

Steps in Creating a Church Safety Team for the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth

The Church is welcoming and is open to everybody. It is full of well-intentioned and good-hearted people. But it isn't automatically safe. Whenever a group of people gathers, there are safety concerns. There should be a protocol in place to handle the unforeseeable consequences.

The Rectors care deeply about the health and safety of their congregation. That is why the church's leadership team should have a safety team with strategic protocol in place.

This process is challenging and uncomfortable to talk about in the church, but it is essential in today's world.

Six steps in creating a church safety team are:

- Identify
- Recruit
- Train
- Partnership
- Deploy
- Manage

Let's take a look at each:

Identify:

Identify members whom you may want to be involved with this team. Make a list of the attributes you desire the safety and security team to display. Some general characteristics might include:

- Strong people skills
- Mental and emotional stability
- Keen ability to observe people and situations
- Good judgment and not impulsive

Building the team requires getting buy-in from the right people or three groups, such as:

A. Staff

B. Retired or current police, medical and fire professionals in the church.

C. Volunteers

We must have all three in place to have success. The church staff will administer the safety team; the retired police and fire professionals will help get the team built and provide insight; the volunteers will assist in executing. No single person can manage the safety of a church. Each group must understand what their specific roles and responsibilities are.

It is highly important to note; We must, recruit with care. While a person may have a license to carry a concealed weapon, inexperienced gun carriers generally do not have the proper skills to react in stressful situations. They may not be the best choice for your team. Hence, the retired or active law enforcement members will be great asset.

For the safety side of your team, identify emergency medical technicians, registered nurses, and doctors within the church.

Recruit

After you have identified potential participants for your safety team, ask them to join. Let it be clear that it is volunteer position. Two dos and don'ts,

- **Do:** Meet face-to-face. Describe exactly what you're recruiting for and explain all the ups and downs involved in this volunteer position.
- **Don't:** Oversell or glorify the position, beg, or say 'God told me you should do this.'

Above all, make sure your prospective volunteer knows that an application process involving a criminal background check is required.

Most people who want to volunteer for the safety team are good people with good intentions. Nevertheless, we should run a background check on every single member who serves on this volunteer positions.

Running these background checks is a way of demonstrating to the church that we take the moral and professional integrity of the safety team seriously.

Requiring background checks will make people feel safer, and it will add a layer of trust and unity to the safety team.

Failing to run background checks on the safety staff and volunteers is itself a failure of proper safety protocol and is not optional.

Train

Generally, safety training involves both individual and group activities. It is important to explain the church's policy and guidelines for dealing with different types of safety needs.

Nothing damages volunteers' enthusiasm more than throwing them into a job without proper training and orientation. In a potentially dangerous ministry like safety, policy and procedural guidelines play a big part in the training process.

Safety training should be ongoing, scheduled, and completed at regular intervals. Attendance should be mandatory—no exceptions.

The Church need to have something in place.

Wherever there is a group gathering, there will be the potential of an incident to occur, whether that be a conflict, medical issue, or mental health issue.

There needs to be a plan for emergency situation and personnel who have operational control when an incident occurs to execute that protocol and minimize the risk of real harm.

As leaders, it falls on us to mitigate harm to our congregations, not by being the safety officer, but by delegating to church volunteer or staff who are trained and competent to put a team and protocol in place for common potential incidents.

When people think of issues or concerns at the church, they often think of active shootings, protests, and fires. They are all concerns and must be taken seriously. There are equally and more common issues over which the church team should take ownership that does not seem urgent but are very serious.

Three primary examples of these commonly overlooked issues are:

1. Child Custody issues
2. Mental health issues
3. Domestic Situations

If a member has an order of protection against another member, it falls on the safety team to manage that situation and communicate with the appropriate parties to ensure that nothing unlawful occurs. Taking these measures is a way of de-escalating an unfortunate situation and ensuring member safety.

If there is a custody dispute between parents, the church team should oversee child custody so that no fraudulent exchange of care can occur. One way of accomplishing this is requiring the parent who picks up a child to be the same parent who dropped them off. It's possible that a parent might appeal to an emergency situation to retrieve their child from childcare, but the

response should be: “We have a protocol in place to keep the children safe in emergency situations. The original parent who dropped off the child still needs to be the parent who picks them up.”

Mental health issues are increasingly common, which can sometimes cause harassment, inclination toward violence, or self-harm. The church safety team should take a proactive role in partnering with the pastoral staff to help those with mental health issues to access the help they need, as well as deter those with these issues from causing any harm in the church.

Partnership: Liaison with local fire and police professionals

The safety team leader and rector should liaison with local police and fire departments to develop a positive working relationship, while asking their retired police professionals in the church for assistance. The chances are that those professionals in your church already have their own observations.

The team should accomplish two things:

- Make members feel safe, not intimidated
- Be a team player and follow the safety protocol

When the team have established a positive working relationship with your local police and fire departments, The team should communicate this positive relationship to your church. When members know that the police are present and friendly with the church, it deters potential safety threats, and it gives members a sense of safety.

Deploy

Now the team is trained, this step deploys the new volunteer to his or her area of responsibility. After the first deployment, it’s important that the team lead check with the team at regular intervals and see how the new volunteer is doing.

Over time, the volunteer should rotate into each of the positions covered by the safety team. (Depending on the size of the church). Every volunteer should have an opportunity to become familiar with all areas of responsibilities to the point that they can be called upon to function in any area if necessary. Flexibility is an important element of an effective safety team.

Manage

Arguably, this could be most important step in the process. In managing the team. The leader will not only help volunteers assume an important job in the church, but also help them to see it as a personal ministry.

Try not to allow volunteers' excitement about their ministry get the best of them. If team members serve every weekend for all services and extra events during the week, that excitement can fade quickly. It will be replaced by burnout, fatigue, discouragement, and even spiritual exhaustion.

To prevent this situation, leadership is critical. Establish a serving schedule that intentionally gives volunteers time off with their family. Allow no exceptions to the schedule you develop. We all need time away for spiritual refreshment and time to relax. The result is likely to be long-term service and volunteers who are refreshed and ready to serve.