

SECURITY

Version 1.02

The Role Of Greeters and Ushers in Establishing a Foundation for Church Security

If you are like most greeters and ushers (G/U's), you may have little or no background in emergency planning, protection or security activities. You may be a senior-aged member, have a disability or illness, or you may be young and inexperienced in dealing with people who are upset. You may be super friendly manner, quiet demeanor or boisterous and outgoing. You might think your role as a greeter or usher would involve smiling, shaking hands, directing guests, passing the offering plate and helping during services. Those will continue to be your primary tasks in most peoples eyes but your are the buildings first line of defense.

All greeters, ushers, deacons, assistant ministers, teachers and the pastor share responsibility for the safety and security of the congregation. None of you are expected to do it all yourself, act as a police officer or security guard. You can continuously observe people and the environment, assess any odd situation to warn security if you see or feel potential danger and respond appropriately. Your job is not only is to fulfill the roles of greeter but also guardian. Greeters and ushers see most everyone that enter the building and many have held this job for years. You know the regular congregation and should look for odd acting new and even long time attendees.

Be very diligent in your job greeting as many people as possible and making eye contact. This makes people feel welcome and allows you to take note of anything odd. We suggest working in mixed pairs of male/female greeter teams. Often one sex will be more in tune to certain behavior than other. Many of you men know how well your wife's radar works. Professional Israeli security leans heavily on females in security roles of observation based on years of research. You must balance the need to be observant with providing a feeling of welcome and openness while being watchful and appropriately wary. Some are so unconcerned that they are rarely aware of what is happening around them, while others are so concerned that they are tense and on edge all the time. You must be realistic about your church environment. When people gather for worship, things are rarely as organized as they might be in some other meetings. People arrive early and late, in groups and alone. Try to be in the flow of traffic and always watching while being friendly.

Members and guests may roam around the lobby or wander down halls. The lobby may be packed with people of all ages. Sundays many churches have more than one service and some people will be arriving as others are leaving. Your post may be in the sanctuary and focused on seating people, or you may be at the front door or in the lobby, busy with greeting, conversing and handing out materials. In either case, you will not be able to contact every guest but someone on the team should try to greet and access each person entering the building and the sanctuary.

Your task is to keep these realities in mind as you look for even small ways to plan and prepare for a surprise emergency. You may not have a perfect situation from the viewpoint of safety and security, but you can improve the situation you have. You must be knowledgeable of plans and procedures. You need to know what to look for and what to do if you see something of concern. You do not need extensive training to be reasonably effective. Your life experiences and some watching and discussion will provide you with most of the knowledge needed.

There are many ways to gain knowledge about your security role: Read all of the written material you receive and review it regularly. Ask about anything you do not understand or that you disagree with. Talk to other greeters and ushers, perhaps even those in other churches, to develop plans for a variety of potential emergencies.

You must be willing and able to fulfill your security responsibilities. Your role is too important to treat it as a joke or something you do not intend to do because it is not comfortable for you. On the other hand, you must not react to people in a hostile, humiliating or excessively fearful way. Being friendly, knowledgeable and proactive is your goal. Greeters and ushers have proven to be top notch and know their congregation well in most churches and spotted many odd circumstances before someone was hurt or abused.

THE SECURITY ROLE OF GREETERS AND USHERS

You serve as a representative of the church and the pastor. You work as part of a church team and must be careful to stay within guidelines you are given. You should not be more strict or more lenient than the guidelines, or base your actions on your personal likes or dislikes about people or behaviors. Your actions can have an impact on the reputation and welfare of the entire church. When in doubt, get another opinion and assistance, unless the matter is an immediate emergency.

Your primary security tasks are to observe and assess, then get assistance or take appropriate emergency action. The best way for you to fulfill your role is to be aware, alert and ready to get assistance. Going beyond that role can make a situation worse, get you or others killed or hurt in the case of a confronting a violent or threatening person in improper method. Sometimes just engaging such person in friendly conversation especially with a mixed couple will defuse them or delay for security to arrive.

You should not carry guns, pepper spray, tasers or other devices without permission. If permission is given, the devices must be carried and used in guidelines of State and Federal law. If you have an interest in augmenting the security team in conjunction with your current position, get in touch with your security team leader or pastor, and if possible, they should leverage any additional active help into the team. Information and notice of possible threats are the most important help that can be done within the current role of greeter/usher. Ability to help staff evacuate the sanctuary and other areas while the security team engages threats will be of great importance.

The security team should have a set program and approval criteria that requires a lot of training and work. Get assistance if you have even a minor concern: Ask one—preferably two—G/Us to assist you if you need to talk to someone whose behavior concerns you or if you are checking on a suspicious situation. Do not confront someone on your own unless you have no other choice. This protects you, may prevent a violent action, and provides a witness about anything that occurs. Stay alert to such situations so you can assist others quickly.

Some Greeters/Ushers have a desire to counsel or pray with someone who is upset. However, while you are talking to a person who seems threatening, volatile or irrational, have another G/U contact security or if deeply concerned about violence, calling 911 is not out of the question. There may be no time to get assistance if your attempts to communicate and counsel fail. Be alert and prepared for any eventuality while remaining friendly. Remember your job is to greet people and make them feel welcome while being attentive to trouble.

Your security activities should focus on:

1. Pray. Before you leave for church pray at home and before services start team should meet and pray for the Lord and Holy Spirit to guide them in their tasks and protection of the people traveling to church, while they are there and safely home. In your training sessions, pray and never cease as God is your best ally and protector. While prayer is important, we must not get lost in “Gods Will” mentality and trust that no matter what his will is at work, He gives us the brains and tools to help ourselves and congregations and your one observation on a single day may be the difference between a good service and a tragedy.
2. Observation: Observe people and the environment continuously and purposefully. The greeters and ushers at most churches remain fairly stable over the years. Most regular congregation members and occasional attendees plus infrequent visitors are often recognized. If concerns arise about a person and the threat doesn't seem immediate, consider asking a couple other U/G's if they know the person of concern before elevating an alert. Its always best to err on the side of caution so if feel someone is a threat always send someone to alert a security officer or staff member.
3. Assessment: Make a reasonable evaluation of the potential for harm. Sometimes we will have long standing members who go through challenging life circumstances. After a decade of being a steady member the stress of life will sometimes cause people to do something unexpected. If you know a person struggling with life circumstances and not coping well, consult with an associate or lead pastor. People's personal lives and privacy should be respected and not shared with the entire group unless the pastoral staff deems it necessary for congregation safety. They can notify staff on a need to know basis. If given such information in the course of doing your job, remember it's for security purposes only, it is not to share info with the community, with friends and sometimes even your spouse. We don't need to alienate a member in distress or worse, push them over the edge where they have a problem.

4. Action: Get help immediately if warranted then warn and help others as possible. You may be able to do something to **prevent** violence or keep it from getting worse, but you should first get help, then warn and help others. Here is where you may have to make a big decision; if threat is unfolding do you try to intervene? Think of your family, if have wife and kids that need you living to support them self preservation may be imperative. Some are wired to act, if you are willing to risk death to protect the rest of the flock, take whatever action you can. Just consider consequences before a situation arises.

5. Alert Security: Many churches have uniformed, plain cloths and discrete security personnel. Security personnel should be identified by staff to U/G's in most circumstances. On rare occasions, we may have someone analyzing security procedures; volunteers' ability to notice and report odd behavior; and the reaction of security staff. Also, on occasion, we may have individuals added to security for a situation of concern or to stand in for low staff situations. Don't assume; even if a regular member is behaving oddly or carrying weapons without you being aware of them being authorized, notify security. It could be as innocent as a congregation member helping temporarily, or as serious as a regular member having reached the end of their rope and about to become a problem.

6. Evacuate People to Safety: You should have designated several areas for evacuation of people in volatile situations. Having several expedient safe zones for small groups of people is important, know if a counter or fixture will just conceal people or stop gun fire. These should be discussed in training but having all zones on a written document can compromise the emergency plans if documents were to land in the wrong hands. Also regular changes in procedures can be expected in event we feel planning information has been compromised. We advise ballistic barriers but only people with a need to know where these are.

7. Multiple Plans for Multiple Teams: Every volunteer team and staff has a unique security plan. Some information is the same from group to group and some is quite different. While keeping secrets is not the intention, there is no need for any group to know another's specific tasks and response except as it effects executing your job. It has happened that an act of violence was perpetrated by a member of a church volunteer group. For this reason its best that parking lot teams, ushers/greeters, security and staff all know each other but not always know 100% of another teams actual responsibility. Compartmentalization is imperative for true security to be effective. This way if an alteration needs to be made in one group's plan, everyone else's does not have to be rewritten and all volunteers retrained.

8. Pray some more. After a safely executed service or event give thanks to God for His protection and guidance. If something bad happens thank Him that it wasn't worse and to help your teams be more prepared and alert in the future;

To God be the Glory