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OVERVIEW

Don't Be a Slave to Fear

Should we barricade the doors?

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

Not so long ago, believers were able to seek a quiet, solitary moment of worship in their church sanctuaries. No locked door, or armed guard, there was no prohibited entry. In many places, those opportunities to meet God in his house (without first being cleared for admittance) are gone.

The shooting of 14 people attending a youth rally at Wedgwood Baptist Church, in Fort Worth, Texas—the bomb that exploded at First Assembly of God in Danville, Illinois, injuring 35 people—the killing of a wife, son, and fellow-member by a congregant of New St. John Fellowship Baptist Church in Gonzales, Louisiana: these are only a few examples of the violence that has shattered the peace of sanctuaries across our nation.

Does this mean we should barricade the doors, shrinking back in fear of what could happen at our church? No! This is a time not only to exercise our trust in the Lord, but to fully equip ourselves with the right tools to protect our congregation.

This download was prepared to help your congregation feel secure in your house of worship. To begin, you can assess the current security of your church. You'll also receive advice on how to plan for the unexpected, whether or not your church should hire a security guard, and how to deal with the media in violence aftermath.

As you seek to protect your church from violence, we encourage you to arm yourselves with information, so you can continue to open wide your doors and let the people in!

Karen Arneson

Contributing Editor

Your Church Resources

SafetyAlert@ChristianityToday.com

ASSESSMENT

Protect Your Church

10 questions to jump-start our security plan.

by Karen Arneson

May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands (Psalm 90:17).

Use the following assessment to see if your church is well-equipped to respond if the unthinkable should happen.

HOW SECURE ARE WE?	YES	NO	ACTION STEPS
Do we have an emergency and crisis plan in place?			
Do we train our leadership, ushers, and greeters in crisis response?			
Do we train our ushers and greeters on how to respond to suspicious persons?			
Do we conduct regular evacuation and emergency response training?			
Have we identified key medical professionals in our congregation?			
Do we have a sufficient number of first aid kits available in key areas?			
Have we identified key law enforcement professionals in our congregation?			
Do we have quick access to phones at all times in key locations?			
Are exit routes clearly marked?			
Have we taken measures to secure our buildings with lighting, security cameras, and lock-down areas?			

Thought Provokers

- Can we answer “yes” to all of the above questions? If not, what do we need to do to protect our congregation?
- Identify people to invite to participate in forming a security team.
- When will we meet to begin planning and what items should be on our agenda?

HOW TO

Violence in the Church

Prepare for the unthinkable.

From Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company

But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you (Psalm 5:11).

Emergency preparedness for churches used to mean having a plan for responding to reports of fires and severe weather.

Today, churches must also be prepared to deal with crises created by violent people, such as a Wisconsin man who killed seven people and himself during a March 2005 church service.

While such events seem unthinkable, they're happening with increasing frequency in business, schools, and churches. There are things you can do to prepare for the unexpected and reduce the stress you may feel if such an emergency were to arise.

Develop a Plan

Creating a violence response plan involves assessing your individual situation, determining how to respond, and practicing what to do if it happens.

In many ways, it's identical to creating a disaster response plan for weather-related events. The only difference is the type of threat you face.

Form a Team to Assess Risks

You'll need more than one person to help you plan for a mass casualty event. Enlist a broad cross-section of people, including staff, volunteers, and church members, who can contribute their expertise to the plan. Have your team determine where your ministry is vulnerable.

Consider what could happen during service times or on weekdays when only a few staff members are present. Also think about what could happen at a school, preschool, or day care center you operate. For example, could a gunman easily enter a children's wing and threaten those in classrooms? This is a time to imagine worst-case scenarios. Developing your response will come later.

Prepare for Threats

There are basically three threats to prepare for, according to school safety expert Michael Dorn, executive director of Safe Havens International.

Confronting Gun Violence at Church | Violence in the Church

- *The report of a weapon.* Someone claims to be armed in the building. (This is the most common.)
- *The use of a weapon.* Someone is brandishing a gun, knife, or other threatening object.
- *A hostage situation or barricaded gunman.* Someone with a weapon is prepared to harm another person if his or her demands are not met.

Determine Your Response

After listing your vulnerability to such threats, determine the probability of each event happening and its impact on people, property, and the ministry. Then, determine how you will deal with them, keeping in mind that your response on a Sunday morning might differ drastically from what you would do on a weekday morning.

Improve Building Security

Security equipment that could help prevent or reduce the impact of violent situations is a key consideration. Consider modifying your building so that it can be locked in zones to provide secure havens for the people inside.

For example, allowing visitors access to a lobby area while the office suite and remainder of the building are securely locked provides time to determine a visitor's intentions before allowing him or her access to other parts of the facility. Placing the nursery and Sunday school areas behind a set of security doors allows teachers to quickly secure the area without evacuating the children.

Video cameras could record information crucial for apprehending and prosecuting a suspect. In addition, you might install a panic button or silent alarm that locks doors and/or alerts authorities to an emergency situation.

Establish Protocol

Your church may already have a plan in place for dealing with fire or weather emergencies. In many cases, you can modify that plan to deal with incidents of violence in your congregation. Here are some aspects to consider:

Communication: If you have a large church, how will you communicate that there's a threatening intruder on the other side of the building and that people need to evacuate? Solutions include using a public address system or assigning people to deliver the message to various parts of the church.

In addition, someone needs to quickly notify law enforcement and deal with a possibly overwhelming response from people concerned about the situation, including friends, family members, the community, and the media.

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Evacuation: How will people leave the building and where do they go afterward? Determine escape routes, designate where people should meet after evacuating, and assign people to make sure that everyone gets out. Have a buddy system for people with disabilities. Post evacuation routes and procedures throughout the building.

Responsibilities: Who will do what? Create a list (wallet size, if possible) of all persons on and off-site that would be involved in responding to a crisis of this nature. Note their responsibilities and their 24-hour telephone numbers. Assign someone to keep this information up to date.

First aid: How will you treat the injured? Buy a commercial first-aid kit and keep it stocked. Train key volunteers and staff in first aid and CPR procedures.

Training: How will you ensure that everyone knows what to do in a crisis situation? You'll need to provide general training regularly to make sure that new people know what to do and experienced people remember their roles. Remember to update responsibilities as church membership changes.

Coordinate With Others

Talk with first responders, emergency managers, community organizations and others about how you can prepare for violent incidents and respond to them. Your local police department's Special Response Team (SRT) or Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit may have a response plan that it would be willing to share.

In addition, the school system may be able to recommend some safety experts who have conducted training workshops in your area. Be sure that the expert you choose comes with proper credentials and has experience working with churches. Ask other churches about their crisis response plans, and encourage them to start continuity planning, if they haven't already. Offer to help them, if you can.

Conduct Practice Drills

Regularly review and practice what you intend to do during and after an emergency with drills and exercises. Ask someone from an emergency response agency to observe the drill and offer advice for improvement.

Repeated practice helps people remember their roles and remain calm during an actual crisis. Drills can also identify problems in your response plan that could be prevented.

Inform the Congregation

Your staff and volunteers aren't the only ones who need to know what to do during an emergency. If someone with a weapon appears in the sanctuary, people will panic. They need to know that the protocol is for everyone to find emergency exits and escape as quickly as possible.

Confronting Gun Violence at Church | Violence in the Church

Parents instinctively will want to retrieve children from other parts of the building, but this can result in chaos and delay. Consider practicing a drill immediately after a worship service or find another way to inform the congregation about your emergency procedures.

You could use an announcement period or discussion time to outline the evacuation plan, point out the emergency exits, and explain the procedures for protecting children in the nursery and Sunday school classrooms.

Other ways of informing your congregation about emergency policies include the church bulletin, visitor packets, and handouts for parents when they drop off children in the nursery. Regular reminders will be necessary, since memories fail and attendees come and go.

Review Your Plan Annually

Just as your ministry changes over time, so do your preparedness needs. When you hire new employees, launch new ministry initiatives, or expand your building, you should update your plans and inform your staff, volunteers, and congregation.

It's easy to imagine that something so tragic could never happen at your church, but experience has shown that it could happen anywhere. With sufficient forethought, planning, and practice, you can help ensure that your ministry is as prepared as possible to face sudden threats to the congregation.

Founded in 1917, **Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company** is one of the nation's leading insurers of churches and related ministries.

Thought Provokers

- Do we have a list of potential staff who can lend their expertise to our violence response team?
- What is our vulnerability to violent threats? Are we prepared for an appropriate Sunday morning response?
- Have we ever conducted a drill during a service? How would we go about implementing a drill?

HOW TO

Colorado Shootings Reflect Big Threats at Big Churches

Growth of megachurches has spawned an industry devoted to protecting and securing large congregations.

by Kevin Eckstrom

May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels (Psalm 122:7).

With megachurches come megacrowds, megamoney, and increasingly, megasecurity concerns.

The crowd—anywhere from 2,000 to 20,000 worshippers each weekend—can be an attractive target for a deranged shooter. Overflowing offering plates are tempting to thieves, and well-known preachers can become high-profile targets.

Sunday's shootings at New Life Church in Colorado Springs and a missionary training facility in Arvada, Colo. —which left five people dead, including a gunman—reflect the security nightmares facing some of the country's largest churches. Many of those churches now employ armed guards to protect human, financial and physical "assets."

Brady Boyd, the senior pastor at New Life Church, said an armed guard "probably saved over 100 lives" when she shot and killed the gunman just inside the doors of the Colorado church.

"That's the reality of our world," he told reporters Monday. "I don't think any of us grew up in churches where that was a reality, but today it is."

Boyd said the volunteer guard was put in position after the church heard about the shootings in Arvada. The church has about 15 or 20 guards, some armed, and the guard who killed the gunman used her personal weapon, he said.

Violent crimes remain extremely rare at U.S. churches. Eric Spacek, a senior church risk manager for the GuideOne Center for Risk Management in West Des Moines, Iowa, said crime accounts for just 5 percent of all claims filed by the 40,000 churches insured by GuideOne.

Still, the growth of megachurches has spawned an entire industry devoted to protecting and securing crowds that can be larger than some towns or shopping malls.

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Scott Thumma, a megachurch expert at Hartford Seminary and author of *Beyond Megachurch Myths*, said financial security is just one concern at a typical megachurch, where offerings can reach an annual average of \$6 million.

“Think about it,” he said. “That’s \$115,000 a week in income. Are you going to trust moving that much money around to folks without guns?”

At the Potter’s House in Dallas, where Bishop T.D. Jakes draws an average 15,000 worshippers on Sundays, the church employs plainclothes and uniformed security guards, said Sean Smith, director of Classic Security, which contracts with the church.

“We’re not trying to get an army of men out there armed with guns,” Smith said, “but we want to take practical and measured responses for any threats that may come to our doorstep.”

Increasingly, that means packing heat, if necessary, said John Ross, who directs security at Dallas’ Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, which draws nearly 8,000 every Sunday.

“You can use your hands, you can go tactical, but these days, that’s not the way people roll,” said Ross, a former ATF agent. “You have to match force with force.”

Some church crime is relatively routine—thefts, vandalism and unfortunately, child abuse. Sometimes, warring parents will take their domestic dispute to church playgrounds, or thieves eye parked cars for break-ins.

Some churches try to take it in stride. Rick Warren, the California megachurch pastor and *Purpose Driven Life* author, has an all-volunteer security team headed by a former Secret Service agent.

“We don’t worry about that,” he said Monday. “We do have security volunteers in our church. We don’t have any paid (security), but every one of them is off-duty law enforcement.”

In the case of most random shootings—a deranged gunman looking to make a statement—some observers said there is only so much churches can do. Dave Travis, the managing director of Leadership Network, a Dallas-based megachurch think tank, noted that the mother of Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed in 1974 as she sat at the church organ.

“The security threat of a crazed person—there’s just no way to totally prepare for that,” he said.

The celebrity status of some mega-church pastors is another concern.

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“Some of these top pastors have become celebrities, and they carry with them the same crazy people who would attack Madonna or the Beatles, and religion is one of the things to which unstable people are attracted,” said Hartford’s Thumma.

Still, churches’ open-door atmospheres frown on the use of some precautions, such as metal detectors or pat-downs. People seek churches for comfort and healing, not to undergo a background check, said Dale Annis, director of Church Security Services, a consulting firm in Bakersfield, Calif.

“If you’re trying to win converts,” he said, “you don’t want it to be so fortified that you’re going into Fort Apache.”

It’s not just the big churches where security is a concern. At Annis’ 600-member Olive Drive Church, a 16-person security team is trained in CPR and First Aid. A golf cart roams the parking lot to deter break-ins, and Annis carries a firearm—just in case.

“Churches are really easy pickings if you think about it,” he said. “You’ve got several hundred people, all in one place with their heads down and their eyes closed. I tell my security team to pray with their eyes open.”

David Finnigan contributed to this report from Los Angeles.

This article first appeared in the December 2007 issue of *Christianity Today* magazine.

Thought Provokers

- According to Eric Spacek, “[v]iolent crimes remain extremely rare at U.S. churches.” How do we respond to this statement? Are we inclined to dismiss the necessity of forming a security plan? Why, or why not?
- What is our response to the statement that it is necessary to “match force with force?” What, in our opinion, is a “practical and measured” response to threats? Should we consider hired security, or might our needs be met through a volunteer team?
- Why, do we suppose, religion attracts unstable people? How ought we to prepare to deal with people of questionable stability?

HOW TO

Dealing with the Media During a Crisis

Having a “media strategy” in mind before a crisis will help you.

from Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you (Psalm 20:1).

Imagine that a parent accuses your nursery worker of child molestation or a parishioner sues for personal injury arising out of a disciplinary measure. Handling such events will be difficult enough. Add the dimension of dealing with the media, and your task becomes even more challenging.

Contact Your Insurer

The first step in any crisis is to report the incident to your insurance agent immediately, no matter the severity of the claim.

Control Your Message

When dealing with the media:

- Avoid extremes. Some pastors seek coverage, hoping to appear on every newscast, while others padlock their churches’ front doors, never to be found.
- Develop a response other than “no comment.” Issue a brief statement like this: “The safety and well-being of our youth are extremely important to our ministry. We are cooperating with the authorities in their investigation, and any comments made before the investigation is complete would be premature.”
- Prepare a written statement for distribution with the help of your attorney.
- Select a central spokesperson through whom all messages are communicated. If that person appears caring and concerned, your church will be perceived as such.
- Anticipate questions reporters will ask. Determine ahead of time what you will say and what you won’t or can’t say.
- Have your attorney present at news conferences, if possible.
- Speak in sound bites—emphasize key points made in the news release, and don’t deviate from them.

Confronting Gun Violence at Church | Dealing with the Media Curing a Crisis

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- Maintain an open mind and a good attitude about dealing with the media.

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Thought Provokers

- Reflecting on this article, how will we deal with the media if a claim gets publicized?
- Have we been able to “control our message” when dealing with the media?

FOR CHURCH LEADERS

Securing the Faithful

What New Life Church did right when a gunman showed up in its parking lot.

Christianity Today *editorial*

Let not those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; let not those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye (Psalm 35:19).

John Murphy, a staff member at Youth With a Mission's Denver offices, was racing on foot toward the Arvada training-center dormitory minutes after a shooting there left two students dead and two others wounded.

It was the very definition of an emergency, but Murphy still stopped to help when he saw a man nearby slip on the icy sidewalk, The Denver Post reported. "Are you okay?" he asked. "Sorry, guys," the man responded in a shaky voice.

Murphy thought this response odd until hours later, when he saw photos that indicated the man to be the gunman at the training center and, later, the parking lot of New Life Church in Colorado Springs.

The irony is compounded when one considers that most churches have a plan for when someone slips on their sidewalk, but not if he were to show up with three guns and 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

New Life Church is an exception, but its response plan has been misunderstood and misappropriated. The church did not issue a call for members to pack heat. Instead, it implemented a studied, careful security plan appropriate for the nature of its congregation. In the wake of the Colorado shooting, more American churches are debating armed security. What's remarkable about New Life's system, however, has less to do with arms and more to do with the body. It doesn't just have a security team. It has a security ministry. And it's not something you can sign up for on a clipboard in the back of the sanctuary. Instead, it is managed with a sense of Christian vocation and gifting.

Members have military and law-enforcement backgrounds, but the church doesn't confuse vocation with profession: not everyone with security experience serves on the security ministry. Those who are selected are carefully screened, as news reports covering the shooting have demonstrated. And many members were essentially reservists, called upon only during heightened danger. It makes similar use of parishioners with backgrounds in

emergency medicine, risk assessment, and other fields.

While the principles here should be broadly applied—have a security plan, make use of members' gifts, work with local law enforcement to assess risk—few churches in America will have the resources to build a security ministry like New Life's. But frankly, few need a security ministry like New Life's. The churches most likely to be the site of a Columbine-style shooting are also those most likely to have the resources to minimize the violence.

As former New Life staffer Patton Dodd wrote for Beliefnet, “No one who has attended there for any considerable amount of time would be surprised to find it the target of a violent attack—not because of any official New Life positions, but just because the place is big and visible and Christian, and some people hate that stuff. And more randomly, some people are just driven to senseless rage.”

Churches can never be completely safe from violent rampages, and the questions people are asking won't stop all future attacks. Nothing we learned about the deaths of Tiffany Johnson, Philip Crouse, and Stephanie and Rachael Works, for example, would have saved Gabriela Parasca, who died at a Phoenix church shooting three days later when her estranged husband attacked her at a church-run preschool. We can take measures to limit the effects of violence, but only in the age to come will the lion lie down with the lamb.

This editorial article first appeared in the February 2008 issue of *Christianity Today* magazine.

Thought Provokers

- Do we want to build a security team or a security ministry? What would be the differences?
- What relationship might exist between the super-sizing of American churches and increased violence in and against the church?

FOR THE BOARD MEMBERS

Should Our Church Have an Armed Security Guard?

Each church must decide for itself.

from Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company

O Lord, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever (Psalm 12:7).

A volunteer security guard is credited with saving dozens of lives at a large Colorado Springs, Colorado, church after firing multiple shots at a gunman who killed two people and injured three before turning the gun on himself.

In the wake of the shooting at New Life Church, other churches have asked whether they need armed security guards.

Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company urges all churches to have a violence response plan—one that helps you respond swiftly and appropriately to threats against people. Each church, however, must determine individually whether its set of circumstances merits an armed security team. If you decide that armed guards are needed, we recommend that you enlist only current or former law enforcement professionals or security firms who receive regular weapons training.

Experience, Training Essential

If you don't know where to start, hire a security consultant to help you assess your ministry's security risks. Be sure to hire a reputable professional who maintains proper credentials. You may be able to obtain recommendations from your local police agency, school system, area businesses, or other churches.

Let's say that your plan calls for a security team. Among the first decisions you'll need to make is determining who should be on the team.

Law enforcement officers receive hours of weapons training each year, and they are taught to deal with unruly, violent, or mentally unstable people. Their training and experience helps them respond appropriately under stressful conditions, including those involving life-or-death decisions.

For these and other reasons, current or former law enforcement officers make excellent candidates for church security positions. Hiring an outside security firm to serve as the church's security also can be an excellent option, especially if there are no trained law enforcement personnel affiliated with your church.

Confronting Gun Violence at Church | Should Our Church Have an Armed Security Guard?

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If you decide that your church needs an armed security team, please allow weapons to be carried only by active or retired law enforcement officers who receive regular weapons training. As you can imagine, a person who may shoot accurately at a firing range or while hunting might not perform as well when faced by a gunman threatening a congregation.

Laypeople and others without the training and experience of law enforcement officials might pose more of a liability to your church than a benefit, when faced with a situation such as the one at New Life Church.

Consider these Factors

Here are a few factors to consider when discussing the need for a security team:

Team composition—Will you use volunteers or hire professional security guards? How many members will you need? How will you screen them?

Risk to Others—What is the likelihood of your security team members being overpowered by an attacker or shooting someone other than the intended target? Could they be accused of using excessive force? How will they be supervised?

Training—How much formal weapons training have security team members received? Are they licensed to carry a weapon in your state? Has their experience included training in resolving conflict with people without using weapons?

Vocation—Are security personnel current or former law enforcement agents? How often do they undergo weapons training?

Before concluding that your church needs armed security guards, do some overall planning in conjunction with local police, your insurance agent, and your attorney. All can give you valuable advice.

Founded in 1917, **Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company** is one of the nation's leading insurers of churches and related ministries.

Thought Provokers

- What are the pros of hiring a security guard for our church? What are the cons?
- Would our church be benefited by establishing a security team?

IT'S TRUE

Lessons from Wedgwood Baptist

Questions you ask when violence walks in the door.

by Robert Welch

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman (Psalm 15:1-3).

I was on my way home Wednesday night when a police car passed me at a very high speed with lights flashing and a full siren. I drove by the area fire station and noted that both trucks were gone. About that time an ambulance wailed passed me.

I had the radio on, and as I approached my house in Fort Worth, Texas, the Christian radio station KCBI interrupted its regular programming to ask listeners to pray for people at a church in Fort Worth. It seems a gunman had walked into the church and opened fire. Initial reports were that several people had been injured. As I got out of my car, I noticed police helicopters hovering in the air about a half-mile away.

To be honest, I really didn't think of Wedgwood Baptist Church, just a few blocks away from my house. Rather, I figured that a major accident had occurred on the interstate. When I got into the house, my wife had the TV on but said that our reception was very poor because of cable damage in the area. Earlier, the network had broken in with an announcement that a gunman had opened fire on a youth rally at Wedgwood Baptist.

I went into my study and turned on my radio. The news was not good. I thought for a moment of going to the church but decided that if the situation was as chaotic as the newscaster indicated, I would be an unnecessary person in a growing crowd of concerned parents and church members. I stayed home and prayed.

Tragedy Strikes Home

Wedgwood is Southern Baptist, a sister church to the one I attend in Fort Worth. It is near Southwestern Baptist Seminary, where I serve on the faculty. A large number of our seminary students are members of Wedgwood. Some of my doctoral students are on staff at the church, and others serve as interns or in other positions of leadership at the church.

In the midst of my prayers, the phone rang. The caller was Walter Norvell, a doctoral student at the seminary and a member of Wedgwood. He was obviously shaken by the events of the evening but was calling to tell me that he and his family were all right.

Two of my students had been shot, however. Norvell said he had seen Kevin (Galey)

loaded into an air ambulance. He had also heard that Jeff (Laster) was one of the first shot and was probably dead. I told Walter I was thankful that he and his family were okay and that I would continue to pray for the others.

About that time, my wife said the cable was back up. Newscasters were naming some of the injured. The initial list included a Jeff Lester; did they really mean Jeff Laster? We watched through the night, waiting for more names. The deaths were not reported.

Aftershocks

When I went to my 8 a.m. class the next day, I looked for Jeff, but his seat was vacant. I told the class that Jeff had been shot and I wasn't certain whether he was still alive. A couple of students said they had heard Jeff was still alive but in serious condition, with gunshot wounds in his stomach. We had a long prayer session for the victims and the church.

By the next class, the names of those killed at Wedgwood were being announced. We began to pray for the families of those people. For the rest of my life, I will never forget the reaction of one student during the teaching that followed the time of prayer. The beautiful young woman stared into space with tear-filled eyes the entire hour. She could think of nothing but her dear friend Jeff and other seminarians that had been shot.

That Sunday in my church, I noticed that for the first time a uniformed policeman was keeping watch at the back of the auditorium during the service. Like many others at church, I asked myself, "Have things deteriorated so much in society that we must have armed guards to protect us in church? Has it come to this?"

Questions in the Wake

While I was a church administrator in Oklahoma, I trained ushers how to handle emergencies, but those were medical emergencies. Now I wondered: Must we train ushers to watch for armed intruders? Should attendants who patrol the parking lot to prevent vandalism also watch for unsavory characters who shouldn't be allowed into church?

I used to ask deacons to walk through the church complex during services, paying special attention to what was happening in the office and children's areas. Now I wondered: Do we need a special patrol to check out everyone who comes into the church?

I used to arrange for an armed, off-duty police escort for committee members who counted and deposited church offerings. Now I wondered: Must we arrange for armed guards to protect the congregation during worship, Sunday school, and other activities?

I thought of the panic buttons at the receptionist's desk and in the preschool office that were linked to the monitored security system and wondered: Do we need panic buttons in other areas of the church?

Such questions are inevitable in the wake of the horrible shooting at Wedgwood Baptist. In the days to come, church leaders will be grappling with how to have an open church with an open gospel while providing for the security and safety of people at worship and study.

Bob Welch is associate dean of doctoral studies and associate professor of administration at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

This article first appeared in the March/April 2000 issue of *Your Church* magazine.

Thought Provokers

- Have you been, or known, a victim of violent crime? What has this experience taught you?
- Do reports of violence against God's people cause us to fear? How do we reconcile our physical fears with our spiritual beliefs? How do we continue to extend the arms of Christ to the lost and hurting in our community? Can we be both secure and vulnerable?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Resource Center

Quick tips and recommended resources.

Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings (Psalm 17:8).

Tips for Using Articles

Consider these options for the use of articles and information in this download:

- Pass the **Protect Your Church** assessment around at your next board meeting and have a 15-minute discussion.
- After reading through an article, choose questions to pose at a scheduled meeting and discuss them together.
- Determine what areas your church will need to pay extra attention to in the area of protecting your congregation from violence and discuss your plans to do this.
- Using the Bible verses found at the beginning of the articles, lead a devotional discussion at a staff meeting on the topic of church safety.
- Using the “Thought Provoker” questions, lead a discussion for ministry workers and other church staff members.

Web Resources

- **Your Church Resources:** YourChurchResources.com, Reference and training material for legal and tax issues that affect your church.
- **Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company, Safety Central:** Violence in the Church

Books, Kits, and Other Resources

- **Church Law Special Reports:** Quick and easy updates on the critical issues that continually concern the church.
- **Risk Management Handbook for Churches and Schools** by James F. Cobble, Jr., and Richard R. Hammar.
- **Pastor, Church & Law** by Richard Hammar. The most comprehensive and practical

legal reference book ever published for churches and clergy.

- **Inspection and Safety Checklists:** 12 modules for assessing and improving facilities, and safeguarding activities.

Additional Articles

- **"Arming in the Aftermath,"** by Sarah Pulliam.

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