Book Review: "Evil Invades Sanctuary: The Case for Security in Faith-Based Organizations"

by Chad D. Baus

Long-time readers of this website will no-doubt recall the active killer attack at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO in 2007. After having killed two people and wounding two others at a YWAM training center, the 24 year-old killer set his sights on New Life Church. What he did not know was that the flock at New Life had protection from wolves such as him, in the form of sheepdogs who made up the church's safety team. Among those sheepdogs was Carl Chinn, author of "Evil Invades Sanctuary: The Case for Security in Faith-Based Organizations."

While many will recall that the New Life Church attack ended when an safety team member Jeanne Assam engaged the killer with the 9mm pistol she had permission to carry in the church, very few may recall that there were other armed safety team members, including Chinn, on hand that day. And although initial news reports made mention of this fact, it's likely that no one who hasn't read the book know the real story about how this team worked together to prevent a greater loss of life.

Chinn's book begins with a chapter called "The Wakeup Call." The chapter opens with a chilling account of an armed, shirtless man with notes scribbled on his body (including instructions on what to do with his body) walking into the lobby of Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family headquarters in 1996. Chinn worked there, and had been extensively involved in pre-incident emergency response planning, just as he was years later at New Life Church, when another armed predator came calling.

Chinn observes that "security is often not a priority at ministries until something significant happens."

"Fortunately," he adds, "that was not the case at Focus on the Family or New Life Church."

Chinn stresses that these types of incidences reveal the crucial need for intentional security for all churches, whether their membership is 50 or 5,000 people.

"Faith-based organizations are in the direct line of fire in the battle raging between good and evil," Chinn writes. "Whether from terrorists, petty criminals, fallen leaders or hurricanes, religious organizations must prepare for adversity."
In addition to large scale risks such as shooters and terrorists, faith-based organizations must increase their awareness of, and preparation for, accidental, criminal, or environmental hazards capable of compromising their primary purpose.

And with that, Chinn embarks on a wide-ranging review of the types of risks faith-based organizations face today, and how they can prepare.

While readers of this website are likely more familiar with some of the active killer attacks on places of worship in the past two decades, Chinn begins chapter two by outlining other types of attacks, including a man who laced the coffee in his Maine church with arsenic, or the men in a Minnesota church whose fight over a washer and dryer led to one man swinging a ball bat at the other, but missing and hitting and killing the man's 14 month-old daughter instead.

Also in chapter two, Chinn provides extensive statistics compiled from 497 deadly force incidents occurring in ministries from 1999 - 2011.

"While deadly force incident remains one of the least likely incidents to occur at any given church," Chinn writes, "this research verified that it is a much more common thing than previously thought."

One statistic that stresses the need for a faster response? Only 4.65% of attacks resulting in the death of others were stopped by law enforcement and 4.19% were stopped by others. 91.16% of the time the killer didn't stop until they decided to stop.

Two other stats that stood out were:

- nearly 25% of aggressors were known to have been affiliated with the ministry.
- 59% of known attack weapons were firearms

As Chinn observes, "statistics can be like theology - you can usually find or manipulate one (or a collection) to support what you want to prove or already believe."

"Regardless of how you want to crunch these statistics," Chinn says, "sufficient data exists to support the need for intentional safety and security awareness in ministries."
Chinn also takes time to address common objections to such preparations.

"Just because we pray for God's protection before driving does not mean we speed or dismiss the value of seatbelts. Likewise, faith-based organizations must intentionally provide for the safety of staff and visitors."

Chinn addresses the various types of attacks that have historically been seen in places of worship and that should be prepared for, including fire, molestation/abuse/pornography/sexual misconduct, and criminal violence, scandal/controversy/deceptions/ethics violations. He concludes the chapter with a detailed analysis of the events that transpired at Focus on the Family in 1996, including a frank discussion what they did right, and what they could have done better, in both their preparations beforehand as well as their handing of the attack itself.

In chapter three, Chinn lays out some things to think about for personnel tasked with forming a safety team in a place of worship. Pointing out that Jesus knew, and approved, of the swords his men carried the night he was arrested (in fact, he told them to obtain them), Chinn advises that "in everything we do, we must be acutely aware of the primary mission of our particular ministry. ...A ministry doesn't exist for security, nor does any ministry owe its success to the security team."

Chinn advises that the ministry team consider the passage from 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 regarding the parts of the body, noting that "parts of the body that are most applicable to our team would be the eyes, ears and palms of the hands."

After making an observation about the inconsistent application of so-called hate crimes laws, (the murder of fourteen people in a Ft. Worth, TX church by a man spewing anti-Christian venom was not deemed to be a hate crime, but the killing of two people in a liberal Tennessee church quickly was), Chinn observes that "hatred stinks, mp matter what group individual or cause it is directed towards. Ministry security should interrupt hatred, while representing their ministry."

Next, Chinn advises that safety team organizers take a look at various legal requirements for employers/building operators to provide safe environments, including the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), as well as local code enforcement agencies, in order to prepare an Emergency Action Plan.
In chapter four, Chinn examines the various options of readiness that a place of worship should consider, pointing out that "there are three critical elements of incident readiness" - People, Parts and Processes.

Under the People category, Chinn discusses making use of everyone from the safety team volunteers to the receptionist, from ushers to church-goers with medical expertise.

Perhaps the one area of greatest controversy - and the area with which I have some disagreement with Mr. Chinn - comes when he gives a specific warning against recruiting vocal pro-gun rights advocates for the team.

"Use caution," Chinn writes, "with ministry security team participation by any who are dogmatic about gun rights, martial arts or similar issues."

After making a correct observation that some readers may have just thrown the book across the room, he explains that his reasoning is that "when it comes to determining the appropriate use of force in response to incidents, you do not want anyone with dogmas of any kind that could cloud their judgement."

Perhaps he should have made effort to define the persons he is concerned about better, because in my experience, it is the people I know who would be considered by most to be "dogmatic" about gun rights who are the most intimately familiar with the laws on the appropriate use of lethal force.

Chinn also presents a hypothetical argument about a greater liability exposure either in court or in the court of public opinion of a ministry has a person who is "outspoken on the right to defend ourselves with firearms and has been active and zealous in second amendment rights protection." Chinn offers absolutely no support for his speculation that this could cause a place of worship problems.

That issue aside, and while warning that public knowledge of a decision to allow armed defenders in the ministry could initiate a loud debate, Chinn is most certainly an advocate for having an armed safety team, saying "I favor some team members carrying a firearm."

"There is nothing like a gun in the hands of a good person to stop a gun in the hands of a bad person."
Chinn then addresses the difference between "intentional team members" and "conceal carry members" that may also be in attendance in a particular place of worship, depending on jurisdiction. Chinn warns ministries not to rely on armed congregants to spring into action in needed.

Chinn explains, "I am not opposed to freedom to carry. I am opposed to signs declaring a gun-free zone. If anyone obeys it, it sure won't be the bad guys with guns. But untrained good guys with guns can become a dangerous reality every team needs to be aware of."

Chinn’s main concern with the presence of armed congregants who are not officially a part of the safety team is the problems it can cause during an already confusing deadly force attack. He encourages the safety team to discuss, plan and train for "some unknown CCW holders eager to get involved if a scenario goes down."

"Unfamiliar (to each other) responders with guns joining the mix is more likely to happen the larger the church."

Chinn's concerns many first seem a bit offensive to the reader who is "that guy" - the unknown CCW holder attending a church at which he is not a part of a safety team. But it is important to consider Chinn's experience at New Life Church when considering his advice in this area.

Early in the attack at New Life, the team had been informed of the possibility of a second attacker. Chinn says that "within seconds of hearing that there may be a second shooter, I had a total stranger show up behind me yelling in anger." Had that person (more on him in a bit) had a gun in his hands, it is highly possible that he and Chinn could have would up engaged in a fire fight.

Chapters five and six are dedicated to the active killer attack at New Life Church, which Chinn documents occurred just fifteen days after the first proposal for his book was finished, and which necessitated edits and the addition of the final two chapters.

The documentation is riveting, especially for those of us who were interested in the incident but had to rely solely on news reports for "facts" about what had occurred. It is impossible to reiterate all of the information that can be gleaned by reading through Chinn's very thorough account, which he
acknowledges "is not my story. It is the story of a team security effort, hosts of witnesses, remarkable church leadership and a significant number of law enforcement, fire and medical first responders."

Just a few of the many things I found of interested in these chapters were when Chinn discussed how his decision to carry a .32 ACP pistol that day - with which his effective range was 10 yards - came into play when his opponent brought a "black rifle" to the fight; how he was forced to anticipate the killer's path and take an ambush position so that the distance between the two would be closer when he engaged; how he experienced with tunnel vision, and failed to see a boy hiding between his ambush position and the approaching attacker; and how his position was exposed by an adrenaline-infused stranger who misinterpreted his waiting in ambush as hiding or being frozen in fear and began yelling at him to take out the killer or to give him his gun (for his efforts, the stranger drew incoming fire and was shot in the arm). After the killer was down, this same stranger was nearly shot by safety team members after he ran to the body and took possession of the killer's handgun, raising it in the air.

Chinn's account of the aftermath of the attack, which occurred at about 1:00 in the afternoon, is equally as interesting - how when law enforcement officers from multiple agencies converged from all directions the atmosphere became "super-charged and escalat[ed] exponentially." (a church employee with a cell phone was ordered to the ground by an officer who thought he had a gun). People who had seen the killer and gone into hiding refused to trust that it was police asking them to come out. The search for secondary devices and/ or killers came to an end at 9:00pm, and the killer's body was not removed until 11:00pm. Chinn arrived home at 1:00 a.m.

There is so much to information in these two chapters that it is impossible to summarize. The bottom line is that this event, which the killer predicted on a blog site would be "Christian America's Columbine," was anything but that, thanks to the extensive prior planning of a group of concerned church-goers, who had the means to defend the flock when a wolf came calling.

"Evil Invades Sanctuary: The Case for Security in Faith-Based Organizations" is an excellent read for anyone involved in faith-based ministry, or interested in defending against active killer attacks.