



The Vergers Voice

The news blog of the Vergers Guild

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Friday, March 20, 2015

Security Planning and the Verger



Eilean Donan Castle in the Highlands, Scotland. Can you spot evidence of security planning?

By Ken Holloway, News Manager, VGEC

Around 2 o'clock in the afternoon on January 5th, at [Blackburn Cathedral](#) in the northwest county of Lancashire in England, Mark Pickering, the Dean's Verger for many years, was attacked by an assailant and injured so badly that he required surgery that night. [The Lancashire Telegraph reported](#) that, "...he suffered head injuries, two broken ribs and a fractured elbow in a frenzied unprovoked attack."

Click the [link](#) and read the details. As you read, think about your parish church or cathedral's vulnerability to assaults like this one. Now, think, in general, about what plans your congregation has in place to deal with all sorts of unexpected events.

When I read the article, I flashed back to some military situations I faced, then to wondering how prepared our Episcopal churches are for all sorts of contingencies like these. In my military experience, we prepared in detail for as many contingencies as could be imagined. Shouldn't we pay the same level of attention to our churches? The Blackburn Cathedral incident catalyzed this week's [Vergers Voice](#) post and those that will follow in the next several months.

I asked David Jette, Head Verger at [Trinity Wall Street](#) to comment on contingency planning. He replied, in part, "Although security concerns in church may seem to be exclusively part of the urban scene, I am convinced that procedures need to be in place for every church and understood and practiced by everyone who comes into contact with those who enter the church building. I am not advocating an NRA approach to security but a common sense and pastoral set of practices that support what we believe an appropriate Christian response to real needs and concerns."

Fire, bombing, assault, flood, tornado, hurricane, heart attack, seizure and other less sensational, but serious events occur in our churches every year. Is your church prepared for any of these situations? Has your congregation ever rehearsed what to do if faced with an emergency?

Others contributing to this week's post are Scott Smith and Duke DuTeil, who, with broad experience strongly urge that, in addition to the material contained in the VGEC [Course of Training for a Verger](#), we all seek and include advice and help from our local fire and police departments, nearby medical facilities and public works agencies/companies (electric power, water/waste water and natural gas providers) in completing our plan. Our insurance companies have consultants available for such planning efforts also. Some insurers will even conduct vulnerability inspections and analysis to help with your plan development.

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Here are some questions to ponder:

The verger generally has a better view of the congregation and the nave than anyone else. The verger can maintain awareness of possible threats as each service unfolds. But awareness is only useful to initiate action. Before one acts, planning is the golden ingredient.

Have you talked about tactics and strategies with purposefully selected members of your congregation on the "what-ifs"? That would range from gentle ushering to Dial 911 and/or get the congregation the hell out.

Who makes the (play) call? If necessary during the course of a service, how is the play call announced? What happens next? What timing constraints should be expected?

Can we arrange to have members representing the various "survival" skills (medical, communications, (strong) ushering, etc.) in church at all services? If not, is municipal responsive help available quickly? What help is it? How is notification made or an alarm sounded?

Are there established escape routes? Who will lead members to which exits? Is there a way to shelter or harbor members out of harm's way in the case of a property invasion?

Where are your fire extinguishers? Have they been inspected? (Generally a municipality responsibility.) Does anyone know how to use a fire extinguisher? Who should receive Fire Department training on extinguishing a controllable fire? How will that training be passed along to others in the congregation?

Who will attend to injuries until EMS arrives? Do we have defibrillators? Where are they located? Have we tested their batteries lately? Do we have an established triage site? Can we provide first-aid training to other than our credentialed medical parishioners? How can we provide breathing assistance (for smoke inhalation) until EMS arrives?

How will EMS calls be effectively made? (physical address, which entrance, number of injuries, nature of injuries, where EMS will find the injured)

How and what is to be communicated to the police department? Will the EMS caller also call the police? In your city or county, is there a central 911 number dispatcher able to access all public services needed?

What role in all of these plans does the verger play? How can the verger help develop the plan?

Has your parish considered any/all of these questions? If not, should the verger suggest that such considerations be evaluated and plans developed by the parish administration/vestry? How will you know that your plan is adequate? Who can you contact to review your planning effort?

Does your diocese have outlines, drafts or suggested plans available as starting points for your parish planning process? Does your liability insurance company have planning help available?

This is a dead serious subject. Folks generally don't like to talk about these sort of plans, but when a situation arises, it is a responsible parish body which is prepared and well rehearsed. More about that in Part 2.

All responses, accounts of events you've encountered, outlines, drafts and mature emergency plans and comments on emergency planning for churches are welcome. We want our follow-up articles to be responsive to your needs and as comprehensive as our publication space can contain, so send your comments and suggestions to news@vergers.org as soon as you can.

Click the big red button to [register for the 2015 Annual Conference](#) being held October 1-4, 2015 in St. Louis, Missouri:



Abstract: We are all involved in dealing with whatever happens in and around the practice of our liturgy. Let's talk about what we as vergers should do, what we have done and what remains to be done to be prepared for human, medical, infrastructure, or

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weather emergencies, indeed, for any crises. Share your stories and information at news@vergers.org.

Posted by [Ken Holloway](#) at 7:47 AM



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1 comment:



Charlie March 23, 2015 at 5:14 PM

My name is Charlie Bolick and I am a "Verger In Training" for St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Pompano Beach, Florida. In my opinion the content of this article is invaluable and I am in total agreement with what Messers. Holloway, Smith and DuTeil have stated. It's hard to imagine something unfortunate happening to, or within, our beloved churches, but the possibilities do exist. If you're like me, when I enter St. Martin I feel a sense of quiet peace, a well ordered dignity, beauty and I feel "safe!" These are things that I want to do my best to preserve.

Like Mr. Holloway I am former military, I fought in Vietnam during Tet Offensives I and II and even today volunteer my time to the Department of Veteran's Affairs. I tell you this because we volunteers are trained to handle the unfortunate events mentioned in this article and we are all tested on a yearly basis to be certain that we have retained our training and are current on any changes that may have taken place. We do not need to be as rigorous as a military hospital, but a basic plan of action should be in place.

As was witnessed at Blackburn Cathedral, times have changed and we need to adjust and take care. 2 Years ago, before volunteering my services to St. Martin, I learned while going through 18 weeks of police academy training (as a civilian) that individuals as well as our places of worship have an enhanced risk factor, brought about mostly due to changes in the world's economies.

I sincerely thank the gentlemen who wrote this article for bringing this tough subject to everyones attention and I am proud that as Vergers we are poised to take a leadership role. Our responsibilities are expanding and I think we're in agreement that it's "all" important.

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