10 Things
Every Church Administrator
Should Know About...

Safety & Security

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1. Getting Started

Every ministry faces a unique set of safety hazards and security vulnerabilities. In many cases, focusing on the basics can go a long way toward increasing safety. Consider implementing these procedures to help improve your ministry's safety and security:

- **Secure the premises.** Use signs to direct people to preferred entrances, and leave as few entry doors unlocked as possible. Remind the last person out to lock all entry doors and windows. Arm electronic security systems before leaving for the night. Keep a record of everyone who has keys to ministry buildings and passcodes to security systems, and recalibrate as necessary.

- **Maintain the building and grounds.** Check for adequate lighting around the building exterior—especially near entry doors and throughout parking lots. Replace any burned-out light bulbs as soon as possible. Keep shrubs and trees trimmed to minimize hiding places. Check to ensure interior emergency lights and backup batteries work. Avoid overloading power outlets to help prevent electrical fires. Keep all stairs, ramps, and walkways in good condition to avoid slip-and-fall incidents.

- **Safeguard valuable items.** Lock the doors of interior offices, classrooms, and other rooms when they are not in use. Store smaller valuables in safes or lock boxes. Keep a detailed property inventory of all items that belong to the church.

- **Protect people.** Keep offices and childcare areas behind multiple layers of security (such as intercom/buzzer system), if possible. Follow check-in/check-out procedures in children's areas. Create and follow a clear, easy-to-use emergency response plan, addressing issues such as fire, medical emergencies, accidents, crimes, weather emergencies, and other hazardous situations. Consider forming a safety and security team to focus on protecting the church and its people.

- **Ask for help.** Contact local first responders and friends in other churches to ask for safety and security tips. They may recognize hazards you overlook. They also can lend their expertise when creating emergency plans or forming a safety and security team. Reach out to your insurance agent and ask about your insurance company's risk management resources. Consider asking neighbors to keep an eye on the facility while not in use, and to call police when they see suspicious activity.

As you take a closer look at your ministry's safety and security, create an action plan to correct the issues you find. Some problems can be fixed quickly and easily, while others will require time, money, and outside help. Increasing ministry safety is often a gradual process, but your efforts will help protect your ministry and the people it serves.

Need a checklist?
See the *Property Assessment Checklist*, an excerpt from *The Church Safety & Security Guidebook*.

2. Emergency Response Plans

If your church caught fire on Sunday morning, would you and your congregation know what to do? Lack of preparation can lead to a panicked, and potentially dangerous, reaction. Following a customized emergency response plan can help you protect your people and speed the recovery process when a disaster occurs.

- **Assess the risks.** Some areas are prone to wildfires and earthquakes, while others are more likely to deal with tornadoes and flooding. Some churches are built on sprawling campuses; others are located in tightly-packed cities. Some areas of the ministry, such as the nursery, may require extra assistance when people evacuate the building. Build a plan that fits your ministry's specific situation.

- **Create a plan.** At minimum, an ideal response plan will include procedures for evacuations, tornado sheltering, lockdowns, medical response, data contingency, financial contingency, and crisis communication. It should also describe the locations of utility shutoff points and a chain of command for response efforts. Remember to consider unique local threats, as well. Have a locally-licensed attorney review the plan to ensure it complies with all laws in your area. Local first responders can also give helpful advice during the review process.

- **Train employees and volunteers.** A response plan is most effective when employees and volunteers are trained to follow it. Train everyone on the plan after it is approved, incorporate the training into orientation for new personnel, and re-train often. Provide printed copies of the plan to employees and volunteers, post evacuation routes and other key information around the building for quick reference, organize situational training sessions, and perform response drills when possible. Keep church attendees informed about the response procedures that apply to them.

- **Evaluate and refresh.** A response plan should be a living document. Evaluate your plan on an annual basis and fine-tune as needed. Have the ministry attorney approve any changes, and re-train employees and volunteers to follow the updated plan.

?   **Want more information?**
Download the disaster response issue of *The Deacon's Bench* safety newsletter.

3. Forming a Safety & Security Team

Increasing church safety shouldn't be a one-person job. Many churches have started safety and security teams to help protect the church and its people. To get the most out of your team, carefully plan how it will operate and how the church will handle the risks that come with a safety and security team.

- **Decide on duties and procedures.** Church leaders, with help from a locally-licensed attorney, should set guidelines for the team's scope, addressing the church's most pressing security issues. Typical duties of a safety and security team include overseeing the distribution of keys, handling security duties for worship services and other activities, heading up emergency response, suggesting building repairs that could increase safety, and more. An attorney can help you tailor the team's activities and create a procedure manual to comply with applicable laws.

- **Address weapons.** Ask church leaders to consult with a locally-licensed attorney to decide what the church's weapons policy will be. The church may create different policies for trained safety and security team members that differs from its policy governing attendees. An attorney can help ensure that the policy follows state and local law and includes training requirements. Document the policy in the church's emergency response plan and follow it consistently.

- **Assemble your team.** Safety and security team members will ideally have a military, police, or medical background and a heart for ministry. Have all members go through a comprehensive screening program that includes a written application, a reference check, a criminal background check, and a personal interview. Generally, it's best to actively recruit members on an individual basis rather than posting an open call.

- **Train your team.** Conduct regular training sessions with all team members to help ensure everyone knows what to do in a crisis. Review procedures and put plans into action with situational exercises and emergency drills. Consider asking local first responders to monitor the training and provide input.

- **Equip your team.** Equipment comes with a price tag, so get budget approval from church leadership first. Two-way radios, first-aid kits, AED machines, and name tags are common equipment for safety and security teams.

- **Talk to your insurance agent.** Safety and security activities come with risks. Before deploying your team, discuss your plans with your agent. Insurance coverage may be available to help protect your ministry and its team members.

Whatever shape your team takes, creating and consistently following a good plan can help ensure that your team operates smoothly and safely.

Looking for more information?
Brotherhood Mutual offers *The Church Safety & Security Guidebook*, featuring more than 200 pages of information to help you create and manage a safety & security program.

4. Medical Response

In many churches, medical emergencies are the most common reason the safety and security team is summoned. When someone needs medical assistance, a calm and competent response can make all the difference. Consider these tips to help your safety and security personnel provide adequate first aid until first responders arrive:

- **Recruit medical responders.** Seek out people with backgrounds in first response, nursing, or medicine. Their experience can be a valuable resource. Individuals without this professional background may serve, as well, if they have relevant training in first aid, CPR, and AED use.

- **Train staff members and volunteers.** Safety and security team members may not always be on site, so it's a good idea to have key employees and volunteers obtain training in first aid, CPR, and AED use. Be sure they retrain often to keep their certifications.

- **Create and follow guidelines.** With the help of medical professionals and a locally-licensed attorney, draw up policies for team members to follow when providing medical assistance. Train (and retrain) team members on the policies.

- **Maintain equipment.** Stock the ministry with the equipment necessary for medical response, such as first-aid kits and AED units. Designate a person to check the equipment for expired items and depleted batteries, and replace as necessary. Be sure kits are positioned throughout the building, so the proper equipment is readily accessible in an emergency, but out of the reach of children.

- **Document incidents.** Use a Notice of Injury Form to describe medical incidents and the care the ministry provided. Gather contact information from the injured person and witnesses, as well as the time, date, location, and a description of all incidents.

Whether it's a bee sting, a skinned knee, or something more serious, injured people may need first aid while at church. A trained, well-equipped team can help protect people and enhance safety in your ministry.

Need a form?
The sample *Notice of Injury Form* on BrotherhoodMutual.com can help you get started in creating your own.

5. Protecting Your Staff and Congregation

The people who come to church—congregation members, visitors, friends, and others—bring their issues with them. What happens if someone becomes disruptive or dangerous to others? How can the church protect its people while ministering to the broken and hurting?

- **Be on the lookout.** People may give unspoken signals that something is wrong. If something doesn't look right, call for help from other ministry personnel or the police. In some instances, you may be able to approach the person and offer assistance—be cautious and use good judgment in assessing the situation.

- **Pay attention to workspaces.** Try to arrange offices so staff members can see visitors approaching. Encourage personnel to store valuables, such as purses and cash drawers, out of sight. Consider installing an intercom/buzzer system to help regulate office traffic during off-hours. Provide panic buttons or other discreet ways to call for help.

- **Train on verbal conflict resolution.** Often, the right words can help resolve a conflict before it becomes violent. Look into training ministry personnel in verbal de-escalation tactics.

- **Follow a violence response plan.** This plan should be part of the ministry's emergency response plan, approved by first responders and a locally-licensed attorney. The top priority should be getting people away from the violent person.

It's unlikely that a violent incident will occur at your church, but it's critical to be ready to protect your people if it does. Planning and training can help ensure that your ministry is prepared for the worst.

Want more information?
Read *Surviving a Violent Attack at Church*, a free article on BrotherhoodMutual.com

6. Cyber Security

More and more information is being stored electronically, making the potential cost of a data breach higher than ever. How can ministries protect their computers and data?

- **Avoid storing sensitive information.** The less data your ministry retains, the less you could lose in the event of a breach. Avoid saving sensitive data unless absolutely necessary. If retaining records that include sensitive data, it's a good idea to black out sensitive information, such as banking information and all but the last four digits of Social Security numbers. Consider working with trustworthy outside vendors to perform tasks such as processing electronic donations—and ask the vendors to agree, in writing, to take responsibility for protecting sensitive data.

- **Keep software updated.** Software companies regularly issue free updates to close holes hackers could climb through. Download updates to all programs and operating systems as soon as you learn that they're available.

- **Perform routine backups.** If data becomes corrupted or a hard drive fails, a recent backup can help shorten recovery time. Keep a backup at multiple secure off-site locations, or use a trustworthy cloud storage service.

- **Be careful what you click.** Emails and websites may contain links to dangerous spyware and malware. Beware of any unsolicited emails. If something looks suspicious, avoid clicking it or call the email sender to investigate.

- **Secure wireless networks.** Ask users for a password before allowing them to connect to the ministry's Wi-Fi networks, and change passwords often. Use encryption to help guard against data theft.

It's a good idea to ask for help from a church member who has a professional background in information technology, or contract with a trusted IT vendor. They can help the ministry protect its computers and sensitive data against cyber security threats.

Need a checklist?
Download the *Computer Security Checklist* from BrotherhoodMutual.com

7. Safety and Security Equipment

Good planning, dedicated people, and the right equipment can help make your safety and security efforts successful. What equipment should you consider, and what does it take to keep things in working order?

- **First-aid kits.** Include sterile gloves, bandages, instant cold compresses, ointments, and more. Assign some-one to check the kits and replace expired items on a regular basis. Be sure enough kits are placed around the facility to allow for quick access while storing kits out of the reach of children.

- **AEDs.** Automated external defibrillators can deliver an electric shock to restart a person's heart. Keep the unit on a charging station and occasionally test the primary and backup batteries, following the operating in-structions. Make sure AEDs are used only by people trained to operate them. Have safety and security team members, as well as key employees and volunteers, undergo training.

- **Two-way radios.** Hand-held radios can help personnel communicate during an emergency situation, espe-cially if cell phone service is unavailable. Look for radios that allow people to communicate from any point on church premises. Make sure the radio frequency will not interfere with wireless sound systems or other equipment. Store the units on charging stations and replace old batteries when necessary.

- **Building security tools.** Your ministry may look into security alarms, surveillance cameras, panic buttons, fire suppression systems, and other protective tools. Ask a locally-licensed attorney to make sure the equip-ment—and the ministry's use—adheres to local laws.

Work with trusted vendors to help ensure your safety and security equipment is of high quality and accomplishes the intended task, so your investment pays off for years to come.

Want more information?
Read *First Aid: Equipping and Training for Safe Use* on BrotherhoodMutual.com

8. Protecting Children

When parents drop off their children, they trust your ministry to create a safe environment. Screening people who work with children and youth—and training them to follow safety procedures—can help you provide a secure place for the church's youngest members.

- **Screen employees and volunteers.** Following a comprehensive screening process can help identify people who could pose a threat to young people. A good screening process consists of a written application, a criminal background check, a reference check, and a personal interview. Screen all employees, as well as all volunteers who will have direct contact with minors. Update background checks every three to five years, or in accordance with local laws. Ask a locally-licensed attorney to review your background screening policy to ensure it follows applicable laws.

- **Follow child protection policies and procedures.** Require volunteers to be involved with the church for at least six months before serving with minors. Follow standard check-in/check-out procedures. Maintain the proper adult-to-child ratio by increasing the number of supervisors for large groups. Instruct workers to never be alone with children—always have at least two adults in the room. Train childcare workers to report signs of abuse, as required by state and local law. Many states provide training to help employees and volunteers understand their legal and ethical obligations.

- **Ask about allergies and special considerations.** Before children check in for the first time, find out about allergies or medical conditions that require special attention. This can help you provide adequate care for all.

- **Fix hazardous conditions.** From removing choking hazards to keeping kitchens clean, take action to keep nurseries and children's areas safe. Inspect the area frequently, especially floors and areas where little hands and feet can wander into trouble.

- **Include children's areas in your emergency plan.** Nurseries and children's areas may require extra attention during evacuations or lockdown situations. Remember to account for these areas in the ministry's larger emergency response plan.

Young people require a special level of care. By taking time to fully establish a safety mindset in those who work with children and youth, your ministry will be on its way to earning a reputation as a fun, safe place for children.

Need a checklist?
Download the *Nursery Safety Checklist* from BrotherhoodMutual.com

9. Background screening

Following a comprehensive screening process is one of the best ways to protect your ministry. By screening all potential employees and volunteers, you can make a more educated decision on whether to hire or appoint them to positions of trust. The process should include the following steps:

- **Written application.** Use an application to gather basic background information. It's also a good idea, if permitted by your state's law, to ask if the applicant has a criminal history, or has been involved in or accused of sexual abuse or misconduct.

- **Criminal background check.** Obtain written permission from the applicant before performing background checks. Perform the checks required by your state, as well as any checks related to the position. For example, it's best to evaluate the driving record of someone applying to drive on behalf of the ministry. For best results, work with a trusted, qualified background screening firm. If state law does not provide a list of offenses that disqualify a candidate from a position, consider asking the local school district for their hiring standards. The existence of a criminal record doesn't necessarily disqualify a person from being hired. Weigh the seriousness of the record, the time that's passed since the offense, and the relevance of the offense to the requirements of the position.

- **Reference check.** Ask for at least two references from people who are not related to the applicant— preferably one from a ministry setting. Make sure to actually contact the references provided. References can provide firsthand insights into how the applicant has performed in previous roles.

- **Personal interview.** The interview is an opportunity to learn more about the applicant and ask about any concerns or strengths that have emerged during the screening process.

All employees and volunteers should undergo the ministry's background screening process. Remember to re-screen everyone in accordance with local law, retain and protect documents, and update your screening process as laws change. A locally-licensed attorney can help you create a policy that is feasible and complies with local laws.

Want more information?
Download *Guidelines for Ministry Workers*, a guidebook that can help you create a background screening policy for your ministry.

10. Documentation

Believe it or not, paperwork is an important part of church safety and security. Documenting your policies, procedures, and activities can help prove your ministry's internal guidelines and your efforts to follow through on them. Which documents should you keep?

- **Policies and procedures.** Written copies of policies and procedures can be used for training purposes. They also can be distributed to employees and volunteers for easy reference. You might make policies and procedures available to your congregation, too. This can show members and new attenders that you value their safety. If policies and procedures change, be sure to update all copies so everyone has the most current information.

- **Background screening records.** Keep secured files containing the application materials for all employees and volunteers. This includes written applications, results of criminal background checks, notes from reference checks, and notes from personal interviews.

- **Proof of training.** Retain records of all training each employee and volunteer undergoes—both internal training exercises and those overseen by outside organizations.

- **Incident and injury reports.** Complete an incident report or Notice of Injury form each time the safety and security team is summoned. Gather basic facts, such as contact information from all injured people and witnesses, as well as the time, date, location, and a description of the incident.

Laws vary as to how long you should keep documents on file. Check with a locally-licensed attorney to find out what the law requires in your area. If documents contain sensitive information, be sure to keep them in a secure location.

Need a form?
See the sample *Incident Report Form* on BrotherhoodMutual.com

A commitment to meeting the needs of others with compassion is the call of every ministry. It's' the passion that drives everything you do, and we understand why, because it's a passion we share. For us, protecting your ministry is more than a job—it's a commitment.

Ministry is your passion...
...We understand why.®

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