

Security

Disruptive Individuals and Threats of Violence in Churches

*A recent survey of news articles showed that, to date, **in the past 18- 24 months 23 people have been murdered or killed** during or immediately after church services in the U.S. **Five of those occurred in one incident in one church in Louisiana.***

In Case of Emergency

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(Source: Ministry Today, Strang Communication, 2009. Used by permission. www.ministrytodaymag.com)

What every church needs to know about security

Brady Boyd had just settled into the warmth of his office on a freezing December day when he heard something chilling: shots that shattered more than just silence on a seemingly typical Sunday afternoon. "Someone ran into my office and screamed that shots had been fired in the building," recalls Boyd, senior pastor of the 10,000-member **New Life Church in Colorado Springs**, Colo. "At that point, I heard shots myself."

A heavily armed Matthew J. Murray, 24, had already killed two people at Youth With a Mission (YWAM) in a Denver suburb hours earlier. He continued his rampage in New Life's parking lot, fatally shooting two teenage sisters before entering the sanctuary, where hundreds of people scrambled to escape or hide. But he was stopped short of a massive killing spree when a plainclothes volunteer security guard wounded him with her personally owned concealed weapon. In total, the gunman had killed four people and wounded five others before taking his own life.

The guard's presence was no coincidence, though. She had been strategically placed in the main foyer as a part of the church's security plan—one New Life has been shaping and implementing for nearly four years now.

"We have a contingency plan in place for anything that we could dream up, including a shooting," Boyd says. "So when someone did come into our building with a weapon, our security team had been drilled over and over again on what to do. **What we believe is that we should expect the worst and pray for the best; that's the way our security team prepares.**"

That preparation, Boyd believes, saved countless lives that day. "While it was very tragic that we lost two young girls, we could have very well buried hundreds of people, and that's not an exaggeration," Boyd says, describing the arsenal discovered under the gunman's vest: **an assault rifle, two handguns and more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition.** "If there had been no security there, it would have been disastrous."

But many churches, Boyd believes, are not as prepared. "My fear for the church at large is that they have not given any thought to the worst-case scenario. If any good comes out of this, I think the church should be prepared, and **senior pastors need to be diligent and ask 'What are we doing to protect our people?'**"

*****Corporate Church Protection*****

It is a question former pastor Jerry McConnell and corporate travel safety trainer Randy Spivey urge church leaders to consider. The two head the Spokane, Wash. -based Center for Personal Protection and Safety, a firm launched in 2002 that is responsible for much of the U.S. government's training on crisis negotiations, workplace violence, abduction prevention and hostage survival situations. The parent organization of the Safe Travel Institute and the National Hostage Survival Training Center, the firm provides training to some of the largest corporations in the U.S., including Boeing and Wal-Mart. McConnell and Spivey believe it's time for faith-based organizations to embrace the same proactive approach already adopted by many of America's largest corporations. "I

really felt like God laid on my heart that He wanted us to protect His people," says Spivey, the firm's executive director. **"What we're seeing now is that the same issues that are there for a company are there for a ministry;** they're all organizations that have people, and their people can be at risk."

McConnell and Spivey began reaching out to the faith-based community in 2003, encouraging leaders to adopt safety guidelines and training programs that could potentially save lives during a crisis situation, specifically during a shooting. At first, many organizations—specifically churches—were reluctant. "In the church community, there is a vulnerability out there, a mind-set that says 'God is going to take care of us and we can go about doing His business,' maybe at the expense of doing some prudent planning and training," Spivey says.

But things have changed since the Colorado shootings. "That was a flashpoint, a catalyst for change in the thinking of pastors," McConnell says. "It really triggered something in people's minds. ... Many of them have heightened their security since the shootings; many have taken a more proactive approach. We've got to be as innocent as lambs and doves, but also as wise as serpents. **We can't just be apathetic and let evil run over us.** God is our refuge in times of trouble, but He expects us to be proactive."

According to Spivey, **fewer than 10 percent of all churches have crisis management plans** in place, with small- to mid-size churches often being the most ill-prepared. "The fact that [New Life] had somebody there that was willing to take an action to end violence showed a level of preparation that many organizations still do not have. ... My recommendation is that, No. 1, leaders have a crisis management plan in their church; and No. 2, people are trained in the contingency. Don't just put it on a piece of paper and put it on the shelf. If you've done those two things, you are ahead of 90 percent of not just churches, but many corporations and agencies, because you are taking a proactive stance."

*****Response Time*****

Hoping to change the statistics, the Center for Personal Safety and Protection developed and recently released Shots Fired, a training tool to teach people how to survive a shooting incident. The 18-minute DVD addresses two key issues: How to recognize and prevent an act of shooting, and what to do during an actual one. It also guides the user through these options:

- Figure out if it is an actual shooting.
- Ask yourself, Can I get out? And if you can't get out, you may have to barricade the room to ...
- Keep him out.
- If none of the above is possible, you may have to confront the shooter and take him out.

"I call it training that gives people a mental permission slip to act," Spivey explains. "One of the tragedies of Virginia Tech was that the students in one classroom just froze; they didn't know what to do ... and the shooter came back in a couple of minutes later, and that's when he killed most of the individuals."

Instead of focusing on organizational response, the program focuses on training the individual, which many religious organizations fail to do. When individuals freeze during a shooting, disaster is almost always unavoidable, Spivey says, explaining that **most shootings end within five to 10 minutes—many times before law enforcement has the chance to act.** "You can have a church that has a prevention program and safety procedures, but usually the weakest link is the individual in that sanctuary or in that office who does not know what to do."

According to McConnell, congregants gathering on Sundays are not the most vulnerable to an attack. Instead, it is the office staff working onsite Monday through Friday who is most at risk.

Since its release in December, the DVD has been picked up by dozens of churches of all sizes. "I think pastors recognize that they have an obligation to protect their people," Spivey says. "We're not talking about armed guards running around the church as much as we are helping to create a survival mind-set among people."

Five Security Tips Church Leaders Can Implement Now

1. Designate a security lead within your church. The role of the security lead is to coordinate all security-related activities within the organization. In the case of a church, this includes: creating and maintaining a crisis management plan; handling and safeguarding collection monies; monitoring the physical security requirements of a facility (i.e. adequate lighting in parking lots); monitoring church services to detect and respond in cases of disturbances; and reviewing international travel plans to assess risk.

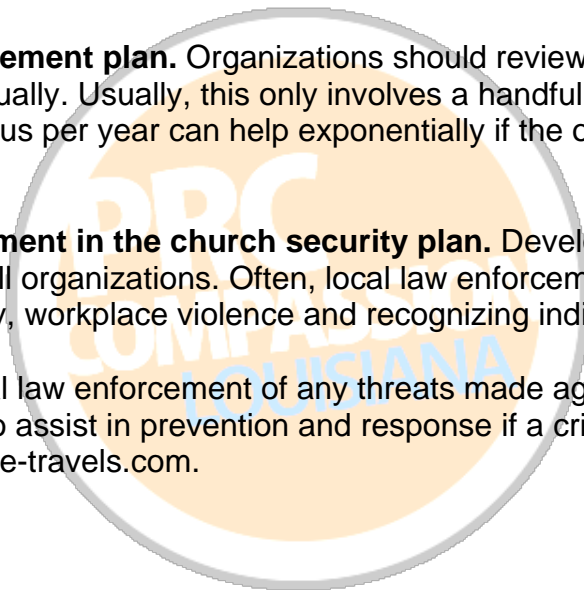
2. Develop and maintain a crisis management plan. This is essential to preparing a church on how to respond to a crisis such as an active shooter incident. The plan outlines procedures for notifying authorities; specific actions to take during the first moments of a crisis; and a training and education plan for the church staff and, possibly, the congregation.

3. Train church leadership on the content of the crisis management plan. A crisis management plan isn't very helpful if those who are responsible for implementing it aren't trained to do so properly. Churches will often designate this responsibility to the security lead or outsource to an outside vendor.

4. Practice the crisis management plan. Organizations should review, update and practice their crisis management plans annually. Usually, this only involves a handful of individuals, such as leadership. A few hours of focus per year can help exponentially if the organization actually has to enact the plan.

5. Involve local law enforcement in the church security plan. Developing a relationship with local law enforcement is good for all organizations. Often, local law enforcement will provide training on topics such as personal safety, workplace violence and recognizing indicators of a violent person before they act out.

Additionally, by informing local law enforcement of any threats made against the church, its people or leadership, they will be able to assist in prevention and response if a crisis does occur. For more information, visit safe-travels.com.



SPECIFIC THREATS and *Suggested Actions*

In most threat incidents law enforcement will likely *not* be on the scene within the first 10 minutes and those first 10 minutes can be critical in determining a resolution with minimal harm or loss of life. Therefore, it is strongly advised that churches think through and adopt some protocol for potential incidents.

The following are some simple recommendations around which protocols can be built. Most local law enforcement agencies can, and are very willing to, assist in development or review of protocols. While the suggested protocols will be helpful, **it is strongly recommended** that faith community leaders vet these suggestions with their specific law enforcement agencies for additional recommendations, adaptations and/or appropriate changes.

✚ Bomb Threats

- ❖ Bomb threats usually come via one of four venues:
 - Telephone
 - Written threat
 - Delivered (USPS, UPS)
 - In person
- ❖ Phone Threats
 - Remain as calm, as possible
 - Keep the caller on as long as possible & get as much information as possible
 - NEVER terminate the phone call. Allow the caller to hang up first.
 - Listen for background noises (music, voices, trains, planes, boats, etc) as this may help law enforcement narrow the location from which the call was made.
 - Note voice characteristic (High, low, young, old, manner of speech, accent, etc)
 - ASK where and when the bomb is set to explode – **THIS IS VITAL INFORMATION**
 - Note if there seems to be familiarity with the location of the bomb, e. g., how specific is the caller in describing *where* the bomb will explode?
 - AS SOON AS THE CALL IS TERMINATED BY THE CALLER, notify whomever is in charge and *on site*.
 - ◇ NOTE: If the pastor is out visiting the hospital notify him/her later.
 - ◇ The person in charge will direct alerting any staff and evacuating the building.
 - Call 911.
- ❖ Written and/or Delivered Threats
 - Do not handle suspicious mail or packages.
 - ◇ In addition to the potential danger in handling the package, critical evidence (fingerprints, handwriting, postage marks, etc) could be compromised.
 - If there is a reason for concern or alarm, NOTIFY LAW ENFORCEMENT.
 - If the threat was *delivered by someone other than the regular USPS/UPS, etc. employee*, write down their description and the description of anyone with them. (See Suspect Information Chart.)
 - Also write down a description of the vehicle, if known. (See Vehicle Identification Chart.)
 - Follow appropriate steps outlined in the Phone Threat section.
- ❖ In Person Threat
 - In the rare occurrence that a treat is made in person, get as much information as possible (where, when, why,) and observe the individual carefully.
 - Follow appropriate steps outlined in the Phone Threat section.

- ❖ Determining when the threat is over. A bomb threat is considered over when:
 - A complete and thorough search finds nothing suspicious; and/or,
 - The appropriate law enforcement has completed its investigation & search (or removal) efforts AND has advised the church leader that there is no further danger.
 - Only appropriate law enforcement officers should make this determination.

✚ Aggressive or Disruptive Individuals

- ❖ Notify the person in charge.
 - Once the person in charge takes over, *only* the person in charge should speak or otherwise interact with the disruptive individual.
- ❖ The person in charge will assess the situation and determine action.
 - Call 911, if determined to be warranted by the person in charge or instructed to do so.
 - When calling 911:
 - ◇ Provide a description of the person,
 - ◇ The nature of the disruption or aggression; ie, the behavior
 - ◇ Last known location of the aggressor.
 - ◇ IF SHOTS ARE FIRED (or an assault has otherwise occurred):
 - Provide the location of where the shots were fired, if known.
 - Describe any injuries (or condition of injured, if known) and advise if medical attention is needed or requested.
 - If known, describe
 - Shooter
 - Weapons seen (pistol, rifle, knife, etc)
- ❖ If possible, the person in charge should escort the disruptive person out of the building as soon as possible.
- ❖ If the person continues to exhibit combative or aggressive behavior, step back and wait for the authorities.
 - In doing so, however, do not leave the person unsupervised as he/she may attempt to harm someone.
- ❖ Generally, so long as the individual does not attempt to harm anyone, do not challenge the aggressor or in other way further escalate the situation.
- ❖ If the person leaves the property prior to law enforcement arriving, immediately fill out a Suspect Information Chart and Vehicle Identification Chart.
 - Original should be given to law enforcement.
 - A copy should be made and kept in the church files.
- ❖ IF SHOTS ARE FIRED (or other physical attack occurs, e.g. Stabbing, beating, etc.)
 - Seek shelter in the safest place available.
 - ◇ If the shooter is inside the building and you can safely get out and shelter, do so,
 - ◇ If the shooter is outside and you can safely get inside and shelter, do so.
 - ◇ If the danger is inside your building and you cannot safely escape:
 - Lock all doors, turn off all lights and secure yourself in your space, office, etc. For example, get under a desk **OUT OF THE LINE OF SIGHT.**
 - **DO NOT MOVE** or do anything that would otherwise attract attention to yourself or those with you.
 - Stay away from windows, doors, etc.
 - Assist others, if possible.

- If children are present, try to calm them and keep them quiet.
 - Speak in a firm, confident, reassuring voice to them.
 - Others present, especially children, will take their cue from your behavior.
- DO NOT “UNCOVER” or unlock doors until a duly authorized and identified law enforcement officer so instructs OR (and better) until an authorized and recognized voice so instructs.

✚ Hostage Incidents – One of the most dangerous periods in a hostage crisis is the first 45 minutes when confusion and panic can be at their highest. Therefore, knowing and following the church’s determined protocol (whatever it may be) is essential.

- ❖ At its root most hostage events are about control.
 - As much as possible allow the hostage taker to “feel” in control of his/her situation.
- ❖ Law enforcement agencies either have or have access to trained negotiators.
 - CALL LAW ENFORCEMENT IMMEDIATELY.
- ❖ Remove all individuals possible from the immediate area.
- ❖ Allow NO movement in the area.
- ❖ If necessary, *only* the person in charge (pastor, administrator, principle, etc) should speak with the hostage taker until law enforcement arrives.
 - Promise nothing by explaining you do not have the authority to make decisions.
- ❖ Appoint someone to keep the media off the property.
 - *Only* the person in charge or his/her designate should speak to the media.
 - ◇ Generally, the best comment is “no comment at this time.”
- ❖ Do not agree to follow any orders or instructions from the hostage taker prior to the arrival of law enforcement, unless there is perceived, imminent danger to the hostage’s life.
- ❖ Answer any questions the hostage taker may have but do not volunteer any information.
- ❖ If communication with the hostage taker is established prior to law enforcement’s arrival, encourage the hostage taker to talk unless violent or suicidal themes develop.
- ❖ Critical information in a hostage situation: (To be given to law enforcement on their arrival.)
 - Number of hostages, names and vital information
 - Physical description of the hostage taker
 - Noted behavior patterns
 - Weapons seen or implied
 - Specific demands and statements (write them down when they are made)
 - Time the incident occurred
- ❖ If at all possible, have building floor plans ready for law enforcement when they arrive with as much detail as possible. Especially,
 - Access points, such as, air conditioning and heating ducts,
 - Electrical panels and service boxes,
 - Water and natural gas shut off,
 - Any explosive or hazardous materials, especially flammable, that may be in the area; i.e. gasoline for lawn equipment, LP gas cylinders, etc.,
 - If there is a kitchen or break room, food and drink that may be available to the hostage taker,
 - Internet access – hardwired and wireless,
 - Telephone numbers and extensions where the hostage taker is located.
- ❖ NOTE: A hostage incident is concluded when – and ONLY WHEN – law enforcement has so determined.

- ❖ As with any critical, traumatic or hazardous incident, arrange for CISD (Critical Incident Stress Debriefing) for any and all individuals present when the incident occurred and/or the families of the hostages or families of those present as they will have been secondarily traumatized.
- ❖ IF YOU ARE TAKEN HOSTAGE:
 - Do NOT speak unless spoken to and then only when necessary.
 - Do NOT talk down to or attempt to rationalize with the hostage taker.
 - Avoid appearing hostile
 - Avoid arguments.
 - Maintain eye contact at all time, if possible, but DO NOT stare.
 - Try to rest.
 - Comply with instructions as best you can.
 - Displaying a certain amount of fear can, at times, work in your favor because of the hostage taker's "need to control."
 - Expect the unexpected, such as, severe mood swings, irrational actions, etc.
 - Do NOT make sudden or quick moves.
 - If you need something, e.g. Water, bathroom, medication, etc., ask the hostage taker.

