



# ***Cherry Log Christian Church*** **Safety/Security Survey and Assessment**

**Jon Breshears**

**January 28, 2017**

## **GENERAL SAFETY/SECURITY**

- A survey of the facilities of the Cherry Log Christian Church was conducted on January 24, 2017, by Jon Breshears of the Gatekeepers Church Safety Ministry. Some aspects of safety could not be observed, but many areas were addressed. This report is a summary of that survey.
- **The church's leadership and staff are to be thanked and commended for their foresight in recognizing that prudent actions must be taken to assure that the church will be recognized as having done its due diligence in safety for all members and attenders, and would pass the Reasonable Person test in a court of law, should the need arise.**
- The church is in a rural neighborhood, relatively free of "crime generators" such as late-night social or retail establishments, low income housing, social services, etc.
- The church may be observed by its nearby neighbors, but there is no Neighborhood Watch program.
- No signage was observed near the property perimeter directing guests to appropriate entrances, but the architecture of the building naturally directs one's attention to the main entrance.
- A drive-by at night indicated that exterior lighting is uniform, without pockets of shadows, although some foliage near the main entrance and outside the children's wing needs trimming to eliminate potential hiding places.
- There is no designated visitor entry point under the visual supervision of a receptionist or administrative office to monitor visitors before they can access other parts of the building.
- The playground area is protected by adequate fencing and has a restricted entry point.
- Playground equipment does not have tamper-proof fasteners.
- The one dumpster observed should be locked.

- The building is clean and well maintained. Storage and custodial areas appeared to be in order and generally uncluttered. It is obvious that pride is taken in the interior and exterior care of the buildings. Storage and janitorial areas are kept locked.

## **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- A photographic inventory of all valuables, church-owned equipment, and records is maintained. This should be updated at least annually.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Valuable church property should be engraved with an owner-applied number and a written record of such property kept on file.
- When employees with access to keys or safe combinations terminate their employment, locks and/or combinations should be changed.
- Police have been requested to include the church property in their regular patrols of the area.
- The church's financial policies and procedures are sound.
- **VERY IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATION** – In today's world, churches are prime targets for burglary, theft, assaults and worse because perpetrators know that it is highly unlikely that they will encounter anyone who knows what to do, and is prepared to act. In 2016, sixty-two people were killed on U.S. church or other faith-based property, more than one per week.
- A Church Safety Team should be enlisted immediately. The Gatekeepers Church Safety Ministry can help the church form and train this vital ministry group.
  - Among other duties, this team would patrol the parking area, rooms, and hallways. A Team Member should always be stationed at the entrance to the Preschool and Children's Check-in area when children are present (see recommendations under Children's Area Security section, below). A minimum of two team members should be stationed at strategic locations in the worship area. A team member should be assigned to the video control room when/if such a system is in place.
  - The Team should be trained in procedures for helping the church deal with eventualities such as natural disasters, violence in the church, medical emergencies, etc. They should meet and practice responses to various scenarios, and should be trained to help evacuate the church.
  - Team members should be relatively fit, able to physically perform assigned duties.
  - The Team should (eventually, as the team grows) provide security/safety for all church events, not just those occurring on Sunday morning (e.g.

- weekday/night Bible studies, youth activities, choir rehearsals, etc.). Many critical incidents occur at night.
- The Team should be trained in use of the AED, First Aid and CPR, and have at least one doctor, EMT, or other healthcare professional on the team.
    - **NOTE:** Preparation for medical emergencies was identified in the Risk Analysis exercise as the top priority need, and rightly so. Statistics indicate that the church is 40x more likely to experience some sort of medical emergency than a violent incident.
    - There is presently an automatic emergency defibrillator (AED) in the building, and several medical kits. The medical kits should be augmented with additional supplies to cover a variety of situations.
    - All deacons and other leaders should be trained to use the AED. They can, in turn, instruct others in its use. In the short term, having the ability to respond quickly and appropriately to a medical emergency (very likely to occur) is more important than the ability to respond to the threat of violence (unlikely to occur).
    - **RECOMMENDATION:** It is suggested that the AED be relocated further inside the building to make it more readily available. It is significant that 40% of cardiac events occur in restrooms.
  - **VERY IMPORTANT** – Church Safety Team members should use two-way radios to maintain contact with each other. Cell phones are too slow and unreliable in emergencies.
  - **RECOMMENDATION:** The church does not presently own 2-way radios. Priority should be given to this need as soon as the Church Safety Team is formed. Radios make possible immediate contact and response in the event of an emergency of any type, and allow for effective communication.

## **WINDOWS:**

- All windows are on ground level. These appeared to be secure, but some around the main entrance and outside the children's wing are partially blocked by trees and shrubs, providing an inviting place for intruders to hide.
- It is good that the windows do not open, but they have no protective measures in place to prevent breakage, providing an easy entrance for burglars.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Some protection against breakage for grade level windows (and therefore entry) should be provided (e.g. bars, wire mesh, plexiglass, Lexan, etc.). For economic, cosmetic and aesthetic reasons, I recommend that clear, 3M Ultra Prestige Protective film be affixed to the windows. This security film is

remarkably strong, able to withstand repeated blows from cinder blocks, ball bats, etc.

## **LIGHTING:**

- Exterior lights are located at entrances and are on timers set to turn off at 10:00pm.
- Entrance lights (and some interior lights in hallways and restrooms) are left burning at night so intruders may be clearly visible when forcibly attempting to enter, and passersby and police may see easily into the premises, whether on foot or in a vehicle.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Recent studies suggest that lights left on continually may lose their effectiveness over time. Exterior lights connected to motion detectors may be more effective, calling attention to the fact that someone has entered the area. Such devices also save energy.
- Restroom lights are operated by motion detecting switches, automatically turning off lights when no one is present.

## **LOCKS/DOORS:**

- All exterior doors of the main building are equipped with the proper hardware, and are of solid core construction.
- Entry/exit doors appear to have quality cylindrical locks, but no deadbolts were observed.
- It could not be determined whether exterior doors have reinforced strike plates secured by at least four 3" screws.
- Exterior hardware and trim has been removed from some emergency exit doors.
- Exterior doors with hinges which are exposed on the door's exterior do not have non-removable hinge pins, and could be removed from the outside.
- In general, all exterior doors are (and should be!) kept locked to prevent unauthorized entry. After an activity begins, only one door to the building should be unlocked, that being the door to the worship area and monitored by the Safety Team or ushers.
- On Sundays, the Deacon of the Month conducts a routine check to make sure all doors are locked.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Exterior door hardware should be inspected to ensure that the doors close properly, and lock, every time. Any needed repairs should be a priority.

- **RECOMMENDATION:** Implementing a stricter check-out system for all keys will help the church improve access control to the facilities.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** As funds become available, an electronic, restricted access entry system should be installed on the main entry door. Such a system will enable the church to limit access and track use of the doors by persons authorized to enter. The need for keys will be greatly reduced, if not eliminated.

## **INTRUSION DEVICES:**

- The church does not have a security alarm system.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Install a security alarm system connected to local police and fire.

## **CLOSED CIRCUIT TV SYSTEM:**

- A closed-circuit television system (CCTV) system is a high value tool to protect the church by enabling just one person to monitor activity in more than one area, and to record entry and movement when the building is not occupied. Such a system should record for at least one month, and have motion detection tied to an alarm system. It should have sufficient cameras to cover all entry/exit points, the preschool and children's areas, the sanctuary (Pan/Tilt/Zoom camera), and parking lot (low light capability) areas, etc. Also, the system should be able to capture quality still images from video.
- **RECOMMENDATION: VERY IMPORTANT** – The top three priority areas for use of a CCTV system are the children's and preschool areas, and the Sanctuary. A good PTZ (Pan, Tilt, Zoom) camera will add greatly to the church's ability to monitor activity in the Sanctuary, obtain accurate head counts, and enable rapid response should the need arise.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** A Safety Team member should always monitor the CCTV system when the church has activities, maintaining radio contact with the rest of the team. The system will record, on its own, any activity observed at other times.

## **FIRE SUPPRESSION:**

- All 13 fire extinguishers are in accessible positions and are well marked.
- All fire extinguishers are tested and inspections are up to date (January of 2017).

- This building has a sprinkler system, and is tested annually.
- The fire alarm system is linked to the fire department.
- Emergency lighting is in place, is working, and is tested quarterly by the Church Administrator.
- Several smoke detection devices were observed in this building, and it is possible that devices are in the HVAC ductwork, but, if so, these were not able to be observed.
- Fire exits are properly marked and lights appear to be working.

## **PRESCHOOL/CHILDREN AREA SECURITY:**

- **The preschool and children's areas are the most vulnerable areas in the church.** Regardless of the number of children attending, this area should receive top priority from efforts to improve safety and security in the church.
- Parents and prospective members/attenders look for reassurance that their precious children are well cared for and in a safe environment when at church. Lacking such assurance, guests and prospective members will quietly find a church that does make such provisions.
- **The area does not have a restricted entry point, and is an area of major concern. The fact that teenagers and adults must access the same hallway is a security weakness. Thought should be given to ways to address this weakness.**
- There is in place a check-in system for children's activities.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS:**
  - A check-in/entry area should be established at the front of the hall. A children's volunteer or Safety Team member should be stationed near the entrance, assisting other volunteers in insuring the security of the hall, with only those workers authorized to be in the area allowed. Except in emergencies, even parents should not be allowed down the hall.
  - **RECOMMENDATION:** A policy should be in place that requires volunteers to be a member of the church or active in church activities for at least six months before they can be directly involved in children and youth activities.
  - Preschool and children's workers should be trained and regularly practice procedures for both evacuation and lockdown scenarios. Drills should be timed to measure progress in completing each, and to establish a benchmark for improvement.
- All doors in the preschool/children area have windows of required size for the protection of children and workers. Windows serve the dual purposes of allowing parents and supervisors to observe classroom activity, and greatly reduce the

likelihood of false accusations against volunteers (CCTV is also a valuable resource in this regard). There appeared to be locks on the classroom doors in the event of a lockdown situation.

- At no time, should exit doors be propped open, providing entrance to the area by unauthorized persons.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** All doors should be able to be locked. It was noted that the door to the children's kitchen area is not lockable. This is a major weakness in securing that area.
- Diaper changing areas are in secure locations, but the men's restroom is not so equipped.
- Great care should be taken during the process of taking preschoolers to the restrooms (see below).
- Storage area doors are lockable to keep toddlers out.

**OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- A computerized check-in/check-out system should be considered. Such systems offer many additional features and safeguards over the current system. Attendance is taken automatically, allergies can be noted easily, special feeding instructions can be noted, and custodial parent issues can be minimized.
- Minor siblings should not be allowed to pick up preschoolers.
- All volunteers should be identified by lanyards with picture IDs.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Extreme care should be taken when escorting preschoolers to the restrooms. For the protection of workers, two adults should always be present in such instances. Restroom doors should remain open. Real world situations sometimes make this impossible, but all care should be taken to protect workers from unfounded accusations. No children should be allowed in the restrooms until workers verify that no adults are in the restroom at the time. This is another instance when CCTV systems watching the restroom halls and doors (never in the restrooms themselves!) are very valuable.
- Great care must be taken to assure that any/all persons working with minors have passed a national criminal background check. This includes last-minute enlistees as chaperones and drivers for youth and children's events.

**CHURCH OFFICES:**

**INTRUSION DEVICES:**

- The staff offices and reception area are exposed, making those areas vulnerable to unauthorized entry.
- There is not a security alarm system in place for any of the offices. Steps should be taken to provide security for the church staff during and after office hours.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Install a security alarm system connected to local police and fire. AT A MINIMUM, install a buzzer system on the office door to allow staff to verify the identity of visitors before allowing entrance into the office.

**CLOSED CIRCUIT TV SYSTEM:**

- The office area does not have a CCTV security system.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Such a system should be a moderately high priority, close behind that of the preschool/children's, and worship areas.

**FIREARMS ISSUES:**

- Georgia law prohibits anyone (except on-duty law enforcement personnel) from carrying a firearm in a church unless they possess a Georgia Weapons Carry License and the church leadership has given them permission.
- Does the church have a written policy regarding the carrying of firearms by persons at the church?
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Develop a written firearms policy that allows only certain persons to carry at church.
- **RECOMMENDATION:** Provide firearms training, at church expense, for Safety Team members.
- Who, if anyone, has permission to carry a firearm?
- Is the church open to/interested in receiving firearms training for some individuals (specifically some Church Safety Team members)? The Gatekeepers Church Safety Ministry can provide this training.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS, BY SECTION:**

### **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Valuable church property should be engraved with an owner-applied number and a written record of such property kept on file.
- A Church Safety Team should be enlisted immediately. The Gatekeepers Church Safety Ministry can help the church form and train this vital ministry group.
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- The church already conducts national criminal background checks on employees and volunteers. This should include last-minute enlistees as chaperones and drivers for youth and children's events.

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