

KEEPING CHURCHES SAFE



Of all the places in your community, you might assume church buildings would be among the safest. And they sometimes are—but not always.

Mark Stusek is a retired police major whose mission is to help churches, schools, and businesses be as safe and secure as possible. Prayer is of first importance. Mark believes that leaders also need to do the work of creating a safe environment and establishing clear policies so that negligence doesn't lead to unnecessary suffering and loss.

Scripture affirms this approach both by example (Nehemiah 4:9: "And we prayed to our God and set a guard...") and by precept (Matthew 10:16: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves).

Mark has a B.S. in criminal justice from Youngstown State University. He worked for the Dayton, Ohio, police department for 26 years. His last assignment was to oversee high profile violent crime in his area. This involved supervising 75 police officers who ranked as lieutenants, sergeants, and investigators. Because they were responsible for the safety of VIPs coming through the area, including the President of the United States, Mark spent several weeks with the United States Secret Service, Department of the Treasury, Washington, D.C., being trained in executive protection.

During the time Mark worked for the police department, there were a couple incidents at his home church he was called to address. One involved a threat to the pastor's life from a mentally unstable church member.

In 2003, Mark took early retirement and accepted a job as an administrator at the church he and his family attended. Part of his job description was to enhance the overall security and safety of the staff, congregants, buildings and grounds. He worked with the leadership team to develop answers to questions like these:

- What do we do if there is an accident in the parking lot?
- How do we respond to a sick or injured child or adult?
- How do we know that the tithes and offerings are being accurately accounted for and safely deposited?
- Have the buildings and grounds been maintained so that all hazards have been eliminated?
- If an armed intruder is intending to do harm, how should we respond?

Once policies had been established, Mark ensured that appropriate staff and volunteers received proper training.

In 2009, Mark was inspired to help other churches in the same way, using his experience and training to make church properties secure places for people to worship. He established his consulting business, G2G Security, which stands for Glory to God!

Schools and businesses, in addition to churches, invite Mark to assess their current situation and make recommendations. His company provides training sessions for key staff and volunteer leaders to be able to carry out the new procedures. Mark never recommends that people carry firearms unless they have, minimally, a Private Investigator/Security Guard State

Certification. "Simply holding a Conceal and Carry permit is not enough, since it requires so little training. Police officers, who have ongoing training, hit their targets 31% of the time," Mark explains, "so chances are high that someone with much less training will hit someone they don't intend to hit."

Since 1999, 564 people have been killed and 869 people have been wounded on church properties in the U.S. This includes accidents, suicides, and criminal assaults. The most common type of crime in churches is robbing of the offering. A recent issue of *Christianity Today* cites Lifeway Research's survey of 1,000 senior pastors in which they found that one in ten churches has had someone embezzle funds.

Once Mark was called in to assess the safety of a church site because they wanted to open a daycare center on their property. The pastor asked for a thorough screening of all aspects of security. He recommended that Mark talk to his administrative assistant, who should be able to answer all his questions. Mark did interview the administrative assistant and gathered her records so he could do an audit of their policies. A few days later, Mark called to ask some follow-up questions. She wasn't there. Two days later she still wasn't there. It turns out that the administrative assistant, seeing she was about to get caught, confessed to embezzlement and resigned. Apparently, she had been siphoning off hundreds of dollars each week for many years; it added up to more than \$340,000. She ended up serving time in prison.

Several times it has happened that Mark's investigations have spurred confessions and repentance. This grieves him. His hope is that organizations would take the initiative to set up accountability and security early, before people are tempted. In this way, unnecessary suffering can be prevented.



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