

Safety & Security Thoughts
Part 3
Cameras

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This month we are focusing on the use of cameras in Part 3 of Safety and Security Thoughts. Cameras can serve many functions in the church. How we use them should be considered with care. Hopefully this article will aid churches in understanding the importance of cameras and some things to consider when developing a policy statement for cameras. A policy statement for cameras should be developed and reviewed by an attorney prior to the implementation of the policy and the installation of cameras.

The first question to consider when choosing whether to implement a camera system is, "what is the purpose of the system?" One purpose could be to record footage of various areas of the church to be reviewed at a later time in case of an incident. Another purpose could be to have certain areas of the church monitored in real time whenever people are present. Cameras can also be utilized in the recording and streaming of worship services. However, if cameras are used for recording and streaming of worship services, they should be separate cameras from any security camera setup the church utilizes. Additional questions to ask are, "Will audio be recorded?"; "Where will cameras be placed?"; "Who will be responsible for any footage?"

Cameras are strictly passive. They record and provide for monitoring. Recorded footage provides visual evidence which can either support or refute claims that are made. If an accusation is made against a church member or visitor, camera footage can determine if the accused individual was in the area of the alleged incident during the times provided by the accuser. Cameras can also provide a visual account in the event of a claim of injury on church property.

When beginning the selection process, determine what sort of budget the church desires to utilize in purchasing a camera system. If budget allows, select an expandable system so more cameras can be added in the future. There are a variety of options available for selecting a camera system. Some systems utilize an internal network for communication with a receiver. This communication can happen wirelessly or through hard wired connection. Other systems use a coax connection.

When installing cameras for the purpose of security, whether the cameras are monitored live, recorded, or both, there are some things to consider before installing the cameras. Cameras should never be placed in areas where people would have an expectation of privacy. There should never be a camera placed in or with view inside of bathrooms, locker rooms, or nursing rooms. Cameras can be placed outside of these areas to allow a visual of who enters an area in the event that an incident is reported. Cameras can cover hallways, access points and public

gathering areas, including a gymnasium and auditorium. Classrooms can have cameras, so long as any peripheral view does not include private areas, such as restrooms. Cameras can also cover the exterior of any campus buildings and parking lots of the property.

I want to make sure to offer a caution on exterior cameras. If the camera can see any part of an adjoining property, there could be liability involved. A church using exterior cameras should be sure any camera cannot see into a neighbor's structure. Local laws should be sought to determine if views of adjoining properties should be considered in placement of cameras.

Physical placement of cameras should be near the ceiling, so they are not easily accessible or tampered with. All wires should be routed through the ceiling or in the walls, again to eliminate the potential for tampering. If the church is performing new construction, input on camera placement should be given during the design phase. This gives better installation options versus retrofitting cameras into an existing facility. Drop ceilings are useful hiding wiring.

Additionally, consider how recordings will be labeled if requested by law enforcement or insurance companies. It is a good idea to include a label on any medium that contains recorded video that indicates the recorded video is the property of the church and any use is subject to the permissions granted by the church. As stated earlier, any policy statements should be reviewed by an attorney prior to implementation.

If you have any questions about cameras that has not been covered in this article, please reach out to me at everett@dakotabaptist.com and I will do my best to provide an answer.