

**Health Safety and Security**  
Andrew Peters, Staff Lieutenant at Troop C, Punxsutawney, PA  
March 2026

**This original document was drafted by the Visioning Team on 9/19/2019.**

Below you will find a compiled list of ideas, practices and technologies that are being used by various congregations in Huntingdon Presbytery. Not all ideas and items will work for every congregation or every building. Not all ideas will be acceptable to every Session or congregation.

The goal is to keep all people safe and healthy, to the best of our ability, but without becoming slaves to fear. Ideally, this list of questions will help you work toward sound preparedness; and sound preparedness will alleviate a great deal of fear.

Gun violence headlines the news and stirs emotion but statistically is a far less likely emergency than health issues (heart attacks during a sermon) or fires, especially in our older buildings. We have a responsibility to work on preventive measures and developing capabilities and plans to keep folks safe.

The **First Step** is to form a team of people willing to discuss and work on the issues. Some Sessions have Safety Committees. Some congregations form Safety Teams.

The **Second Step** would be to work through the list below to improve prevention and preparedness for health safety and security emergencies.

**Health**

- Do you have First Aid Kits? Are they well stocked? Are they up to date or ancient?
- Have Elders, Deacons, Ushers and Security Team received First Aid and CPR Training? Red Cross can help with that.
- Do you have AED units with signage marking their location? Are the batteries up to date?
- AED units may be operated by an untrained person; however, AED training is available, valuable and recommended.
- Do you have physicians, nurses, EMTs in the congregation?
- Do you have a spare wheelchair, walker, crutches, blanket readily available?

**Safety**

- Does your building have a Fire Alarm that notifies either a 3<sup>rd</sup> party or Fire Department?
- Does your building have Smoke Alarms? Are they battery operated, electric or both? Who is responsible for changing batteries? Are they changed annually?
- Does your building have Carbon Monoxide Detectors? You might benefit from having them in rooms located near parking lot areas, and in the kitchen if you have a gas stove or water heater.
- Do you have Fire extinguishers with signs clearly marking their presence? Do people know where the extinguishers are? If not, point them out to everyone on a Sunday.
- Do people know how to use a Fire extinguisher? If not, many fire departments offer training.

- Does your building have fire suppression? Elide balls or sprinklers?
- In a fire when a quick exit is needed, elderly may be carried up/down staircases by two people in Emergency Evacuation Blankets. “Moving blankets” work well for this purpose. They should be marked and permanently stored near the staircase where they would be used.
- Plan Annual Fire Drills. Loud alarms startle some people into inaction. A drill trains people to respond well, that is, decently and in order.
- If you plan a fire drill, are you aware of folks with special needs, autism, Alzheimer’s, or dementia, that may not be mentally or emotionally equipped to handle a drill? Will a buddy system help them or do other plans need to be made?
- Do you have Floor Plan Maps at doors noting fire exits?
- Do you have LIGHTED Exit Signs?
- Do you have Emergency Lighting not dependent on electricity? These may be Nickel Cadmium battery operated lights permanently plugged into key outlets to “light the way” or they may be tied to fire alarm)
- Do office personnel and pastor have flashlights available? Are the batteries good?
- Do you have a Knox Box for Police and Fire Depts.? This is a security box mounted at one or more doors to allow quick access by Emergency Personnel.
- Have you ever had a Fire Dept. walkthrough and inspection seeking their input and educating them on the floor plan of the building?
- Do you have your furnace inspected annually?
- Do you have Crash Bars on all emergency exits? Some old buildings have doors that open inward instead of outward. Can that be changed/updated for safety?
- Do you have Kitchen Safety Rules posted and explained to all kitchen users particularly regarding children in the kitchen?
- Do you have a Fire Extinguisher in the kitchen? Are all extinguishers regularly checked for charge?
- Are all your exits clear for emergencies? Never block an exit that may be used for emergency evacuation.
- Do you have a door that may be MISTAKEN for an exit, but is not? Mark it as “NOT AN EXIT.”
- Do you have cones to mark unsafe areas? Signs for spills?
- Do you have multiple people responsible for making sure all candles on the property are properly extinguished?

### **Security**

Security steps can be controversial because churches want to be welcoming to people, not fortresses. Discernment should be exercised by Sessions, Security committees and Security Teams as they consider these issues. There are creative ways to implement both security and welcome. Use this list for discussion. Churches with Pre-Schools have State-mandated health, safety and security requirements that must be followed.

### **DURING THE BUSINESS WEEK**

- Are the doors locked?
- Do you have a doorbell? There are doorbells that can buzz a handset rather than sound.

- Do you have a remote-control lock so that people can be buzzed in?
- Do you have security cameras? Are the cameras at entrances and along property walls? Who monitors them? Are they easily monitored? Technology now allows doorbells and camera monitoring via smart phone.
- Do you have motion detector alarms or motion triggered lights?
- Do you have burglar alarms?
- Do you have exterior signage that may act as a crime deterrent?
- Do you have Keycard access or use Keys? If you use keys, how do you control who has them?

One congregation has a Panic Button at the pulpit, in the kitchen and in the pastor's office that will summons State Police directly. For more information:

Installed by Vigilant Security of State College  
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 State College, PA 16803-2282  
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## **DURING WORSHIP**

- Should you lock SOME or ALL of the church doors during a worship service?
  - One congregation keeps all doors locked except the main doors. The main doors are locked after 15 minutes into the worship service to prevent ingress. Egress is always possible for fire safety. After the door is locked 15 minutes into the service, there is a doorbell that vibrates a handset so that latecomers may be admitted by a security team member.
  - Are children protected with locked doors, so that intruders cannot abduct? Are the doors nearest the nursery and children locked?
  - Do you have radio communication from the nursery to Safety Team?
  - Are the nursery volunteers trained in safety procedures?
  - Does the nursery have a panic button?
  - All locked exit doors must be openable from the inside for fire safety.
  - Do you have a security team that works together to monitor the property during worship?
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- Have you taken advantage of an Active Shooter Prevention and Training? Your insurance company can tell you about available classes. The United Methodist Church offers A.L.I.C.E.
  - Presbyterian Disaster Assistance lists resources offered by FEMA and Department of Homeland Security regarding Human caused disasters at houses of worship.
  - Have you ever had an "active shooter" drill or offered training to the congregation for such an event?
  - Domestic dispute is a leading cause of violent acts. Awareness by the security team of domestic issues is a key to prevention. Knowledge of child custody disputes is a key to prevention. This is a difficult issue because of our responsibility for confidentiality. Is there a balance that may be struck between confidentiality and child protection?
  - Do you have law enforcement personnel in your congregation?

[This last item concerns extremely delicate issues charged with emotion on all sides. Rather than avoiding the question, facilitate respectful, thoughtful discussion.]

- Should you implement a “no weapons rule”?
- Are there trained folks in the congregation with a concealed carry permit?

### **Updates from Lieutenant Andrew Peters as of March 2026 include:**

The recommendations look good at baseline. For evacuation and threat management, designated "searchers" and "evacuation" teams are helpful. Those would be pre-designated members to aid in searching to ensure everyone is evacuated (fire) or searching the building for anything suspicious if you have a security breach or suspected breach to ensure someone did not stash weapons, IEDs, accelerants in the building. If there is an obvious threat, such as a suspicious package, the course is to evacuate, but until something is physically seen or a specific threat is received, it will be up to the members to determine if someone was actually lost or if did they enter a restricted room, hallway, etc. for nefarious purposes.

In addition, for items to keep, I would ensure there is adequate hydration (bottled water with/without electrolyte packs) and some short-term snacks available. You don't need complete MREs or anything, but in the event a shelter in place order is issued for an area during a service, will the congregants be comfortable and stay healthy (think diabetics). for 4, 6, or 8 hours? Water for those places where water may be an issue (or shut off because of emergency) and some snacks (granola bars, single trail mix packs, etc.) can make things tolerable until the shelter order is lifted.

Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Teams can assist in assessing the building and grounds, but simple things like ensuring lighting both inside and outside is adequate, trimming back landscaping, ensuring there is not easy access to rooftops, hardening the exterior of the building to deter vehicular attacks on the structure (bollards, or decorative planters) are all considerations.

Big thing is to have a plan, exercise the plan, have the equipment needed in the event of an emergency, and then keep up with it. Checking the building on a frequent basis (windows all latch, doors all lock, equipment is all up to date, lighting is still working) is all part of overall preparedness. With such diverse weather in central PA, locks, doors, windows, etc. take a hit and should be checked at least semi-annually (fall and spring).

Last thing is for larger congregations with larger buildings/schools attached, need to establish a reunification area in the event people are separated during an evacuation. This area should be far enough away from the complex that it is not within a "hot" zone, but also manageable to take children/elderly. Ideally, its own building but if outside, ensure the area can be secured itself so it does not become a secondary attack scene.

I could go much deeper, but for general preparedness, thinking about preparing (planning), protecting, practicing, and being proactive (not reactive) will go a long way.