

BEULAH HEIGHTS UNIVERSITY

Before the Crisis Happens - and It Will

A Proposal for a Crisis Management Plan for First Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church

A Paper

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Of The Course Requirements

LS 617 Leading Through Times of Crisis

By

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## Before the Crisis Happens - and It Will

During the time of rotary dialed telephones phones people dialed zero for the operator in case of an emergency. In 1968, AT&T established 911 as a national number system where people could call to request help in a time of emergency. (Stone 2014) Since the onset of 911 times have and continue to call for more intense emergency preparedness and response. So much so that the term crisis now replaces the word emergency in many situations. There is a distinct difference in an emergency and a crisis. Emergencies are situations that can be handled by emergency response teams such as police, fire, and or emergency medical services. A crisis, however is a situation that may significantly affect a business's ability to carry out its' day to day operations, cause physical damage to both the structural building and employees working there, has wide spread impact that may extend beyond the job place and which requires additional resources and coordination to support initial responders to the crisis. (Toronto 2009). Historical times that come to mind when thinking about crises are the December 14, 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting, Orlando Night Club Shooting, June 12, 2016, Kansas Department of Revenue Shooting, September 19, 2017, First Baptist Church, Sutherland Springs, Texas Shooting on November 5, 2017, December 16, 2016 shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South, Carolina, June 14, 2016 armed hostage takeover at a Walmart in Austin, Texas, February 1, 2017, Inmates Take Employees Hostage at a Delaware State Prison, , and of course no one can forget September 11, 2001 coordinated terrorist attacks on New York. World Trade Centers. One thing these places have in common is that during one or more days of the week they are all or was someone's workplace.

Crisis in the workplace are no longer few and far in between. Every organization is vulnerable to crises. W. T. Coombs (2007) in his article Crisis Management and Communications, talks about five best practices in crisis management. He says, every workplace should have a crisis management plan and should update it at least yearly. Next, he says, every workplace should have a designated crisis management team. Thirdly, Coombs believes the crisis management plan should be tested annually. Finally, Coombs suggests pre-drafted crisis management messages prepared to issue when necessary.

If the church as a workplace isn't prepared for a crisis event, it is set up for failure, destruction, and major loss during such a time. This paper is written based on statistical data and information used as a basis to create a proposal for a crisis management plan for the First Mount Pleasant Baptist Church where I as this paper's author serve as Assistant Pastor and work along with a team of paid and volunteer employees.

### **Statistical Data**

Statistics on church violence clearly demonstrate that there is a need for intentional security for those whose workplace is the church. According to the Atlanta Journal Constitution, on October 24, 2012 Floyd Palmer a disgruntled facilities maintenance employee at World Changers Church International in College Park, Georgia calmly walked in the church during a Wednesday morning prayer service and fatally shot Greg McDowell, the worship leader and church volunteer, before calmly walking out (Jeffries 2012). On December 31, 2014 Pastor Terry Howell of Living Water Fellowship Church in Kissimmee, Fla was meeting with a maintenance worker by the name of Benjamin Parangan, to fire him when other employees of the church saw Parangan take out a handgun and shoot at the Pastor several times. The Pastor was not shot but returned fire with his own gun and hit Parangan (Sandavol 2014)

Christians, have been taught that God will provide in all situations. While this is a definite truth, as the devil has turned up the heat with his antics, the leaders of God must recognize that the time has come when it is a must to be aware and diligent in protecting the people who have elected the church as their places of employment. Carl Chinn, author “*Evil Invades Sanctuary: The Case for Security in Faith-Based Organizations*,” spends his life traveling the country teaching and strategizing with churches, helping them to create personalized crisis management plans for their church’s personal needs. Chinn became acquainted with church crisis when he was an employee at Focus on the Family, a Christian ministry in Colorado Springs Colorado. There, Chinn was hired as a building engineer for the ministry. In 1996, Chinn found himself involved in a standoff with an angry gunman who took hostages at the ministry. (Ogles 2015). After this terrifying event, Chinn began studying violent incidents at ministries and eventually started educating faith-based operators and law-enforcement groups about ministry security. He was directly involved in implementing a security program for New Life Church in Colorado Springs in 2005 where just two years later, he was part of the security team that stopped an active shooter there (Ogles 2015).

Each year, Chinn releases a report of violence in faith-based organizations. As much as church leaders and church goers would like to think that their churches are protected from or less vulnerable to violent crime, according to Chinn’s statistics it just isn’t so. Chinn states that, “our houses of worship and faith-based organizations, our sacred ground, aren’t shielded from the harsh realities of violence in American culture (Chinn 2012). In fact, according to Chinn’s report and [the latest government statistics](#), twice as many people die in violent incidents on religious property as die in school shootings. (Ogles 2015). According to Chinn’s 2017 preliminary statistics report, from January 1, 2017 through June 10, 2017 104 faith-based incidences were

recorded throughout the United States (Chinn 2017). They were counted as nine in January, fourteen in February, twenty in March, twenty-five in April, twenty-five in May, and nine in June. A few concrete incidences are noted as follows:

1-12-17	Paris, AR	As the pastor of the First Free Will Baptist Church was walking to the restroom from his church office, he heard banging on the door and someone yelling, "Help pastor, can you let me in?" When he opened the door, 3 thugs, with at least 1 gun, attacked him, forced him to the ground and took all his valuables.
2-2-17	Des Moines, IA	St. Augustin Church deacon Joe Coan (89-years-old) was working in the front of the sanctuary as a 31-year-old woman was praying. When she concluded praying around 11:00 AM that Thursday she walked up to him, said something he couldn't understand, then stabbed him with a big knife. He will survive, she was arrested. A sign declaring "Chapel is Currently Closed" was put on the door.
3-22-16	San Fernando, CA	Faith Center Church Pastor Rudy Trujillo was badly beaten by a former congregant as he was getting into his car outside his church. The 53-year-old attacker beat him so severely he had head injuries and a broken hip.
4-10-17	Charlottesville, VA	An alert and trained child-care worker at the St. Mark Lutheran Church playground stopped a man who was attempting to abduct a child from the playground. At approximately 4:00 PM that Monday the staffer had seen the 46-year-old man reach over the playground fence to grab a girl, but the staffer's yells startled the man and he ran off. He was arrested.
5-18-17	Chicago, IL	JLM Life Community Center church went into lockdown when a man attempted to carjack someone outside at gunpoint.
6-3-17	Pearl River, MS	A family reported their 21-year-old family-member missing. He was found in the parking lot of the Salem Baptist Church by congregants showing up for Sunday AM services. He had committed suicide there the night before.
Chinn 2017		

After becoming aware of such heartbreaking statistics and information, what church, ministry, or faith-based operation wouldn't be ready to put a crisis management plan in place to protect their employees as well as members? In her book *Crisis Communication Plan: A PR Blue Print*, Sandra Clawson-Freeo advises from a secular position on crisis management that a crisis is any

situation that threatens the integrity or reputation of your company. She suggests that it is usually brought on by adverse or negative media attention and can be contributed to incidences such as a legal dispute, theft, accident, fire, flood or manmade disaster that could be attributed to your company as well as a situation where in the eyes of the media or general public a company did not react to one of the above situations in the appropriate manner (Clawson-Freeo 2001) Crisis management in the church as a workplace or place of worship must be an intentional process of action. In preparing a proposal for crisis management for my place of employment, First Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church Nehemiah 4:9 is observed. "I prayed to my God and posted a guard.

### **Crisis Management Proposal**

For the purpose of this document, crisis refers to:

An event or emergency associated in some way with the First Mount Pleasant Baptist Church beyond its control, which can be expected to become public. A crisis presents potential for damage to individuals or the image of the Church, and hinders its' ability to be productive in ministry. In other words, a crisis is anything that could cause the public to lose faith in the local church leadership or the operations of the local church (Bernstein 2016).

Crisis comes as a surprise. It occurs unexpectedly and when least expected or able to deal with it.

- Surprise leads to insufficient information, and questions are difficult to answer.
- The media, public, and church members will have questions almost immediately. which is the time to take control and not be hesitant or unprepared.
- At this point it is time to take control. Control is what will help withstand pressure.

Crises that most likely will be faced by the church come in the form of:

1. a personal nature as with a clergy or lay person
2. a legal or criminal matter
3. a corporate nature such as during a church worship service or conference
4. involving violent acts, public demonstrations, death or injury
5. prompted by a natural disaster such as tornadoes, floods, fires, accidents, etc.
6. situation only perceived and not of true crisis proportion

### **Immediate Actions of the Crisis Team.**

1. The Pastor, or his designee, will convene as many members of the crisis team as possible immediately upon becoming aware of a crisis. In the event the team cannot meet in person in a timely manner, a telephone conference call should be arranged.
2. The Crisis Management Team, in consensus with the pastor, should develop a strategy for the dissemination of information, determining how much and what kind of information can be released, as well as when and to whom. At this time, an official statement regarding the situation will be developed.

3. The Pastor, or his designee, will assign a spokesperson to the media should the pastor not be available for this role. The spokesperson must be thoroughly, and regularly briefed before making any appearances or statements. The spokesperson may refer news media representatives to others who can speak with authority on the subject.
4. The pastor's spokesperson should establish a schedule for regular briefing sessions of team members for updates and discussion
5. The team will agree to provide 24-hour availability and access to one another if necessary.

### **Responsibilities of Team Members.**

Senior Pastor - manage and direct the Crisis Team.

Assistant Pastor - key link between the pastor and congregation, assists in gathering information about the crisis and act as the designated back-up spokesperson in the event the pastor is unable or unavailable to speak at the time.

Chief of Security - delegates ground responsibilities.

Chairman of Deacon Board - provide information and consultation, designated back-up spokesperson in the event the assistant pastor is unable or unavailable at the time.

Pastor's Administrative Assistant - direct employees, volunteers, and/or parishioners, monitors the logging of all telephone calls/contacts from the media, prepare information to be reported to the media, and makes assignments for monitoring media coverage of newspaper articles, radio and television news.

The Pastor's Adjutant - attends to personal needs of the Pastor.

Lead Prayer Intercessor - engages prayer warriors in round the clock prayer.

### **Immediate Team Meeting**

The immediate team meeting is to establish protocol for dealing with security and safety issues at the church.

- First person aware, contact appropriate members of the Crisis Team immediately.
- Assemble the Crisis Team.
- Crisis Team assesses the nature and extent of the crisis.
- Questions to ask:
  - Who knows about the situation?
  - What do they know?
  - What is the status of the situation.
  - What can we expect to occur over the next few hours?

During the meeting, prepare a one paragraph statement to be distributed as soon as facts are known. Say what can be said, including facts about what happened and what you intend to do. Provide background information on the denomination, conference and the people involved.

Appropriate Examples of Media Response:

Respond as soon as possible to all inquiries. It doesn't have to say much, but will serve to appease the media. Each inquiry from a reporter needs a response as soon as possible.

To buy time: "We're looking into situation. I understand you have a job to do and I understand that you must get the facts. I don't believe I know enough information now to tell you and as soon as I have information, I will call you immediately. When is your deadline?" (Coombs, 2007)

At this point begin uncovering as many facts as possible, develop a statement of truth and get back in touch with the media.

Support Staff (including receptionists and other staff) will:

- direct calls as instructed
- keep copies of all messages related to the crisis
- assist information flow as directed
- not attempt to answer questions (even if you have information. This is the sole responsibility of the designated spokesperson(s))

### **After the Crisis**

Debriefing of the Crisis Management Team is necessary immediately after the crisis. The team will meet to review how the crisis unfolded and how it was handled. The team will consider: what went well, what missteps were made, what problems could have been foreseen or avoided, what adjustments in the crisis management plan are indicated. And what loose ends need to be tied up.

### **Conclusion**

It is difficult to condense all that is known about crisis management into a ten-page paper. A complete manual would be much more resourceful. I have tried to identify key points and best practices into this crisis management proposal based on the knowledge of expert researchers and analysts in the field. While crises begin as a negative/threat, effective crisis management can minimize the damage and in some cases, allow a workplace to emerge stronger than before the crisis. No workplace is immune from a crisis so all must do their best to prepare for one. This research and proposal provides many ideas that can be incorporated into an effective crisis management plan. At the end of we all must be vigilant and alert to and admit that in these last and evil days, a crisis is both possible and probable. The best thing is to stay prepared.

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