

## **NEWS FROM LYNNE PABST**

### ***Our Certified Christian Educator and POINT Partner***

#### **Masked Faces and Opened Eyes**

*Happy Easter to Everyone! Christ is Risen! Jesus lives! Alleluia!*

For this week's message to you, I am stepping out of the box of Christian Educator and am going to talk about keeping our congregations and churches safe. During stay at home Holy Week, I read the book *Pray and Protect: Practical Ways to Keep Your Churches and Ministries Safe* by Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo. Written with global Christian worship communities in mind and aimed at giving guidance in how to prepare and protect against possible governmental persecution, societal persecution or natural disaster, this text provides many helpful tips on how to protect parishioners, church leaders and church buildings from attack. Dr. Sookhdeo gives tips on how to work through a risk analysis and then prioritize addressing site security, personal security, financial security, information security and legal security. In the final chapters, pastoral care and rebuilding are addressed. Hopefully, we soon will be rebuilding our face-to-face physical ministries but until then we must continue to do risk analysis and maintain the security of our church community and facility.

As I read through the chapters, I began to think about our current COVID 19 pandemic situation. While terrorist attacks, governmental seizures, fire, cyberattacks and weather-related crises were mentioned, a worldwide plague or pandemic were not specifically mentioned in the text. I began to think about all that we are racing to do in order to keep our congregations connected and functioning in this time of social distancing – virtual services, online giving, youtube Sunday School, Zoom Session meetings, online Bible Studies and no one in our church buildings. Questions started to come to my mind: Have we addressed the legality of using music online? Have we asked for participant written permission to record them in a service or during a meeting? If not, we may be open to legal attack. Have we increased our church computer protection service to handle the increased usage? Have we increased internet security? Are we regularly changing passwords? Have we considered the real threat of ZoomBombing? If not, the church information and that of our members could be under cyber-attack. Have we designated someone to routinely check our vacant buildings for broken pipes, intruders or unwanted animals which might move-in in our absence? Empty offices are invitations for break-ins especially the longer this pandemic continues and the more financial stress it incurs. Unused church vehicles are at the mercy of animals seeking shelter or who just enjoy chewing on wires. Our buildings and materials are at risk as well as our members.

*Some other not thought of questions:*

Do church refrigerators or freezers need to be purged before people return?

Will areas need to be dusted from non-use?

Do toys need to be re-cleaned?

Do places where children crawl need to be checked for mouse dropping. (They quickly move in in country buildings.)

Do you notice a strange smell? When sewer traps dry out because of nonuse sewer gas escapes? Did the roof spring a leak when no one was looking?

If the landscaping has been unattended check for poison ivy and other unwanted plants.

Our first concern is our people -- their health, food, shelter, wellbeing, spiritual needs. Churches are being very creative in how they are connecting with their members, caring for the most vulnerable and continuing spiritual care. Deacons are doing a wonderful job of shopping for older members and checking in with vulnerable families. But the loss of material things, identity, financial information can add to the stress of this pandemic as well. When we finally come out of social distancing, church communities will want to celebrate. The last thing we want to be faced with are lawsuits from someone who feels they were recorded without consent or for copyright infringement, costly repairs because something was left unattended in the building, time spent reentering lost information or food poisoning because someone did not realize church food items were from 3 months ago. Our members' closed businesses are at the same risk. They need to have their eyes open to these risks as well.

So once again as leaders of the church, we ask ourselves what more can be done? As the pandemic continues, the risks start to shift? We need to see beyond masking our faces, sanitizing our hands and social distancing. What other risks do we need to recognize in this new norm? What other protective measures do we need to put in place as we adjust to being an online community?

### **Resources:**

Crabtree, J. *Better Safe Than Sued*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1998.

Sookhdeo, P. *Pray & Protect: Practical Ways to Keep Your Churches and Ministries Safe*. McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2017.

Wilger, J.R. *The Safe and Caring Church Nursery*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1998.

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/legal-resources/creating-safe-ministries/>

<https://www.pcusa.org/covid19/>

<https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/03/20/keep-uninvited-guests-out-of-your-zoom-event/>

<https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/unoccupied-properties-during-covid-19/church/>

**Blessings – Stay Well – Stay Alert!**