

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CHURCH SECURITY

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As a Christian, a former law enforcement administrator, firearms instructor, and church member, it amazes me at the lackadaisical approach to church security that some pastors and church boards take in this modern age of random shootings and targeted assassinations that have taken place on church grounds over the last few decades. These events have been well documented. Here are a number of examples of incidents that have taken place.

February 14, 2010 - Richmond, California - Three hooded men walk into Gethsemane Church of God in Christ and opened fire and then fled the scene, as the singing of the choir was replaced by frightened screams. The two victims, a 14-year-old boy and a 19-year-old man, were hospitalized.

March 8, 2009 - Maryville, Illinois - Suspect Terry Joe Sedlacek, 27, of Troy, walks into the First Baptist Church, and shoots pastor Fred Winters dead, point blank. Several church members are injured by a knife in the struggle to capture after the attack, The suspect also had stabbed himself, but survived, when his gun jams.

July 27, 2008 - Knoxville, Tennessee - A gunman opens fire in a church during a youth performance, killing two people and injuring seven.

Dec. 9, 2007 - Colorado - Three people are killed and five wounded in two shooting rampages, one at a missionary school in suburban Denver and one at a church in Colorado Springs. The gunman in the second incident is killed by a guard.

May 20, 2007 - Moscow, Idaho - A standoff between police and a suspect in the shootings of three people in a Presbyterian Church ended with three dead, including one police officer.

Aug. 12, 2007 - Neosho, Missouri - First Congregational Church - 3 killed - Eiken Elam Saimon shot and killed the pastor and two deacons and wounded five others.

May 21, 2006 - Baton Rouge, Louisiana - The Ministry of Jesus Christ Church - 4 killed - The four at the church who were shot were members of Erica Bell's family; she was abducted and murdered elsewhere; Bell's mother, church pastor Claudia Brown, was seriously wounded - Anthony Bell, 25, was the shooter.

Feb. 26, 2006 - Detroit, Michigan - Zion Hope Missionary Baptist Church - 2 killed + shooter - Kevin L. Collins, who reportedly went to the church looking for his girlfriend, later killed himself.

April 9, 2005 - College Park, Georgia - A 27-year-old airman died after being shot at a church, where he had once worked as a security guard.

March 12, 2005 - Brookfield, Wisconsin - Living Church of God - 7 killed + shooter - Terry Ratzmann opened fire on the congregation, killing seven and wounding four before taking his own life.

July 30, 2005 - College Park, Georgia - World Changers Church International - shooter killed - Air Force Staff Sgt. John Givens was shot five times by a police officer after charging the officer, following violent behavior.

Dec. 17, 2004 - Garden Grove, Calif.: A veteran musician at the Crystal Cathedral shoots himself to death after a nine-hour standoff.

Oct. 5, 2003 - Atlanta, Georgia - Turner Monumental AME Church - 2 killed + shooter - Shelia Wilson walked into the church while preparations are being made for service and shot the pastor, her mother and then herself.

June 10, 2002 - Conception, Missouri - Benedictine monastery - 2 killed + shooter - Lloyd Robert Jeffress shot four monks in the monastery killing two and wounding two, before killing himself.

March 12, 2002 - Lynbrook, New York - Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church - 2 killed - Peter Troy, a former mental patient, opens fire during Mass, killing the priest and a parishioner. He later receives a life sentence.

May 18, 2001 - Hopkinsville, Kentucky - Greater Oak Missionary Baptist Church - 2 killed - Frederick Radford stood up in the middle of a revival service and began shooting at his estranged wife, Nicole Radford, killing her and a woman trying to help her.

Sept. 15, 1999 - Fort Worth, Texas - Wedgewood Baptist Church - 7 killed + shooter - Larry Gene Ashbrook shot dead seven people and injured a further seven at a concert by Christian rock group Forty Days in Fort Worth, Texas before killing himself.

April 15, 1999 - Salt Lake City, Utah - LDS Church Family History Library - 2 killed + shooter - Sergei Babarin, 70, with a history of mental illness, entered the library, killed two people and wounded four others before he was gunned down by police.

The following are popular attitudes (and statements) of men in positions of church leadership:

It won't happen here!

There is too much liability in preparing for an event that will likely not happen.

I will not allow any member of my church to be armed. This is opening the door for a law suit.

If you were to ask the pastors who survived a church shooting (some did not) they will tell you that they would have never anticipated such an attack in their facility. These pastors will also tell you that they have since better prepared themselves for a possible future attack as well.

For a pastor to say that it “won't happen here” shows a poor mindset of ignorance and lack of true stewardship as the shepherd of his flock. If it couldn't happen in YOUR church then it can't happen in ANY church! Sadly the fact remains that it HAS happened and it WILL happen again and it just MIGHT happen in your facility with your congregation! I would sincerely and passionately urge every pastor, deacon, or board member to seek out a plan of action in starting a church security team and plan.

Here is something else to think about. Liability is a two way street. If you are afraid to provide a plan of action that includes armed personnel after you have been requested to do so by a member or members of your congregation, you can and likely will be held liable for the deaths and injuries that may happen to your flock and any visitors to your church.

Let's take a look at some Biblical principles of the self defense, preservation and security.

In Luke 22:36 Christ tells us, “... he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one!” This is not a parable. It is not a metaphor. It is strong advice given by the Son of God!

Did Jesus believe in preserving the peace and sanctity of the Lord's house? You bet he did! Let's take a look at John 14!

13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,

14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:

15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

Let's take a look at a few key facts regarding this incident recorded in scripture.

1. **The Lord's house was infiltrated and desecrated, not in a violent fashion but in a non-violent, passive aggressive manner.**
2. **Jesus' first response – He made a weapon. He didn't find one. He didn't buy one. He didn't borrow one. He MADE ONE! Any court of law would state that this fact proves that His attack on the sellers was premeditated and deliberate. The time it would take to fashion a scourge of small cords, braiding it and tying it all together would have given any man ample time to contemplate the course of action that they were about to take and reconsider. Keep in mind that this was Christ, The omniscient Son of God who could not sin. He knows all and did not need time to reconsider.**
3. **He used the weapon!**

On a side note – This course of action would be considered a first degree assault in our modern criminal justice system. Our belief system today would dictate that a person who commits a first degree assault (premeditated at that) would be committing a sin. Yet Jesus, who was and is and will always be sinless did it. That must mean that sin is not always what we think it is.

Now think about this. If Christ would arm himself and defend his Father's house from desecration by non-violent passive aggressive intruders, what are you as a pastor doing to defend the House of the Lord and His children from those who would actually arm themselves, assault, and kill those He loves?

Are you following Christ's example of true stewardship in preserving His house and His children. If not, you could be held accountable, not only to God, but before the criminal and civil systems of our land.

There are many resources available to the pastor to aid in the research and implementation of providing an armed security ministry (yes, it is a form of ministry).

Please keep in mind that should you decide to incorporate an armed plan of action that those participating in the program who will be armed must abide by all state and federal regulations. Check with your local firearms instructors who have a background in law enforcement. You will find that they will most likely be eager to provide training and information to you and your members.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

<http://www.churchsecurityplanning.com>

<http://www.churchsecurityconference.com>

<http://tinalewisrowe.com/category/safety-and-security/the-greeter-and-usher-role>

<http://store.churchlawtodaystore.com/pryoco.html>

<http://www.speakupmovement.org/church/content/userfiles/church%20security.pdf>

<http://www.safetyinfo.com/aa-members/Church%20and%20Religious%20Facility%20Safety%20and%20Security%20Plan.htm>

<http://store.brotherhoodmutual.com/?ad=ChurchSecurityKit&gclid=COXy7I2Rpq0CFWvptgodVBj5ng>

<http://churchsecuritymember.com/church-security-the-role-of-greeters-and-ushers-part-1/>

http://www.freechurchforms.com/church_emergency_plan.html

<http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/coad/documents/ChurchCrimePreventionVSept2008.pdf>

A GREAT HANDBOOK:

http://rmdc.org/files/Resources/The_Greeter_and_Usher_Role_In_Church_Security-Tina_Lewis_Rowe.pdf