

Organizing, Training and Running a House of Worship Armed Congregant Security Team

An Interview with Attorney Emanuel Kapelsohn

by Gila Hayes

Frequently a Network member or an armed citizen who is interested in becoming a Network member asks if we would assist a member who uses force in defense of their church, temple, or synagogue – their house of worship. So long as the member serves in an entirely volunteer capacity, our assistance encompasses volunteering on the church safety team, as well as after self defense in their private lives. Of course, our member education efforts are equally applicable to a member defending himself, herself, a loved one or their fellow worshipers. Network Advisory Board member and attorney Emanuel Kapelsohn, who is very active in organizing and training church defense teams, has agreed to help us better understand the responsibilities and concerns arising when armed congregants organize to look out for the safety of their fellow worshipers. Due to the value of his knowledge for members who serve their churches on volunteer security teams, we have also produced a video of this interview for Armed Citizens' TV <https://armedcitizenstv.org> where it is split into two videos for learners who prefer the streaming video format.



eJournal: Thank you for sharing your knowledge with us, Manny. Please tell us a little about your background.

Kapelsohn: Thank you, Gila. I'm in my early 70s. Many, many years ago, I got an undergraduate degree with honors from Yale University and a law degree from Harvard Law School. I've practiced law on and off since 1978. I've been a police firearms instructor and a defensive firearms instructor for 45 years now. Along the way, I became an expert witness in court cases that involved firearms, use of force, crimes committed with weapons, self-defense cases, and products liability cases involving guns and holsters and related products. I've been an expert witness for 39 years now in state and federal courts all across the country. I'm also a reserve deputy sheriff, an armed sworn position I've done for 27 years in two sheriff's departments in the two states that I've lived in.

In more recent years, I've spent a lot of time helping to develop, organize, train, and supervise armed congregant security teams for houses of worship. I've done that for several churches, one large synagogue, a faith-based community center, a private school, and some others. For about the last 5-6 years, I've been involved in not only actually training but working on the armed security team for a large church near us almost every Sunday morning and some holidays, as well.

eJournal: That's exactly the kind of from-the-ground-up experience we want to learn from. I am sure it entails a lot more than standing guard outside the front door. How extensive are your responsibilities?

Kapelsohn: In order to preserve the anonymity of the church, I'll refer to it as Good Church; that's not its real name. On a typical Sunday morning there will be 2,200 to 2,500 people coming for one or another of the services at 8, 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. We have day-care and Sunday school activities for everyone up through high school age and Bible study classes for adults. Our armed congregant security team is about 35 in number and our goal is to have at least five team members there at all times, so it isn't necessarily one person who's there from 8 a.m. until 12:30. In addition, we also have a medical team of people who are paramedics or EMTs or have some other advanced medical training. The armed security team members have first aid training – tourniquets and CPR and such. It's quite a good, extensive program.

eJournal: There was a time when people might argue that armed defense was unnecessary or even be appalled that anyone would carry a gun to a house of worship. That is changing.

Kapelsohn: I think we're all familiar with the active killer problem that exists. Some people who work in this field object to it being called active shooter because sometimes it's someone with a knife not a gun and some of the highest body count events in history were not committed with guns. They were committed with gasoline or dynamite, or a vehicle driven through a crowd. It's not always a shooter. The problem exists not only in the United States but in countries all around the world. There have been mass killing events everywhere from Russia to Canada to Japan to China. In a house of worship today it doesn't make sense to me not to have armed security because houses of worship are targets.

A problem common to all active killer events is that they are usually over very quickly. From start to finish, it is not uncommon for them to be over in 5-7 minutes. Studies by the FBI and the Secret Service, indicate that in the United States about 50% of the time, it is over before the first police officer arrives on the scene. I've spoken to boards of directors, trustees or clergy groups of congregations who say, "Well, we've got a plan. We're going to call 9-1-1." The police expression is, "9-1-1: when seconds count, help is only minutes away."

Provided by Armed Citizens' Network which invites you to browse <http://acldn.org> to learn more.



In many of these events, 3-4 minutes go by before the first call goes in to 9-1-1. You have to understand: when someone starts shooting in a public place, whether that's a church or a synagogue, a school, shopping center, office building or a movie theater, calling 9-1-1 is not the first thing people do. People duck, run for cover, get under their seat in the theater or whatever and it's not until a few minutes later that the first call goes into 9-1-1. Then, the dispatcher has to take that call and dispatch police. The police have to get to the location and if it's a large venue – perhaps a school with several stories and dozens of classrooms or an office building – the police have to find their way in to where the problem is occurring. Often by then, the problem is over because the person has either run out of ammunition, killed themselves, fled the scene or killed as many people as they intended to kill.



Click for streaming video of our talk with Emanuel Kapelsohn.

Ron Borsch, a friend of mine who is the single most knowledgeable person that I know about active killer events in the United States and perhaps the world, calls this timeline the “Stopwatch of Death.” The point he’s making is that every second that goes by – not just minutes, but each second! – more people may be killed. You have to have an approach that isn’t just, “We’ll call 9-1-1 and wait for the police to arrive.”

There are parts of the country where police are not as readily available as they are in others. We have suburban and urban areas where response time for police may be two or three minutes on a good day when there’s not much going on. When I lived in rural Indiana, response time by the sheriff’s department might be 20 minutes if the deputies who were on duty were over on the far side of the county. That’s with lights and sirens and no traffic to speak of. There are a lot of parts of the country where the police response is further away than that.

I think it behooves a congregation to have some planning and some armed security. The incidents that have been stopped right when they started or maybe after just one or two people unfortunately have been killed, have been stopped by people who are already there on the scene, whether that’s a school resource officer in the local school or an armed or unarmed individual. A significant number of active killer events are stopped by unarmed civilians, non-police who tackle the person or hit the shooter with the chair or do whatever they can to intervene.

We have to understand that the goal of armed security in the house of worship is not to replace the police. It’s not to deal with someone who’s got their car double parked or even someone who’s being a bit disruptive in a service. Call the police to evict a trespasser or to deal with someone who’s intoxicated or under the influence of drugs and needs to be removed, that’s a police function and so is protection of mere property as opposed to protection of life.

The duties of your security team, or at Good Church we call it the Safe Team, may not only be response to an armed attacker, but it may also be providing first aid. They should certainly be trained in things like CPR and regular first aid functions, treatment for shock and stopping massive bleeding whether that’s with tourniquets or Israeli bandages or Quick Clot combat gauze. Whatever the system is, they should be trained in it.

The security team may also be trained to help evacuate the building in the event of a fire or perhaps a bomb threat and many other things that are beyond our subject today. The security team may do things as mundane as looking for a lost child. At Good Church we’ve had a number of instances where the child gets separated from the parents and the parents are looking for the child or the child is looking for the parents. *[Smiling]* Sometimes the parents don’t even know their child is lost yet. The security team helps in that regard, so there are many, many functions the team can serve.

eJournal: It is hard to oppose a team that’s helping lost children or giving first aid! If starting a safe team, who most needs to support the concept?

Kapelsohn: The clergy must buy into having an armed security team. If the clergy isn’t for it, it’s not going to work. In some congregations, depending on their size and the makeup of the congregation, the congregation may need to buy in to it, as well. I’ve been a member of congregations that have thousands of members and I’ve been a member of what are called family churches. In my case, I was a member of a family church where the typical turnout for Sunday morning services might be 15 or 20 people.

eJournal: Size has to affect how safety is addressed, too.

Kapelsohn: It’s just like the difference between fielding a varsity football team in a Big Ten school that has 40,000 students and having a football team in a small school that has 100 or 200 students. You’re not going to have the same kind of football team. I work with some police departments that have 11 or 12 officers. Well, that’s not a department that can have a SWAT team. There aren’t going to

be enough people for a tactical team. In the same way, the nature of the armed security provisions will naturally depend on the size and the makeup of the congregation.

In a large congregation like Good Church, you can have an armed congregant team. You can have a large enough armed congregant team that you have different people coming to different services or different weekends during the month. Of course, you want people also to be able to go to the services to participate in worshiping, not just be there for a security function, so it's common at Good Church for someone who's on the Safe Team to come for two services. During one service, they are assigned to a security post and the other service they're participating in worship.

In a family church where you might only have 12, 15 or 20 people on a typical Sunday morning, it might just be a number of congregants who carry guns. They have concealed carry permits and you provide them with training about the law, about appropriate responses to different situations, maybe first aid training and so forth. They're just coming with their families, as they would to a normal worship service, but they are prepared to respond in an armed capacity if that terrible event comes.

eJournal: Volunteers sometimes wonder if they need an armed guard license and that's affected by whether they're considered employees compensated by free training, free equipment, and free ammunition. What regulations do church entities and safety volunteers need to consider?

Kapelsohn: That's going to be a matter of state law and will vary from state to state, so there are fifty different formulas that I would not attempt to address here. If you're thinking about having an armed congregant team, one of the preliminary considerations is whether it's legal and what steps need to be taken to make it legal.

Is this a state where concealed carry permits are available and necessary for anyone carrying a gun concealed? Is it a so-called constitutional carry state where permits are no longer necessary? In some states where permits are no longer necessary, permits are still available to those who wish to apply. That may be a good thing for a security team, because the process of applying for and getting a permit means you've been put through a criminal history check by the police. That assures us that parishioner Smith who may have been a member of this congregation for 12 years and we all think we know him very well, doesn't have a felony on his record from when he lived in a different state. There's an advantage to getting concealed carry permits in places where they are available.

In some states, like my own home state of Pennsylvania, someone who is an employee as defined by law, who works in an armed capacity as a requirement of their job – such as an armed security guard or an armored car crew member or a bank guard or an armed private investigator – but are not law enforcement officers, must have certain state-required training and licensure. In PA, Act 235 requires a 40-hour course to work in an armed capacity unless you have previous law enforcement experience. It has to be renewed every five years. To the best of my understanding and legal judgment, someone who's a member of a congregation, who is just carrying their gun and helping serve a security function on a purely volunteer basis is not an employee. They're volunteering so they don't need Act 235 licensing. I'm not trying to give legal advice here; I'm just trying to address the subject.

In some states, if that congregant gets any benefits from their job that might be considered compensation, that can make them an employee, not a volunteer. Depending on the state, that may change the situation. This needs to be considered.

Another preliminary consideration is insurance. Some insurance companies that issue insurance to houses of worship and other businesses will not cover that facility, operation, or activity if there are any armed protectors, whether they are an armed security guard service that has its own liability coverage or whether it's armed congregants in a church, synagogue, or temple. I was involved in such a situation when the congregation I was part of wanted to have armed security guards. The insurance carrier said, "No, not with us you won't! We won't cover for that," so we had to find another insurance carrier.

There are two very large insurance companies, one called Church Mutual (<https://www.churchmutual.com/>) and the other is Brotherhood Mutual (<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/>), that cover, among other things, houses of worship. They will cover houses of worship with armed security, including armed congregant security. They want to know that you have a training program and about the setup of the program. After the insurance carrier said they would not cover us if we had the armed security guards, we found that with our armed security, another insurance company would provide us \$1,000,000 more coverage at a lower annual premium. Some of these are excellent companies. I mentioned two; there are undoubtedly others, but those are two I know about.

One of the congregations I was affiliated with also required each member of the armed congregant team to have his or her own insurance or something that would provide financial support. You might say, "Well, why does the individual need it? The congregation's liability coverage should cover." Yes, it did, but they wanted to make sure that if, for some reason, the congregation's insurance wouldn't, the person would still have their own financial support. It was also a way of making sure that the members of the team bought in, just like we're asking the clergy and the congregation to buy in. It's a reality check – are you really serious? Do you understand that there are potential liability ramifications?

eJournal: Let's pause to clarify that insurance coverage for liability from, perhaps missed shots for which the individual does bear responsibility, is different than Armed Citizens' Network's assistance which pays for the legal defense of our members but does not pay a judgment against a member. We get a lot of questions about paying for the legal defense of members who are volunteers at

church, so let me add that we would count it a privilege to assist God's people and make sure that their legal expenses were taken care of after defending the sanctuary.

Kapelsohn: Thanks for clarifying that. Sometimes people ask, "If I become a member of an armed security team, might I have some personal liability?" Well, of course you will. If it snows and you don't shovel your front walk well enough and the UPS man slips and hurts his back, you've got liability. If you have a car accident, you've got potential liability. Whether ultimately you have liability or not is a secondary question; the first question is, "Can I be sued?" Of course, you can! People can sue you for virtually anything. If you carry a gun in your personal life, there's a responsibility and a potential liability connected. Something like Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network is so important.

eJournal: Beyond the church's insurance broker, who else needs to know about the armed safety team?

Kapelsohn: If you're going to have an armed team, your local police should know so if they respond to an incident, they're not surprised that there may be some congregants there, possibly even with drawn guns holding someone at gunpoint, who aren't bad guys. The police need to know that! Good Church has a good relationship with our local police and district attorney's office. Both gave the "thumbs up" to this program before it was started. The district attorney's office sometimes teaches legal programs for one of the teams that I'm connected with. Coordination is important.

Other first responders need to know about armed security, too, whether that's your local ambulance squad or fire department. If there is a mass casualty event, there are going to be first responders arriving. If you've got a large enough congregation and a large enough team, you may be thinking of having a training exercise – whether it's a tabletop exercise or a meeting or two or a simulated event that involves your local ambulance crew or fire company.

eJournal: Let's say we are starting an organized church security team. What should readers know about choosing team members?

Kapelsohn: I recently saw a suggestion that I thought was terrible, just a terrible way to select teams. "Just put a notice in your church newsletter saying we're now accepting applications for armed security team members. Anybody who's interested, please see so and so about it." I think that's just an awful way to do it!

First of all, you are announcing to the world that you have armed security. You may not want to announce that to the world! Everyone in the world may not be your friend. Whether that's someone who's a potential attacker or whether it's an unfriendly voice in the local media, I don't think you want to announce that publicly any more than you would publish an article in the paper telling the world, "Our building is now installing a burglar alarm system and here's where the sensors are and here's how it works." That's not information the world needs to know.

The other thing you may get is people applying that aren't the people you want. I think there is a much better way. Hopefully, there are congregants that you know well and trust; people you think would be good assets for such a team. Ideally, if it's going to be an armed team, they'd be people that already have some firearms knowledge. In Good Church's large congregation, we have a number of team members who are retired police officers or state troopers. One is a judge. We have people with extensive prior military training, maybe even as military police, and people who are firefighters or EMTs. These are people who have experience dealing with critical incidents and stressful emergencies. They make good team members.

We recommend people from within our congregation. Someone on the team will say, "You know my friend Joe Smith who also attends our congregation? He and I go shooting together. He's a great guy, a family man who has good religious values and he's got some experience with firearms. I think he'd be a good member of the team." There should be some leadership group, maybe that's a member of the congregation's clergy plus one or two members of the team, that evaluate a proposal to put a person on the team.

In two sizable congregations of which I've been a member, we have had an actual written application form. We ask the person to fill it out and provide information about themselves. That form then sometimes serves as the basis for an in-person interview. We may be interviewing someone that we know personally but haven't addressed subjects like, "How does your spouse feel about you being on an armed congregant security team? Is this going to cause a problem in your family? Do you have the time to do this? Will you be able to devote time to X number of training sessions per year? Are you willing to pay for some equipment that you may need in addition to what the congregation provides to you?" Equipment is an issue that we'll mention later.

It's important that a member of your congregation's clergy is on the committee that helps choose who's proposed to be on the team. Sometimes the clergy will be privy to information that the rest of the congregation isn't. This congregant may have come to them and told them that he or she has an alcohol or drug problem or who knows what the situation is? The clergy may just say to the leadership committee, "Well, I don't think Joe Smith's a good applicant right now. Maybe after a little while, but we need to let this wait. Let's pass on him for the time being."

eJournal: It's a tough situation, particularly in the very small churches where denying a request to serve is a lot like telling a family member that he's not good enough! That's a really hard position to be in. Maybe it's buffered a little bit in the larger Good Church. How does this scale to small congregations? Do small churches even perform formal background checks?

Kapelsohn: We do several things. In our state, a concealed carry permit is still required. It's not a constitutional carry state, so the fact that someone has that CCW permit means that they have gone through a criminal background check conducted by law enforcement. We then require them to get the two childcare certifications that any teacher or daycare worker would have to have in order to work with children. One is a state certification, and one is a federal certification. Both are free for volunteer workers. The Safe Team gets a copy of the person's concealed carry permit and the paperwork that shows they have passed the childcare certifications, that they have nothing negative in their history in that regard.

We interview the people. There are two standards, I think, that are useful. Years ago, I was a staff instructor at Gunsite, the American Pistol Institute. We taught defensive handgun, shotgun and rifle classes that typically started on a Monday morning and finished Saturday at noon with the man-on-man competition and scored standards drills. The people who went through that school could get one of several different certifications. The highest was expert. The standard that Colonel Cooper used for an expert rating was this: "Is this someone you would choose to have with you in a fight?" If the answer was, "No, I'd rather pick somebody else," that person didn't get an expert rating even if they came in first in the man-on-man competition, which after all is just competitive shooting, or if they came in first in the standards drills, which is marksmanship, speed, and accuracy. A lot is involved in wanting to have someone with you in a fight other than just how fast are they, how accurate are they, and can they win a competition? We're talking about people who have to be levelheaded and have good judgment and able to handle stress well and so forth. Cooper's standard was, "Is this someone you choose to have with you in a fight?"

Now I will give you our standard for the Safe Team at Good Church. "Is this someone to whom you would entrust the care of your children?" Hopefully, children are the person's most precious possessions. You know people who you might think of as the world's best gunslinger, if there is such a thing, but you'd not leave your kids with them. They're not the kind of person you would entrust your children to in an emergency. Someone to whom you would entrust the care of your children and someone you would choose to have with you in a fight is levelheaded, trustworthy, has good judgment and is mature and even-tempered in all respects. If you combine those two, you have a standard which is, admittedly, very subjective, but that we can all understand.

eJournal: OK, so a candidate gets selected. Are you going to control what they carry? Are you going to tell them what kind of equipment or even apparel? Do you ask them to conceal their gun, not let it print? How strictly should we manage a volunteer?

Kapelsohn: Well, I can tell you what we do at Good Church. We don't carry guns openly. I'm sure there are many members of the congregation, especially ones who are visitors or new members, who have no idea that anyone there is carrying a gun. We don't have a dress code. You dress however is comfortable for you as someone attending services. I often wear a blazer because it's the easy way for me to cover my gun and my radio and whatever else I'm carrying, and we have other people who just wear a sport shirt.

Greeters, ushers, building maintenance people and members of the Safe Team and medical team have name tags on lanyards around their necks. Our nameplates have just our first name; mine reads "Emanuel" and doesn't have my last name on it. The nameplates are color-coded, so the Safe Team has a certain color nameplate. The world in general doesn't know that code. Our nameplates also have magnetic codes that open certain locked doors in the facility – the door into the childcare area, our security communications center on the second floor, or the outer door. If you go outside and the door shuts behind you, you're not locked out.

The Safe Team and medical team are issued radios or check out a radio from the communications center for their tour of duty. Our radios have ear buds, and the wire goes into your collar and so while it's visible to someone who wants to look for it, it isn't very obvious. We also issue armed security sashes and require people to carry them whenever they are there. These are the sashes made by DSM Safety Products – the initials stand for Don't Shoot Me (<https://dsmsafety.com/security/>). It's in a little pouch on your belt or in your pocket and when you deploy it, it's a bright yellow or fluorescent green sash across your front and back. Ours say, "Security." If you draw your gun, you are supposed to deploy your sash as soon as you can so that arriving police or other congregants who may be armed but not part of the Safe Team know that you have an official capacity, that you're part of the security team.

We train our Safe Team in the use of pepper gel. We don't require them to carry it, but we strongly encourage it as a less lethal option. We also give people hand to hand defensive tactics training on a periodic basis so whether they have the pepper gel or not, they do have means of using force other than deadly force. That is some of the equipment that people are required to carry or urged to carry, depending on what it is.

We have written policy that specifies the kinds of firearms that are acceptable to be carried. It specifies that you must qualify with the firearm you're carrying not just a similar one, but the actual Glock or Smith & Wesson or Springfield or whatever it might be with that serial number. The ammunition you are carrying must be controlled expansion ammunition, not full metal jacket. If you should have to shoot someone, it's more likely to be contained in the person you shoot and not pass through them and injure or kill someone else. People who are on the security team are prohibited from carrying other weapons which have not been approved and with which they have not been trained and qualified. In other words, they can't just decide to carry an expandable baton or a TASER® or something that the team doesn't train with and authorize.

eJournal: Do you mandate certain calibers?

Kapelsohn: Yes, we mandate a minimum of 9mm or .38 Special and within a certain range of calibers. We list approved manufactur-

ers, and we say that if you want to carry a different model of gun by some other manufacturer you need to get it approved by the team leader or the head firearms instructor for the team. I had one member on a team that I trained and worked with who argued strenuously that he wanted to carry a certain kind of gun, “In case the active killer was wearing body armor this would go right through it.”

I said, “Yes and when you miss, it’ll go right through three congregants, too.” There is no good expanding ammunition made for this gun. He said, “Oh, but the Secret Service carries it!” I said, “Well, with all due respect, you’re not the Secret Service. Our function is different, and you can’t carry that here.” There are good reasons for the congregation to control what kind of weaponry people carry and to make sure that they’re trained and qualified.

eJournal: Manny, it is clear that there is a tremendous amount of detail that goes into selecting and equipping a team of volunteers to protect people who’ve come together to worship. We have not even touched on documenting their training and skill maintenance, whether they guard assigned positions or simply join the rest of the congregation in the pews during services, and one element that will be challenging for many, creation of a use of force policy. I don’t want to give short shrift to any of those topics – or other aspects of armed church security about which we should be alerted – so with your understanding, I would like to take a break and come back next month to those and related topics in our next edition.

eJournal: You’ve explained many of the basics of setting up an armed church security team, including preliminary selection of team members. Once approved, what lies ahead of a new volunteer on your church’s Safe Team?

Kapelsohn: We’ve got this person who’s been approved for team membership. They’ve got their childcare clearances and concealed carry permit or if it’s a state that doesn’t require a permit, we figure out how to put them through a criminal background check. We require that our team members start with a 17-hour long program that includes classroom training on state law, firearm safety, mental preparation, alertness, and mental conditioning for this task. It includes range training on everything from drawing and firing single and multiple shots to engaging multiple targets, reloading, clearing stoppages, firing in situations where you have to miss innocents and other things. It includes firing a qualification similar to what a police department might fire.

Class starts in the classroom on a Friday night. Saturday morning we’re in the classroom and on the range in the afternoon. Sunday morning is services, so we don’t have anything then, but Sunday afternoon we’re back on the range. That’s how we get in our good, solid 17 hours of training. People also get a written 3-ring binder of materials; some is sent to them ahead of time to study. It’s a good and rigorous program.

You have to pass a written test in that class. If you don’t pass it, you can’t be on the team. Maybe more study is needed for the written test. You’ve got to qualify with your weapon. If you don’t fire a qualifying score, maybe remedial training is needed, and you can’t be on the team yet.

After being accepted for the team, they get the first aid, pepper gel, and unarmed defensive tactics training. We have several training sessions throughout the year in addition to the in-service firearms qualifications. We bring in lecturers to speak on various topics and many other kinds of training including man-on-man Simunitions® or Airsoft® with role players. We’ve done video simulator training both at our nearby police academy and I’ve brought in a mobile video simulator from another police academy. We put 42 people through that video simulator over three days. This is state-of-the-art training of a kind that police officers would go through. The goal is to make people on the team competent, confident, alert to things they should watch for and to develop the right mindset.

eJournal: When a team member has completed their initial training, do they work alongside a mentor?

Kapelsohn: The first few times that they serve a security function, they may work up in the communications center. Keep in mind, we’ve got our Safe Team and medical team on one radio channel, and parking lot attendants and building maintenance people on different channels. A parking lot attendant may see something that causes them some concern and they may radio in. If the communication center or the operations pastor thinks the Safe Team needs to respond, they’ll put it out on our channel. When a team member is new to the job, they may spend a couple of sessions in the communication center where they see the security video camera coverage and hear the radio traffic. The first time or two that you’re there, you’ll be working with someone else, sort of like a field training officer, very, very similar to a police department.

eJournal: How does the new volunteer get a good understanding of your policies so he or she does not inadvertently mess up?

Kapelsohn: We have a written use of force and firearms policy. I suggest that any house of worship should have that if they have an armed congregant team. I mentioned before that the policy governs things like what weapons and ammunition you can carry. The policy also specifies qualification intervals. What happens if someone fails to qualify? What rules do we follow? When do we use deadly force? It may not be the same as just saying, “Whenever state law permits.” There are some uses of force that may be permitted by state law that we don’t want to permit in our congregation; we may want to be more restrictive. We make it clear in the policy that there are things like protection of mere property – and I’m using the word “mere” – or apprehension of criminal suspects that typically aren’t our job. That’s for the police.

If someone is out in the parking lot vandalizing a car, the police need to be called. Maybe someone from the Safe Team goes out there

and yells, “Hey, what are you doing? Get out of there! The police are on the way.” Maybe we act as a deterrent, maybe we get a good description of that person, but our people won’t try to effect a citizen’s arrest of someone committing criminal mischief. Similarly, it’s not our job to catch someone who commits a crime and is running away. Our policy makes it clear that we may need to detain that person if it’s necessary for the safety of the congregation. In other words, someone comes in and shoots or stabs someone in the hallway outside the service and is now running down the hall with the weapon still in their hands, they’re not just a fleeing criminal. They’re someone who’s a current, active deadly threat to others. That’s the reason we’d apprehend them; not because we want to see them brought to justice. Our job is to make sure they don’t hurt someone else.

The policy covers that. Our policy is a little bit over 30 pages long. It’s quite comprehensive and it covers the things you carry when you’re on duty – your name badge, your radio, your pepper gel, your loaded weapon and at least one spare magazine or one speed loader. Your holster has to be an approved holster because we want to make sure that it’s safe and that your gun isn’t going to fall out. We’ve never had a problem of that sort, but the policy is important. It’s guidance for the team members; it’s liability protection for the team members and for the congregation. It’s the game plan by which people operate, so that’s important.

If you have an attorney who represents your congregation, legal counsel certainly needs to look at the policy. Your legal counsel may or may not have a clue about armed security or armed confrontations or firearms, so you’ll have to figure that out when the time comes. Clearly, the written policy is something that your legal counsel should pass on and agree to. In our case, the insurance carriers wanted to know that we had a policy, and they want to see our policy. That’s important.

eJournal: Once the policy is written and approved, we come to the thorny issue of policy enforcement.

Kapelsohn: Any time we have team members present at the facility, there’s someone in charge of them. I mentioned that they have radios and that someone in the communications center is monitoring and managing that radio traffic. They may get a call that says something like, “Command, I have a child who twisted his ankle in the west hallway. Can we have somebody from the medical team respond?” or sometimes a person faints during a service – loses consciousness – or people have diabetic attacks, or someone has chest pains and needs an ambulance.

If you have a radio call that says someone just twisted their ankle in the west hallway, you don’t want all seven of your armed security people and both of your medical people to converge on the west hallway. Who’s protecting the rest of the congregants and the rest of the activities? You’ve got to have standard operating procedures; you have to have someone in charge.

You may get a call, “Hey, I have a person of interest who I don’t recognize as being a regular attendee...” Of course, that’s not unusual. We have many visitors on any Sunday, but maybe this person is unsteady on their feet; they’re staggering a little bit. “I wonder whether they’re intoxicated. Here’s their description. I’m going to keep an eye on this person.” That’s something the person who’s in charge of the Safe Team needs to know about. They may need to go up to this individual and say, “Hey, are you feeling OK?” to make a judgment about whether they are intoxicated or not.

After all, we’re a house of worship. We want to be welcoming to people. We don’t necessarily want to evict people because they’re having a personal problem. For the most part, those decisions are left to the clergy at Good Church. There may be someone sitting in the middle of a service that has 800 other people in it and this person is speaking out loud, doing something that you or I might consider disruptive. At Good Church, until they do something that appears to be a threat to people’s physical safety, if they’re just disrupting the service, no matter how disruptive it is, the Safe Team won’t eject that person from the church. They may get closer to that person, but ultimately the pastor makes the decision.

The pastor may actually stop the service and step down from the lectern and go up to that person and say, “Are you having a problem today? Is there something we can do to help you?” The pastor is the one who ultimately makes the decision whether that person is going to be allowed to remain or whether that person is asked to leave or to come away to a quiet place to be counseled by another member of the clergy.

eJournal: If a Safe Team member is seriously worried by a visitor’s actions, does he or she leave their assigned post to shadow the possible risk?

Kapelsohn: It depends on the post. For instance, we have daycare for the youngest children. That’s behind a locked door. There are children in that area ranging from infants to three or four years old with teachers and people to care for the infants while the parents are in the service. It’s a very good system. The parents have to register for it and when they check in each day, they get a 2-part pressure-stick label. They slap one piece of the label on their kid’s back that’s got the identifying number and information. The parent keeps the other half. When the parent comes to pick up their child at the end of the service, they have to have the matching half, so Aunt Sally can’t show up and say, “I’m taking the child out,” and neither can the estranged spouse. It has to be the person who’s in the system as the one who’s allowed to pick up that child. Well, that’s behind locked doors and we have one of our Safe Team members posted right outside of the children’s area. That person will not leave that area. If there’s something that’s going on short of some incredibly unusual situation, the member who’s at that children’s post will not leave. That’s their spot.

Other people may be circulating through the facility or sitting in the service, and they’ll tell the communication center, “For this service,

I'll be sitting in the right rear of the main sanctuary." That's someone who's free to move if they need to, but if they do, they'll typically call and say, "Command, I've got a person of interest here. This is the situation: they're now moving down the hallway and I'm following."

The communication center will immediately pick that up on the video cameras and might say, "I see it," and sometimes they'll say, "I see it. It's OK. I know that person." A couple of weeks ago we had two congregants in the main service who stood throughout the whole service. One was far up in the front, close to the lectern or podium and one was in the back. One we knew, but it was a concern, so it came across the radio, "The man who's standing up in the left rear of the service has a back problem. He can't sit down; it's OK, don't worry about him. We know him." We didn't know the one who was standing up front and so one or more Safe Team members sat in that part of the sanctuary so they could keep a close eye on him in case it turned out to be something.

There's a supervisor in charge for every event. That's your team leader; your watch commander to take a term from the police. That's the person who's in charge. Maybe there's someone out in the parking lot and it kind of looks like they're living out of their car. They've been parked there all night. I'd like to go up and speak to this person, so I ask, "Would you come with me so that more than one person is going out?" You don't want your whole team going out there. Number one, it's more likely to incite high tension and the other reason is that the team is needed elsewhere. You may want more than just one of your security team to be a witness of what is said. Those decisions are typically left to the watch commander or the team leader in charge.

An obvious exception is an active killer, someone who comes in with a weapon and then you respond immediately. You respond immediately; you don't get permission to respond to something that's life threatening. Thankfully, we have not had that situation, but it has occurred elsewhere.

eJournal: The element of Safe Team formation and supervision that I'm having the hardest time wrapping my head around is how it scales. Your Good Church situation is the ideal, but how does a congregation of 50 worshipers in a little town scale down to enjoy the same protections and responsibilities? I'm not even sure how a church with 500 members on the books of which 300 show up every week assures a level of oversight like the communication center. Your thoughts?

Kapelsohn: It's an excellent question. It's got to be addressed on an instance-by-instance basis. For example, at a congregation that I was affiliated with before Good Church that had a fraction of the people coming to a service on the weekend, we would try to have at least two people there. Two people is a magnitude of more than twice as good as one person. Two people can back each other up. One can communicate, while the other addresses a problem. One can serve as a contact to a potential threat, while the other is a cover officer. You know, two is much better than twice as good as one. Our goal there was to always have at least two.

At Good Church we try to have at least five from the armed team and at least one from the medical team. That may turn at any given time into seven armed people and two from the medical team, but five and one is the minimum for which our operations director strives. If he doesn't have at least five who said they're coming to the 8 o'clock service this Sunday, he'll start texting or phoning people and saying, "I've only got three people coming at 8 o'clock. Can you come in and fill it? I know you signed up with the 9:30 service, but we've got plenty at 9:30. Could you come for the 8 o'clock instead?"

Some places, it may be one armed person present, which is certainly a lot better than none. Some places it may be two present which is more than twice as good as one.

Then you may have other events. For instance, we have an annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony. Women in the congregation bake in excess of 10,000 cookies. We have a huge tent full of cookies of every description and coffee, tea, lemonade, hot apple cider and hot cocoa. This is not just for our congregation; it's open to the community. There's a beautiful outdoor Christmas tree that's strung with lights and there are choirs that sing and at the appropriate time, the Christmas tree is illuminated. For kids, there's a bounce house, a climbing wall, other kinds of games and a horse-drawn wagon gives a hayride. There's singing and dancing and other activities going on inside where it's warmer in case it's cold out that evening. There are thousands of people there.

If we have a lot of people present for something that's likely to draw a big crowd, like Christmas or Easter services where the place is more packed than it usually is, we'll have a lot more than five of our team members present and a lot more than one medical team member, as well.

eJournal: You bring up a good point about the variety of activities at which an attack is possible. Many churches have parochial schools because they like to nurture their children's faith. Does the Safe Team shoulder any responsibility to make sure that those students can attend class safely?

Kapelsohn: Good Church doesn't have a church school, but it does have daycare for very young children. There are one or more regular employees of the church present during the week who are trained and state licensed. There are other churches in our area and all over the country that run church schools – we have one not far from us that goes K through 12. A volunteer armed congregant team probably will not suffice for that because most volunteers have jobs on the weekdays unless they are retired.

Church schools are going to need to think about having someone whose regular job it is to be there Monday through Friday when

school is in session and when activities are in progress. That may be some staff members who are trained or it may be some people who have other functions like a teacher or an administrator. It may be people who are there just to be security officers, like school resource officers. We have some very stringent statutes in PA which unfortunately limit what church schools and parochial schools can do to provide adequate security.

Good Church also has evening activities on Monday, Wednesday, and Sunday nights. We try to have a Safe Team member present each of those nights with radio communication with the receptionist at the front door and with maintenance people who are on duty. Because it's a multi-story facility, the radio allows a teacher on the third floor, for instance, to call you on the first floor and say, "We've got a problem here."

eJournal: On a different topic, I'd like to explore the responsibility of an armed man or woman who simply is a worshiper. Perhaps they don't have the physical ability or time to volunteer on the organized Safe Team, but they attend services discreetly armed in the same way that they go about their daily lives. If a deadly force attack threatens them or their children, they will take action. Should they inform the security supervisor or clergy? We would not want to mistake a well-intentioned armed citizen for an attacker's accomplice, but at the same time, many armed citizens wisely keep the fact they're armed extremely private. We don't talk about it, and I think that's best most of the time. Inside the church security environment, do armed parishioners need to report themselves to be armed?

Kapelsohn: That's a wonderful question and, of course, it's founded in your experience with all kinds of people who carry guns for all kinds of reasons. I love it when I'm speaking to a congregation's board of directors or the board of trustees or the clergy and one of them says to me, "No, I don't think we should have an armed congregant security team because I don't want anyone carrying a gun in the church or in the synagogue." I say to them, "You have a lot of people who are carrying guns. You just don't know who they are!" Sometimes they're shocked, but that's the truth.

There are people who are carrying guns who have concealed carry permits; there are people who are carrying guns that never had a concealed carry permit – you know, Mrs. McGillicuddy who's got a little revolver in her purse and she's carried it for 50 years ever since her husband gave it to her. Some of those people are trained and safe; some of them are untrained and unsafe. A lot of people carry guns.

In the past, as a member of small congregations, at a point where I've developed a rapport and little bit of a relationship, so they knew who I was, I've gone to the pastor or the minister and said, "I just want you to know, this is who I am, this is what I do and I'm always carrying a gun. If there's a problem here, you should know that I'm armed." In each of those cases, they've said, "Oh, good. I'm glad to know that. Please keep carrying your gun to church or to the synagogue."

A bigger problem is something like Good Church where we've got five or six or seven armed Safe Team members. What would happen if there were ever an armed attack – an active killer situation? We've got Safe Team members who would likely be drawing their guns and we might have congregants who are drawing their guns, too. We might not recognize all those congregants. They may be visitors, there for the first time or someone who's been there more than once but we just don't recognize them or we're behind them so we can't see their face, but we see their hand out, holding a gun. That's a potential problem! The Safe Team carries [Don't Shoot Me](#) security sashes so after the situation has gone on for a few seconds we would hope that our members deploy their sashes so it's obvious that they are members of the security team, but what about all the other people?

Of course, different congregations take different approaches. Some post a sign that says, "No Firearms Allowed," the so-called "Gun Free Zone." I'm not in favor of that because there are no gun free zones. It becomes an announcement. They're free fire zones for active killers. Some congregations post signs that say, "These premises are protected by armed security. Try to hurt us at your own risk." That establishes an atmosphere that I'm not sure I'd want to be in.

At Good Church we do this: once a year, we have an evacuation drill for the children. The adults don't evacuate during the service, but they're told, "Fifteen minutes into the service, you will hear an alarm go off and the children in daycare, children's activities and Sunday school classes will all be evacuated in an orderly fashion from the building by their teachers." It's like a fire drill in the school that you went to. We time it and we have Safe Team members outside in the assembly areas to which the classes are brought. We check out the parking lot ahead of time to make sure they're all safe.

The evacuation drill allows the pastor to say something else to the congregation. The pastor says, "By the way," and I'm paraphrasing, "Many of you know this already but in case you don't, we'd like to let you know we have a security team that is very carefully selected and very highly trained. They are trained to respond to any kinds of problems we might have here, including violent, armed problems. If any of you happen to be carrying guns and something happens and you feel that you need to draw your gun or use your gun to protect yourself or your loved ones sitting next to you, by all means do what you have to do, but don't go to involve yourself in the problem. If the problem is across the room or down the hall, don't go to involve yourself in that. We have people who are trained to do that and by involving yourself you may create more of a problem." You get the idea. People are told that there are people here prepared to deal with this. It's not their job.

If, as a congregant, you think you need to draw your gun because the guy with the machete is right in front of you and your children,

then by all means, do what you have to do, but don't go across the room or down the hall to try to solve the problem. That's our Safe Team's responsibility. That's the way that we've dealt with it. The Good Church program has been in place now for about 12 years. It's got quite a good history and has dealt with many kinds of problems; thanks to God, not an active killer event, but many kinds of problems, including ones where people have needed ambulances or where the medical team has treated them or where the state police have been called. It's been an excellent, excellent program.

eJournal: I feel fortunate to have been able to learn from their good example. It can be really difficult for people who know there's a risk to life but don't know how to best stop it, hopefully before blood is shed.

Kapelsohn: In addition to this interview and the podcast version of it at <https://armedcitizenstv.org/> which should serve as a good resource, the large insurance companies that I mentioned, Church Mutual (<https://www.churchmutual.com/17529/Safety-Resources-for-Houses-of-Worship>) and Brotherhood Mutual (<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/safety-library/>), both have written materials that I believe are available having to do with security at houses of worship and dealing with potential problems of the kinds we've been discussing. They also have written policies, training programs, et cetera. I don't know if they're available only to people that insure with them, or to the public at large. If you go on the Internet today, you will find many training programs offered for house of worship security teams. Our state, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, is actually offering programs several times a year on the Internet. I think it's our state attorney general's office that sponsors these programs.

There are other church security people, and they discuss various issues. Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman is a wonderful speaker who lectures all over the country on this subject. If you go on the Internet and you look up things like "sheepdog" or "sheepdog security," some of these organizations have newsletters that they'll send to you every month or more often that are free. There are many, many kinds of resources available. There are publications of the federal government on house of worship security that you can get free for the asking. You don't have to be alone. Don't feel like you have to invent the wheel all by yourself.

eJournal: I'm glad you bring up the various sources of education and mentoring for church safety teams. To me, the subtle lesson is that while guns and armed responses are the most serious element, we err if we ignore the huge array of other concerns. You're really not looking out for your fellow worshipers very well if you ignore emergency medical needs and if you fail to ask questions like, "Are you doing OK today?" Those actions demonstrate the "heart" side of caring for your fellow worshipers. By mentioning those other resources, you're inviting us to expand our knowledge and reminding us that using a gun in defense of worshipers is a minuscule, tiny part of the bigger need.

Kapelsohn: Absolutely! Years ago, I was a director of security in charge of an 11 man – actually 10 men and one woman – executive protection team for one of the wealthiest women in the world. When we were teaching things like the Heimlich Maneuver, I can remember saying to my people, "It's much more likely that you're going to have to use this to keep our principal from choking to death on a bite of steak in a restaurant than you're going to have to use your gun to shoot a terrorist or a kidnapper." It's so true! Our medical team is used much more than the Safe Team is and when the Safe Team is used, it's often to assist someone who's fallen down or to help someone who's having a problem of some sort or reunite a child with their parents, not because of a violent attack. You have to be realistic. If you have people on your security team who are only there because they intend to have gun fights with terrorists, you probably got the wrong person on your team.

eJournal: That's sobering. We've covered a lot of ground. What do you want our members to take away from our time together?

Kapelsohn: Different kinds of programs may be appropriate for different sizes and types of houses of worship, but organization, supervision and policy, proper selection of people, and proper training of people are necessary and ongoing processes. All of these things are important. Your goal of making a safer place for everyone to come worship in is a wonderful goal. It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of thought, but it's not beyond anybody's ability. With the right intentions and a little thought and a little energy you can achieve a tremendous, tremendous boost in safety.

eJournal: Thank you so much for sharing your valuable time and your extensive experience with keeping houses of worship safe. I have particularly appreciated the way you gave us high-angle overviews, especially your insights into the potential legal issues that can arise if we don't take security team functions seriously. Thank you for your generosity!

*If you enjoyed and learned from this interview, please browse to <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/our-journal> where we make our interviews and other columns available to the public each month. Readers can learn more about Emanuel Kapelsohn at <https://www.peregrinecorporation.com/> and our advisory board profile at <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/defensefund/advisory-board>. Few are as well qualified to teach use of force as Kapelsohn, whose experience involves 39 years as an expert witness in federal and state courts all across the country, often in high profile law enforcement cases including *State of Minnesota v. Yanez*, *State of Arizona v. Brailsford*, *Estate of Angel Lopez v. City of San Diego*, *LeGrier v. City of Chicago*, *State of Minnesota v. Noor*, and *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Roselle*. He was also a key witness in the trial of *Miller v. Rob Bonta*, Attorney General of the State of California in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California. His résumé also includes 27 years as an armed, sworn, reserve deputy sheriff and his career as an attorney, starting in 1978, with a few years away as an executive protection team leader, and being a firearms instructor, a pursuit he has enjoyed for about 45 years.*