

THE WATCHMAN PROJECT PRESENTS

# S.H.A.M.A.R.

**Securing Houses of Worship  
Against the Multitudes of Risks**

*A Church Security Framework for Faith Leaders and Security Teams*

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**By Dr. David E. Jackson**

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**The Watchman Project, Inc.**

*"Guardians of Worship...Agents of Peace"*

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## About the Author

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### **Dr. David E. Jackson**

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Dr. David E. Jackson is an executive leader, minister, author, consultant, and learning and development professional with over 15 years of experience across the non-profit, faith-based, law enforcement, and corporate sectors. In a rare combination of callings, he served simultaneously as a senior pastor and a police officer for nearly five years — and it was during that time that he first identified a critical gap in how faith communities approach security.

His academic credentials include a B.A. from Cornell University, an M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary of New York, and a D.Min. from New York Theological Seminary. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership at Southeastern University.

Dr. Jackson has served at every level of the church to include being a senior pastor, church planter, and a consecrated Bishop in the Light of the World Covenant Fellowship. He currently is credentialed in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and serves as the Assistant Pastor at the Refreshing COGIC in Decatur, GA and the Superintendent of the Refreshing District of the Western Georgia Jurisdiction.

His experience with gun violence reduction began while leading a Christian youth development organization in New York, where he became increasingly concerned about the impact of gun violence on his students. He was introduced to violence interruption work by the God Squad in Brooklyn, and later was encouraged by the Mayor of Atlanta's Faith Advisor to support clergy involvement in violence interruption efforts. That work grew into The Watchman Project, Inc.

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#### **The Watchman Project, Inc.**

A non-profit organization committed to safeguarding houses of worship and promoting peace in communities, through two initiatives: S.H.A.M.A.R. (church security consulting and training) and R.S.V.P. (clergy-led gun violence response). Led by Dr. David E. Jackson.

Chapter Introduction [ S.H.A.M.A.R. ]

## The Urgent Reality

*Why your church can no longer afford to wait*

It happened again.

Another church, another community, another congregation left shattered — not by doctrinal debate or financial hardship, but by violence that walked through the doors they deliberately left open. If you have been paying attention to the news over the past decade, you know that houses of worship are no longer exempt from the threats that plague our broader society.

***"How many times have we heard about church violence on the news? It's a stark reminder of the urgent need for proactive security measures."***

— Dr. David E. Jackson

The truth is uncomfortable, but it must be named: the church has been slow to respond. Many congregations have operated with the assumption that spiritual openness and physical vulnerability are inseparable — that to secure the doors is somehow to compromise the welcome. That assumption is costing lives.

This ebook was written for faith leaders and security personnel who are ready to change that. Whether you have never thought formally about security, have a team that needs direction, or are simply looking for a framework that honors both the tactical and the spiritual dimensions of protection — this is for you.

### **The S.H.A.M.A.R. Framework**

S.H.A.M.A.R. stands for Securing Houses of Worship Against the Multitudes of Risks. It is the flagship church security initiative of The Watchman Project, Inc., and it is built on a foundational conviction: that prayer and preparation are not opposites. They are partners.

The chapters that follow address the key pillars of a comprehensive church security posture — from understanding threats and building your team, to the spiritual theology of protection and the growing influence of the mental health crisis on church safety.

Read with an open mind and a willing spirit. Your congregation is counting on you.

**Chapter 1** [ S — Spiritually Grounded Security ]

## **The Spiritual Case for Church Security**

*Answering the objection that faith and force don't mix*

Of all the objections a pastor will face when introducing a security program, the most persistent is also the most sincere: "Doesn't having armed guards at the door send the wrong message? Isn't the church supposed to be a place of welcome?"

This is not a frivolous concern. It comes from a real theology — one that takes seriously the radical hospitality of the Gospel. And it deserves a serious answer.

### **A Theology of Stewardship**

Scripture is consistent on this point: those entrusted with the care of others bear a responsibility for their safety. Ezekiel 33:6 warns explicitly about the watchman who sees the sword coming and fails to sound the alarm. Nehemiah 4 describes a people who built the wall with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. Proverbs 22:3 tells us that the prudent see danger and take cover.

Security is not a departure from biblical values. It is an expression of them. Stewardship extends beyond finances. It includes the physical safety of every soul under your pastoral care.

***Security is not a departure from biblical values — it is an expression of them.***

### **Prayer Is Indispensable — And Insufficient Alone**

The Watchman Project's approach is not to replace prayer with protocols. It is to ensure that prayer is accompanied by preparation. We believe the Holy Spirit works through trained teams, well-designed spaces, and practiced procedures just as readily as through spontaneous divine intervention.

A church that prays without preparing is presuming on grace. A church that prepares without praying is trusting in its own strength. S.H.A.M.A.R. holds both in tension — and that is what makes it distinctly faith-based.

### **Addressing the Congregation**

When you introduce a security program, lead with the pastoral frame, not the tactical one. Tell your congregation: "We are doing this because every life in this room is sacred. We protect what we love." That framing transforms security from a message of fear into a message of care.

**Chapter 2** [ H — Hazard Awareness ]

## **Threat Assessment & Risk Awareness**

*You cannot protect against what you haven't named*

Before you can build a security plan, you need an honest accounting of what you are actually facing. Most churches skip this step. They purchase cameras, hire a guard, and call it done — without ever systematically examining their vulnerabilities. That is not a security plan. That is the appearance of one.

### **Understanding the Threat Landscape**

Houses of worship face a range of threats that are distinct from commercial or government facilities. These include:

- Targeted ideological violence (hate crimes based on race, religion, or denomination)
- Domestic violence incidents that follow members into the sanctuary
- Mentally unstable individuals drawn to large gatherings or pastoral care environments
- Theft and property crimes during off-hours
- Medical emergencies during services (including cardiac events and seizures)
- Active shooter scenarios — increasingly, not exclusively external perpetrators

Each of these requires a different response protocol. A risk assessment that only prepares you for an active shooter scenario will leave your congregation exposed to the more statistically common threats listed above.

### **The Four Dimensions of Risk**

S.H.A.M.A.R. evaluates risk across four dimensions:

- Physical: entry points, parking lot visibility, interior chokepoints, emergency exits
- Digital: surveillance systems, communication infrastructure, data security
- Psychological: threat behavior recognition, de-escalation training, trauma awareness
- Spiritual: the emotional and relational health of the congregation, pastoral staff burnout, internal conflict

#### **The Watchman Project Risk Assessment**

Our comprehensive on-site risk assessment walks through your entire property and operations — examining all four dimensions of risk — and delivers actionable recommendations your leadership can implement immediately. To schedule, visit [www.thewatchmanproject.com](http://www.thewatchmanproject.com) or call 929-313-1051.

Chapter 3 [ A — Awareness of Mental Health Risks ]

## The Mental Health Pandemic & Church Security

*The crisis at your door — and through it*

The United States is experiencing an unprecedented mental health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated trends that were already alarming: rising rates of depression, anxiety, psychosis, and social isolation. And where do people in crisis often turn? To the church.

This is not a problem. It is the church's calling. But it has direct and significant implications for security.

### Why the Church Is a Mental Health Flashpoint

Faith communities are uniquely positioned at the intersection of spiritual care and psychological vulnerability. People experiencing mental health crises may seek out the church because they have no other safe harbor. They may appear at services, at the pastor's office, or at church events in states of acute distress, confusion, or even danger.

Church security teams that have not been trained in mental health awareness will either overreact (escalating a situation that needed de-escalation) or underreact (missing warning signs of a serious threat). Neither outcome is acceptable.

### Key Mental Health Realities for Security Teams

- Not every disruptive person is dangerous — but every disruptive person needs a trained response
- Individuals in psychotic episodes respond differently to commands than neurotypical individuals
- Trauma history affects how people respond to authority figures, including security personnel
- Substance use and mental illness frequently co-occur, complicating behavioral prediction
- Suicide risk is elevated in individuals who reach out to churches in crisis

### What This Means Practically

Every church security team should include or have direct access to a mental health-trained individual. De-escalation skills are not optional for church security — they are foundational. The goal is not to remove all distressed persons from the premises; it is to respond with both firmness and compassion.

***The goal is not to remove all distressed persons from your church. It is to respond with both firmness and compassion.***

Additionally, pastoral care providers need to coordinate with the security team around high-risk pastoral relationships — individuals in counseling who may pose a risk to themselves or others. This requires clear, confidentiality-respecting protocols between the pastoral staff and security leadership.

**Chapter 4** [ M — Mobilizing Your Team ]

## **Building & Training Your Church Security Team**

*Who guards the guardian — and how do you train them?*

The difference between a church security team and an armed group of well-meaning volunteers is training, structure, and leadership. Many churches have the latter and believe they have the former. This chapter is about closing that gap.

### **Who Should Be on Your Security Team**

Recruiting for a church security team is not simply a matter of finding the biggest volunteers or the ones who happen to own firearms. Effective team members share a specific profile:

- Sound judgment under pressure — more important than physical size or firearm proficiency
- A servant posture — security in a faith context must reflect the character of the congregation
- Trainability — willingness to learn, be corrected, and adapt to evolving protocols
- Situational awareness — naturally observant of people and environments
- Discretion — able to act decisively without escalating unnecessarily

Prior military or law enforcement experience is an asset, but it is not a prerequisite — and sometimes it requires additional recalibration. Church security is not policing. The environment, the relationships, and the objectives are different.

### **Team Structure**

A basic church security structure should include:

- A Security Director or Team Leader (coordinates with senior leadership)
- Perimeter team (parking lot, exterior doors, street monitoring)
- Interior team (roving coverage during service, stationed at entrances)
- Children's ministry security (separate protocol for children's areas)
- Medical response designee (ideally a trained first responder)

### **What Training Must Cover**

At minimum, your team should be trained in the following areas:

- Threat identification and behavioral recognition
- De-escalation techniques
- Emergency communication and chain of command
- Active threat response (including Run-Hide-Fight adapted for worship environments)
- First aid and AED operation

- Legal considerations for church security personnel in your state

### **Hands-On Training with The Watchman Project**

Dr. Jackson conducts direct, on-site security team training with churches across the Atlanta area and beyond. Training is scenario-based, practical, and tailored to the specific environment of each congregation. Contact us to schedule.

**Chapter 5** [ A-R — Agents of Reconciliation ]

## **Bridging the Tactical & the Spiritual**

*Intercessors, security teams, and pastoral care working as one*

One of the most overlooked elements of church security is the integration of spiritual resources with tactical ones. In most churches, the prayer team, the security team, and the pastoral counselors operate in entirely separate silos — and this is a significant vulnerability.

### **The Role of the Intercessory Team**

Your church's intercessors are not peripheral to security. They are a front line. Intercessors who pray over the sanctuary before services, who are attuned to the spiritual atmosphere of the building, and who are trained to identify people in spiritual distress are functioning as a form of threat awareness — even if they never think of it that way.

The practical application of this: intercessors and security team members should know each other, communicate before and during services, and have a shared language for flagging concerns. An intercessor who notices someone in acute distress should know exactly who to notify and how.

### **Pastoral Care Providers as Security Assets**

Pastoral counselors and care providers hold some of the most sensitive information in the congregation. They are aware of high-conflict marriages, mental health struggles, financial crises, and relational breakdowns — all of which can become security-relevant. This does not mean confidentiality should be violated. It means that protocols should exist for what happens when a pastoral care situation rises to the level of a potential safety concern.

Key questions every church should answer:

- Who does the pastoral counselor notify if a counseling client makes a threat against themselves or others?
- Is there a protocol for communicating (without violating confidentiality) that a specific individual needs gentle, proactive monitoring during services?
- Is the security team trained to provide supportive, non-confrontational care for individuals in emotional crisis?

### **A Unified Security Culture**

The goal is not three separate teams operating in parallel. It is a unified culture of care and protection that flows through every person in a position of ministry. The greeter who notices someone acting strangely. The usher who recognizes a domestic violence situation. The

intercessor who feels an unusual spiritual heaviness in a corner of the room. The security team member who responds to all of the above with both competence and compassion.

***Security is not a department. It is a culture. Every person in ministry is part of it.***

When these roles work together, your church becomes both safer and more pastorally effective. That is not a contradiction. That is the S.H.A.M.A.R. vision.

**Chapter Conclusion** [ [Next Steps](#) ]

## Your Church Deserves to Be Secure

*The question is not whether — it's when*

You have read this far because you take seriously your responsibility to the people in your care. That already puts you ahead of most. But reading about church security and actually building a security culture are two different things — and the gap between them is where tragedies happen.

The Watchman Project exists to close that gap. We are not selling fear. We are selling preparedness. And we have seen firsthand what a congregation looks like when leadership takes seriously both the spiritual and tactical dimensions of safety: they worship more freely, serve more confidently, and open their doors more boldly — because they know those doors are covered.

***"Security is an essential aspect of the business of the church."***

— Dr. David E. Jackson

### Your Next Step is Free

We are not asking you to sign a contract today. We are asking you to take 15 minutes.

Schedule a complimentary 15-minute consultation with Dr. David E. Jackson. Bring your questions, your concerns, and your honest assessment of where your church stands today. We will help you figure out what you actually need — and what it will take to get there.

### SCHEDULE YOUR FREE 15-MINUTE CONSULTATION

*Take the first step toward a safer congregation.*

[www.thewatchmanproject.com](http://www.thewatchmanproject.com)

**929-313-1051**

[info@thewatchmanproject.com](mailto:info@thewatchmanproject.com)

After your consultation, explore our next steps:

- ▶ **Church Security Assessment** Comprehensive on-site evaluation of your facility, team, and protocols.
- ▶ **Virtual Pastors & Leaders Church Security Seminar** 4-hour virtual training for pastors + 1 guest | \$199