



Risk Management Tip Sheet

Church Violence

People think of churches as idyllic places for contemplation and prayer. While that's certainly true, they are also public places. As devastating events in a wide variety of public places have demonstrated, it's important to have plans in place to mitigate the risk of violence—and to be able to react appropriately and quickly in case something does happen.

Similar to a Disaster Preparedness Plan, a Violence Preparedness Plan can be developed and run-through much as you would a fire drill or weather emergency. There will always be the possibility of situations you can't predict, but the more situations you prepare for, the better you'll be able to respond if something does happen.

Violence Preparedness Plan

Your Violence Preparedness Plan may share many of the same characteristics as other types of disaster preparedness plans. Communication is a key component, as well as notification. There are also other eventualities you must prepare for. Do you evacuate or shelter in place? Who contacts the authorities? Do your main decision-makers have an easy way to contact one another immediately? Preparations for a violence plan may also raise questions about firearms in your church.

Communication with members

If you experience a violent incident in a small church, it's possible that most members will know about it immediately, but if you experience the incident in one building on a large site, you need to know how to share that information with everyone in the community.

Some churches set up an automated message to go to members in case of any kind of disastrous incident. Others arrange mobile phone trees, or use the intercom system. It depends on your unique situation as an institution.

Think about how you will communicate with the media and select one member to act as one consistent voice in the aftermath of the event.

Tips to mitigate risk of church violence

- Practice basic risk management to improve security. Make sure adequate lighting is in place in all public areas and that shrubbery and trees don't block windows.
- Connect with local authorities. In many places, police will meet with you and complete a site review. That way, you can determine where you might need to focus your attention and make changes. It also helps build the idea of safety being collaborative.

- Re-think an open-door policy. More and more churches are requiring that people seeking entry be buzzed in.
- Use technology. There are many technological solutions that churches can use, depending on needs and budgets. Locking and camera systems and key access can all be automated.

Maintain a balance

As you plan for the possibility—however remote—of a violent act occurring at your church, it's important to remember that it's a balancing act. Minister to souls in need, but keep your people safe at the same time.