

Safety Response Teams (SAMPLE POLICY)

The policies of *Community Church* reflect our values and are understood to be in place as a guide for church leaders and members. We understand every situation cannot be anticipated, hence no policy is intended to be so restrictive as to override the use of common sense or wise discretion.

Introduction

Our church is a public house of worship and we welcome guests to join in the worship of our Lord. However, we must be aware of the world that we live in and the dangers it presents. Current events in recent years have shown us that American churches are not immune to tragedy from aggressors armed with firearms and other deadly weapons. For the safety and security of parishioners, guests, and staff we deem it prudent to have a prepared and planned response to an armed aggressor(s) who chooses to attack our congregation or guests. In addition to armed threats, we recognize there is also consistent threat of unarmed person disrupting a service, harming another person, or damaging property.

Purpose

As Christians we believe it is both prudent and proper to have a balanced approach to an assailant(s) attacking our church. Nehemiah's response to an armed threat was prayer and an armed guard, "*And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night*" (Neh. 4:9, ESV). Faith in God and taking personal responsibility is a balanced approach. While we pray for safety we will *set a guard* by having an **armed** Safety Response Team trained and ready to provide an immediate response to stop or neutralize any lethal threat. We will also have an **unarmed** Safety Response Team trained and ready to provide an immediate response to stop and remove a person who is attempting or threatening to disrupt a service, harm another (without the use of a deadly weapon), or damage church or personal property.

Definitions

Unarmed aggressor: An unarmed aggressor is a person who is attempting or threatening to cause harm to any person and/or attempting or threatening to cause damage to church or personal property.

Unarmed Safety Response Team (USRT): A team selected by the Governing Board of Elders who are not armed with firearms and have received training to respond immediately to an unarmed aggressor. The purpose of an USRT is to take control of an unarmed aggressor before that aggressor is able to harm any innocent person or disrupt a service. If it is deemed necessary or if the aggressor had to be physically removed or restrained the police should be notified.

Active shooter: The United States Federal Government defines an *active shooter* as "an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area, typically through the use of firearms."¹ Armed killers that pose a threat to churches include those inspired by radical religious ideas, jealousy, hatred, demonic influence, and the mentally unstable.

Armed Safety Response Team (ASRT): A team selected by the Governing Board of Elders who are armed with firearms and have received training to respond immediately to an active-shooter incident.

¹ (Federal Bureau of Investigation, Critical Incident Response Group, n.d.)

The purpose of an ASRT is to quickly neutralize an armed aggressor before that aggressor is able to harm any innocent person.

Preventive Measures

Preventing an attack is the best way to ensure the safety of all persons. Studies demonstrate that half of all active shooters had some connection to the church and/or church members. Therefore, there is a high probability that an assailant will be familiar to our congregation on some level. Members of the church family should be encouraged to be aware of and report any suspicious persons or threats of harm to the pastor or an elder. To help prevent incidents and to be better prepared to respond, critical information that comes to the attention of the pastor, elders, or SRT members will be maintained in a confidential file. The file will be maintained in a secure place by the pastor or his designee. The information will be shared as deemed necessary to SRT members. The information will be purged and destroyed when it is no longer necessary to maintain.

Congregational Response

In the event a person armed with a gun enters the sanctuary during a service the leader or another should notify everyone by shouting "Gun!". When the congregation hears the warning everyone should drop to the floor while the ASRT responds as trained.

SRT Response to a Threat

Members of the ASRT should respond in accordance with their training and as circumstances merit to a lethal threat. In the event of a nonlethal threat or an unarmed disrupter in a service the ASRT should react as necessary, but allow the USRT to secure and control the disruption.

Team Selection

Team members will be approved by the Governing Board of Elders and will serve at their pleasure.

Training

Keeping in mind that the purpose of an ASRT is to quickly neutralize an armed aggressor before that aggressor is able to harm any innocent person and the purpose of the USRT is to take control of an unarmed aggressor before that aggressor is able to harm any innocent person or disrupt a service proper training is necessary. Both SRTs should train as necessary to maintain a level of competence to fulfill their goal.

Congregational training will include encouraging parishioners to maintain vigilance, report suspicious or threatening people, and giving instructions how to respond in the event of an active shooter incident.

References

- Federal Bureau of Investigation, Critical Incident Response Group. (n.d.). *Active Shooter Incidents*. Retrieved from Federal Bureau of Investigation: <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-incidents>
- Rupp, T. G. (2016). *Pistol in the Pulpit*. Idaho Falls, ID: The Strong Blue Line.