

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR  
FORMULATING  
A  
CHURCH  
EMERGENCY  
ACTION  
PLAN**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

When formulating an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for a church, it is important to assess several factors: the demographics of the area, the physical layout of the church, and the level of security that church personnel feel is necessary for the church. Churches located in an urban area will have different needs from churches located in a rural or suburban area.

The next step is determining for which scenarios an EAP is needed. Answering the following questions may aid churches in determining what level of EAP they feel is necessary:

- Do you want an EAP for just natural disasters?
- Do you want an EAP for sickness and injury that might occur before, during or after a service?
- Do you want an EAP to cover an active shooter scenario?
- How secure do you want your building during the service?
- What level of security do you feel is needed for the offering counters?
- Do you conduct off-site activities for which an EAP might be needed?
- What trained first aid personnel already exist in your congregation?
- What training will be necessary prior to implementing the EAP?
- Do you have a first aid kit on all levels of your building?
- Who is currently responsible for checking the first aid supplies on an ongoing basis?
- Do you have an AED available?
- If an AED is available, how often is it checked to make sure that it is in working order?
- Do you have EPI-pens available?

The plan that follows is currently in use at Trinity UCC in Brookfield, WI. Prior to each section, I have made additional comments that might help as each church determines its specific needs for an EAP. I am available to answer questions via e-mail at [jdoleschal@hotmail.com](mailto:jdoleschal@hotmail.com), or via cell phone at 414-708-7024. Church personnel can also contact me to arrange a consultation at your church.

If I perform a consultation, the only cost will be round-trip mileage at the current federal rate.

**EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN**  
**Trinity United Church of Christ**  
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Since this plan will be used by the entire congregation, it is important to define the purpose of the plan. One of the most frequent questions that arises is “Why do we need a plan?” followed by the comment “Nothing like that has ever happened around here.”

The answer should be “If something happens, we want to be prepared and we want to have as safe a church as possible for all of our members and visitors.”

**Introduction**

This Emergency Action Plan (EAP) is intended for use in the event of any emergency occurring during the use of the Church building. Emergencies could include anything from burst pipes or a fire necessitating that the building be evacuated to an active shooter situation. Various emergency scenarios will be discussed and the necessary action steps to be taken will be explained.

As in all EAP’s, it is vitally important that all entities using the building are familiar with the procedures, and that the procedures are practiced on a regular basis (at least twice a year.) As needs change, the plan should also be revised to cover any new eventualities that may occur.

It is not the intent that the presentation and practice of an EAP should alarm anyone. The intent is to prepare individuals should an emergency occur and evacuation as quickly as possible becomes necessary. Questions regarding these procedures should be addressed to the Pastor, the Church Council, or the Property Committee.

**PRIOR TO THE SERVICE**

From the tone of our precautions prior to the service, a reader would be correct to surmise that these precautions imply the possibility of someone wanting to enter the building to do harm to individuals inside the building. You would be correct in your assumptions. While Trinity is located in suburban Brookfield, there have been incidents in the area, which have occurred during worship in churches and in places of business. Therefore, when our plan was drafted, we wanted to provide the highest level of security that we could.

Some churches may take issue with the locked doors. We have an usher who monitors the main doors for late arrivals, and one usher remains in the Gathering Place (probably narthex area in most churches) during the entire service. Ushers are reminded on a regular basis of their duties and a copy of their duties is posted in the Gathering Place.

**Because there is a church entrance that would allow an individual to come into the building and access the front of the sanctuary and the pastor immediately, and allow access to the lower level and our Sunday School classes, that is the reason for the locking of the northwest entrance door.**

### **Precautions at the Beginning of Worship Services**

The following safety precautions will be taken during services to aid in preventing any unwelcome intruders from accessing the building easily.

Prior to the Pastor coming into the Sanctuary at the beginning of the service, the Projectionist will lock the parking lot northwest entrance door (1) to the north hallway leading downstairs and up to the Sanctuary. The Pastor will lock the entrance door into the Vestry (2). Immediately following the service, the projectionist will unlock the northwest entrance door to the hallway. The Pastor will unlock the door to the Vestry after the service.

When the service has begun, one usher will lock the northeast parking lot entrance doors (3) to the Church lobby and all but one Calhoun Road entrance door on the east entrance (4) to the lobby. The head usher will close the Sanctuary doors, and they should remain closed during the entire service. One usher will remain stationed in the Narthex until ten minutes into the service to allow and aid entrance to any late arrivals for the service. During the remaining portion of the service, the head usher will lock the remaining door and be stationed in the Gathering Place overseeing the main Calhoun east entrance doors. Should anyone attempt to gain entrance, the usher will continue to monitor the entrance for any late arrivals, or inappropriate individuals seeking entrance. Upon anyone seeking entrance, the usher will allow entrance only after either identifying the individual as a member, or upon identifying that there is no immediate threat and an individual is simply late for the service.

**The next section addresses actions that should be taken if an individual exhibits suspicious behavior before or during services. For your information, we have had three incidents of this nature at our church. The actions are intended to defuse the individual without being disrespectful. In all three incidents, we were able to defuse the situation and continue with the service.**

### **Suspicious Behavior Before or During Services**

If at any time, behavior of an individual attending a service or who has gained access to the service appears to be suspicious, follow these procedures:

- Anyone whose behavior appears to be suspicious should be approached immediately by one of the ushers;
- A second usher should remain within six to ten feet while another usher approaches the individual;
- Be calm, tell him/her that you are glad s/he is here and welcome them to Trinity;
- Ask the individual if you can assist him/her in any way;

- If the behavior appears to continue or the individual becomes aggressive in any way, attempt to calm the individual and isolate the individual from the congregation;
- If you feel that there could be a possible problem, do not walk to the front of the congregation down the center aisle during the service. Send an usher down the south aisle to alert the Music Director who will respond to aid in de-escalating the situation. The Music Director will alert other necessary personnel for assistance if needed.
- If the situation continues to escalate, the head usher should immediately call 911.

### **ACTIVE SHOOTER SCENARIO**

**Our plan is intended to give the people in the building as much advance warning as possible if it appears that we will be subjected to an active shooter scenario. Please note the several suggestions given for disabled or mobility-challenged individuals. In this scenario, it is important to clear the building as quickly as possible. However, in any emergency the possibility of panic or people freezing is present. In an emergency situation, 80% of the people panic, freeze, or deny the reality of the situation and do nothing to save themselves, 10% of the people get hysterical, and 10% of the people take charge. Therefore, it is imperative that churches practice clearing the building as quickly as possible. This can easily be done with ongoing fire drills. Once people get used to leaving their belongings and exiting as quickly as possible, no matter what the situation, they will become accustomed to the emergency procedures.**

**The alarm that we use is a boat air horn. Using the air horn also affords the possibility of coding the alarm, e.g., one sustained alarm for fire, two short bursts for tornado, three short bursts for anything else. We use a sustained burst in the Gathering Place aimed at the sanctuary and a sustained burst down the stairs to alert any Sunday School classes or individuals working in the kitchen.**

**The exit plans that are presented are particular to our church building. Each building will have its own set of problems that need to be addressed and its own exit plans. It is vitally important that each church determine a plan for all areas of the building being used at any given time.**

**ONE person should be designated to call 911. Confusion and delay can occur if multiple individuals call 911 and each one gives conflicting information - which is what usually occurs. See "During the Worship Service" for specific information that should be conveyed by the caller.**

#### **Before the Worship Service**

The closest usher to the siren will sound the alarm and direct a second usher to call 911. All persons should move as quickly as possible to the nearest exit away from the shooter and gather at the southwest corner of the large parking lot.

If the shooter is in the Lobby or Gathering Place, head through the Sanctuary and out the Sacristy (6) and northwest pulpit side Sanctuary doors (5). Two ushers, one at each of the west Sanctuary exits, will direct people to move as quickly as possible.

Individuals in the Dining Hall should exit through the boiler room (7) and immediately head to the southwest corner of the large parking lot.

Disabled individuals or individuals who have trouble moving should immediately go into the bathroom off the Gathering Place (if it is safe to get to it) close the door, lock the door and gather yourselves against the southern wall. Turn off your cell phones and the light and remain silent. If access to the rest room is blocked, head into the area in front of the elevator, close the door to the space and wedge it shut. The wedge will be located on the back of the door. If it appears that the door will be broken down, go into the elevator, shut the elevator doors, go down to the dining hall level, and exit into the space at the elevator. Set the elevator doors on OPEN. If you can, exit through the Dining Hall and the boiler room. If it appears unsafe, close the door to the elevator space and wedge it shut with the wedge located on the back of the door. Get in the elevator and push the button for the main floor, halfway up, pull the STOP button. When everything is clear, we will let you know to run the elevator up to the main floor. If you cannot access either the elevator or the bathroom, move as quickly as you can and ushers and other congregants will assist you in exiting the Sanctuary.

#### **During the Worship Service – Sanctuary Emergency Procedures**

As soon as a real and potential threat has been identified, an usher will sound the emergency siren to alert the congregation to evacuate immediately. The head usher will call 911, tell them we have an active shooter situation, give number of shooters, approximate description, and tell them that we are evacuating the building. Number of injured or dead is currently unknown. One usher will then proceed to the lower level to alert the Sunday School and aid anyone in the Kitchen area to evacuate immediately.

If the shooter is attempting to enter the building through the east main Calhoun Road doors, the Evacuation Aides will coordinate an evacuation through the Sacristy doors (6) and the northwest pulpit side exit doors (5) in the front of the Sanctuary. The Evacuation Aides and any assisting ushers must remain calm and assist the groups exiting as much as possible. The Evacuation Aides and the projectionist, if able, will open the appropriate exit doors from the Sanctuary and assist in moving individuals out as quickly as possible. Ushers and others assisting should remain on the far side of the exit door. The individuals on the lectern side will exit through the Sacristy (6) and out of the building, moving towards the southwest corner of the large parking lot. Individuals on the pulpit side will exit through the northwest doors (5) of the Sanctuary and out of the building, moving towards the southwest corner of the large parking lot.

If the shooter gains access to the building, keep moving as quickly as possible. Leave your belongings behind. Continue to move towards the southwest corner of the large parking lot as quickly as possible. Move as quickly as you can away from the building.

If the shooter enters the Sanctuary from the north or the south front Sanctuary entrances, immediately exit as quickly as possible through the east main and lectern side Sanctuary doors (9) and out of the building. Leave all your belongings behind. DO NOT STOP TO ASSIST INJURED INDIVIDUALS. Move as quickly as possible to the southwest corner of the large parking lot.

Anyone still in the building when law enforcement officers arrive must immediately hold their hands in the air, spread their fingers, and remain calm. Follow all directions. Do NOT ask for help. Do NOT ask questions. Simply follow directions. The role of law enforcement is to neutralize the threat first. Emergency aid will be provided as soon as possible.

**Please note that in the directions for the Church School listed below that individuals who are restricted to an enclosed area are instructed to turn off their cell phones. This is vital as cell phones can go off and disclose where individuals are hiding. Having said that, if it is at all possible to evacuate EVERYONE from the building, do so.**

#### **During the Worship Service – Church School Emergency Procedures**

Sunday School teachers will empty the Guppy Room and assist the children in attendance at Sunday School to exit via the southernmost exit doors on the eastern side of the building (10). If the shooter(s) are entering from the lower level, and you do not have time to evacuate, get all children and teachers into the Guppy Room, lock both doors, cover the window on the main door, turn the lights out, turn your cell phone off, and gather in the southeast corner of the room. Stay completely silent. Do not move or attempt to exit until you are told to do so either by law enforcement personnel or the Pastor.

#### **During the Worship Service – Kitchen/Dining Hall Emergency Procedures**

One usher will check if you have heard the siren alert. Immediately upon hearing the alert, exit through either the northwest doors (11) or the boiler room doors (7). Once out of the building, move as quickly as possible to the southwest corner of the large parking lot. Leave your belongings.

**It is important that a gathering point for individuals be designated once they have exited the building. This gives law enforcement personnel the time and space to do what they need to do to secure the building, and it gives individuals at the gathering point the opportunity to determine exactly who is left in the building or may have hid in an undesignated location.**

**If loved ones have been injured and remain in the building, under no circumstances should anyone be allowed to return to the building until it has been cleared with law enforcement. Emergency medical personnel will be dispatched once law enforcement personnel determine the exact needs.**

### **BEHAVIOR ONCE AT THE GATHERING POINT**

### **Upon Gathering at the Southwest Corner of the Parking Lot**

Remain calm. Once law enforcement officers have neutralized the situation, they will approach and tell us that it is now safe. If the weather is such that we cannot remain out of doors, we will cross over to the East Wing and gather there for interviews from law enforcement. At NO TIME RETURN to the Church until we are advised by law enforcement that it is safe to do so.

## **FIRE EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

**Fire emergency procedures are self-evident – get everyone out ASAP. These procedures are the easiest to practice and give individuals the practice of clearing the building quickly. Normal procedures to be followed regarding smoke and hot doors have been included. Once fire procedures have been conducted several times, it can be helpful to put fake flames in front of one of the exits to force individuals to seek an alternate exit.**

### **Fire Emergency at Any Time**

Leave all belongings. Head for the nearest exit. Do not use the elevators. If smoke is thick, drop to the floor and crawl to the nearest exit. If you come upon a closed door, feel the door first. If it is hot, DO NOT OPEN and seek an alternate exit. Remain calm and move as quickly as safely possible.

Individuals in the Sanctuary area should head for the front Sanctuary doors and out the Sacristy and the northwest exit doors, go down the steps and out. If the fire is in the front of the Sanctuary, individuals should exit through the rear Sanctuary entrance doors and exit down the stairs and through the main eastern and northern Lobby doors.

Individuals in the Dining Hall should exit through the boiler room, the northwest stairs or the southeast stairs and up through the eastern Lobby doors.

**Tornado shelter areas depend greatly on the blueprint of the church building. Generally speaking, in a building such as a church, tornado shelter areas should be free of windows, and as low as possible. It will be necessary for each church to decide the best areas in their specific buildings.**

## **TORNADO PROCEDURES**

### **Tornado Procedures at Any Time**

Leave all belongings. When the community tornado alert sounds or we are advised via media that a tornado warning has been issued for our neighborhood, the ushers will immediately ask everyone to move to the Dining Hall. If in the Sanctuary, head for the nearest exit and proceed to the Dining Hall. Once in the Dining Hall, proceed to the electrical room and the boiler room. If individuals are already in the Church School area, the Kitchen, or the Dining Hall, proceed to the boiler room or electrical room.

We will place as many people as possible in those two rooms, young children with their mothers will go into the room first as well as at least one First Responder and one Evacuation Aide. The remaining individuals will sit on the floor against the wall in the southwest corner of the Dining Hall. Put your hands behind your head and bend over so that your elbows are on or outside your knees. If there is time, we will pull tables over to afford extra protection from breaking glass or flying objects.

If a tornado is going through the area, we will wait until it has passed, until the community sounds an OK, or we are apprised via media access that the danger has passed. We will then assess for any possible damage. First Responders will respond to anyone who has been injured and the head usher will call 911.

### **MEDICAL EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

**Medical emergencies are the most prevalent occurrences in most churches. These could include cuts, abrasions, falls, strokes, heart attacks, nausea, allergic reactions, etc. The bottom line is that churches should always be prepared for medical emergencies and a protocol be developed as soon as possible. To facilitate aid in cases of medical emergencies, the following equipment is vital: first aid kit, EPI-pen, and automatic external defibrillator (AED).**

**Training for your personnel can be arranged through the American Red Cross, your local fire department, or possibly through your school or recreation district – all at minimal cost. To facilitate securing initial personnel to be trained, I would suggest that the church defray the cost of training. Further, there may be individuals who are required to maintain their training as teachers, nurses, or certified emergency personnel.**

**The instructions pertain mainly to emergencies occurring during the service. However, our First Responders are instructed to remain until all people have left the building since an emergency could arise during the post-service fellowship time.**

**It is also important that your Sunday School classes have a protocol to report to a designated individual if a teacher encounters a medical emergency.**

#### **Preparing for Medical Emergencies**

At least one individual who is trained in First aid/CPR/AED will be on duty during each worship service and designated as the First Responder. A schedule of First Responders for all services will be drawn up and posted in the Gathering Place.

The First Responders will notify the Property Committee if any supplies need to be replaced. The Property Committee will then be responsible for purchasing supplies, stocking the first aid kit, and ensuring that the AED is in working condition at all times.

All individuals contracting to use any Church facilities will be instructed to familiarize themselves with all emergency procedures and to designate who will call 911 in case of an emergency.

### **Medical Emergency**

The First Responder will stand and announce that we have a medical emergency. The Pastor will suspend the worship service until the emergency has been treated or until the individual has been moved to the Gathering Place, northwest hallway, or Vestry.

The First Responder will immediately assess the situation, begin administering first aid, and determine if 911 should be called. If at all possible, the injured or ill individual should not be moved and first aid should be administered on the spot. If the individual feels that s/he can move to the Gathering Place, northwest hallway, or Vestry, the First Responder and the usher will assist in moving the individual.

One of the ushers will assist the First Responder by:

- Moving individuals back to give the First Responder space to work;
- Moving the ill/injured individual to one of the indicated locations;
- Calling 911 if needed;
- Transporting the AED to the First Responder if needed.

The First Responder will be responsible for completing and submitting the First Aid Report.

## **ROBBERY**

**Counting offering monies occurs in many different areas of church buildings. The cardinal rule is that no one should ever count alone. Two people should also convey the day's receipts to a designated individual for deposit. In larger congregations, there may be a safe with a drop slot. Other congregations may give the receipts to an individual to deposit the next day. Still another procedure would involve an individual depositing the money in a depository at the bank. Under no circumstances should counters risk their lives to defend against a robbery. Giving the most accurate description possible to law enforcement individuals will aid them in apprehending the thief and getting stolen money back.**

### **Attempted Robbery of Offering**

Most likely, such an attempt could occur while transporting the money across the street to be counted or while the count of the funds is in process. If the individual is armed, give the person the money. Be as alert as possible and immediately following the robbery, write down your recollection of the physical characteristics of the individual, what was said, any distinguishing marks, height, weight, clothing, tag number and description of vehicle if individual leaves via vehicle, direction of egress whether via

vehicle or on foot. If the individual is not armed, respond as you see fit, but do not put yourself in unnecessary danger.

Immediately after the robbery, call 911.

## **AFTER ACTION PROCEDURES**

**The general rule when dealing with the media is that ONE person should be designated as the contact person. In the case of a major incident, media may want to talk to other people involved. It is always the individual person's decision whether to talk to the media or not.**

### **Dealing with the Media**

If the issue necessitated that law enforcement respond, the law enforcement responders will be the main contact with the media. Media personnel may attempt to speak with you as soon as possible after the event. If cleared with law enforcement, the Pastor or the Church Council President will act as the main contacts for the media. If a request is made to talk to specific individuals, whether you talk to the media or not will be a personal decision. If you decide to speak with media personnel, tell the truth, do not be afraid to answer their questions. Once they ascertain what occurred, they will be seeking mainly human-interest pieces. Do not attempt to blame or point fingers at anyone regarding actions taken during the emergency. Stick to what you experienced.

### **After Action Report**

**Whether you have a drill or an actual incident, a debriefing is necessary to determine both strong and weak spots in your plan. When weaknesses are identified, they should be addressed ASAP and the EAP revised as needed.**

Following any emergency action that has been taken, there will be a de-briefing conducted as soon as possible to review the incident and determine if all necessary actions were taken as indicated. Revisions to the EAP will be made as necessary. Follow-up counseling will be made available to anyone who feels there is a need.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

**A written record should be kept of all supplies and the maintenance of those supplies. Accident reports should be written and kept on file for at least three years. This section also contains the role of the Evacuation Aides in ensuring that all evacuations progress smoothly and do not fall on the shoulders of the ushers who may, in some cases, be elderly and feel that they are unequipped to aid in an evacuation.**

### **Role of the Evacuation Aides**

The duties of this position are detailed in various sections of the Emergency Action Plan. The primary purpose of these individuals is to aid in evacuating the building in cases of emergency. A list of Evacuation Aides will be maintained at the usher's station.

### **Log Book**

A Log Book will be kept in the Gathering Place. The Log Book will be used to record the following items:

- Maintenance of the AED
- Maintenance of the first aid supplies
- Emergencies
  - Nature of the emergency
  - Name of the First Responder
  - Action taken (FA given, 911 called, etc.)
  - First Aid report (if necessary)

### **Maintenance of the AED**

The AED should be checked on a quarterly basis by a member of the Property Committee to ensure that it is in working order. If not, necessary repairs or replacement should be undertaken as soon as possible. Clearance for necessary funds should be obtained from the Church Council President if replacement is needed and replacement should take place as soon as feasible.

### **Maintenance of First Aid Supplies**

The first aid kits in both the Gathering Place and the Kitchen area should be checked on a monthly basis by the First Responder assigned to the last Event of the each month who will then notify the Property Committee. A member of the Property Committee will purchase any necessary supplies as soon as possible and restock the first aid kit.

**The following sample forms are attached for your information:**

- **Accident Report Form**
- **AED Maintenance Log**
- **First Aid Maintenance Log**
- **First Responder Schedule**

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

**When off-site activities such as a picnic in a local park are conducted, a First Responder should be assigned and on the First Responder Schedule any special instructions that need to be followed should be indicated.**

