



## Spotlight on Crestwood #33

### Safety and Security

When Rev. Wilcoxson suggested I do a Spotlight article on Safety and Security at Crestwood, I was less than excited. It sounded depressing, and I couldn't imagine that our church needed to deal with such issues.

Not surprisingly, I was wrong on all fronts. The subject is interesting, important, and comforting. I spent several hours chatting and touring our facility with Mitchell Smith, chair of our Safety and Security Committee.

Mitchell refused to start our conversation until he found a printed copy of our church's vision statement and highlighted it in bright yellow, referring back to it often. The whole thrust of our church's safety and security, he continually emphasized, is "Connecting People with God and Each Other." I don't know that I had paid attention to that statement before, but it is a powerful vision to lead any effort in our church. The Safety and Security committee is not just discussing technical issues, but keeps the overall purpose of connection forefront in their efforts.



Their work began in 2016 as a grassroots effort. Mitchell and Ward Ransdell, spurred on by a church shooting in South Carolina, started discussing the issue. Together, they took an on-line course on church security. They were soon joined by Rick Tittmann, then by Libby Wachtel and Joan Stafford. The Board formally made them a standing Safety and Security Committee.

Who would have guessed there were so many things to consider as they began their work? There are doors exiting to the outside that many of us don't even know are there. It is a window-filled church, and safe interior spaces had to be identified. The group soon realized that each of the potential incidents needs to drive the individualized proposed response. That made planning even more multi-faceted. For example, responses need to be entirely different if we were to deal with a fire, with threatening weather, or with an interior conflict. How does the congregation know which door to head for, or do we head to the interior, but where?

Mitchell stood up and went into his policeman (which he used to be) directing mode. He demonstrated how well-meaning people could actually confuse others if they aren't well-trained in how to give clear directions. Since you need strong guides during a crisis for the best results, Mitchell mentioned that training will soon be available, probably for elders and deacons, to learn how to effectively help if needed.

The committee has made many changes already. Together they have toured the church from top to bottom, identifying every possible hazard from wires on the floor, to bushes interfering with cameras outside, to securing the folded bleachers. They met with fire officials and emergency management representatives. They found there were over 300 outstanding keys that had lost accountability over the years!

Their initial Safety and Security proposal is already activated, and other components are being planned and will be submitted soon to the Board. There are four components they have identified and acted on:

1. A camera system has been strategically placed so that most doors for entry are covered visually inside and out as well as cameras placed throughout the building. The cameras' videos are recorded and kept for months. Already that has been helpful and produced a cute, warm-hearted story.

A woman was attending a class in our Mission Center and forgot her coat which she had tossed on the gym's bleachers. When she returned to get it, it could not be found. So, Facilities Manager Jim Cristi accessed the gym camera recording. He found the Day Care Center used the gym later that day and one of the little boys helpfully picked up the coat thinking it was his teacher's and carried it back to the Center. There, the teachers had been wondering where the coat came from! The little one's good deed was recorded, and the coat returned to its owner. Another time, without the sweet ending, a woman stole an item and was tracked down and arrested by using the same system.

2. We have a video intercom system in place that is not usually used, but can be if the need arises. Mitchell pointed out we don't want a locked-down campus, but we must balance security with its being a welcoming place to worship and gather. At the main doors, there are intercom buzzers that connect with the office. If for some reason the doors are locked, the visitor can communicate and be buzzed in or directed to a better entrance.

3. For better access control, the locks of the main entrances have been changed and replaced with maglocks with code-pads, making keys obsolete. Now, the names of those given codes to the building are recorded so that we know who has permission for access after hours. I don't fully understand how these work in spite of a patient explanation, but, without a code, essentially a giant magnet makes it impossible to open the doors which are locked remotely or in person. You can get out through them, but cannot get in. We cannot have a system which locks people inside.

4. We also have an alarm system in place. All doors have a magnetic sensor. If a door is left open, or is forced, an alarm will sound. And if someone is left in the building when it is supposed to be locked, there are motion sensors to set off alarms. The alarm system sensibly can be enhanced or lightened, depending on the situation.

These first four components are up and working. The Safety and Security Committee is now turning its attention to writing further procedures to address other safety concerns of the worshipers and visitors. Their recommendations will be presented to the Board for approval. We will be hearing more, as it will involve leadership training to help in event of emergency.

It has already been determined that over twenty people could fit into the restroom near the sanctuary in case of a storm. In that case, I am hoping my guide will direct me to a less crowded, more pleasant place to hunker down until the dangerous weather passes! But regardless, I feel our safety is in good hands. And we all thank the committee for its hard, silent work.

Rev. Wilcoxson gratefully said, "We are so thankful for the hard work of the Safety and Security team and for their commitment to balancing their work with the importance of staying connected. Our church is safer and more hospitable because of their efforts."

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If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together. Gaye Holman@bellsouth.net



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