



PRESENTS



Church Safety Guidelines And Recommendations

Building Safer and Educated Communities

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Note: There are no guarantees, expressed or implied, with this booklet or the information provided within this booklet that will make your place of worship EMERGENCY or CRIME-PROOF, or that the recommendations will prevent any type of emergency or crime against property or persons within your place of worship.

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A Letter To Our Church Leaders

This guide was prepared for church leaders to assist them in preparing a comprehensive plan to react to emergencies in their place of worship. This guide should not be considered a comprehensive plan nor should it be substituted for the efforts needed by the leaders of congregations of places of worship to create, implement, and practice their safety plans.


No one could ever provide you a complete list of considerations specific to your place of worship nor can any plan anticipate every possibility of emergency situation. Rather this guide has been prepared with the idea of creating the conversations and thought processes needed to create an emergency response plan for your place of worship.

It is our desire to be partners with you in both prevention and response of emergencies at your house of worship. We are more than happy to do security inspections, answer questions, and offer advice as you move through this process.

It is also important to understand that just creating a plan is not enough. You must communicate that plan to your congregation and you must practice the plan periodically. While it has been said that no good plan survives first contact with the enemy, when you have created an environment of leadership and cooperation, you will be much more likely to be able to adapt as an emergency situation evolves.

Thank you for your serious approach to crime prevention and safety. I and the entire Newberry County Sheriff's Office are excited to be a part of making your place of worship safer understanding that true worship cannot occur until the people feel welcome and safe.

God bless you in your service to him!



Lee Foster, Sheriff

Blessed are the Peacemakers



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Church Safety Guidelines And Recommendations

The Newberry County Sheriff's Office understands that keeping a church safe is no easy matter. This booklet is designed to assist you in some easy, sensible ways your church leaders can help be prepared for the possibility of emergencies. It is important to remember that your place of worship is a facility that is used often by a large group of people which makes safety awareness just as important here as in any other buildings where a large number of individuals gather such as schools and office buildings. It's impossible to predict when, where, or what kind of emergency or incident will strike, so start now to help make your place of worship a welcoming and safe place for the congregation.

Building Safety

Building protection starts with the building itself. Today's worship centers are more active with increased functions during all hours of the week. Many burglars just walk in through unlocked doors or windows so it is very important that all doors and windows are locked when the church is not in use. Think about establishing a procedure for the use and distribution of keys. Post a list of when the facility is being used and by whom and assign responsibility for locking and unlocking the building for each event.



Make sure all outside doors are the solid-core type with rugged jimmy-proof frames with deadbolt locks. For double doors install cane or flush bolts at the tops and bottom. If your facility has sliding glass doors add an extra measure of security by putting a metal bar or even a broomstick in the track and install screws in the track of sliding doors to prevent burglars from lifting them off the track. As an added precaution use interlocking hinge plates to make it hard to take a locked door off the hinges.

Be sure that locks are installed on all windows. These can be simple stops made from nails or manufactured key locks. No matter what type, the most important thing to remember is to make sure that they are locked when the church is not in use. Don't forget to protect the stained glass and other art windows from vandals and burglars trying to gain entry as well with some type of safety glass covering. These coverings also aid in protection from weather damage such as wind and hail.



Criminals prefer to work quickly, in darkness or hidden from view so if you take those opportunities away you can help discourage a crime from taking place. Use exterior lights to deter criminal activity and make sure that shrubs, trees, and other exterior items do not block this lighting. Remember that these areas also provide great hiding places for thieves, so be sure that they do not obscure visibility to doors and windows. Don't forget that you should also provide adequate lighting for your parking lot to dissuade criminals from approaching your building as it makes suspicious activities visible to persons in the neighborhood. They also help protect from potential accidents or crimes to your members and visitors, or possibly their vehicles, when arriving and leaving.

Since churches tend to be more technically advanced than ever, this leads to easy to sell electronic equipment being on hand for the thief to easily carry away. Inventory and record all serial numbers of these electronics including televisions, sound systems, and other audio and/or video devices as well as other church equipment and property. Don't forget





your churchware such as alter sets, communion ware, offering plates, candelabras, and the like as well as other valuable artwork. When not in use, place valuable and irreplaceable items in a secure locked area. As added security, photograph the items as well. Do a routine walk through to insure that all is in place before closing and locking the facility.

On Sundays when events may tend to go on throughout the day is a prime opportunity for large amounts of money to be on hand from day's tithes and offerings. So be especially watchful after services as robbers know that this may be a vulnerable time for the churches to have large amounts of cash. Never keep cash money of any amount in plain sight or unattended. Count and record the amount and place the money under lock and key as soon as possible after collection. Remember whenever receiving checks to immediately stamp "For Deposit Only" to ensure that they cannot be "cashed" to an individual. It is never a good idea to keep cash of any amount in the church, but if it is necessary for the operations of your place of worship consider investing in a burglar-resistant safe.



Deposit tithes and offerings after each service to avoid having cash in the church. It is best to carry money in a disguised container and make the deposits during daylight hours. If you must make a night deposit, do not approach the deposit unless it is clear of other people. Go directly to the bank and never for any reason leave deposits unattended in the vehicle. Vary the time and route when carrying the deposits. Conceal the cash when transferring it from the vehicle to the bank. Use common sense and be alert to your surroundings. If you feel you are being followed while transporting money, drive or walk directly to an open business, law enforcement department or fire station. Call 9·1·1 to insure proper response of Law Enforcement to assist with an escort.



Neighbors of your worship facility are a great source of help to watch the church during times no one is there. Often these neighbors are also members of the congregation and have a vested interest in helping to watch for potential threats. The objective is to have neighbors watch for emergencies, unusual behavior, or suspicious vehicles and report them to a designated church leader or, if the situation warrants, to the Sheriff's Office.

Medical Emergencies

Although you may not have thought of the church as a place for a medical emergency, medical emergencies can happen anywhere. Quick thinking and actions can save a person from serious injury or death, so it pays to be prepared. Being prepared for medical emergencies will help provide an increased level of comfort and assurance of safety to the church family and guests.

An effective medical emergency aid is to use the resources available within the church – the members. Create a medical team comprised of members that are doctors, nurses, paramedics or other trained medical personnel, yet don't limit your team to the medical field. Non-medical volunteers can also be a great resource, although it is reasonable to require that they should have basic lifesaving and first aid training. This team can provide first aid and help in the event of minor accidents or illnesses and help evaluate potential situations that might need further medical assistance. They could also provide invaluable assistance prior to the arrival of emergency medical responders in the event an ambulance must be called.



One element that can be handy for a variety of minor medical incidents yet is commonly forgotten is a first aid kit. If your worship center has more than one building make sure that every building has at least one easy to get to, fully equipped first-aid kit. Make sure that everyone knows where the first-aid kit is located. Make sure someone is assigned to regularly check for used or out of dated supplies and replace as necessary. Another

important safety tip when placing the first-aid kit: Place out of reach of children as even the most basic kit contains items not suitable to be within their reach.

In the past several years, automated external defibrillators (AEDs) or defibrillators have become an important lifesaving medical devices especially since most sudden cardiac arrests occur outside the hospital. Today's defibrillators are easy to use and relatively inexpensive. This may make Defibrillators within your church an important feature to safeguarding the health and safety of the members and visitors to your church. *(Neither staff nor employees of NCSO endorse or recommend the use of AEDs for any congregation. Each congregation must consult with their own leadership and advisors in the choice of procurement, training and use of AED equipment.)*



Remember, the most crucial step of all major medical emergencies or when there is a question about the status of a situation is to call 9·1·1, yet often when people panic they forget this critical step. It is imperative to get help on the way as every second counts. Designate someone to call 9·1·1 and meet the ambulance to guide the EMTs to the emergency.

Fire Safety

Unfortunately, fires takes the lives of more people every year than all other natural disasters combined. What's even more tragic is that it is estimated that half of these deaths could have been prevented. If your church ever faces the devastation of fire, it will cause a financial loss but even more it will inflict a much greater emotional toll to the congregation. By taking fire safety actions in the church chances of your church family and visitors being harmed in a fire can be reduced.



Two easy and essential safe guards are the installation of smoke detectors and portable fire extinguishers. Make sure there are smoke detectors throughout your church as an early warning system of a fire. The detectors must be in proper working order to help, so they should be cleaned and tested regularly. Routinely test batteries and change them at least once a year. Even though a fire extinguisher is no substitute for the fire department, it is an essential tool in fighting small fires, and just like a smoke detector they need regular

inspections.

Your congregation should have an evacuation plan to follow in case of a fire. It should be clearly drawn and written out and posted on bulletin boards and other prominent locations. Make sure the plan has the evacuation route and exits clearly marked. Be sure to keep these evacuation routes and exits well-lit, unobstructed, and clear of debris and other hazards. Teachers should take roll call before evacuation and accompany their class. Designate assembly areas where the congregation should gather after evacuation and get a head. Establish members that can be designated to assist in the evacuation procedures and be in charge at assembly areas. Periodically discuss the evacuation plans with the church family so they know what to do in case of fire. Remember to include some important "dos" and "don'ts" if the church is evacuated:

- Remain calm.
- Follow the instructions of the incident coordinator or emergency response team, if applicable.
- If you are the last to leave a classroom or office, close the door as you leave.
- Use stairwells (do not use elevator) for evacuation.
- Be alert for others who might also be using the stairwells.



- Do not return for coats, purses, briefcases, etc., after you have left the area.
- Do not return to your area until the “all clear” signal is given.

Once you have established emergency evacuation procedures and created the plan it should be provided to all members if possible.

Inclement Weather



South Carolina is susceptible to several types of inclement weather situations such as snow, ice, flooding, etc. Because of this your worship center needs to have a plan in place to communicate with your congregation for the cancellation of services during these times. Also, imminent weather emergencies such as tornados are likely in our area, so plans should be in place for this type of emergency. No matter the weather emergency, the congregation should follow our local emergency management directions for safety.

The National Weather Service (NWS) has developed a method of identifying storm conditions that promote the development of severe weather. The two classifications are a “watch” and a “warning.” The “watch areas” are usually large geographic areas, covering many counties or even states that could be affected by severe weather conditions. A “warning” is an alert issued by the National Weather Service after severe weather condition has been detected by radar or sighted by weather watchers or by the public. The National Weather Service provides the approximate time of detection, the location of the storm, and the direction of movement.

Unfortunately, this area is also prone to tornados. Following the NWS classifications, a “tornado watch” status indicates that weather conditions are favorable for the development of tornadoes and a “tornado warning” is an alert that a tornado has been spotted by radar or seen by someone on the ground. Since a tornado can move from 25 to 40 miles per hour, prompt emergency action must be taken during a tornado warning. If a tornado warning is issued, you should take shelter in the safest location in the building. Move quickly but do not run and assist disabled and the elderly in your area. Use the stairs, not the elevator. Move away from windows. If you have time, close any window blinds or shades to help prevent flying glass and debris—the cause of most injuries in buildings. Move to an interior room away from windows—to an enclosed room or conference room, a rest room, an interior stairwell. Stay in place until you hear an announcement that it is safe to return to your area. Leaving is extremely dangerous and attendees are much safer in the building than in the car.



Manmade Emergencies

There are other special concerns that may arise due to manmade emergencies. Some of these are due to the worship center’s location to certain types of businesses or their proximity to nuclear plants. Other manmade considerations could be hazardous spills or gas leaks. Just like in weather emergencies, the congregation should follow our local emergency management directions for safety in these types of situations. There are normally two directives during such events: Shelter-in-Place (take shelter) and Evacuation.

For instance if it is a hazardous spill or an event within the Protective Zone of VC Summer Nuclear Plant and you are advised to shelter-in-place, or more simply put to take shelter, this means for the members to remain indoors and any that are outside to go indoors until the emergency is over. All windows and doors are to be closed and someone should turn off heat/ventilation/air conditioning systems. Advise everyone that they should not use their cell phones unless it is absolutely necessary.



Keep landline phones and key personnel's cell phones open for emergency communications. Everyone is to remain indoors until officially notified that the emergency is over.

In the event your congregation needs to evacuate your place of worship, you may be asked to only evacuate the facility or you may need to leave the area. Depending on why the evacuation is necessary will dictate which method of evacuation to take. For instance, if your church heats or cooks with natural gas or propane gas and there is an interior leak, the attendees should leave the building immediately using your established emergency evacuation procedures. Do not use any electrical device, such as light switches, telephones or appliances as they



could spark and ignite the gas. Do not use an open flame, matches or lighters. Do not try to locate the source of the gas leak or try to shut off any gas valves. If there is a hazardous spill or an event within the Protective Zone of VC Summer Nuclear Plant and you are advised to evacuate the area, shut off water, gas, lights, appliances and heat/ventilation/air conditioning systems. Instruct members to keep their car windows and vents closed and air conditioners turned off as they relocate to a safe location outside of the area of evacuation.

Bomb Threats

Although bomb threats are typically seen as the work of cranks or not-so-funny pranksters, recent increases in terrorism have made it important that all bomb threats be taken seriously. Bomb threats are serious until proven otherwise. It is much better to assume that a threat is deadly serious than to shrug it off as a prank only to find out through a tragedy that there really was a bomb. More commonly, bomb threats are received over the phone although they may be received by a handwritten note or email. It is important to act quickly, but remain calm and obtain as much information as possible.



Call 9-1-1! Write a note to a colleague to call the authorities or, using a different phone, notify the authorities yourself as soon as the caller hangs up, but do not hang up the phone. Ask where the bomb has allegedly been placed, what it looks like, when it is set to detonate, and what will make the bomb explode? This will help emergency personnel locate the bomb and disarm it safely. If your phone has a display or caller ID, copy the number and/or letters on the window display, or note if the number is blocked. When a bomb threat happens,



you may not have much time to think about what is going on, so make writing down the phone number or blocked status of a threat call your first reaction. Details such as the caller's gender, whether the caller was an adult or a child, whether or not the caller had an accent or spoke in broken English, the caller's ability to give details about the bomb threat location, whether or not there seemed to be a sense of urgency or panic are some important things to note.

The more information you can give the authorities, the better chance they will have at catching the threatening caller. Continue communication between your local law enforcement and other responding public safety personnel and provide them with the information gathered. They will be able to provide you with further instructions regarding notifying other building occupants and, if necessary starting evacuation using your established emergency evacuation procedures.

Missing/Lost/Abducted Children

These steps are short and direct. This isn't the time for complicated directives!

- Step 1: **FREEZE EVERYTHING!**
- Step 2: If outside, move inside.
- Step 3: Do a Head Count.
- Step 3: Search the entire area thoroughly where last seen.
- Step 4: If not located within 5 minutes, **Call 9-1-1!**
- Step 5: Notify parents/legal guardians.

The first person that becomes aware of the missing child should immediately contact a member of the pastoral staff. Use your emergency response team to perform a meticulous search of the facility including parking lot and area immediately around the building, radiating out from the last location the child was seen. If the child was last seen outside, the search will be concentrated outside the facility yet the building should also be checked as the child may have returned to go to the restroom or get a drink of water. Many times the children are close to where they were last seen. They may be found hiding in the general area or may fall asleep somewhere close and be afraid of getting in trouble when they see people getting worried. Check everywhere a child could be including drawers, cabinets, behind furniture, etc.



Gather as much information about the child as possible, such as what type of clothing they were wearing, when they were last seen time and the location, etc. The emergency response team will ensure that the area is monitored and that no one enters or leaves unchecked. Volunteers should be positioned to monitor each exterior door with a description of the child to watch for the child. The Pastoral staff can decide if more restrictive measures such as building lockdown should be taken.



If there is any indication that the child was abducted or that a crime occurred, get as much detail as you can about the suspect and the suspect's vehicle. Oftentimes, child abductions are by family members so one of the first things you should be prepared for are custodial disputes between parents.

Make sure you have a plan to match parents to children. Develop an authorized pickup list for the children in your congregation and release the children/youth safely into their custody. Do not release to anyone not on the list without express written permission from the parent. If someone not on the list attempts to pick up the child, contact law enforcement and the parents.

Special Considerations

There are other controversial or special considerations your worship center should be aware of and plan for when preparing your comprehensive plan. Examples of these are concerning sex offenders, other felons who attend church, and transgender restroom usage. As there is no one-size-fits-all solution to these issues, each worship center must address these concerns and develop policies that support their individual faith beliefs and ministries.



As such, your church should take every precaution to ensure attendees are safe and protected from those who seek to harm them. As standard practice, you should require that all volunteers and employees complete an application as well as read and sign your child-safety policy and procedures. Also, run background checks on all volunteers.



When creating these guidelines, the process for developing your plan should be handled carefully. No matter what policy you choose, the protection of children, youth, and others in your congregation is the primary objective.

Emergency Response and Protection

As well as your medical team you should also have a security response team. If possible, include members that are current or past law enforcement, military, other security related fields and CWP holders in this team, yet do not limit the team to those members. You need members that continuously observe people and the environment and can assess the situation to see if there is danger and respond appropriately. Some churches chose to hire off duty officers for protection.



Even though greeters and ushers may have little or no background in emergency planning, protection or security, they already share the role as greeter and guardian, so using them to establish this team can be the first place to start. Another area to place a team would be in the parking lot. The members of this ministry team can often spot trouble before it gets into the church. We recommend that one or more persons on the security response team be clearly designated, much as is done with ushers, to keep a view on all entrances into the sanctuary during worship services or other church activities.



Supply the teams with two way radios so that there is communication between the parking lot ministry and inside the church. It is important to remember that your security cannot be so intimidating that it scares visitors away. When properly used these teams can increase your outreach and provide additional protection at the same time. Be sure to have a primary and back up leader for each team.

Remember to complete your church information sheet for the Newberry County Sheriff's Office. The sheet can be found at www.newberrycountysheriff.com and then click on the crime prevention link. Also, remember that if you have your floor plans in a pdf format, you can submit those and we will add it to our 9-1-1 mapping to aid in an emergency response.

Disruptive Attendee

Whenever possible, disruptive behavior should be addressed immediately as this action can create concern for the physical or emotional safety of the congregation. Simply defined, disruptive behavior includes actions that disturb church activities and prohibit the pastoral staff from serving present and future members. Disruptive behavior may happen within the church building or at church sponsored events.



Therefore, if you have an attendee that is causing disruptive behavior, it should be handled immediately by a designated member. Be sure this person is accompanied by a security team member, a staff person, or another adult member before

approaching the person. First attempt to de-escalate the situation by use of verbal skills. Politely greet the person and identify yourself. Ask the person how you can help rectify the situation. If this does not work, ask the person to leave. If they fail to respond, members of the security team should work together to remove the person from the sanctuary.

Once decided to forcefully remove the person it should be done as quickly as possible. Use only the amount of force necessary to remove the person. If the situation arises to the level of removal, call 9·1·1 if for no other reason than to document the incident in case there are further incidents. At this point the person will either begin to calm down or escalate worse than before.



After the incident is over, the worship leader or pastor should regain control of the worship service by acknowledging the incident. The congregation should be reassured that the matter is well in hand and they are safe to return to worship.

Concealed Weapon Permits

The people who come to your church to worship expect a safe and spiritual environment but unfortunately, there is nowhere safe or sacred to criminals and zealots as shown by the mass shooting incidents at places of worship in the past few years. In South Carolina Concealed carry in churches and houses of worship is allowed only with permission from the church leader or governing body. Police officers do not need such permission to carry open or concealed.



Therefore, it is important to establish a policy or constitutional amendment that specifies who has the right to approve a CWP holder to carry a weapon and what action they must do to get this permission. The church may place additional qualifications on the permit holder above the state requirements such as additional firearms qualification. Remember you are giving this person permission to have a firearm and, if needed, to fire that weapon in your sanctuary during a worship service. You must ask if one time firearm qualification is sufficient to take that shot. The following are some recommendations we advise to include:

- Written request from the person
- Copy of their CWP (with the Date of Birth stricken out)
- Signed notice that they have reviewed and agree to comply with the policies/procedures of the church at all times
- Written response from the church once approved by the pastor or appropriate committee to include at a minimum:
 - Restatement of the church's insistence that the person approved comply with all the policies and procedures of the church policy at all times
 - Statement that the approving body of the church has the right to suspend or revoke such approval at any time by written notice because people and circumstances can change

Regardless of the guidelines your church establishes, we encourage you to have frank discussions with your church leaders and develop and adhere to the clearly written policies and procedures for all CWP carriers. You should be aware that while there is no case law to this effect at this time, it is highly likely that the church could be held liable for that person's actions since you have given them written permission to possess a firearm on your church property.



Active Threat

All places of worship should engage in active threat planning so that if an incident occurs, pastoral staff and church leaders can follow safe procedures for the potential acts of violence on church property. Not only should your security response team be aware of the surroundings, you should urge the congregation to maintain a general awareness and encourage them to report any unusual situation to the staff.

During an active threat event, if the threat is observed approaching the church, every effort should be made to deal with the threat before it gets inside the church. Attempt to lockout the active threat by locking the exterior doors to keep them from entering. If the threat gets inside the church, immediate action must be taken. Someone should be assigned to call 9·1·1.

Members of the security response team should respond to the threat. The security team should be trained in the Avoid-Deny-Defend response:

AVOID|DENY|DEFEND

AVOID starts with your state of mind.

- Pay attention to your surroundings.
- Have an exit plan.
- Move away from the source of the threat as quickly as possible.
- The more distance and barriers between you and the threat, the better.

DENY when getting away is difficult or maybe even impossible.

- Keep distance between you and the source.
- Create barriers to prevent or slow down a threat from getting to you.
- Turn the lights off.
- Remain out of sight and quiet by hiding behind large objects and silence your phone.

DEFEND because you have the right to protect yourself.

- If you cannot Avoid or Deny be prepared to defend yourself.
- Be aggressive and committed to your actions.
- Do not fight fairly. THIS IS ABOUT SURVIVAL.

<http://www.avoiddenydefend.org/add.html>

If deemed a shot must be fired at the threat, the security team must be aware of those around them and behind the suspect to prevent unintended injuries. If the threat is encountered in the hallway or other common area, Avoid-Deny-Defend should be practiced by non-security team members while security team members would encounter the threat.

If the threat makes it into the sanctuary, all church members who are not on the security team should take cover under the pews or safe areas in the church. Try to stay calm and be as quiet as possible. This will allow the security team clear sight of the threat and create the clearest possible opportunity to mitigate the threat. In this environment, the members should not attempt to evacuate since it would cause more confusion for the security response team. Also, repeated study of previous active threat incidents have continually shown that noise and movement will almost always draw attention and fire from the shooter.



As soon as the scene is secure, the medical response team should attend to any wounded. As soon as possible the church should evacuate just as with the fire safety plan while being alert of the possibility of multiple shooters. Everyone should remain at the rally point until law enforcement and public safety can arrive for additional protection and direction.

When law enforcement arrives, all members of the security response team should immediately secure their weapons, obey all commands, and identify themselves as part of the church security response team. It is a very difficult task for responding officers to identify the threat from the response team so the security response team must make every effort to not be seen as an active threat to the arriving law enforcement officers.

Plan, Plan, Plan



These guidelines cannot cover every possible situation that might occur, but hopefully it can be used as a tool to aid you and your place of worship if such a situation occurs. Remember: You must plan for the unexpected.

This booklet presented as a service to the citizens of Newberry County by:



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