

Developing an Emergency Operations Plan

Introduction

Every church is different, so no single plan will work for everyone. Such a plan may not seem urgent today, but a good Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) will help you minister more effectively when the unexpected happens. Consider these steps as your starting point for preparedness.

Utilize Insider Expertise

1. Put together a team to develop (or review) your EOP. The team should include leaders from a variety of ministries. They will provide practical insight regarding what will work in your situation.
2. Also include members with experience and expertise in emergency response. They will bring technical understanding to the process. Both technical and practical input will be important in developing an effective plan that people will actually use.

Take Advantage of Outside Expertise

3. FEMA has a free downloadable booklet, ***Developing High Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship***, which can be a valuable tool. Get it at <https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/33007>.

Also see the companion webinar at <http://rems.ed.gov/OverviewEmergencyOperationsPlans.aspx#>.

4. Many church insurance providers have developed tools for churches related to planning your EOP. Ask your insurance agent to attend a meeting of your team to explain what is available. See the following:

<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/church-security/>

<http://www.guidestonepropertycasualty.org/SafetyToolkit>

<https://www.churchmutual.com/98/Safety-Resources>

<https://www.guideone.com/SafetyResources/Churches/churchindex.htm>

5. If the church is hosted/sponsored by another congregation, visit with the host/sponsor leader to see if an EOP is already in place. If no plan is in place, it might be possible for the two congregations to plan together.
6. Develop an ongoing relationship with local first responders, and involve them in the conversation as the plan is developed. They will know about local practices and procedures, which may vary from place to place. Some churches invite local fire and/or police departments to use the church building for training seminars and exercises, which builds goodwill and familiarizes responders with the facilities.
7. Learn from good sample EOPs, but never adopt one without serious discussion about the unique setting and needs of your own church.

An EOP Framework

1. Develop
 - Select Planning Team
 - ✓ Ministry Leaders
 - ✓ Experienced Members
 - ✓ Pastor/Staff
 - ✓ First Responders
 - ✓ (Insurance Agent)
 - Discover Resources (see Safety & Security Resources Info Sheet)
 - Determine Scope/Assess Needs
 - ✓ Medical
 - ✓ Fire
 - ✓ Severe Weather
 - ✓ Community Sheltering
 - ✓ Shelter in Place
 - ✓ Open/Concealed Carry Policy
 - ✓ Intruder/Active Shooter
 - ✓ Bomb Threat
 - ✓ Child Abuse
 - ✓ Missing Child
 - ✓ Regular Training
 - ✓ Others?
 - Plan for Ministry
 - ✓ To Victims
 - ✓ To First Responders
 - Draft the Plan
2. Implement
 - Select Ministry Team Volunteers
 - ✓ Ushers/Greeters?
 - ✓ Separate Team? If so, how will they work together?
 - ✓ Armed/unarmed, professional/volunteer?
 - Initial Training
 - Congregational Awareness
3. Maintain & Improve
 - Keep Learning
 - Communicate Consistently
 - Keep Ministry in Mind

Additional Considerations...

Don't wait to implement basic safety and security practices.

Be aware some may tend to sensationalize or trivialize security concerns and practices. Members and guests need a calm assurance that their church is taking appropriate steps to protect them.

By their nature, emergencies are not regular occurrences, so preparedness may become lax. A "champion" for your safety and security ministry can help insure it is not forgotten.

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