



**R**ichard Bennett is the state representative from District 120 - Harrison County on the coast. Richard Bennett is the Chairman of the Study Committee on the Lottery for the House of Representatives.

The final public hearing for Chairman Bennett and his study Committee was on Thursday, November 16, at 1:00 at the Capitol. On that morning, before the final hearing, Chairman Bennett made the following comments on statewide talk radio, and I quote, "Today we have, we invited everyone we could think of that might... We have casino people. We have religious organizations were [sic] invited. None of them are coming. They chose not to come and give an opinion either way on it. And that was a Baptist organization, Catholic, Methodist, I think the Episcopal, anyway, those for whatever reason, the religious organizations have chose [sic] not to get involved in it."

Having heard these comments on radio by Chairman Bennett, I went early to the final hearing. I approached Chairman Bennett. I

## Set the Record Straight

introduced myself to him again (having done so at the very first hearing.) "I am Kenny Digby, Director of the Christian Action Commission of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. I am here, and very concerned about the lottery, and would like the opportunity to speak." Chairman Bennett said I was not on the list of those invited to speak, and was not on the program for the hearing. He said he would not allow me to speak at the "public" hearing.

I then told him that I had heard his comments on radio, and I needed the opportunity to set the record straight. The Christian Action Commission does care; we are against the lottery and gambling in any form. We are present and ready to give our opinion. I again asked for two minutes to speak at the hearing — to set the re-

cord straight. He again said he would not allow me to speak at the "public" hearing. I then made the following comment to Chairman Bennett, "Sir, I have never claimed to speak for you or know your mind. I would recommend that you not speak for others on radio or in public, especially for Mississippi Baptists." He then said I misunderstood his comments on radio. One can go read them for himself — Chairman Bennett needs to read his own comments.

Two minutes could have corrected misleading statements by Chairman Bennett. Two minutes could have set the record straight so that the Clarion Ledger newspaper would not have propagated the misleading public accusations of Chairman Richard Bennett toward faith based groups. Two minutes could have corrected

Chairman Bennett's false statements (whether willful or just ignorant.)

I think Chairman Bennett, with his comments on radio, willfully threw a grenade into the room to distract everyone from the real issue of the damage a state lottery will do to our communities across our state.

Hear me: we at the Christian Action Commission are opposed to a state lottery. I believe every member of the House and Senate knows we are opposed to the lottery — everyone except Chairman Bennett. We have been present and available at three public hearings by the Study Committee. We have tried to let Chairman Bennett know how we feel about the lottery — we would ask you to let him know how you feel about the lottery. Call him at 601-359-2860 or email him at rben-nett@house.ms.gov.

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# Church Security: As crime rises, churches must plan

FIRST IN A SEVEN-PART SERIES

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(1944-2013)  
Correspondent

Church crimes are increasing exponentially. While attacks are geographically isolated, they are occurring in almost every state on a regular basis. Sanctuary size or membership levels don't correlate when churches are selected as attack zones. Some churches are targeted because they are located in more vulnerable, inner-city locations. Other churches are targeted because they are "soft" and "easy" targets.

Churches are not safe havens! Criminals hold almost nothing sacred! Murder, robbery, burglary, rape, child abduction, pedophilia, and crimes at off-facility, church sponsored activities are becoming more frequent. Car theft and automobile break-ins are perpetrated during services, while burglary and arson are after-hours problems. Some targeting occurs during services.

In developing comprehensive security plans, we should always remember the words of our Lord in Matthew 10:16, when he challenged his disciples, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves." We need wisdom beyond ourselves and a recognition of the evil in our society. James 1:5 recorded, "If any of you lacks wisdom,

### Crime Prevention Basics

- Stop denying crime threat.
- Recognize crime can be deterred.
- Read the Word.
- Pray for guidance.
- Form a security committee.
- Plan to prevent/deter/avoid crime.
- Plan for natural disasters.
- Establish a guardian program.

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

Matthew 10:16

let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach."

Jeffrey Hawkins, in writing Security and Emergency Planning for Faith-Based Organizations, quoted an online July 2008 poll taken by the Christian News Web site, OneNews-Now.com. This survey indicated that "over 75% of all responding Christian churches indicated that they had no security or emergency plans in place." Your church should be an exception to this statistic.

The first step in church security is to read the Word and pray for guidance in finding solutions to the complex issues of crime. The second step is to recognize and accept the fact that churches are frequently targeted. The third step is to form a security committee that is representative of all ministries, ages, and genders.

The committee should then complete a comprehensive risk assessment. How dangerous is your neighborhood? Have any churches been targeted in your area? Your local police or sheriff's department can help you focus your priorities and give you specifics appropriate to your site.

If security cameras, burglar and/or fire alarms, or contract security officers are needed, you will also be dealing with for-profit security companies. Oftentimes your security committee will be inundated with crime data, some of which may be contradictory. Always remember that private companies offer a service or a product, so sometimes their assessments are biased in favor of a profit.

Remember that the word "security" is a positive term. Security doesn't have to cost a lot. In fact, some of the

best security programs are free! Even if security requires a financial investment, it is a wise expenditure when considering the vulnerability of not addressing your risks. Substantial liability results from a secular Pollyanna approach. Ultimately, lawsuits may be your highest risk!

Most churches already have a security program in place. A welcoming committee, sometimes called greeters, are components of an effective guardian program. A church member stands at each entrance and welcomes both members and visitors as they enter. Criminals don't want a welcoming. They don't want your greeter to look them in the eye or to shake their hand. They want to reconnoiter the premises to see if they can target your facility successfully.

A cold-hearted church that does not recognize nor greet visitors (indeed, the members don't even speak to their visitors) is like a magnet to a church criminal. Warm-hearted, caring churches are crime resistant by their very nature, but even a warm-hearted church needs a viable security and safety plan.

*Quarles, who died in October 2013, was professor emeritus of criminal justice and homeland security at the University of Mississippi, and co-author of the book, Crime Prevention for Houses of Worship. Copyright 2011. Used by permission. This series originally appeared aperiodically in The Baptist Record during 2011 and 2012. All rights reserved.*