

Five Step Plan: Security for Places of Worship

Churches and places of worship welcome people with open doors, but that could be the window of opportunity that leaves them vulnerable to someone with bad intentions. They're "soft targets," unfortunately. Case in point: the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, where an attacker took the lives of nine individuals, and now the shooting at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, which killed 26 people and injured 20.

Each church and place of worship is unique and has its own challenges, and there are many factors to consider. We look at the age of the church, its size and its design. Even the location makes a big difference as to the types of protocols you put in place.

I recommend a 5-step plan:

1. An immediate security assessment of the church or place of worship and their properties by an experienced security consultant. The assessment results serve as the initial step in developing any type of action plan.
2. The formation of a safety and security committee of members of the congregations and development of safety and security teams during services.
3. The examination of current emergency crisis plans, with updates and changes made to reflect what is current around the surrounding community.
4. The implementation of security technology such as camera systems, access control, and communications and notification systems, among others.
5. A written agreement with the sheriff's department or local law enforcement to have a full-time deputy sheriff or police officer in uniform with a vehicle assigned during all service hours. You may consider also hiring off-duty law enforcement officers.

Being proactive and seeking out preventive measures are the best ways to protect not only your church or place of worship but the congregation as well. Training could be all the difference in a life-altering situation.

It takes the entire community to really make a difference. Respect the fact that it's a church or house of worship, but security measures still need to be in place.

Posted by Patrick V. Fiel on Nov 10, 2017

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