

First Steps

in Church Safety and Security



Studies have confirmed a dramatic increase in crimes against church ministries in recent years. Tragically, dangers such as arson, child abuse, vandalism, assault or threats of assault, breaking and entering, child abduction, and theft have become more common occurrences in churches.

But unfortunately, most church leaders are not addressing this issue. After a church shooting in Knoxville, Tenn., last year, a survey of Christian churches found that 75 percent had no security or emergency plans, reports Jeffrey Hawkins of the Christian Security Network. Churches are “soft targets,” he says—easily accessible places with little or no security.

It's time for all churches, small or large, to proactively evaluate their ministry settings and develop security and safety strategies. But how do we begin?

Allow me to suggest these seven initial steps . . .

1. View safety as a stewardship matter.

Protecting the people in our churches and securing the properties and facilities we all use demonstrates compassion and is simply good stewardship.

2. Establish a safety and security task force.

Although the pastoral staff and deacons could oversee this effort, it's probably best to enlist the help of a selected group of qualified individuals who could evaluate the church's security needs, establish specific policies and procedures, coordinate training, centralize resources, and monitor progress in implementation.

3. Formulate a written safety and security plan.

Under the direction of the task force, and with the input of other church leaders, a comprehensive church security and safety manual should be developed and affirmed by the deacons and congregation. See sidebar for suggested components of a good plan.

4. Provide training.

Establishing specific training for church staff and leaders is helpful. For example, properly trained greeters and ushers can play a vital role in the church's response in an emergency—including the recognition of suspicious behavior and the prompt alerting of local law enforcement.

5. Keep the congregation informed.

The value of an informed congregation in emergency response situations cannot be overstated! Therefore, some churches have formed safety communication teams to help keep their congregations informed. Others make literature available—in the lobby or even in the worship center itself—that summarizes the safety and security plans the church has established.

6. Think long term!

An effective effort in this area is not a one- or two-year project. Ongoing security evaluations and regular reviews of safety procedures by church leaders are crucial.

7. Trust God.

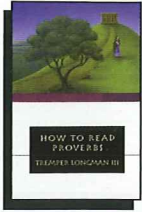
Despite the increasing crimes against church ministries, we don't need to be held captive to fear. While we should do all we can to provide for the safety of the ministry and people we serve, we recognize that our greatest protection and ultimate security is found in God! **B**

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Half dozen helpful...

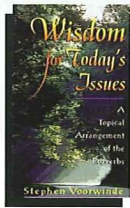
Books on Proverbs

Proverbs provides great sermon material—and practical material for teaching as well! Good books on Proverbs abound, but these stand out to me as especially valuable.



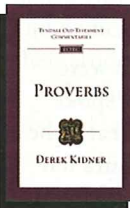
1. How to Read Proverbs

Tremper Longman *InterVarsity Press*
Longman explains helpful background material on proverbs in general and the book in particular, with practical comments on some of its major themes along the way.



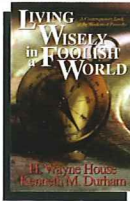
2. Wisdom for Today's Issues

Stephen Voorwinde *P&R*
A topical arrangement of the Scriptural text. Great for devotional reading as well as for start-up study of the various subjects addressed in the book.



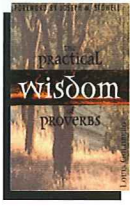
3. Proverbs

Derek Kidner *InterVarsity Press*
Kidner's commentaries on Old Testament books have been well received. This one is a helpful reference work with comments (although brief) on almost every verse in Proverbs.



4. Living Wisely in a Foolish World

H. Wayne House and Kenneth Durham *Kregel*
My favorite topical treatment of the book! Includes chapters on "proverbial" wisdom about finances, family, marriage, vocations, and more.



5. The Practical Wisdom of Proverbs

Louis Goldberg *Kregel*
A newer printing of his previously published (Moody) book with a similar title. Its focus is a survey commentary of Proverbs with good outlines and overview material.



6. Proverbs

NavPress
A Life Change Series Bible study book. Includes 15 individual studies using a fill-in-the-blank format. An excellent tool for use with small groups or classes.

Church Safety and Security Checklist

- Guidelines for lock and key controls, health and safety inspections, building usage, etc.
- Children's and youth ministry safeguards
- Transportation ministry safeguards
- Financial ministry safeguards
- Step-by-step procedures for responding to specific emergencies
- Information about access to available medical supplies—along with the identification of doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals in the congregation
- Procedures for notifying authorities and communicating with emergency professionals in the community
- Building evacuation procedures
- Training procedures for staff, ushers and greeters, and others
- The identification of a church spokesperson to communicate on behalf of the church family during an emergency situation
- Information about insurance provisions and legal support

