

Creating a Security Team

No one is immune to violence, including faith-based organizations. Creating a security team at your place of worship, can go a long way toward ensuring the safety of your employees, members and guests.

Here are tips for creating your security team, putting a plan of action in place and setting standards for its operations.

- Include staff members, volunteers and congregants on your security team.
- Provide radios and earpieces for the team as a primary communication tool.
- Identify potential crisis events.
- Establish a written security and violent response plan for your organization.
- Train and use greeters and ushers as a first line of defense to detect potential threats involving suspicious people, packages and vehicles.
- Establish procedures for patrolling exterior and interior areas before, during and after services, as well as during regular business hours during the week.
- Conduct a security sweep of the entire building before locking all doors and windows for the day.
- Ask members to help keep an eye on the property during off hours and report unusual activity to law enforcement.
- Conduct periodic safety surveys of all buildings and grounds and keep written records of conditions and corrective actions.
- Call police if a suspicious person is on your property and let the police investigate the situation.

Where to start

To help identify areas of risk and provide security recommendations, the St. Petersburg Police Department provides, **free of charge**, an in-depth security assessment along with a written security report.

For further information or to request an assessment, please contact:

**St. Petersburg Police Department
Community Awareness Division
1301 First Avenue North
St. Petersburg, FL 33705
727-893-4993**

Nothing can prevent all crime. That is why it is important to take measures to minimize risk, when possible.



**If you see something suspicious,
Text the keyword
“SPPD” and your tip to 847-411.**

This publication can be made available upon request in alternative formats, such as, Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer disk. Requests can be made by calling (727) 893-7345 (Voice) or 711 for the Florida Relay Service or email the ADA Coordinator at lendel.bright@stpete.org. Please allow 72 hours for your request to be processed.

Securing Your House of Worship

**Develop a Plan of Action
Before Tragedy Strikes**



**St. Petersburg Police Department
St. Petersburg, FL
727-893-4993**



Protecting a religious institution from crime requires an approach that balances public access and security.

It's critical to use crime prevention strategies that protect your members and property, but won't interfere with the overall mission of the institution for outreach and ministry.

Building Exterior Security

Criminals look for an easy opportunity, so don't let your house of worship be an easy target. Make sure the areas surrounding your buildings are safe.

Here are some simple but important upgrades you can make to help ensure the safety of your members, guests and employees.

Install deadbolts. Deadbolts provide the best possible security of any door locks.

Lock your doors. An open-door policy at your worship center is a nice thought, but the fact is, you need to restrict access. Unlock the front door to your worship center only during worship services. Be sure all doors and windows at your other buildings are closed and locked at all times.



Keep track of your keys. It's not unusual for worship centers to hand out multiple keys. Limit distribution to a few people

and keep a record of who in your organization has a key. Also, never hide a key outside your building. Rekey your locks if a key is lost or not returned.

Upgrade your outdoor lighting. Using the right size lamps and fixtures helps create a feeling of safety for staff, congregants, volunteers and visitors.

Consider your foliage. Keep all bushes around your buildings trimmed so people cannot hide behind them.

Install security cameras. Today's digital cameras can connect wirelessly to a recording system in your main office or directly to your security company. Install them near doorways and other high-traffic areas. Make sure your cameras are near a light source so the images on your video are clear.

Consider audible alarms. Many times, audible alarm systems are overlooked in favor of silent alarms. The sound of an alarm, however, is exactly what you need to signal an emergency. The sound can alert neighbors and passersby to potential danger as well as scare off intruders.

Invite the community to get involved. If possible, start a Neighborhood Watch program at your ministry. Neighbors look out for one another because they want their community to be safe too.

Add safety curbs and barriers. Adding curbs around your grounds is a good way to direct the flow of traffic. In addition, safety curbs or retaining walls offer security benefits. Terraces, raised plant beds, trees, planters, fencing, gatehouses and bollards also are good protective tools. Consider temporary barriers for special events or festivals.

Building Interior Security

Violent acts, in or around worship centers, have become more common and the trend is likely to continue.

To help avoid a potentially dangerous and costly situation, make sure to follow these practices to protect the interior of your house of worship and the people who may be there.

- If opening your house of worship for a service or special event, only unlock doors as needed. Do not unlock all the doors unless necessary.
- Limit access to childcare, business offices, and cash count areas.
- Inspect entrance hardware, door closers and locks and ensure they are in working order.
- When lights are turned off, check that emergency lighting is in working order.
- Have solid doors with locks on all sensitive areas of the interior.
- Consider establishing a "safe room" for the religious head of the facility.
- Provide alarm alternatives, like flashing lights and visual readouts to send out emergency alerts throughout the facility.
- Create an emergency plan that includes an evacuation plan with exits marked. Ensure all exits are clear of any obstacles and easy to access.
- Consider utilizing CCTV cameras in the nursery and children's rooms.