

SafeGuards

HELPING YOU CREATE A SAFE & SECURE SANCTUARY |

Featuring Brotherhood Mutual's

Five Steps To A Smart Start

- Engage leadership
- Assess your needs
- Make key decisions
- Form a team
- Create a plan

Overcoming Tragedy
Jeff Laster
A Dawning of Light





Brotherhood Mutual's

Five Steps To A Smart Start

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The following was excerpted from Brotherhood Mutual's *The Church Safety & Security Guidebook* and *Quick Start*.

Every church needs a safety and security ministry. But a safety and security mindset doesn't just happen. It takes someone who is passionate about creating a program that is focused on ministry. It takes coordination, planning and leadership.

It takes *you*.

Here are five steps to help you get started.

1 ENGAGE LEADERSHIP

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

For a project to succeed, it needs leadership support. In ministry, this means getting a commitment from the pastor and possibly the church board. Their influence can make or break a new initiative.

Prepare

Help your pastor and church leaders see that improved safety is necessary. They may be unaware of the need or have concerns about launching a safety and security ministry.

Be prepared to answer questions like:

- Why is this necessary?
- What would it cost?
- Would it be sustainable?
- What message would it send to visitors or the community?

Develop a vision for a safety and security ministry and rehearse how you will respond to possible objections.

Take action

- **Show, don't tell.** Offer examples from real life — perhaps incidents that happened in similar churches or communities.
- **Roll film.** Have leaders watch video news clips of recent incidents at churches.
- **Initiate dialogue.** Open up discussions about safety and security issues at your church.

2 ASSESS YOUR NEEDS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Sometimes, we're too close to issues to detect them. Conducting a safety and security assessment can identify a church's unique strengths and weaknesses.

Prepare

Recruit fresh eyes to help you. Place a call to a local crime prevention officer, a fire marshal, ambulance service or disaster response agency. They can detect issues you didn't know you had. Also, enlist key church volunteers to uncover safety and security issues in every room and activity.

Take action

- **Make a plan.** Who will help assess church safety? How soon?
- **Have a chat.** Ask people in key ministries about safety and security issues they have observed. What improvements would they make?
- **Write it down.** Note any issues and ideas for correction.

3 MAKE KEY DECISIONS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

During the assessment, you identified safety and security problems and solutions. Now, leadership must make some decisions. This involves discussion about the scope, financing and timing of your program. Leadership also should consult the church's attorney and insurance agent about liability risks and insurance coverage.

Prepare

Review options for addressing safety and security issues at your church, focusing in their cost, required manpower and ease of implementation. Understand the ramifications of weapons, if you propose allowing them in church. Develop handouts to illustrate the pros and cons of your suggestions.

Take action

- **Make your pitch.** Share your recommendations with the church pastor and other church leaders.
- **Invite discussion.** Unearth and address objections key leaders may have. Talk about the size, shape and structure of a safety and security program at your church.
- **Seek approval.** Ask leaders to approve taking specific action to improve safety, such as creating a safety and security team and associated policies.

4 FORM A TEAM

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Recruiting a safety and security team requires great care. You'll need the right mix of skills, including leadership, conflict management, observation, communication and medical response abilities. You'll want people who are ministry-minded and calm, and you'll need to train your team.

Prepare

To pick the right mix for your ministry, ask yourself:

- How many medical response people will we need?
- How large must the safety and security team be to adequately protect all services and special activities?
- How many people are needed to cover vacations, illnesses and scheduled breaks?
- What will be their qualifications and responsibilities?

Take action

- **Develop materials.** You'll need a written application, a list of qualifications and a job description for team members. You'll also need forms that allow you to conduct background checks on all applicants.



Jeff Laster A Dawning of Light

"YOU HAVE TO HAVE A PLAN, and you have to document and train on that plan," says Jeff Laster. "Treat it like a ministry — and dedicate resources to it."

On September 15, 1999, Jeff was the first of seven wounded in a shooting spree during a youth event at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Seven others — four of them teenagers — were killed.

The attack took 12 minutes.

"At that time, violence in a church was a totally foreign concept," says Laster. "After I was shot, I ran through all the scenarios I'd prepared for in my head — fire, car accident, tornado — but 'shooter' wasn't there. We had never talked about that possibility."

Now the church administrator at Wedgwood, Jeff helps lead the safety and security team at Wedgwood. He also speaks to other ministries about security. Taking their cues from many security experts, Laster and his team have taken an "iceberg approach" to security at Wedgwood: 10% of the security is seen, while 90% is below the surface.

"You want at least some of it — security cameras, door locks, lighting — to be visible so people know it's there. It's reassuring to your congregation and helps deter opportunistic criminals," says Laster. "The behind-the-scenes part is about having plans for every aspect of your ministry — and making sure people are trained on those plans."

"You can't just prepare for an active shooter. That's one of the least likely scenarios you'll face. You have to think about child abduction or abuse, about rape and theft, about domestic violence. Churches of all sizes need measures in place. Because in many ways, smaller churches can look like much friendlier-looking targets."

In the time since the shooting, Wedgwood Baptist Church has grown and expanded. The specter of that dark September day still lingers, but the church, collectively, has embraced it as an opportunity rather than an obstacle.

"Wedgwood was strong before," Laster said. "This experience made us stronger because we were able to build on that strength. Every event is an opportunity to trust in God and lean on Him."

- **Take a personal approach.** Since you're looking for a very specific mix of skills and temperament, it's best to approach potential team members individually. A blanket invitation may invite hurt feelings.
- **Do a fine-mesh screening.** Take background screening seriously. Review written applications. Check at least three professional references. Conduct thorough interviews, and obtain criminal records from all counties in which your top candidates have lived recently.

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CREATE A PLAN

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Consider the simplicity of a stop sign. When people encounter one, they know what to do. A safety and security plan functions this way, too. People know exactly what to do when they see a situation outlined in the plan. A well-written plan, communicated effectively and practiced by your team, can reduce panic and lessen injuries in a crisis.

Prepare

You may already have a plan. Does it address all relevant emergencies, including weather-related and medical ones? What about man-made situations, such

as bomb threats or disruptive individuals? For your plan to work, it needs to be **coordinated, consistent** and **communicated**.

Take action

- **Find a template.** Ask schools, government agencies or other churches for sample plans that you could use for ideas and best practices.
- **Tailor your plan.** Avoid "borrowing" another organization's plan. Your ministry may not offer the same activities, leadership model or structure. Customize every part of the plan to fit your ministry.
- **Review and approve it.** Before adopting a safety and security plan, be sure to seek input from subject-matter experts, including the church attorney. Have the leadership board approve the final draft before producing copies for distribution and training.

Note: The concepts shared in this piece are intended to raise awareness of safety and security issues facing churches. Development of safety plans should only be undertaken in consultation with legal and safety professionals.

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