

## ***“Becoming a Welcoming Church”***

*By Thom Rainer*

“But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

*2 Thessalonians 3:3*

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

*Psalm 46:1*

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

*Psalm 32:7*

What do you do when you are expecting guests to come to your home? The average person cleans every area of the home, prepares the guest bedroom, puts out extra towels, and even prepares a meal. If children are coming you may find some movies or take out some games to keep them occupied, busy, and safe. The ultimate goal is to make sure that your guest feel comfortable and wanted. Well, lets apply this same thought process to Antioch. Are we prepared for when our guests arrive?

Two things that guest look for when they are attending a new church are a clean facility and a safe facility. These are two areas that every member can play a significant part.

### **The Safe Church**

When guest visit our church they want to know that they can worship in a safe and secured environment. They should feel confident that if they send their children to the children’s area of the church that their children will return to them better than when they dropped them off.

\*(Parents will return to a church if they see their children enjoy the church)

A few things we should look for based off of insurance companies checklist:

- Are batteries for exit signs checked regularly?
- Are rugs and mats in good condition or properly repaired?
- Is the right type of fire extinguisher visible and available?
- Are any electrical cords frayed, broken, or in some type of disrepair?
- Are there tripping hazards such as stumps or rocks?

The protection of our children should be the utmost priority. Many times people like to say “*that will never happen in my church.*” In this day and time you can’t take it for granted and we should be proactive instead of reactive.

## Children Safety

- Anyone who works with children should be required to be a member of the church for an established length of time.
- Regardless of how well you know the worker, everyone should be interviewed before working with children.
- Before someone works with children the church should consider doing reference checks, criminal background checks, and check with the national sex offender registry.
- The church should maintain record for all children’s workers.
- The church should have some type of ongoing training for volunteers.
- The church should have a clear response plan to protect victims according to all applicable laws, in the event of an incident.
- The church should be certain that any off-campus small groups, regardless of where they meet, fall under the same guidelines.

Child sex abuse in churches has been the number one issue of litigation for churches for over two decades.

## The Sloppy Church

*Clutter.* “I felt like the place had become a storage house for everything member didn’t want or forgot.”

*Scarcity of garbage cans.* “I had an empty coffee cup in my hand when I entered the church. I took it home with me. I only found one trash can and it was overflowing.”

*Odors.* “It was a weird musty smell. It reminded me of when my parents used to take me to visit my great-aunt. Her house was really dirty and always had a stale odor to it.”

*Unstocked restrooms.* “I’m glad I checked all the stalls. There was no toilet tissue in any of them.”

*Dirty carpet.* “I hope the church is giving a lot of money to missions, because they sure aren’t spending it on carpet cleaning. It’s gross.”

*Torn and dirty pew cushions.* “We found another row of pews. The first place we sat had torn and filthy pew cushions.”

## What Safe and Clean Churches Do

*They see the issue from a gospel perspective.* People will not have a desire to hear the gospel because of the presentation of the church. If guests are not distracted by clutter they are more prone to hear the gospel and become followers of Christ.

*They find champions.* A champion is a person who is both passionate and accountable about a ministry. They see a need and they inspire others to help them meet the need.

*They focus on three distinct areas: cleanliness, safety, and security.* And the best-in-class churches have champions for each of the areas.

*They have regularly scheduled check-ups in all three areas.* Many of these churches had checklists they used with a frequency of once a quarter to once a year.

*They listen to a secret guest.* If they hear on an area in need of improvement, they don't get upset with the guest for recognizing it, instead they act immediately.

*They check out other churches.* It's always good to visit other churches to see what they are doing and if its successful try to implement it here at our church.

### **Points to Ponder**

1. If you were to rate the cleanliness of your church on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being highest, how would you rate it? If you did not rate it a 10, what improvements could be made it?
2. How can cleanliness and safety be a gospel issue?
3. What do you think Millennial parents expect of a church facility when they bring their children to church? Does your church meet those expectations?
4. Has your church ever had a thorough safety inspection? What do you think the results are or would be?
5. Look at this verse in Colossians 3:23: "*Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people.*" How would you relate this verse to the topics of this chapter? How should it affect your attitude as you seek to help make your church cleaner and safer?