



# ACTIVE SHOOTER SAFETY

PREPARE | RESPOND | MINISTER



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# MINISTERING IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY

[Originally published in April/June 2016 issue of *Elder's Digest*, a quarterly resource for local church leaders]

Tragedy is a fact of life. In the past year, terrorist bombings, active shooter incidents in schools and churches, and natural disasters occurring worldwide claimed many lives and critically injured more. As ministry leaders, we cannot shield ourselves or our congregations from heartbreak.

Christ warned us tragic times would come. He also promised He would be with us through every moment (Matthew 28:20). This knowledge gives us hope and comfort and helps us cope with loss and grief.

## **The Role of Church Leadership in the Midst of Tragedy**

Ministry leaders are primary points of contact for the bereaved. When a tragedy occurs, church leaders provide emotional support and spiritual guidance for those who experience loss. Tragic deaths, such as a young person's suicide or mass shooting casualties, affect an entire congregation.

## **What You Can Do**

The church's greatest strength is its ability to provide hope and comfort in a time of grief. As spiritual leaders, reach out to those who are hurting and provide for their spiritual needs. Pray with the bereaved and remind them of God's love through their time of suffering. Demonstrate compassion and sympathy through the use of active listening skills. Bereaved individuals are reassured when they believe you hear them, and their emotions are validated.

Equally important is the ability for church leaders to create a safe place for people to grieve together. Open the worship space for prayer vigils. Hold a community



meeting to discuss the tragedy. Creating a safe space for those not directly impacted gives other church members the chance to mourn and find support from each other.

Another option is to hold a meeting with the congregation following a service. Members can then openly dialogue with each other and their spiritual leaders about their experiences, emotions, and concerns about the situation.

These events do not have to be structured, but someone must be designated to make certain all members have a chance to be heard. It is important that everyone involved understands that these meetings are not meant to be group therapy sessions. Limit conversations to the subjects of the tragedy and those directly impacted.

### When to Seek Outside Support

Many times, church and spiritual leaders are sought after by bereaved members to render counseling services. Unless the leader has been trained in clinical counseling or another counseling discipline, providing psychological therapy goes beyond their scope of practice. It may be necessary to meet with the individual(s) once or twice to determine if their needs are of a spiritual or psychological nature.

If the needs are of a psychological nature, such as grief counseling or family therapy, refer the bereaved to trained professional counselors. Ministry leaders should have a referral list of appropriate counselors

and social workers for domestic and child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, marriage and family therapy, and individual counseling.

When an event affects an entire congregation, leaders can network with local professional counselors or aid agencies on behalf of their members. Churches can also assist bereaved members by posting flyers, brochures, or contact information for trusted organizations such as Adventist Community Services, The American Red Cross, The Volunteers of America, or Children’s Disaster Services. Organizations such as these are trained to provide aid and mental health counseling for those coping with large-scale disasters.

### Give Love and Hope

Utilizing outside help is not a sign of weak faith or distrust in God. God knew that the hardships of a sinful world would threaten to overwhelm us; therefore, we are counseled to bear each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). As Christians, the greatest help we can give to those who are hurting are the gifts of love and hope. Love for each other and hope in a loving God who watches over us, grieves with us, and longs for the day when He can gather us to Himself to wipe every tear from our eyes.



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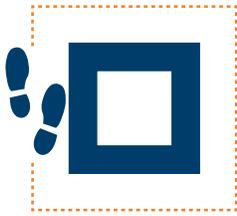


# SECURING THE CHURCH BUILDING

***The church service is over.*** *The last potluck dish has been washed and packed away. It is now time to secure the church building before heading home, out for ministry, or a Sabbath nature hike.*

*Every Sabbath a designated official, usually the church deacon or elder of the week, has a very important job. It is his or her responsibility to secure the local church building and all of its assets. Use this 3-Step Checklist as a guide.*





## Step 1. Perimeter Check

- Walk around the exterior of the church building, checking all exterior doors and windows. Lock all doors and note any opened windows to close when you go inside.
- Make a note of any damaged or malfunctioning locks. Repair or replace them as soon as possible.
- Examine the exterior fence and gate(s), if applicable, for compromised security. Note any concerns and present them to the safety committee during the next meeting.
- Check any outside or additional buildings on the property to be sure they are locked.
- Check the trash dumpster area. Trash containers should be secured away from the building. Deposit all trash in the appropriate containers and close all trash container covers.
- Non-secured items (trash cans, tables, chairs, equipment, door decorations, etc.) should be anchored or moved inside the building.
- Collect any personal items that have been left behind and place them in lost and found.

## Step 2. Interior Check

Check each room inside of the church building. Close any open windows. Ensure all rooms are vacant and all lights, except security lights, are turned off.

- When lights are turned off, check that emergency lighting is in working order.
- Double-check that all sanctuary aisles, emergency exits, and hallways are clear.
- Check that all water faucets are turned off.
- Electronic equipment should be locked in interior rooms and not visible from windows or doors.
- Lock all interior doors that should be locked.
- If you see any personal items, place them in lost and found.



## Step 3. Secure the Building

- Once the perimeter and interior checks are completed, and the building is verified as being vacant, check the security systems and cameras, if applicable, to be sure they are working.
- Set the security alarm for the building and lock the front door on your way out.



IF AT ANY POINT DURING THIS **3-STEP PROCESS** YOU NOTICE ANYTHING UNUSUAL OR OUT OF THE ORDINARY, STOP AND INVESTIGATE. MAKE NOTES TO SHARE AT THE NEXT CHURCH SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING.

## Church Security 24-7

Church security is more than sturdy locks and a weekly walkabout. Everyone must be observant and responsive to suspicious activity. In some locations, it may also mean the visible presence of a trained security team. To learn more about protecting your church or ministry, sign up for our *Solutions* newsletter, at [AdventistRisk.org/solutions](http://AdventistRisk.org/solutions), and follow us on social media.

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# HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHURCH FOR AN ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATION

It's a situation no one wants to think about, but recent events have pushed it to the forefront of your mind. What would we do if a mass shooting happened at our church?

How can your members, children, and visitors be best prepared for an active shooter?

As churches, our ministry to embrace anyone in need makes us vulnerable. How do we keep our doors open to all, while protecting those inside? Here is a three-step approach to protect your congregation from active shooters

## 1. Plan

First form your emergency response team. Ideally your team should include individuals with medical and law enforcement training.

Next, educate your team on responses to an active shooter situation that result in the least amount of loss. **Run. Hide. Fight.** is the recommended course of action for adults, and **Lockout. Get out. Take out.** is the recommended course of action for Sabbath School teachers and grades K-12 environments.

Learn more about the **Lockout. Get out. Take out.** method in our resource *"Be Emergency Ready."*

Meet with local first responders and learn how they will respond to a shooting in your building. Make it easy for first responders to assist you. Provide local law enforcement with building blueprints and emergency contact information for the pastor and emergency response team members. Report any threats to the safety of your church, including restraining orders your church may have in place.

Make your active shooter emergency action plan using the information you have learned and with additional church Emergency Planning resources from Adventist Risk Management Inc. (ARM).



## 2. Practice

You have a crisis response plan. Now, it's time to practice. First, rehearse with your emergency response team. Next, hold a safety drill and train your entire congregation.

### SAFETY SABBATH: MARCH 24, 2018

As part of the Risk Management Initiatives for North America, it is ARM's goal that every church in the North American Division holds a safety drill on **Safety Sabbath** each year on the fourth Sabbath of March.

ARM is providing free, customized resources with everything you need to hold an active shooter drill. You will find every action step included, from how to form your emergency response team to completing the post-drill survey. Register your church for Safety Sabbath and receive free resources to protect your church.

## 3. Prevent

Creating a plan and practicing safety drills with your congregation are the fundamental steps you can do to protect your members if an active shooter targets your church. However, there are some things you can do to prevent an incident from happening altogether.

**Train Your Staff** — Train your church staff, especially greeters, to recognize signs of a person who is

agitated, angry, intoxicated, or shows aggressive or threatening body language. Create guidelines on how to approach and, if needed, deny access to such individuals.

**Create Barriers** — Create layers of protection that can stop or stall a violent person before they reach your congregation. These steps can include monitored surveillance of your church parking lot and closing sanctuary and church doors after the service has started. Those who come late are met at the door and guided to seats by church greeters.

**Prepare Your Building** — Optimize your building for efficient evacuation and secure lockdown. Make exits accessible and clearly marked.

**Hire Armed Security** — Work with your conference to determine if your church needs armed security. Contract with a professional security provider. Do not allow untrained, nonprofessional, armed church members to ensure the safety of your church. Review the five questions you should evaluate before hiring church security (page 11).

None of us want to be unprepared when an active shooter enters our church doors. The most important things you can do to protect your members are to make your emergency action plan, practice safety drills, and take measures to prevent violent individuals from harming your congregation.



Every resource you need to host your active shooter drill is at [SafetySabbath.com](http://SafetySabbath.com).

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# EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM ROLES

Use these descriptions to form your Crisis Response Team. Your Crisis Response Team members should have or receive the necessary training to perform their role in an emergency.

## Response Team Roles

### Administrative

This team provides overall leadership during a crisis. They communicate with local first responders, giving them a detailed description of the crisis at hand. This team also communicates necessary information to church members, keeping them aware of the situation. This small team may include pastoral staff, ministry leaders, and other church members with an emergency response background. This team should also include a member with risk management training and experience, such as your church Safety Officer.

### Communications

This team communicates with the media and external and internal audiences during a crisis. They prepare statements to be released to the media and maintain contact with police, emergency services, hospital

representatives, and the district office to keep information current and accurate. This team should handle all media requests for information, and may include your conference and local communication director. It is recommended that all statements be reviewed by the Conference communication department before being released to the press or public.

### Medical

This team provides immediate medical assistance during an emergency. They monitor the patient's vital signs in order to provide a report to paramedic or hospital personnel. This team is equipped with necessary medications and medical supplies needed to provide immediate emergency care. This team may include local nurses and doctors, or other church members with a medical or emergency response background.

### Security

This team works to secure the building and nearby premises during and after a crisis. They may also strategically search a building for a missing child or for church members who may be in danger during a crisis. The Security Team works in collaboration with local law enforcement authorities and has in-depth knowledge of the building's floor plans, including exits and potential hiding locations. This team may include deacons, deaconesses, and other church members with a law enforcement or emergency response background.

## ARM Cares

Our ministry is to protect your ministry. Find more ways to protect your facility and those under your care at [AdventistRisk.org](https://www.adventistrisk.org).



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# ACTIVE SHOOTER

## WHAT TO DO

**It's a moment that no one ever expects but should... what to do in an active shooter situation. It's a stressful time as thoughts of escape, prayers, and reflections of your loved ones fill your head. There is no single response that fits all active shooter situations but knowing what to do can make a difference.**

### **1. Respond Immediately.**

Denial of the situation only delays reaction time. Leave your personal belongings behind. There's nothing in one's purse or briefcase that's more important than one's life. Items can be replaced. Life cannot.

If you not able to run, then HIDE. Lock and barricade doors with heavy furniture or other items. Turn off lights and cover windows. Remain hidden until identifiable law enforcement gives an all clear sign.

### **2. RUN! HIDE! FIGHT!**

Visualize possible escape routes as you move toward exits. Move as quickly and quietly as you can. Follow the instructions of your trained church safety officer, deacons or a first responder. Getting yourself out of harm's way must be your first priority.

### **3. Remain calm.**

Keeping a clear head in a moment of crisis might protect you and others from alerting the shooter to your presence. When first responders arrive on-site keep your hands visible at all times and follow all instructions given.



## Prepare Now

No one can prevent emergencies from happening, but creating and practicing an emergency plan helps minimize the amount of loss when an emergency takes place. The power of an emergency plan is that it is customized to fit the needs of your organization or ministry. It should ensure not only staff, but also students and members are educated and trained on how to follow the plan in the event of an emergency.

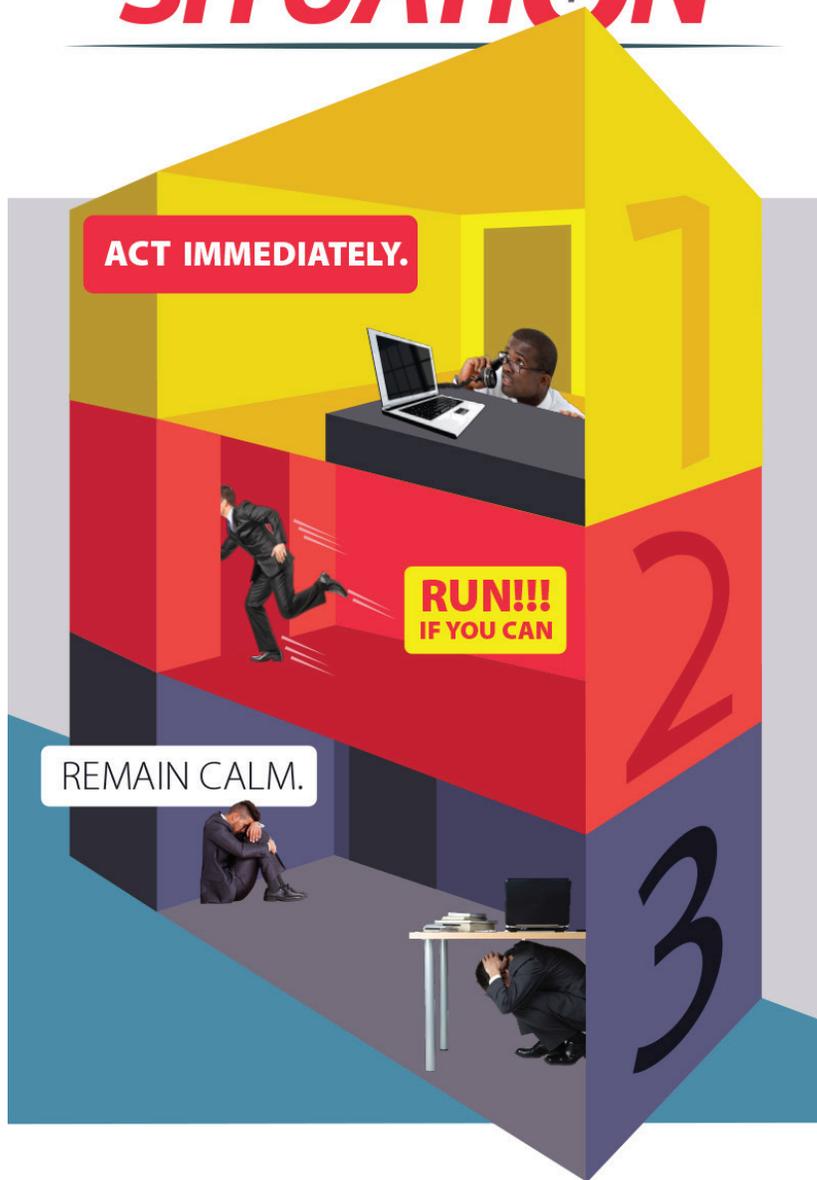
Because of the rise in active shooter incidents on church grounds and school campuses, organizations should consider conducting active shooter drills as often as fire and tornado drills. It is vital that your emergency plan include a section on responding to acts of violence.

It is important to create an emergency plan before a situation occurs. Share your plan with local first responders. Provide them with schematics and interior/exterior photos of the building complex. This will be helpful in their rescue efforts. Most importantly, practice the plan. A good plan is useless if no one knows it.

## ARM Cares

Adventist Risk Management, Inc. has several resources to help schools, houses of worship, and organizations customize their own emergency plan. Find these and other risk management resources at [AdventistRisk.org](http://AdventistRisk.org)

# WHAT TO DO DURING AN ACTIVE SHOOTER SITUATION



"Most importantly, practice the plan.  
A good plan is useless if no one knows the plan."

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# FIREARMS ON CHURCH PROPERTY

**T**he rise in deadly shootings in public places has many congregations considering the use of armed security at their church, as well as members and visitors wanting to bring their own firearms to church for protection.

Before hiring armed security, a congregation's first consideration should be to establish a security plan and practice emergency drills with the congregation. Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM) encourages all congregations to appoint a local church safety officer to work with the church to prepare for emergencies. Learn how to develop emergency plans for your church and receive safety officer training and resources at [AdventistRisk.org](http://AdventistRisk.org). It is also advisable for the safety officer to make contact with local police who will provide support should an incident occur on church property.

Once initial emergency planning and church safety have been provided for, there are many risks and legal issues to evaluate carefully before an informed decision is made by both the local church board and local conference on whether or not to have armed church security.

If armed security is used, it should be contracted from a professional security provider. Do not allow untrained, nonprofessional armed church members to provide security during church services.

If a pastor knowingly allows a church member to carry a weapon into the church for the purpose of providing armed security, this individual may be held to be an agent of the local church and conference. The actions taken by this individual could cause the conference liability for negligence and civil damages. Further, the loss of life or injury caused by an error in using the firearm may raise criminal prosecution for those involved.

Before hiring security, a congregation's first consideration should be to establish a security plan and practice emergency drills with the congregation.

**ARM encourages all congregations to appoint a local church safety officer to work with the church to prepare for emergencies.**

Learn how to develop emergency plans for your church and receive safety officer training and resources at [AdventistRisk.org](http://AdventistRisk.org).



If a police officer attends church and is required to carry a weapon at all times, even when off-duty, it is advisable to support this member police officer by allowing the officer to carry a firearm, but request that the officer provide a written employer statement showing the requirement to carry a firearm. Church leaders should understand that the member police officer should not be considered armed security for the church, even when off duty. It should be noted this privilege should not extend to a regular security guard who is not employed by the church for security protection.

If your conference is insured through Adventist Risk Management, Inc.'s general liability insurance policy, please be advised there is a Firearms Use Exclusion. This use of a firearm by either an employee or volunteer in the course of their duties is NOT covered under this insurance policy. The conference or the individual could be held personally liable for any legal actions or damages. If the church authorizes anyone to carry weapons for the purposes of church security, special insurance needs to be purchased.

## 5 Questions to Evaluate Before Hiring Church Security

1. Have you consulted with local conference leadership and the conference attorney to review the gun use laws in your jurisdiction?
2. Has your conference established a policy that no firearms will be allowed on conference owned property? Your church is private property and in many states, the property owner can establish their property as a weapons free zone. Some jurisdictions require specific announcements or postings.
3. Does the individual who may be willing to provide armed security for the congregation have the proper license or concealed weapons permit and firearm liability insurance? State laws vary as it relates to gun licensing and whether a concealed weapon permit grants permission to the owner to have a gun in a house of worship.
4. What level of training in firearm use does the individual have and do they have law enforcement experience in the use of deadly force in a public assembly area?
5. Is the armed security service provided by a licensed and bonded security company? Be sure the person has insurance or be willing to purchase such insurance for the church.

THE DECISION TO CONTRACT ARMED CHURCH SECURITY CANNOT BE MADE WITHOUT CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF THE RISKS AND OBTAINING PERMISSION FROM THE LOCAL CONFERENCE. AGAIN, DO NOT ALLOW ARMED CHURCH MEMBERS TO PROVIDE SECURITY DURING CHURCH SERVICES.

IF THE DECISION IS MADE FOR ARMED SECURITY TO BE USED, SPECIAL INSURANCE SHOULD BE OBTAINED FOR SECURITY OFFICER PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY COVERAGE. YOUR ADVENTIST RISK MANAGEMENT INC. ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE CAN ASSIST YOUR CONFERENCE TO DETERMINE AVAILABILITY AND PRICING.

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