OZARK Police Department
Charles R. Ward – Chief of Police

Church Protective Management: Procedural Notebook
Security and Safety Compliance

Subject: Understanding Basic Protocols for Church Crisis Preparedness

The potential for church-related violence in the United States is quite real. The sheer number of violent church attacks and disrupted planned attacks by malevolent actors in the United States provides one indication of this possibility. Many church officials are re-evaluating their prevention and emergency preparedness measures to see how well they address the wide array of attack methodologies used in vicious attacks.

Protocols for communication, lockdown, reverse evacuation and reunification are just some of the procedure's churches should have in place.

Emergency Communications Protocols

Without communication there is no command and control. This aspect of emergency preparedness involves written, trained and practiced approaches to improve the speed and effectiveness of communications in the first critical seconds of a crisis event. Emergency communications protocols combined with facility situation drills and tabletop exercises can help prepare church staff and life-safety members to make the right communications in the correct order. **Effective communications is therefore the basis for effective operations**. Given this, communications planning should be a foundational piece of any church's crisis-preparedness platform. Communications planning can be challenging; requiring infrastructure and protocol that will assure effective movement of information to create a common operating procedure, in emergency operations.

In dealing with church security and life-safety issues there is a cohesiveness of planning required for effective communications. As a part of such planning processes, leadership should always begin with a discussion of some essential terms and concepts that, once understood, will help to drive the process; i.e., **how the message is delivered from the**

sender to the receiver . . . such as a cell phone, two-way radio, or some form of public address system.

Emergency Lockdown Protocols

One of the most hotly debated protective actions – the emergency lockdown protocol – is also among the most important procedures for acts of church violence. Extensive analysis, during a three-year research effort, demonstrates that the fail rate for staff-initiated lockdowns is extremely high when all-hazards scenarios are used. In fact, such research indicates that people in various workplace conditions, participating in timed one-on-one crisis simulations failed to implement a lockdown on their own initiative more than 70 percent of the time when presented with situations where a lockdown should be utilized. For this reason, a focus on training and empowering staff and life-safety members to initiate a lockdown and to notify the leadership of the need to lockdown the church infrastructure is especially important.

It must be noted that there is no "one size fits all" lockdown protocol that will work properly in every church scenario because such procedures must reflect the differences in church design and local law enforcement response capabilities. Lockdown protocols that look great on paper or during basic drills can have significant gaps when tested by actual events; i.e., analyzed instances of delays in the implementation of lockdowns ranging from a minute to several minutes in actual incidents, including failure rates of 60% to 81% during simulations that required individual staff members to make and communicate the lockdown decision.

Research indicates some lessons learned:

- _**Don't focus all of your efforts on active shooter situations**_.

  If lockdown training and drills are focused on active shooter situations, a higher fail rate occurs when other types of incidents occur or are simulated. Research indicates that experiencing or simulating a wide range of crisis situations can prepare churches to make life and death decisions more effectively.

- _**Churches that only have one type of lockdown procedure are more likely to have plan failure during a crisis**_.

  While it is normally good to keep things simple in church crisis planning, it has been found that churches that only have one protocol based on active shooter situations and other crisis events have a high fail rate because church administrators are averse to

overreacting in a situation they feel is too "minor" to warrant a lockdown. This can allow a situation to escalate into a deadly event because an early opportunity to lock down the building is missed. Having a lower level, "preventive" or "soft" lockdown option is important because most situations where lockdowns are needed do not involve weapons.

- *Codes can kill.*

Plan failure can occur in actual events because church staff members may confuse different codes when they are used in a crisis. For example, during a security assessment of a school district, administrators at 22% of the schools assessed accidently ordered lockdowns instead of sheltering procedures in response to a tornado scenario. This could easily result in mass loss of life. In another district, a staff member at one school referred to a "code purple" protocol that was not listed in any plan. No other staff members referred to this protocol. The staff member was able to describe in detail what a "code purple" would entail, but there was no way to be sure that other staff members would know what to do when hearing this instruction.

- *All church life-safety members should be issued keys, participate in life-safety development and some form of lockdown drill.*

If one door is not locked soon enough because a single employee is unable to lockdown, mass casualties can occur. It is important to allow life-safety members the tools they need to keep the building secure throughout church services and special events. And life-safety members should be given ample practice in physically performing lockdown procedures before a crisis. People in a crisis often fail to perform seemingly simple tasks like evacuating a building or going around obstacles when it would be clear to any rational person that action should be taken. In one example, research describes an airplane accident where a passenger repeatedly pulled on her armrest instead of the emergency door release latch until another passenger reached over to help open the door (at which point the emergency door fell on the first passenger, injuring her and temporarily blocking the exit).

- *Certain doors should either be lock controlled (access control points) or locked when the door is not actively in use.*

Some churches require access control at their doors as a preventive measure. The way the church operates can impact the practicality of this approach, but in general it is only a small adjustment to make in the church's culture. Some church administrators feel

that keeping doors open creates a positive and inviting environment, but research suggests that locking or control-locking <u>certain</u> doors does not have a negative effect on the church environment.

- ***<u>If life-safety members are not trained with drills, they are less likely to respond effectively during a crisis.</u>***

The threat that indicates the need for a lockdown often takes place in parts of the church away from the main sanctuary. This means that it is important to hold drills where different life-safety members are required to make the decision to initiate a lockdown without consulting with anyone. While the timing of the drill should be determined by the safety team leader, individual members should be required to make the lockdown decision after being prompted with a scenario. While many people assume that members will perform how we want them to in an actual event, the incredible stress of a crisis has extreme effects on the human body. In another case study, a restaurant/lounge fire, some employees looked for a supervisor to report the fire . . . while a busboy, taking immediate action to evacuate the building, saving hundreds of lives that would have otherwise been lost due to a delayed response.

- ***<u>Basing the lockdown decision on the location of the threat instead of the nature of the threat can be dangerous.</u>***

Often referred to as lockout/lockdown protocols, taking this approach has an extremely high fail rate because it is exceedingly difficult for life-safety personnel to quickly decide which approach is best when they are presented with varying scenarios. For example, in scenarios where there was a clearly suspicious individual in a high-rise building who was not armed, an angry woman brandishing a knife in the front office of a business, or an intoxicated man brandishing a large crow bar in a school hallway — most employees did not order a lockdown at all when this type of protocol was in place. Past crises have shown us that people tend to act based on physical memory or the direction of others rather than internal rational decision-making.

Reverse Evacuation Protocol

Most churches that do not have a written reverse evacuation protocol are not properly prepared to implement an emergency lockdown, shelter in place for specific crisis-based incidents or severe weather sheltering protocol when staff, congregants, and visitors are outside when a crisis situation arises. Reverse evacuation drills can be relatively easy to

conduct and are especially important. Typically, the reverse evacuation drill is used in combination with a lockdown drill, or a severe weather sheltering drill.

- *Research indicates that reverse evacuation protocols and drills are critical.*

   Lockdowns, sheltering procedures for severe weather and other critical life-saving protocols cannot be implemented as rapidly if there is no mechanism to promptly return church members who are outside to the building in an organized fashion. While most staff are already familiar with the basic concept of a reverse evacuation, very few understand it as a formal procedure and often delay action while considering what to do when they need to return to the building quickly.

Room Clear Protocol

Though very few church emergency plans include it, the room clear protocol is extremely useful. The room clear protocol can be used to rapidly clear people from a sanctuary, office area, gymnasium, or other church space. The combination of a thoughtfully worded room clear protocol, effective staff development and periodic room clear drills can significantly improve survivability for a variety of types of incidents. This protocol is also extremely useful for much more common situations, such as out of control visitors, intoxicated visitors or a medical emergencies.

- *Research indicates that room clear protocols can also be important*

   Churches must have a mechanism to quickly clear people from the sanctuary or from rooms where there is a threat. Such protocol procedures include sending people to another part of the church building quickly during a small crisis that does not require a church-wide evacuation but does necessitate quickly removing congregants, visitors and employees away from a dangerous situation.

Bomb Threat and Explosion Protocols

Caution should always be exercised when evacuating a church during a bomb threat alert. Automatic evacuation for every bomb threat can make it easier for an aggressor to shoot evacuees or to target them with an explosive device. Visually sweeping of evacuation routes and sites are especially important considerations for life-safety teams. It is also

recommended that churches have plans for a law enforcement presence to protect evacuees.

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