



This “VERSUS” document is provided to you as a starting point or maturity checkpoint for existing policies, procedures, and equipment. It is brought to you on behalf of Jim McConnell, Principal Owner, and Ask McConnell, LLC – a converged security services provider. The content is not meant to cover every circumstance, industry, law, regulation, contractual requirement, threat, environment, or risk, but it provides a starting point for any organization. Please consult with your legal counsel and insurance provider about added requirements. If you know of peers that you think would find value in these resources, please have them contact us. These will be updated on our website regularly. We are not legally protecting these documents; we just ask for credit, shout-outs, and referrals if you find them helpful. If you have recommended updates, we are all ears. And if you need Converged Security Consulting and Training, please reach out, we would be honored to serve you and your organization.

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Call 911 First vs. Handle Internally First

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This is ONE guy's perspective that must be weighed against law, insurance, culture, etc.

Note: This is a protocol question, not a capability question. Your team's ability to respond does not change when you answer it. What changes is the order of operations — and in a life-safety situation, the order of operations matters.

One of the most important and most neglected decisions in church security is this: when something happens, what does your team do first? The answer must be written down, trained to, and practiced before an incident — not decided in the moment by whoever happens to be closest. 'Handle it internally first and call if we need to' is not a protocol. It is a delay. This document is designed to help your leadership have that conversation and arrive at a clear, written policy.

This can be tested with amazing tool from Simon Osamoh at: <https://www.decisiondecks.com/> Which incident follows which “first”?

Remember, this is about 24x7x365 decision and incident handling, not just during services!!

	Call 911 Immediately	Attempt Internal Resolution First	Simultaneous: Assign Roles
Pros	<p>Law enforcement / EMS is notified at the earliest possible moment — response time begins counting.</p> <p>Removes ambiguity — team members know exactly what to do without judgment calls under stress.</p> <p>Consistent with best practice from law enforcement and emergency management guidance.</p> <p>If the situation escalates, help is already en route.</p>	<p>Appropriate for low-level disruptions that a trained team can clearly resolve: medical, behavioral, de-escalation.</p> <p>Avoids unnecessary law enforcement presence for minor incidents that the church can manage.</p> <p>Preserves community relationships — not every incident warrants a police or EMS response.</p>	<p>Eliminates the either/or choice — one team member calls 911 while another responds to the situation.</p> <p>Law enforcement and EMS is notified without delaying the team's initial response.</p> <p>Best practice for any situation where the severity is unclear.</p>
Cons	<p>May result in law enforcement responding to minor incidents that did not require it.</p>	<p>Delays law enforcement notification — if the situation escalates, response time is now longer.</p>	<p>Requires clear pre-assignment of roles — who calls, who responds, who manages the crowd.</p>

	<p>Can create friction with congregants if they feel minor matters are being escalated unnecessarily.</p> <p>Requires team members to be confident making the call quickly — training matters.</p> <p>Public Information Officer (PIO) role may get real busy.</p>	<p>Creates a judgment call under stress — team members may underestimate the severity. If the situation goes wrong, 'we tried to handle it internally' is a difficult position for the church.</p>	<p>Who escorts the responders?</p> <p>Requires communication equipment: team members must be able to coordinate instantly.</p> <p>Requires training and practice — simultaneous roles only work if everyone knows their assignment.</p>
<p>Also Consider</p>	<p>Write this protocol down and put it in your team handbook. 'Call 911 if you think you need to' is not a protocol.</p> <p>Train your team on what types of incidents always trigger a 911 call: active threats, weapons, medical emergencies, unconscious persons.</p> <p>Brief your team on what to say when they call — location, nature of incident, number of people involved, what your team is doing.</p> <p>Review the protocol with LEO and EMS.</p>	<p>Define in advance which incident types permit an internal-first response. Be specific. 'Situations we can handle' is not a category.</p> <p>Even when handling internally, always designate one team member to monitor whether escalation is needed.</p> <p>If an internally managed situation does not resolve quickly, calling 911 late is always worse than calling early.</p>	<p>Pre-assign roles before every service: who is the designated 911 caller? Who responds to the incident? Who manages the crowd? Who escorts the responders from Street to incident scene?</p> <p>Rotate these assignments in writing — do not assume people will self-organize under stress.</p> <p>Practice the simultaneous response in a tabletop exercise at least twice a year. (Staff and Volunteers AND LEO/EMS)</p>