

***Is Your Church a Soft Target?***

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There is, without a doubt, an influx of active shooter incidents in America. The FBI designated 50 shootings in 2016 and 2017 as active shooter incidents. Twenty incidents occurred in 2016, while 30 incidents occurred in 2017. As a result, in that two-year span of 50 such incidents there were 943 people shot, 221 killed, and 722 wounded. As with past FBI active shooter-related publications, this report does not include all gun-related situations or where a gun or other weapon was found, pulled, or used to threaten someone. The FBI defines an active shooter as one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area. Implicit in this definition is the shooter’s use of one or more firearms. The active aspect of the definition inherently implies that both law enforcement personnel and citizens have the potential to affect the outcome of the event based upon their responses to the situation.

According to criminologist Dallas Drake, from 1980 to 2005 there were 137 incidents of church related shootings in the United States. From 2006 to 2016 there were 147 such instances. That is more in that 10-year span than the previous 25-year timeframe. In percentages, that is a 268% increase. These numbers do not include non-Christian houses of worship such as mosques or synagogues. According to church security expert, Carl Chinn, there have been 617 people killed in a deadly force incident since 1999 on faith-based properties. This does not even address the increases in church break-ins, vandalisms, arsons, fights, or other criminal activity. Here in our country, a great contributor to this influx is not just gun control or even terrorism. Another main factor why specifically churches are having more of these incidents is a growing lack of respect for God. Just a couple decades ago, there was still a reverence for God, God’s Book, God’s men, and God’s house even among the general public. Those days and those feelings have changed. In light of this decay in our society, church security is now becoming a necessity. You wouldn’t have ever imagined the need for such a thing 50 years ago or training armed security guards to protect Christians as they gather to worship the Lord in the safety of America, but here we are. You probably also would not have imagined back then the need for metal detectors and drug dogs in middle schools either, but they are now there.

Another reason why churches, schools, and similar places or facilities are seeing a spike in such incidents is because they are considered “soft targets.” Crime Prevention Research Center President John Lott Jr. noted in October 2015, “Only two mass shootings in the U.S. since 1950 have occurred in an area where citizens were not prohibited from carrying a gun.” What qualifies a building or event as a “soft target” to someone wanting to bring mass carnage to innocent citizens? Below are listed such characteristics:

1. Gun-free or gun-restricted zones and laws

2. The absence of security or a police presence

3. The lack of proper training or equipment for security

4. Lack of cameras, alarms, and locks

5. Lack of good lighting and visibility

6. Multiple unsecured, unmanned, or unmonitored entry points

7. No organization, training, plan, or ability to quickly contact law enforcement

8. Extended proximity to or response time of adequate law enforcement

The more of these that describe your church or Christian school, the more of a soft target you become. Therefore, the more of these you can eliminate, the less of a soft target you are. A few of these issues may be beyond your control, however, let us discuss some of the things you can do to help decrease the vulnerability of your church or Christian school from being a soft target.

**1. Check your state gun laws concerning what they allow or have made provision for concerning having armed security in your church or school.**

**2. If allowed by state law, start and train a security team of church volunteers based on the following recommendations:**

A. Choose the right people in assembling your security team.

1. Select people that are faithful and loyal. People not there can’t help do anything!

2. Select people that are calm natured, but not passive. You don’t need a Barney Fife!

3. Select people that are teachable, not know-it-alls.

4. Select people that are servants, not drill sergeants! People skills are key!

5. Select people that have some law enforcement or military experience if possible.

B. Get help in training your security team.

1. Because this is a growing need, there are experts that now train such teams.

2. Do research and use good information resources.

3. Get assistance from others who have trained church security.

4. Contact your local sheriff’s department or closest large town police department.

5. Do regular training and honing of your team’s knowledge and skills.

6. Do not let someone on your team carry a weapon that is not properly trained to use it.

C. Supply the necessary equipment to do the job efficiently.

1. Have the right surveillance and alarm systems.

2. Make sure your security team has radios to communicate with each other.

3. Have at least some of your team members properly armed and qualified.

4. Give clear instructions and responsibilities to each person at each post.

**3. Invest some financial resources into adding adequate cameras, alarms, locks, electronic-keyed access pads, and lighting.**

**4. Contact your local police and request regular patrol drive thrus and/or squad cars parking in your parking lot or near your church between calls. If they are doing this during the day, take them a drink. Have a squad car and uniformed officer on property during big days.**

**5. Lock down all entrance doors 15 minutes after any service or the school day begins and man and monitor a limited number of entrance points for latecomers or deliveries.**

**6. Give specific instructions about and responsibilities of whom and how law enforcement will be contacted in case of an active shooter situation.**

A. There are now Panic Button apps that can be used to immediately and simultaneously notify all

necessary personnel as well as contact police.

B. There are ways that a downloaded layout of your buildings can be immediately sent to all law enforcement personnel responding to your location in many larger police departments.

**7. Train your people, students, staff, and school faculty about what they need to do in active shooter situation to minimize casualties.**

**8. Coordinate with your local law enforcement about your building layout, response times, and entrance points.**