Part 2: The Importance of Greeters and Ushers in Security Planning

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Never underestimate the importance of greeters and ushers in security planning. These individuals should be a first line of defense in all safety and security planning. However, they need not be members of a “security team.” They should however, be trained to work side-by-side security team members. They should be trained in observation skills, reporting procedures, communication skills, etc.). That ensures standardization to some level between greeters, ushers, and other security team members.

Greeters and ushers have two primary purposes: to welcome and seat guests and visitors; and be additional eyes and ears for the security team. Here are several examples to think about. What would you do if:

• An unknown individual entered the sanctuary 20 minutes after service started, carrying a guitar case?
• A visitor was wearing a long winter coat during a summer service?
• An unknown individual was observed trying to make entrance to the facility during business hours, but was not using the regular entrances/exits?

Observation is essential. If something does not look right or feel right, the job of greeters and ushers is to report the incident in a timely manner to security team or designated individual(s). Safety and security of all attendees is paramount.

If no security team exists, specific procedures should be in place for greeters and ushers to report such incidents. In addition, a security team can be established with just a few qualified and capable individuals. Just make sure that appropriate procedures are followed when choosing applicants to fill these roles. It may also be beneficial to include staff members (i.e., clergy, administrative assistants, etc.), as these individuals will have a majority of the contact with those visiting the church or place of worship during the week.

About the Author: Dr. Olivia Johnson holds a master’s in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Missouri, St. Louis and a doctorate in Organizational Leadership Management from the University of Phoenix – School of Advanced Studies. Perseverance in raising awareness to officer wellness resulted in her being named the Illinois State Representative for the National P.O.L.I.C.E. Suicide Foundation. This role led to her being invited to speak at the FBI’s Behavioral Science Unit’s 2010 – Beyond Survival Toward Officer Wellness (BeSTOW) Symposium. Dr. Johnson is the Founder of the Blue Wall Institute, which trains first responders about health, wellness, stress, depression, and suicide. Dr. Johnson is a veteran of the United States Air Force and a former police officer; she collaborates with several law enforcement publications and is a columnist for PoliceOne.com. She is the Director of Security for a church in the Metro-East. Her services were contracted out by Crisis Systems Management to train military personnel worldwide on Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS). She was recently invited to present at the FBI National Academy Associates Conference in Orlando in July 2013.
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