Security for Faith Bases Organizations,

Does Your Local Church Have a Security Team?

Today’s Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) are faced with many of the same issues that police officers deal with on a daily basis. These include domestic disputes, child custody issues, sexual predators, vandalism, suspicious people, theft, robbery, embezzlement, medical issues, assaults and even active shooters. Couple this with the rivalry between some faiths and the potential for violence today becomes very high.

In most cases, when a local law enforcement agency hears that a local church or faith based organization has a security team in place, the initial thought is why? Most people in the nation consider the church to be a “safe haven” from the threats of the world. One of the first things for you to consider is, are your area churches safe?

To combat these problems, many faith based organization have instituted a church security team. In the larger mega churches, these teams are composed of full time security officers and often members of the church who volunteer their time to assist in creating a safe environment. Medium and small churches will often hire off duty officers or implement a team with volunteers for the congregation. Frequently members of the team includes current and retired police officers, current and retired military people, EMTs, Paramedics, Doctors, Nurses, businessmen and interested members of the church. Often these teams have the same training as private security companies and often police agencies.

Once of the best examples of the success of the church security team is the response by the church security team at New Life Church in Colorado Springs in 2007 when an active shooter entered the facility after killing four people. A volunteer church security officer, Jeanne Assam engaged a single active shooter and stopped him after he entered the lobby of the facility. By the time the police arrived the shooter was dead and armed staff was securing the crime scene.

In many cases, local law enforcement does not have a clue that these security teams are in place. If local law enforcement does not know about the church
security team, tragedy can happen during a violent incident such as an active shooter. To help you understand the mindset of the volunteer church security teams, you need to start with the reasons that a church makes the decision to implement a church security team.

**What is the primary reason that your local faith based organization started a security team?**

Safety of the members and guests! Recent church violence has caused many churches to start looking at the current state of their security measures. Teams are started with the primary goal of having a group of watchmen to look after the churches family and visitors. The team develops preplanned response to the various security and medical incidents that can affect the members and guests.

**What does the security team do?**

Over the past years my team has dealt with offering pickup, heart attacks, strokes, minor play injuries in the toddler area, early pregnancy’s, dehydrated people, elderly who have fallen, as well as small kids who lost their parents, bipolar people, broken bones, stalkers of college girls, sexual predators, security at festivals, concerts in the facility, major seminars, and a get out the vote rally in with Shaun Hannity, Bill Bennett, Ollie North and Neil Boortz. We have had up to 3,000 people at some of these events. Additionally, we train to deal with the active shooter and thus prepare for the worst possible events that we can imagine.

With the noted rise in church violence FBO’s need to think about these items:

- The church has a duty to protect the church family and visitors.
- The church needs to provide reasonable protection for those in the facility.
- The church must do background check for staff and volunteers.
- There is a tremendous amount of published incidents on church violence, sexual misconduct, or poor facility maintenance issues causing accidents. The church needs to review these items.
- The church needs to have a completed a risk assessment on file.

**Peace of Mind for the church body**

- Can you live with yourselves if a child is assaulted or kidnapped by a predator or non-custodial parent?
- Can the church pay a 1 or 2 million dollars or more settlement in a lawsuit and survive if the insurance company decided you have not met due diligence standards?
Advice to the Church Security Team on Interfacing with Local Police

Mutual co-operation between the church and the local law enforcement agency is a critical tool for the churches in your jurisdiction.

One of the first things we recommend to churches who has decided to put a security team in place is to contact the Public Service Officer (PSO) at their local police or sheriff’s department. The Public Service Officer works directly with the business community and citizens to strengthen the lines of communication heighten community awareness and develop a stronger community partnership. This officer is typically the best way to initiate contact with the local police department.

The PSO can assist in conducting an initial review of the facility and arrange for meetings with the various shift commanders or regional patrol officers that work in their area or sector. If a church has or will be establishing a safety or security team, the local law enforcement department needs to know this. Additionally, if some of the team members are carrying a sidearm, this must be communicated to the PSO. If there is a critical incident at the church, the church security team does not want the first responding officers to shoot one of the team members if they see them with a drawn sidearm. Current rapid response tactics will have responding officers enter the facility very quickly on arrival in an active shooter event.

Law Enforcement Support to FBO’s

We believe that local police departments should be encouraging and helpful to the security teams for FBO’s. Realize there is a time delay between the start of an incident and the time it takes to respond to the scene, and the damage that can occur until prior to your arrival. The church security teams can provide an immediate response for any incident from medical issues to active shooters.

As police officers it is extremely important that you communicate with them while they are developing their church security plan or shortly after putting it into place. Many departments can be useful in assisting with loss prevention measures from theft and burglary, tactical considerations, self defense law, and to answer any other questions FBO’s may have.

Here are some simple steps that will help you in communicating with your Faith Based Organizations…

1. Emphasize your recognition of their role and let them know you want to help them develop the best plan for their church.
2. Provide any training resources that your jurisdiction might have available such as defensive tactics, CPR, and policy writing. If you don’t offer it, you may know an organization or individual officer who does.

3. Communicate your intention to develop a partnership with the local FBO’s.

4. If their security plan allows individuals to carry concealed weapons, work with them to establish a protocol for joining up during or after a critical incident. The last thing you want is to add tragedy to tragedy, and having a church security officer getting shot by the police while defending their church. This can be avoided with pre-planning and communication. If your laws allow it, then FBO’s should be open about church security officers being authorized for a sidearm with the police. Consider hosting an active shooter seminar at one of the local churches.

5. Identify weapons carriers before an incident happens. When the police, the church security team should have a security officer meet the arriving officers. This officer can assist in avoiding friendly fire incidents. Most incidents are chaotic and the police will aggressively confront anyone they see as a threat.

We advise church security teams that the best way to get their local police department to work with them is to communicate effectively and professionally with their police department. Understanding ahead of time why some departments may be suspicious of their plans, or may even be outright hostile, will aid both of you in breaking down barriers and establishing a good working relationship.

Summary

The reality of the church security team’s existence is to be a servant based ministry to help the church members, staff and visitors. The Church Security Team provides our church family the freedom to focus on ministry while we keep the environment safe and protected. It is a new day in church life and the security and safety ministry is a must!

When a church elects to put a formal Security Team in place it must meet the required due diligence to establish a properly trained team with a formal manual with operation guidelines and policies in place. Even if there is not a licensing or state mandated training requirement, FBO’s must institute a proper level of training for all members of the they know what must be done to provide a safe
environment without being reckless? To do any less means that they are cheating their church family of the safe environment that they deserve.

**About the Author and Church Security Alliance**

Disturbed by the increasing trend in church violence, and receiving many requests for information Jack Justice co-founded Church Security Alliance where anyone interested could have affordable access church specific training.

Jack has served as a security director for a large teen outreach program as well as two large suburban churches over the past 10 years. Jack’s background includes over eight years in law enforcement in uniform patrol, detective division, and vice/narcotics divisions. Jack’s involvement in tactical training in the firearms arena and his law enforcement background has provided a strong skill set for his entry into faith based security.

Jack has assisted in the startup of many church security teams over the past seven years and these efforts were part of the motivation for starting Church Security Alliance as a means of providing information to more area churches on starting and training their church security teams. After the 2007 incident in Colorado, the value of the church security teams became highly evident. Jack’s current responsibilities include supervision of church security operations, recruitment, child security issues, and major event planning. Jack may be contacted at [jack@churchsecuritymember.com](mailto:jack@churchsecuritymember.com).