

Church Security, ASIS, and the Security Risk Survey from the START

Starting a security program for a house of worship can be a challenging & difficult task. After all, the security team could be responsible for the safety of hundreds of people. Difficult decisions may have to be made by this team that would potentially affect their lives as well as the house of worship. The alternative is to do nothing and hope everything will be ok. To me, that is not an option.

My wife and I moved to the Beaufort County area of South Carolina from Ohio in 2012. We had vacationed in this area for years. We also started attending a great church on Hilton Head Island in 2007.

When we retired in 2012 we moved to this area and became more involved with our church on Hilton Head. My wife works in the Children's Ministry and I have done various types of volunteer work. Then I became an Elder. I had noticed a general lack of security at our church. This was a "ahah" moment for me.

I have never been a security professional. However I have always been security conscious. This attitude started early on in my life because of the schools I attended and later in my sales and business career. I called on all areas of large metro cities all over the eastern half of the US. I learned the streets the best I could and completed personal protection training.

About three years ago I presented a security program to the Elders of our church. I expected a certain degree of push-back due to the nature of security and the audience that I was presenting to which was our church leadership. After presentations and discussion with the church leadership, we started a security program taking baby steps at first.

Mission

Our mission is to provide security for our church body. Security is especially important during the 5-9 minute response time before the first responders arrive on scene.

Team

Our team is currently made up of seven men which consists of civilians, ex-law enforcement and ex-military personnel. We also have many volunteers such as greeters, ushers, Elders, counters, etc. They play a secondary, but just as important security role, and are looked at as part of our team. All these great folks are volunteers.

First tasks tackled

- All unnecessary doors are locked during any church event.
- An electronic inventory system for children was installed. Parents and children are issued one off identity stickers during child check in. When a child is picked up, the parents have to have a matching sticker to the child to be able to remove that child from the premises. We are aware that if a child were to go missing under our care it would be catastrophic to the church.
- We hardened an area where the offering funds are counted and all funds are only handled by a minimum of 2 or more trusted and known people at our church. All funds are escorted by members of the primary security team to the hardened area.
- Our building and grounds manager is an ex-police officer and a member of our security team. He is a great man and has a big job taking care of our 30,000 sq. ft. building. He has cut back shrubbery, added security lighting, addressed safety issues with the building and continues on a daily basis to make the property more secure and safe.
- 2 years ago we invested in 2 way radios. Since our building is very large and spread out we found it necessary for a quick response. Some of us use earpieces so we can hear in the sanctuary without disturbing others. Seconds count.

- We are developing a medical team which has already been used a few months ago. Everyone involved did their job and the patient was safely transported to the the hospital and back at church the following week. It isn't If it happens, it is WHEN.
- We are now installing CCTV cameras. This is another step to make our church more secure.
- We are also developing an emergency exit awareness program that will help those in the body know where to exit the building in case of emergency.
- Our pastors recently provided an electronic defense against cyber attacks.
- Training is one of the most important pieces of the puzzle. It involves all members of our team and many members of our church. Examples of which include greeter and usher training in regard to a suspicious person, CPR training, AED training, radio proficiency training, evacuation training and yes although rare, active shooter training. Our goal is to train more in the future.

About 2 years ago I read about an upcoming seminar in regard to house of worship security. I attended along with representatives from about 40 other local churches. The seminar was excellent and put on by Jim McGuffey of ASIS and hosted by the Bluffton, SC Police Dept. ASIS is the American Society of Industrial Security. This is one of the largest security organizations in the world. They recently started a house of worship security division and Jim has been instrumental in its development.

At the seminar that I attended Jim gave us a copy of a Security Risk Survey that he developed with houses of worship in mind. It is a great guideline for a security team and covers many areas for evaluation that may be overlooked. It takes awhile to complete, but believe me, it is worth the investment of time to do so.

I have since joined ASIS and am extremely pleased with the access to information available and the professionalism of this organization.

We have a local chapter that has monthly meetings that Jim chairs. Each month there is a guest speaker on all aspects of security. It is a great source of information.

In summary

We are on the right path but we feel we have a long way to go. Our team's primary goal is church safety but also as greeters, helpers, friends, and God loving people. We pray we will never have a worse case scenario but if it happens we pray that we will be able to address it the best way we can and save lives.

From feedback we have found that the church body really likes our ministry. They like the feeling of being safe at church. The church leadership has been great and in a huge way the driving force behind this ministry.

If you don't have some sort of church security, you might want to consider it. As church leaders we have the responsibility to keep the body safe as possible.

Suggestions

If you don't have a security team, seek someone in your church body to volunteer.

Join ASIS and attend your local chapter meetings.

Do the ASIS Security Risk Survey

Read the book Keeping Your Church Safe by Ron Aguiar