

# HOW TO START A SECURITY TEAM AT YOUR CHURCH

by Matthew Gilstrap

IN THIS DAY AND AGE when security is a top priority everywhere we go, what about our churches? Shootings, assaults, domestic disturbances, and child custody battles all occur within our worship centers. Each time it shakes us to the core and we think, "I can't believe it happened here." Preparation is the key to significantly reducing the chance that events such as these will occur in your church. This article was created to guide you in building a team to prevent and respond to the unseen things that occur in and around your church.

For explanation of why you should have a security team, I like to use the example of Nehemiah (Chapter 4). During the building (or I should say rebuilding) of the wall of Jerusalem he got word of a planned attack by the enemy. Nehemiah did not stop the work and worry about what he could not control; he placed armed guards in the open/exposed/low areas of the wall. Of course, we know the plan was thwarted and the work of the Lord continued. This article contains general ideas for building, placing, and

training your team. As you read this, take into account your church environment (location, socio-economic standing, theological position, etc.) and remember this team is to assist in the overall vision of the church. Prepare for and frustrate the enemy's plan to disrupt the work that God has called you to do.

Security teams involve many different people from police officers to body guards to volunteers. All of them are important; all of them play a critical role in protecting the House of God. Police officers have powers that regular citizens and security personnel do not have. They are a valuable asset to use for traffic and internal protection purposes. Body guards (sometimes called personal protection officers) are contracted for a variety of functions in the church but their main focus should be on personal protection. They work well in the church environment because they work in a plain-clothes capacity and blend well with the crowd. Volunteers should never be overlooked, but volunteers should not be asked to endanger themselves in any situation. They work great in areas of observation, patrols of the hallways and parking lots and being a presence around the church, but paid professionals should handle major emergencies.

**Build your teams by finding members of the church who are law enforcement (federal/state/local) officers, security professionals, and volunteers who are willing to help.** Word-of-mouth recruiting works best, and it

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allows people to invite others that they trust. A team that trusts each other works together far better than a bunch of strangers who must get to know each other and how each one operates. Nehemiah placed the guards according to families because he knew they would watch out for each other more closely (Chapter 4 verse 13). Recruit according to your environment. I recruited once by doing an informational breakfast for our ministry. That worked for me but might not for you. You must be selective in who is on the team and do background checks on them. If they understand the importance of security they will not mind the formality of a background check. Look up local security companies that can provide personal protection officers. Interview the company management, and get references and a client list. Most importantly, have it written in the contract that you or the

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staff person over your security has the power to select officers for the team and remove them if necessary and cancel the contract at any time. You do not want someone on the team or some company "representing" your church that is not under the proper authority, and because of a contract, you are powerless to respond to it. Decide that this is an important addition to your church's vision and budget for the need. If you are in the middle of a budget year and didn't put it in last year, propose a budget revision and grow the team as the budget allows. Budget restrictions are where volunteers can help the most but make sure you value and take care of them. Once again, do not willingly/ knowingly put volunteers in positions where they must endanger themselves.

**Placement of your team is very important.** Decide what is of most importance and prioritize placement from there. For instance, the children's area should be a location of placement along with people strategically placed in the sanctuary. If you are concerned about the cars in the parking lot, place people patrolling on foot or in a golf cart, or have the police patrol in a car. The key to remember is someone cannot properly respond to an event unless he is in the immediate area. Security personnel should also cause as little distraction as possible when responding. You would not want someone on the front row running out of the service during the sermon to respond to something down the hall or five people responding to something one person can handle. Right now

you may be asking, "How do we know how to respond or what to do?" The answer is communication, procedures and training.

**Communication is of the utmost importance among security teams and there are many ways to communicate effectively.** Two-way radios are the most common. Find a communications vender in your area that can get commercial grade radios. As they get used, they get dropped and banged around. The commercial grade radios are built for such abuse and thus last longer. This is an area where most people look at price. Cutting corners here could create disastrous results. Improper equipment causes problems. Talk to the vendor about the proper wattage of the radios so you can communicate over a distance. I recommend 3-5 watt radios. You may even need to file for a FCC license and get a repeater system. This will allow communication for extremely long distances, multiple buildings, and terrain changes. For the team you also want to get two wire microphone kits. These are the "security service" radio devices that have an earpiece on one end, a plug into the radio and a microphone on the other end. These allow team members to communicate without everyone else hearing what is being said. Make sure someone teaches the team how to use the radios. Training your team to talk with a normal volume regardless of the noise around them and not to "eat" the microphone when they talk (six to eight inches from the mouth works well) makes for less confusion

during events. Try to limit the number of people who have radios (sometimes the budget will do this for you) or use multiple channels for the different ministries. This also prevents a crowd of people from showing up in a potentially dangerous situation which security should handle. If the budget does not allow for radios at the time, come up with some basic hand signals to use to alert other team members that assistance is needed.

**Procedures are important to guide your team in all of these areas.** These procedures should be written under the guidelines of what the law allows, what you want people to do, and, most importantly, what the church management endorses. Think about it from a liability prospective. That is why a paid security team member should respond to certain things and a volunteer to others. You have to start somewhere, even if it is a one-page procedure. Then, as the ministry grows and the need arises, add more approved procedures.

**Training is the important key to responding properly in any event.** I have found that the best way to bring people in for training is to have a time of fellowship, around food of course, and then go thorough the training processes/procedures. I also recommend that you train people in the environment where they will be assigned. For example, don't use a classroom for training a team on how to respond in the sanctuary, go into that environment, point out the places where they will be assigned, and put them in those places. Being familiar with the environment is very important in securing an area. If you are not qualified or comfortable with doing the training, find a police officer or a professional security consultant to do it for you. You could even have the emergency response team for your police department use your building for training purposes during off-hours. That way they are familiar with the building in case they must respond. The point is to get local law enforcement involved in




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the church and training. They will appreciate your cooperation and you will get better response when the need

arises. Remember that everyday the security team does not have to respond to an incident is a successful day.

With the proper recruiting, placement, procedures, communication, and training you can have a great security team that assists in the vision of the church. The members, staff, and guests will all appreciate the ability to come to a place where they let their guard down because you have placed people in the open/exposed/low areas that are guarding the work of the Lord. 

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