbers for maintenance people.

Staff and people who are frequently in the place of worship could be given hands-on training about turning off hot water heaters, checking fuses and other mechanical first-responses that are not dangerous.

**10. Community emergencies:** If an emergency occurs in the community, the place of worship may be asked to assist in varied ways. If that is likely in your place of worship, a plan for quick response should be in place, according to the potential emergencies in the area.

These plans might include methods for setting up a shelter site, providing food, securing the rest of the building while others are using it, extra cleaning and maintenance, and similar issues. Keep a list of contact information for local and regional emergency responders (Salvation Army, Red Cross, etc.)

**11. Continuity of operations plans (COOP):** If you were not able to meet in your place of worship starting right now, where would you meet for the next service, and how would you notify people about it? What would you do about the assets of the building? That kind of information is part of continuity planning.

The plans will vary according to whether the place of worship is still accessible and has items that can be transferred to a new location, or if it has been destroyed or is damaged severely.

Continuity of operations plans may also include plans for dealing with such varied issues as the emergency absence of the pastor, temporary lack of electricity or water or damage to roofs or windows,

Plans can include information about for restoring computers, reestablishing programs, contacting insurance providers and similar issues.

**12. Communication plans.** There is often a need to communicate quickly with members and the community. Quick and frequent communication can stop the spread of rumors and misinformation as well as explaining what will happen next.

- Who, besides the pastor, is authorized to speak for the church in the event of an emergency? Has that person received training about the task, at least as it relates to liability concerns about statements?

- Is there a way to use a website to inform the public about events related to emergencies or events at the church? Who would ensure that happens?

- Is there a radio station that can make announcements? If so, who is the contact person?

- Is there a phone, computer or personal network of contacts to inform people about emergencies? What if the most obvious methods of communication don't work for some reason? (Phone lines down, cell phones in dead cell spots, etc.)

## SUMMARY ABOUT SECURITY ASSESSMENTS

The material in this document can help you get started assessing the safety and security of your place of worship. As with all activities it requires effort and a degree of knowledge and skills. However, anyone with the commitment to be thorough and focused, yet well-balanced and reasonable, can do an effective job.

Use this material in conjunction with Internet and library resources, information from other churches and the intuitive judgments of you and your team of leaders and volunteers.

**An ongoing process:** At the beginning of this material the statement was made that safety and security assessments are ongoing and must be continuous and consistent in focus and balance. The same is true about advice and ideas for conducting assessments. This material is a good foundation, but you will find many ideas through other resources, and some of that will change over time—especially as technology changes and becomes more affordable.

**Target Hardening and the Target Hardening Trap:** Briefly stated, *target hardening* is the process of making a target (something or someone that could be harmed) so resistant that harm is deterred, delayed or can be detected. It incorporates protection, prevention, resistance and response. The *target hardening trap* is spending large amounts of money, time or effort to prevent something harmful from happening *again*.

One of the challenges of security is keeping the macro focus that is neither excessive nor unconcerned, but that always has the big picture and ultimate goals in mind. At the same time you must have a micro focus to ensure you do not make assumptions about safety and security, but instead that you inspect and assess closely.

**The Three C's:** The three C's of safety and security planning are to be, Continuous, Consistent and to Communicate openly and often. A security assessment process is one of the key elements of each of those elements.

You can have a tremendous leadership role in your place of worship when you work with others to know the safety and security status of every aspect of the people, places, assets, processes and programs of your church and work to improve them in reasonable, effective ways. You can also have a leadership role by helping everyone be prepared for potential problems and emergencies.

**The goal of this material:** The goal, as stated in the introduction, was to:

- 1.) Give you the information, ideas and guidelines you need to conduct an effective assessment of your place of worship.
- 2.) Encourage a focused and balanced approach to safety and security planning.

I hope you will let me know if you find the material helpful and if you have ideas to share. Best wishes!

## **Security Concerns For Churches: The Role Of Greeters and Ushers**

The following material was first published in 2008 and has been updated several times since then. It focuses primarily on responses by Greeters and Ushers to potentially violent or disruptive situations. However, it can be adapted to many other roles and activities. It contains some specific scenarios and potential responses that can be helpful for security briefings and training with any staff members or volunteers.

Greeters and ushers can have a leadership role in safety, security and emergency planning related to many concerns in a place of worship. Their knowledge and experiences about church schedules, members and visitors and concerns or problems they have observed or handled, can make them invaluable contributors to the overall church security program.

Tina Lewis Rowe  
[www.tinalewisrowe.com](http://www.tinalewisrowe.com)

## Establishing A Foundation For Church Security

If you are like most greeters and ushers (G/Us), you have little or no background in emergency planning, protection or security activities. You may be a senior-aged member or have a disability or illness, or you may be youthful and inexperienced in dealing with people who are upset. You may be friendly in a quiet way or assertively outgoing. You probably thought your role as a greeter or usher would involve smiling, shaking hands, directing guests, passing the offering plate and helping during services. Fortunately, those will continue to be your primary tasks.

However, greeters, ushers, deacons, assistant ministers, teachers and the pastor, all share responsibility for the safety and security of the congregation. You are not expected to do it all yourself or act as a police officer or security guard but you *are* expected to continuously observe people and the environment, assess the situation to see if there is danger, and respond appropriately. ***Your challenge is to fulfill the dual roles of greeter and guardian.***

•**You must be balanced in your approach.** You must balance the need to provide a feeling of welcome and openness with being watchful and appropriately wary. Some G/Us are so unconcerned that they are rarely aware of what is happening around them, while others are so concerned that they are tense and on edge all the time.

•**You must be realistic about your church environment.** When people gather for worship, things are rarely as organized as they might be in some other meetings:

- People arrive early and late and in groups and alone.
- Members and guests may roam around the lobby or wander down halls.
- The lobby may be packed with people of all ages.
- Your church may not have a greeting area, or it may have a large lobby.
- If there is more than one service some people will arrive as others are leaving.
- Your post may be in the sanctuary and focused on seating people, or you may be at the front door or in the lobby, busy with greeting, conversing and handing out materials. In either case, you may not be able to contact every guest.

Your task is to keep these realities in mind as you look for even small ways to plan and prepare for an emergency. You may not have a perfect situation from the viewpoint of safety and security, but you can improve the situation you have.

•**You must be knowledgeable.** You need to know what to look for and what to do if you see something of concern. You do not need extensive training to be reasonably effective. Your life experiences and some review and discussion will provide you with most of the knowledge you need.

**Other ways to gain knowledge about your security role:**

- Read all of the written material you receive and review it regularly.
- Ask about anything you do not understand or with which you disagree.

- Talk to other greeters and ushers, perhaps even those in other churches, to develop plans for a variety of potential emergencies.
- Find other resources and share them—but be sure they fit the guidelines established by your church leadership.

•**You must be willing and able to fulfill your security responsibilities.** Your role is too important to treat it as a joke or something you do not intend to do because it is not comfortable for you. On the other hand, you must not react to people in a hostile, humiliating or excessively fearful way. Being balanced, knowledgeable and proactive is your goal.

**Your security challenge: Be balanced; Be knowledgeable; Be realistic;  
Be willing and able.**

## THE SECURITY ROLE OF GREETERS AND USHERS

**You serve as a representative of the church and the pastor.** You work as part of a church team and must be careful to not go outside guidelines you are given. You should not be more strict or more lenient than the guidelines, or base your actions on your personal likes or dislikes about people or behaviors. Your actions can have an impact on the reputation and welfare of the entire church. When in doubt, get another opinion and assistance, unless the matter is an emergency.

**Your primary security tasks are to observe and assess, then get assistance or take appropriate emergency action.** The best way for you to fulfill your role is to be aware, alert and ready to get assistance. Going beyond that role can make a situation worse, or get you or others killed or hurt in the case of a violent or threatening person.

- You should not carry guns, pepper spray, *tasers* or other devices without permission. If permission is given the devices must be carried and used within the law.

- **Get assistance if you have a concern:** Ask one—preferably two—G/Us to assist you if you need to talk to someone whose behavior concerns you or if you are checking on a suspicious situation. Do not confront someone on your own unless you have no other choice. This protects you, may prevent a violent action, and provides a witness about anything that occurs. Stay alert to such situations so you can assist others quickly.

- Some G/Us have a well-meaning desire to counsel or pray with someone who is upset. However, while you are talking to a person who seems threatening, volatile or irrational, have another G/U call 911. There may be no time to get assistance if your attempts to communicate and counsel fail.

**Your security activities should focus on:**

- 1. Observation:** Observe people and the environment continuously and purposefully.
- 2. Assessment:** Make a reasonable evaluation of the potential for harm.
- 3. Action:** Get help, then warn and help others. You may be able to do something to prevent violence or keep it from getting worse, but you should first try to get help and warn and help others.

**The security role of greeters and ushers:**

- 1. You are a representative of the church.**
- 2. Your primary security tasks are to observe and assess people and situations and take appropriate action.**
- 3. Get assistance rather than trying to handle a situation on your own.**

## THE POTENTIALS

Among recent tragic events that have happened in places of worship in the United States have been:

- In December 2007 in Arvada and Colorado Springs, Colorado. Four young people were killed in two locations. If not for the actions of a volunteer security officer, Jeanne Assam, the attacker might have killed hundreds of people.
- On July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Greg McKendry and Linda Kraeger were shot and killed in the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. Mr. McKendry, a board member and usher sacrificed his own life to shield others. Ms. Kraeger was a visitor who came to watch a play. Seven others were injured.
- On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Senior Pastor Fred Winters of the First Baptist Church in Maryvale, Illinois, was shot in killed at the close of services, in front of his congregation.

Around the world similar and even worse acts of violence have occurred.

- By the time you receive this and read it, there will likely be other tragic events that could be added to a chronology of violence or disruption.

### **Other crimes and acts of violence:**

A scenario of someone on a hate-filled rampage is the one we tend to think of most often when we consider violence or disturbances in a church. However, other violent and criminal situations have occurred that could happen in your church as well.

- In Neosho, Missouri, two members and an assistant pastor were killed at the conclusion of a Sunday morning service, by a man who had argued the night before with the two members he shot, both who were relatives of his.
- In Arkansas, a man involved in a child-custody dispute came to his wife's church and shot her while she was getting out of her car in the parking lot.
- In Chicago a young church musician was unloading musical equipment when he was shot and killed by a gang member who had intended to shoot the first person he saw.
- In Florida a man was brought to church on a Wednesday night by a friend, so he could talk to someone about the fact that he murdered a female neighbor.
- In California a church building was damaged, the pastor's wife was injured, and services were disrupted, by protestors who objected to a scheduled guest speaker.
- In North Carolina a church worker who assisted a homeless man was stabbed to death by him in the church kitchen, after which he took her purse and fled.
- In Laurel, Maryland, a man entered a church during an evening meeting and sexually assaulted three girls, ages 6-12, who were playing in a basement area, then abducted a 4 year old and sexually assaulted her before releasing her. None of the three girls reported what happened to them until the mother realized the 4 year old was missing, almost an hour later.
- In 1963, the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama was bombed, killing four young girls. Since then other churches have been bombed or vandalized for a variety of reasons or for no discernible reason.

- In 1998, in Illinois, an Assembly of God church and a Methodist church were bombed, killing one and injuring many others. Two weeks later the prime suspect was killed while making a bomb in his garage.
- Several churches in recent years have had shootings during funerals.

In many of the cases above, a church building was viewed as more vulnerable than other locations. In some cases the church or a member was the specific target. It is clear that violence can happen, even at your church.

- No amount of planning can stop someone from wanting to harm others. Nevertheless, having a plan of prevention and response can make your church a more difficult target and can help reduce the harm if violence occurs. A frequent recommendation for effective planning is to prepare for *when* something happens rather than *if* it happens.

## **CONSIDERING THE RISKS**

Everyone involved in church leadership, including those who are often the frontline of security responses—greeters and ushers—should be involved in considering the risks that are present in a specific church. Do some of these issues fit your church?

- Churches in urban areas have a higher likelihood of random violence—although, no church is immune from the danger.
- Churches in isolated or rural areas may be viewed as easier targets or defenseless.
- Every church has beliefs that may be controversial to some and these can result in threats, vandalism or violence.
- Churches that are near highways and main thoroughfares provide escape routes for criminals.
- Churches with schools may be targets for that reason.
- If a church is thought to provide food, lodging or financial assistance it can attract people who are disturbed, resentful or desperate, as well as criminals. If a request for assistance is turned down, there may be a criminal or violent reaction.
- Churches who have had conflicts with individuals, groups or neighbors may be the subject of revenge or retaliation.
- People who have already committed criminal acts may go to a church to seek help, then become violent over the way they feel they were treated.
- Churches that attract attention, even for very positive reasons, can also attract the attention of those who want to commit a crime or do a violent act. The attention may be from publicity, special events, television ministries, church programs, sports, signs, crowds, music, well-known pastors, guest speakers, or any of dozens of other reasons.

### **Human risk factors:**

- If there is a family conflict, it may continue at church.
- If one member of a family is a new convert, a spouse, child or sibling may resent the role of the church in creating unwanted changes at home.
- Former church members may have grievances and become violent about them, even years later.

- Someone who was once asked to leave may come back to get revenge.
- Someone who feels rejected or criticized by even one church member may react violently toward the entire congregation.
- Divorces, separations and child custody issues may create violent conflicts.
- Someone whose church membership is well known can have a conflict away from church that results in someone following him or her there.
- People who are ill or on medication, or who have mental illnesses, can react violently for no logical reason, or because they think they are doing the right thing, getting revenge or simply making themselves famous.
- Churches may become the focal point of general grievances against society.
- When there is violence in one church, there is the likelihood of copycat violence.

•**What else might place *your* church at risk?** Talking about that with other G/Us and with your church leadership is the first step in prevention, planning and preparing.

•**A total comprehensive security program:** The security program of your church may involve:

- Locks and key systems
- Lighting
- Alarms
- Cameras
- Access methods
- Visitor screening
- Security teams, either professionals or volunteers
- Security audits
- Other systems and programs

Safety and security plans may include:

- Fire safety
- Burglary and theft prevention
- Computer security
- Child care and classroom safety
- Vehicle and parking lot safety
- Protection for other vulnerable or high-risk issues.

The comprehensive security program of your church may be developed with advice from a security firm, security consultant or the police, or through research by informed church members such as you and other G/Us. Your pastor may appoint a committee to provide oversight for the program and your insights would likely be very helpful.

***This document is focused solely on how you can effectively fulfill your security role as a greeter or usher, as part of the church team. You may not have control over other aspects of security, but you can do your part.***

## PLANNING FOR THE RISKS

Generally, decisions about the level of planning and preparation for any church security program are made by the pastor or his designee. The material in this document can be used by them to help train and guide greeters and ushers. Even if you are not in charge, you will probably be able to offer worthwhile input. Whether or not your church has a formal security plan, you can think about what *you* would do and mentally prepare for a variety of potential situations.

If you are ever tempted to think security planning is unnecessary, do this: The next time you are at church, look at the people of all ages who are laughing and talking in the lobby, kneeling in prayer in the sanctuary or enjoying refreshments in the fellowship hall. Ask yourself what you and the other G/Us would do if one of the violent events you have read or talked about were to happen right at that moment. It's a chilling thought!

•**Plan as a G/U team.** Purposely spend some time talking about what would be the best way to handle sample scenarios that all of you develop. Even though your G/U group may change every Sunday, or at least now and then, a core group can benefit from thinking about those questions.

What should the first G/U who becomes aware of a problem, do?  
Who will help the first G/U, and who will warn the pastor and congregation?  
Who will call 911?  
Who will lock the doors to keep an assailant out, and is that possible?  
Who will guide people to safety and how will they do it?

•**Know the locations of your G/U team members.** The ideal situation is for each G/U to have an assigned location and stay in that general area throughout the greeting time. G/Us in the sanctuary should stand or sit in the same general area throughout the service. If G/Us conduct a security walk-through of the building or outside, other G/Us should be informed. This allows everyone to be able to depend upon where a security resource will be most of the time. That level of planning may not be easy to accomplish and may be more than your team decides is necessary, but it is a good goal.

•If the parking area is not visible from inside the lobby, G/Us should work together to determine specific locations with the best view of the parking lot, to allow for occasional checks of the area. As with the lobby and sanctuary posts, this consistent outside post will let G/Us be better aware of the location of others and can increase safety.

•If your church has parking lot attendants or assistants, include them in your security conversations since they may be the first to observe a suspicious vehicle or person. They should call 911 immediately if that is necessary, or let the G/U team know that further observation might be a good idea.

## INCLUDING CHURCH MEMBERS IN THE SECURITY PROGRAM

Church members of all ages can help protect themselves and others if they are given tips about how to report their concerns immediately, and how to respond to situations that might occur. Let members know you depend upon them to help.

•**Children:** Even very small children can be taught to tell adults immediately about people or situations that are strange or scary. They should not play in isolated rooms or areas when trusted adults aren't around, and they should not play in the parking areas or away from the immediate view of teachers or other adults.

•**Adults and young adults:** Adult and teenage church members should be briefed on the overall security plan of the church and the role of greeters, ushers and others. They should also be given guidelines about common safety and security concerns and how to respond effectively. This can include information about fire and medical emergencies, the characteristics of dangerous devices, safety hazards and violent situations.

•**All members:** Everyone should be encouraged to be observant about people and situations in the parking lot, in areas adjacent to the church, in rooms and hallways inside the church, and before, during and after services and activities. They should write down license plate numbers or physical descriptions. If they feel concerned about any aspect of a situation—medical, criminal or other—they should immediately report it to a G/U or call 911 if it is an emergency.

•**Basic guidelines for church member response to a violent or threatening situation:**

1. Get down.
2. Get out if possible.
3. Get to a safe place and stay there if you can't leave immediately.
4. Get help by calling 911 or asking someone else to do it.
5. Guide others by directing children, the elderly, guests or others to get down, get out through the nearest exit, or get to a safe place and stay there.

•**Inform the pastor about potential problems:** Members should inform the pastor immediately if there is a risk issue, such as a potentially violent conflict involving the family, neighborhood or work, or about stalking, threats or child custody conflicts.

•**An alert word, phrase or signal:** Consider establishing an alert code word, phrase or signal for G/Us and members of the congregation to use if they want assistance or for 911 to be called, but cannot ask openly. This security technique can be helpful in a variety of situations if used correctly.

Any word, phrase or signal that will get attention but not alert a potentially violent person, can be effective if everyone knows it and responds without questioning the person using it. It should never be "tested" as a joke. Note: The "phone call" gesture with hand to ear, is too obvious a signal for calling 911, so don't use that!

## **Observation: Continuous and Purposeful**

The same diligence that is necessary to ensure that guests and members are made to feel welcome will also allow you to do a brief security observation of each person. It may be helpful to have one or two G/Us whose primary job is to observe and assist.

**Assigned responsibility:** Each door, group of doors, or general entrance area, should have an assigned G/U. One of the main causes of security failures is when everyone assumes someone else is doing a task. The attitude of, “If it’s going to be, it’s up to me” applies to the security function as well as to everything else.

- If your church does not have G/U post assignments, you will probably notice that you and others have a favorite location. Make sure the location you pick allows you maximum time to observe people who are walking up to the door, and lets you see areas adjacent to the door, if possible. In the sanctuary, you can stand at a slight angle to be able to see both the entrance and the congregation.

- If a door is used infrequently and there is no G/U posted there, it would be far safer to give keys to the few people using it rather than having it unlocked.

- **Observe with purpose:** Visually scan and personally greet members and every non-member, if possible. This not only fulfills your greeting role, it allows you the chance to observe people close-up and establish a friendly relationship with them. A friendly greeting and good eye contact can make a difference in how someone reacts, even when angry or upset.

**Hands and body first:** Before you make eye contact, look at the hands, general appearance, items being carried or worn, and the overall actions and demeanor of the person you’re greeting. With practice, you can do this effectively in a few seconds while reaching out to shake hands or give the person a bulletin.

Remember the old adage: No one hits you with his face—so look at the hands and general behavior first. Then, you can make eye contact with a smile and say a friendly greeting. That is when you can observe the person’s facial expression and reaction. In addition, *really* looking at someone and smiling at them, is the best way to show warmth and welcome.

**Limited entry areas after services start:** Consider reducing the number of doors that are open and post a sign about which door should be used after that time. Fire department restrictions may affect which doors can be locked when people are present.

**Security walk-through:** Your church leadership may prefer that G/Us not engage in security patrols, so be certain of your responsibilities. However, if no one else is doing it, you may want to suggest that you and other G/Us could perform a quick walk-through, and still be done in time to be in the service and participate in worship.

**Purposeful observation during a security walk-through:**

- Check unused offices and rooms and lock those that should be locked. If *you* can walk in a room or office, someone who wants to commit a crime can do so as well.
- Unless there is a legitimate reason for people to remain in halls, rooms and offices, or to stand outside, courteously remind them that the service has started. If you have a reason for concern, linger in the area until the person either goes into the service or leaves. Do not leave someone in a place where he or she should not be.
- If there is a child-care area, check to ensure there are no outside doors propped open and that all the children are in the child-care area.
- Look for anything that could be a safety or security hazard or evidence of a crime. Among those things are suspicious packages, boxes left in unusual places, tools in areas where they should not be, items and equipment moved about, or unusual odors.
- If you think a crime has been committed, call the police immediately and notify the person responsible for the area. You may want to notify the person responsible before you call the police, to have them verify that something is wrong. Otherwise, it may be enough to lock the area and notify the person in charge after services.
- Quickly inspect the parking areas and other areas you can easily see around the church building. Your church campus may be too large to make this practical, but if it is possible, it is a good security check before the service starts.

**Maintain your role to maintain your effectiveness:** Your role in all of your security activities should be limited to looking for situations and areas of immediate concern and dealing with emergencies. You will be resented and will lose your effectiveness if you are viewed as being meddlesome, over-bearing or excessive. If you see that tendency developing in other G/Us, gently help them regain their focus or discuss it as a team.

**During services:** Some churches keep one more G/Us in the lobby at all times, while others prefer to have all members in the church service. Even if G/Us are in the lobby, at least two should sit at the back of the sanctuary, in a location where they can observe doors and the congregation most effectively. They can sit with their families or friends, but need to be alert for problems.

The degree to which you should be active during services will depend upon the guidelines you are given and the nature of the situation. The pastoral team is in charge of services and may want to deal with non-emergencies such as talking, emotional outbursts or someone standing or moving about unexpectedly. They may prefer that greeters, ushers or deacons handle those situations for them.

- If someone becomes ill, appears to be having an emergency emotional or physical crisis or is asking for assistance, you may need to respond to the area immediately, or step out and call 911.

- Get direction from your G/U leader about potential security problems related to people leaving the sanctuary during services—especially in unusual circumstances. People often need to leave to use the restroom or for other reasons, but usually they will return in a reasonable amount of time. Failure to do so could be a cause for concern.

### **Assessment: A Reasonable Evaluation of the Potential for Harm**

While you are observing a person or situation, you should be mentally assessing what you see. Is everything normal? Is there something that bothers you? Do they seem to need assistance in some way? Is there a potential for danger? If the danger is obvious you may need to quickly decide the degree of danger.

If you try to visualize someone committing an act of violence at your church you probably envision a man—probably a young-to-middle-aged man who does not attend your church. Statistically you would be correct in making that assumption. However, violent crimes have been committed by men and women of all ages, ethnicities and religions. Anyone—a member, a guest or someone walking by—could do something to harm people, buildings or assets. Remember also that violence can be caused by one person or by two or more people who have plotted to do harm.

The fact that there is no one type that commits violent acts doesn't mean you should think the worst of everyone, or that you can only call for assistance if you have proof of violent intent. However, it should remind you not to base your assessment solely on factors such as clothing, hair, race, age, or the fact that you do or don't know someone.

- Use your reasonable judgment.** Your reasonable judgment will usually be enough to help you decide whether to call the police or what other action you should take. You don't need to be a doctor or psychologist to be able to tell if someone seems to be drunk or drugged, or if he or she is already angry or talking in a depressed way. You don't need to be a police officer to see if someone has a weapon or if they are wearing or carrying something that might conceal a weapon.

The same reasonable judgment you would use to decide if your safety or the safety of your family is at risk is appropriate for your role in church security. Your biggest decision is whether to call the police. Sometimes that is obvious. If it is not, it is better to call than not to call if you have any concerns.

- The presence of the following behaviors and appearance do not make it likely that someone is going to do something harmful.* However, each has been observed in the behavior and appearance of those who have committed crimes and acts of violence and it is reasonable and appropriate to watch for them. Action to take if these indicators are present will be discussed in the next section.

## **1. Look for indicators of unusual emotion.**

- Anger or rage
- Crying
- Unusual laughter or hilarity
- Nervousness, furtiveness or evasiveness
- Fear or panic
- Out of control or “wild-eyed”
- An unusual absence of any emotion

## **2. Look for unusual behavior.**

- Standing or sitting in a vehicle for an extended length of time.
- Taking unidentifiable items out of a vehicle.
- Walking up to the door and looking around as though on the lookout.
- Running up to the door.
- A suspicious appearing person being dropped off but the car stays idling.
- Someone walking in with members who do not seem to know the person.
- Two or more unknown people entering together and going different directions.
- Obviously trying to go unnoticed, being furtive or looking for concealment.
- Confrontational or angrily questioning or arguing with you or someone else.
- Asking for monetary or other assistance, especially if you know it cannot be provided.
- Asking about a church member or about the pastor.
- Talking or muttering, or fidgeting or moving excessively.
- Indicating self-hatred or disgust with self.
- A grin or smile that seems inappropriate for the situation.
- Intoxicated, drugged, flustered or confused.
- Responding with anger to greetings or questions.
- Staring in an exaggerated way; especially, staring while moving toward someone.
- Standing very still when others are moving forward.
- Seeming to stall for time.
- Standing alone or facing the congregation in the sanctuary instead of sitting.
- Doing something that does not fit with the service at the time.
- Going into areas other than the sanctuary when no one else is present.
- Spending an excessive amount of time in the bathroom.
- Attempting to get a G/U or someone else to go away from the main area.
- Note: A frequent action of those who have a concealed weapon, explosives or drugs, is to touch the area, or keep a hand in the pocket or bag where the items are hidden.
- Walking awkwardly, as though having concealed weapons.

### **3. Look for clothing or characteristics that might be linked to problem behavior.**

It is becoming more the norm for people to wear casual clothes to church. Even though some clothing may seem inappropriate or offensive to you, clothing alone is not an indicator of problem behavior.

However, the characteristics of some attire seem to be linked to a potential for disruptive behavior. Observe more closely or talk to the person in a friendly way, to assess the situation.

- Wearing unusually inappropriate clothing for a church environment.
- Wearing military, hunting or camouflage clothing without a reason.
- Wearing menacing-appearing clothing: Pulled-down hats, all dark, long-coats, etc.
- Wearing clothing with wording or a photo to convey a hostile message.
- Being noticeably dirty or unkempt or having a very offensive or unusual odor.
- Carrying or wearing a bag or backpack, especially if it looks stuffed full.
- Wearing a coat or other clothing that looks as though something is being concealed.
- Looking much less heavy than the bulkiness of the clothes would indicate.

### **ACTING ON YOUR ASSESSMENT**

You will not have time to observe and assess much of anything if someone runs into the church lobby, sanctuary or other area with a weapon and begins to fire it at people. That frightening scenario would require immediate action in a panic situation. There are many other times when you can prevent a conflict or violent situation, or reduce the harm, by responding in an effective way.

### **A TOOLKIT OF RESPONSE OPTIONS**

Plans, suggestions, tips and ideas don't have to be followed exactly to be useful. Even a very good plan may not fit every emergency. However, plans, suggestions and tips can give you a toolkit of options for responding to situations.

The following guidelines are not in order and all of them may happen at once, according to the number of G/Us present and the situation. Some portions of these guidelines are written as though you are directly involved with a suspicious, threatening or violent person, but your actions will depend upon your role at the time. Adapt them to your personal situation, the layout of your church and the assistance you might receive. They are a starting point for your own planning.

### **SECURITY CONCERN: A PERSON WHO DOES OR SAYS SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU CONCERNED ABOUT HIS OR HER INTENT FOR BEING AT THE CHURCH.**

Most visitors will walk in the door, be greeted by you according to your church's protocol and continue into the sanctuary or other area. If you are in the sanctuary, you will find that most people walk in and look for a seat or get your assistance and sit down.

Occasionally someone will concern you for some reason. There is no harm in finding out more about the person. Your effort to establish a positive relationship may change the mind of someone who was going to create a problem. Your focused attention may make someone realize he or she could be easily identified. The best result is that your extra observation assures you there is no reason for concern.

**1. Observe and assess further to determine if a threat exists.** As part of your friendly welcome, step slightly to the side with the person and have a brief conversation. (“It’s great to have you visiting with us! I’m Bill Logan. Have you been here before?”) If you are in the sanctuary you might even sit next to the person for a moment as a way to have a more personal conversation.

You might say: “Do you know someone here?” “Is there something special that brought you here today?” “Have you visited a (type of church or denomination) before?” “Is there any way we can make today more meaningful for you?” “If you have questions after the service please ask me.”

**2. Signal to another G/U if you become more concerned during the conversation.** Use an alert code or other subtle method to let another G/U know to come over to stand by or to call the police if that seems necessary.

This is when a well-trained G/U team is helpful. It would not be good for a G/U to rush over and ask what the trouble is or if he should call the police! However, if he were to calmly walk over and allow you to introduce him to the person, he could provide reinforcement if something were to occur or be a witness to what is being said. Or, based on your signal to him, he could call for help.

**3. If you are still concerned, but nothing seems problematic, let a G/U in the sanctuary know about your concerns. If you are a G/U in the sanctuary, alert other G/Us so they can watch when you are busy.** This will not happen often, but it is better to stay aware than to not tell anyone of your concerns for fear of sounding foolish.

**What would you do?** You see a young man walk into the lobby from a side door that is not often used. He seems to purposely avoid making eye contact with anyone and heads for the sanctuary in a hurried manner.

**Some suggested actions:**

- Immediately catch up with the young man and get his attention verbally in a friendly but direct way. Visitors aren’t required to talk to greeters or ushers, but the fact that someone will blatantly avoid being noticed could be reason for concern, if combined with other factors. On the other hand, he may simply be shy or not want to be pressured. Your friendly greeting may help him see that there is no need to worry.
- Or, signal to another G/U to take your place before you leave your area to contact the young man. You might explain what happened and ask that G/U to contact the person.

- Even if a visitor who concerned you is already seated in the sanctuary and service has started, you can make a brief, friendly contact to allow you to do a quick visual and verbal assessment. Offer the visitor a hymnal, bulletin or Bible, or introduce yourself briefly and say you are available if the person has questions afterwards. You could also offer to introduce them to someone appropriate, such as a youth worker, women's leader or others.

**SECURITY CONCERN: A PERSON WHO SEEMS TO BE  
EMOTIONALLY OR MENTALLY DISTURBED, BUT IS NOT  
IMMEDIATELY VIOLENT OR VERBALLY THREATENING.**

- Some people are more emotional than others are. You may encounter people who seem highly emotional because of a spiritual or personal situation. This section specifically refers to someone who is acting unstable or disoriented, seems mentally or emotionally ill, seems irrational or has some other condition that makes him or her potentially harmful.

- A person who is emotionally or mentally disturbed may not consciously want to harm anyone, but may do so anyway. You must be very cautious in your dealings with such a person because their demeanor can change quickly and for no reason.

**1. Observe and assess the physical and mental state of the person and the immediate level of threat.** Is the person drunk or drugged? Is he or she crying or angry? Is there a weapon or something that could be used as a weapon? Is the person saying or doing anything that is unnerving or a cause for concern?

If a G/U is talking to a disturbed acting person, one or two other G/Us should assist or stand near enough to hear and see what is happening. In a normal, non-threatening situation, a female member of the church might be asked to assist with a female guest or member. But, when dealing with a problem person it may be safer to have only the G/Us or a member of the pastoral team involved.

One G/U should be prepared to call for police assistance immediately if necessary. This is another time when a code word or signal is useful.

**2. Separate the person of concern from others.** This safety space could be created by you and/or other G/Us standing between the person and other people, or by moving the person to the side of a lobby or sanctuary. You could also go to an adjacent space or office or take the person outside to talk.

One way to get someone to move to another area is to start walking while looking at the person and conversing with them. More often than not they will walk with you. Non-threatening phrases can be used: "Let's step over here so I can hear you better." "Why don't we move to this room so we can talk without being bothered."

**3. Talk in a normal and calm tone of voice and keep some distance between you and the other person.** Ask non-threatening questions: “What did you say your name is?” “Where did you park your car? Did you find a parking place OK?” “Where do you work?” “Do you live around here?” “Do you know someone in our church?” “I can tell something is bothering you. Can I help?”

Asking questions and having a conversation can help keep the person calm, and will also be helpful if you need to give information to the police later.

Do not try to grab or hold a disturbed or agitated person unless there is no other way to avoid harm. Keep some distance between you and them rather than standing right next to them. If someone gets increasingly upset, step back and away to allow more safety if he or she becomes more agitated or violent. You do not have to keep talking to someone who is threatening you or acting irrational. Step back and keep stepping back, all the way outside if you must, until help arrives.

**4. Call the police or have someone else call immediately, if the person:**

- Appears under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Says or does anything that indicates he or she may harm anyone, including comments that he or she doesn't *want* to harm anyone.
- Does not immediately cooperate with requests to leave or stay out of the sanctuary or other parts of the building, or to stay away from members of the congregation if he or she is disturbing them.
- Appears mentally ill or severely emotionally upset or for some other reason should be questioned by the police, given protective custody or evaluated further. The person may leave your church and harm himself or herself or others, so you cannot consider the situation over when the person leaves.

**5. Do not attempt to detain a person who wants to leave before the police arrive.**

Get a good description and write it down and watch or follow to see where he or she goes. There is an inclination to try to keep someone there until the police arrive, but that can create the violent situation you are trying to avoid.

**What would you do?** You see a young man walk down the street, then stop and stand in front of your church, staring at it for a few minutes before coming in the lobby. He is wearing a winter coat and has nothing in his hands. He looks around in a confused, disoriented way. His conversation is rambling and incoherent and he says he wants to talk to the congregation. You courteously explain that it will not be possible, but he is insistent that he wants to do so. Many people are in the lobby and some seem unnerved at his belligerent tone of voice.

- Did your assessment include some of these thoughts?
  - You do not want this person to feel he is being rejected, but you know he will not be allowed by the pastor to speak to the congregation.
  - Until he is more rational you do not think he can be reasoned with or assisted to his satisfaction.
  - You know your church wishes to help everyone, but this person seems to want and need more than brief counseling or prayer.
  - You realize a person who is disoriented and confused has the potential to be violent if he or she feels upset or threatened.
  - You have looked at the young man's hands and do not see a weapon, but he is wearing a coat in which something could be concealed.
  - You are concerned that he could come back and harm someone if he is treated badly this time, or he could leave and harm himself or others.
  - You notice that people are already unnerved by his demeanor.
  - You think this person would probably be disruptive to the service, but you also worry that he might react in a violent way if you tell him he cannot go into the sanctuary.
  - You worry that people standing around the two of you might be hurt or frightened if there is a verbal or physical altercation.

**Some suggested actions:**

- Your best response, unless there are other circumstances, would be to signal one or preferably two G/Us to your area and signal another G/U to call 911.
- You may wish to get the assistance of a member of the pastoral team, a deacon or some other person, if it seems safe to do. They might ask the person to come back for counseling or prayer or ask him to convey his message to them. You could get the young man's name and phone number and have someone contact him later.
- If the weather is good enough to allow it, consider telling the man you want to talk to him about his request and you would like to step outside to do it. This adds an extra layer of protection for church members. You may want ask the disturbed person to step to an adjacent office area if that is safe and you have assistance.
- In the meantime, a G/U or other person inside should calmly ask people to move from the lobby or entrance area into the sanctuary. There may not appear to be a need for serious concern, but the fewer people who are close to the situation the better, if something occurs.

Some greeters or ushers hesitate to call the police about an otherwise nice person who is mentally disturbed or disabled in some way, if no crime has occurred. However, the police may have information you do not have about the person or his or her previous actions. They may be able to contact relatives or transport the person home or to a

community resource. You need to call the police about anyone who is irrational, disoriented, confused or who seems to be in need of professional care.

**SECURITY CONCERN: SOMEONE OUTSIDE THE BUILDING IS COMMITTING A CRIME,  
OR APPEARS TO BE DANGEROUS OR READY TO DO VIOLENCE.**

The nature of the crime or threat will dictate some of your actions, but in every case 911 should be called and as much detail as possible provided about the situation. You can be on the phone while moving to take other action or directing others to safety.

- Know how to lock the doors quickly and be ready to do so the moment you see trouble developing. Your role generally is to prevent outside danger from coming inside to harm the entire congregation, then to do what you can to respond to the situation that is happening outside, if you can do it safely.

- Whether you should let a criminal or violent person know you have seen them will depend upon many factors: Your ability to protect yourself, the assistance you have, the number of criminals and weapons involved and the nature of the crime.

- Generally, if you see someone committing a crime or apparently intending to commit a crime, stay in a safe place and yell that the police have been called.

If you do not think you can safely yell at the criminal, you may be able to turn on outside lights or shine a flashlight at night to stop the criminal activity.

- Circumstances may compel you to intervene more directly to save a person's life or to prevent some other dire act such as the taking of a child. Otherwise, you should limit your role to calling the police, letting the criminal know he or she has been seen, getting good identification of people and vehicles, and observing from a safe distance.

- It is not worth being killed or injured to prevent a car from being stolen or to chase a purse-snatcher.

- **Outside:** Yell to others in the area of the criminal activity to get down and get to safety by coming into the church building, locking themselves in their cars and leaving if possible, or going to adjacent business or residential areas.

- **Inside:** Lock all the doors to prevent the criminal from coming in the building.

- If there is imminent danger, warn the congregation and pastor.

- If it is safe, stay at your observation post and tell someone else to take the appropriate action about warning or contacting others.

- According to the nature of the criminal activity, you or the pastor might tell everyone to stay where they are and be ready to get down. You and other G/Us might need to move people to areas of safety.

**What would you do?** Services have just begun and you have stepped outside for a last visual check. You see a man who is a member of your church walk angrily up to a car driven by his wife and begin to yell at her. He kicks at the door and picks up a rock and breaks the window.

**Suggested actions:**

- **Call 911.**
- If you are in a safe place, yell and let him know he has been seen and that the police have been called. You can do this even while on the phone to the 911 operator.
- Tell another G/U to let the pastor or other church leader know what is happening.
- Do not approach the man unless you feel you must do so to prevent a violent crime. This is where your judgment of the situation will be vital.
- The fact that he is a church member you know does not lessen the crime or make him less of a threat to you or others.

**What would you do?** Your church is having a local community leader as a speaker. You look out the door and see a group of apparently angry protestors approaching the church, waving signs and chanting. Many people are in the lobby and others are walking in at that time.

- That specific scenario might not be likely at your church, but something similar might occur. The key point is this: How should you react to a situation that involves people or groups that are not thought of as criminal, but that could be threatening or dangerous?

**Suggested actions:**

- **Call 911.**
- Tell those outside who can safely get inside to do so, otherwise tell them to leave immediately, go back to their cars and leave the area.
- Lock the doors, while telling another G/U to alert the pastor and congregation.
- Keep everyone away from the front doors and windows and stay away yourself to avoid agitating the group more, and also to avoid injuries if windows are broken.
- The pastor or speaker will likely decide what to do about confronting the group. Your role is to take immediate action to reduce the level of harm to the congregation until the police arrive, then to provide information about what happened.

## **SECURITY CONCERN: AN ARMED PERSON OR GROUP ENTERS THE CHURCH.**

This is the scenario that brings the most fear to everyone. You may only have a few seconds for your immediate response and you may or may not have other G/Us to assist you.

- A violent situation can involve many scenarios:
  - An assailant targets one or more people in your church, but does not target others.
  - An assailant shoots randomly, with no specific target.
  - The purpose is to kill, to take hostages, to commit other crimes, or a combination.
  - There is one assailant or more than one.
  - The assailant has one loaded weapon.
  - The assailant has many weapons and a large amount of ammunition.
  - The assailant only has firearms.
  - The assailant has other devices, such as explosives or tear gas.
  - Services may not yet have started.
  - Services may be in progress.
  - The church may be in meetings or Sunday School, instead of a regular service.
  - People may be in the sanctuary or in the fellowship hall or classrooms.
  
- By the time you can react, the assailant may have already shot people you know, or may have taken hostages and threatened to kill them. Your own family may be involved. This is when your preparation and self-control can help the most. Even though you may not be able to do much, there may be some things you can do that will save lives or stop the violence. It is in these extreme situations that having thought about such an event ahead of time can help you and others.
  - If you have discussed possible responses with other G/Us, you may be able to take coordinated action without much communication.
  - If you and your family have discussed how to respond in an emergency you may not need to direct them to exits or safe locations.
  - If you know the building in detail, you may not need lights to guide others to safety.
  - If you have spent some time checking the building, you may know the most sturdy protection in the sanctuary or lobby, or the most easily fortified rooms.
  - Even if your plan of action is not the absolute best one, by having a plan you maybe able to do something immediately rather than taking too long to decide.

**The knowledge, plans and preparation that are helpful for responding most effectively to violent events include:**

- Regular briefing of each key person about their roles: Pastor and pastoral team, ministers of programs, greeters and ushers, deacons, teachers, key adults, etc.
- Briefing the church membership about how to respond in emergencies.
- Knowing exits in every area of the building, including windows that can be used for exit in an emergency.
- Knowing areas and items of concealment and/or protection and how they can best be used. (Can pews, desks, chairs or tables be easily turned over, picked up or moved? Is the lectern or podium solid? How many people could hide in what locations?)
- Knowing the most easily secured inner areas of the church and how to lock the doors or barricade them quickly.
- Knowing the layout of the building, including overhead and crawl spaces.
- Being able to quickly direct guests who are unfamiliar with the building.
- Having methods for communicating with 911, other G/Us, the pastoral team, teachers, or people in other areas of the building or church campus.
- Knowing the location of fire extinguishers, phones, water valves, electrical and mechanical equipment, ladders, tools and other items and equipment.
  - Having each G/U pre-assigned a primary responsibility for this and other emergencies. (Some may be assigned to help Sunday School classes get to safety while others are responsible for helping the handicapped or the elderly.)
- Having each G/U know some basic First Aid techniques.
- Reviewing emergency information regularly and at least walking through possible events, with a focus on observation, assessment, and suggested actions to help members and guests.

**If a shooting incident is threatened or occurs:**

- The minister or worship team should provide direction to the entire congregation if possible, by yelling “Get down and get out!”, or some other quick guidance. If it’s not possible for them to do so, you and other G/Us should direct those around you.
- Get in the most protected area you can and call 911, unless you know others have called. (Having several hundred calls made in a few minutes is not helpful, and your time could be better spent if the call has already been made.) If you have information about the assailant or the location of victims that other callers to 911 may not have had, you should call.
- You can’t help if you are injured, so you should attempt to stay down, be undetected and assess your options.
- The presence of children always creates an added risk and responsibility. If possible, have adults shield them and get them to exits or get them under pews.
- Even though you may have a responsibility as a greeter or usher, if you are with your family you will likely be most concerned about them. Discuss this with your family

members ahead of time and talk about how each of you might respond to protect your family or those around you in church.

- Sometimes staying down and staying put is the best solution. However, in some situations people had options to escape but were fearful to leave. The decision to try to leave or to stay in a concealed location will likely have to be made quickly, based on where the exits are located, the level of concealment available, and the actions of the assailant.

- Direct those around you to get down and get out if they can do so, or get to a safe place if they must stay inside. If you can go with them, do it and lock and barricade the door to the room, trying to ensure that as many people as possible are using the safe place. You may not be able to help everyone, only the group you are guiding, but you will have to do your best in the situation.

- Unless you know for sure it is safe to do it, do not call others in the building to check on them. Answering a phone is not the best use of their time! And, if they are concealed the ringing may give away their location. It may be possible to contact people if you know their phones are set on silent or vibrate.

- If you are directly confronted by someone with a weapon who is demanding you to do something, your response will depend upon the imminent threat. If the person threatens to shoot, but has not shot anyone so far, you may think it best to comply with the person's demands long enough to allow you to take other action. Or, you may feel the circumstances indicate you should not comply.

- If you are with several other people you may be able to work together to overpower an assailant. You will have to decide the risks and the likely outcome quickly. This kind of decision is not one that can be planned ahead. However, talking about your options *prior* to a violent event, and considering how you think you could respond, may allow you and others to act with much less obvious communication at the time.

- Remember that help may arrive quickly but not enter the building quickly. It may be many hours before you can move from a safe location.

If that happens, the reality is that children will cry, people will need to relieve themselves, some may be injured, some may become ill, sorrow may engulf the group, fear will be overpowering for many. Your leadership role will be best fulfilled by keeping everyone as quiet and calm as possible until you feel completely confident that the threat is over.

**What would you do?** In the middle of congregational singing a wild-eyed man kicks open a door to the sanctuary and opens fire with a long barreled weapon. Several people fall and the noise of the weapon, combined with screaming and yelling, seems deafening. You are standing with your family.

There is no way for you to know exactly what you would do in the tragic and frightening situation described above. However, having security information and plans in mind can help you be a better observer and be able to assess effectively and take action. The material in this document can help you with that planning and preparation.

Use this checklist to decide if you have the information you need to effectively fulfill your dual role as a greeter and guardian.

### Greeter/Usher Security Checklist

	Y/N
1. Do I know the policies of my pastor or other leaders about my security role?	
2. Do I have a G/U post assignment?	
3. Do I know where other G/Us are supposed to be?	
4. Have I talked with other G/Us to develop plans about emergency responses?	
5. Am I comfortable being assertive with a suspicious person or situation?	
6. Do I know the best route to every exit in my church building?	
7. Do I know how to covertly signal another G/U to call 911 or to assist me?	
8. Do members of my church know my role if an emergency occurs?	
9. Have I walked the route from my G/U post to every exit in my church building?	
10. Have I ever practiced getting to another area while staying low?	
11. Do I have a plan for how I can separate a suspicious person from other people in the lobby or sanctuary?	
12. Do I know what items or areas in every part of the building would provide the best protection, barricade or concealment?	
13. Do I know where mechanical and utility areas and items are located and how to access them? (Electrical boxes, water supply, alarms, gas, fire extinguishers, ladders, tools, potential weapons, office keys, etc.)	
14. Do I know where crawl spaces, overhead storage and closets are located and if they would be useable for concealment?	
15. Could I lock every front door quickly?	
16. Do I know which interior doors have locks?	
17. Do I know the best location outside for viewing each parking area?	
18. Do I know where there is a flashlight in several areas of the building?	
19. Have I ever checked to see if I could move a pew, desk, table or other item if it was necessary to do so in an emergency?	
20. Do I have a plan for how I might respond to an emergency in a variety of church areas? (Lobby, during the service, classroom, fellowship hall, parking lot?)	

**Are you prepared for your dual role of greeter and guardian?** You can be better prepared by knowing your role, your resources and your options for responses.

Best wishes to you and thank you for your service in helping others!

Tina Lewis Rowe  
 Denver, CO  
[www.tinalewisrowe.com](http://www.tinalewisrowe.com)

## About the Author

Tina Lewis Rowe had a thirty-four year law enforcement career, first with the Denver Police Department where she served in every division and was a captain in charge of the Academy and Internal Affairs before retiring after serving as the captain of Patrol District Two, northeast Denver. She served for eight years as the Presidential-appointed United States Marshal for Colorado.

One of her challenges as the United States Marshal was to develop and provide oversight for security in the trials for Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, who committed the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, OK, April 19, 1995. The explosion took the lives of 168 people--including 19 children--and injured over 500 others.

Tina has been an inspirational and informative presenter and trainer for forty years and has spoken to thousands of audiences. She started her own training company in 2002 and now is involved full-time in presenting, training, writing and assessing the effectiveness of people, programs and processes. Her focus is on professional and organizational development in government, criminal justice agencies, businesses and organizations.

She is one of the Workplace Doctors on the *Ask The Workplace Doctors* website, developed by William Gordon, Ph.D. ([www.workplacedoctors.com](http://www.workplacedoctors.com)), a site that answers workplace communication questions from around the world.

Tina is the author of a book on preparing for assessment centers, *A Preparation Guide for the Assessment Center Method* (Charles C. Thomas, publisher), as well as hundreds of workbooks, guides and templates related to effective supervision, communications, security assessments and planning, and professional development.

Her online training journal is at [www.tinalewisrowe.com](http://www.tinalewisrowe.com).