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Claremore policeman to address security measures at church

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Staff Reporter

CLAREMORE — In the book of Matthew, Jesus told his followers they were being sent out as sheep in the midst of wolves, advising them to “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

Claremore police officers are hoping for the same thing from members and staff of local churches.

Next Saturday, the Claremore Police Department will be presenting a program for members of Rogers County churches to help prepare themselves to deal with potentially dangerous or emergency situations while at church.

“Several months ago, (Claremore Police) Chief (Mickey Perry) began to recognize the need to look at programs about security in churches, based on trends we’d started to see,” said Stan Brown, assistant chief, Claremore Police Department. “Both nationally, in Oklahoma, such as when Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty was attacked during an alter call, and even here in Claremore before Easter when there was a domestic-like situation that arose during a service at First United Methodist Church.

“Increasingly, churches have been seeing more and more incidents of danger, even violence, and members of the church may not know how to react to them or to protect themselves,” he continued. “We began looking at what we could do to better protect and prepare church members — deacons, greeters, etc. — and educate them on what they can do to prevent, recognize, and react to potentially dangerous situations that occur at church.”

The result of their search sent Claremore Police Capt. Charles Downum to train at Strategos International — a company which specializes in tactical training for law enforcement personnel on how to instruct intruder response training for churches and similar groups.

“It’s not just about security — it’s about planning and leadership preparation,” Capt. Downum said. “It covers the whole gamete basically. At the program, we’ll look at the history and



Claremore Police Captain Charles Downum (left) will discuss security and intruder response behaviors for churches next Saturday at Memorial Heights Baptist Church in Claremore. The day-long instructional conference will address Biblically-supported habits when dealing with disturbances and potentially dangerous situations while at church. Memorial Heights pastor Paul Simpson (right) will be among those in attendance. Tom Fink

demographics of previous acts of violence in churches, liability considerations, education and training and communication,.

“It will cover the whole gamut, really, and we’re encouraging churches to send their leaders, security personnel, ushers, greeters, deacons, etc. and other leaders to attend — they all have a role in the church’s security,” he said. “They need to be able to identify and know how to deal with individuals who could potentially create a problem at the church.

“The three H’s — hurts, heartaches and hang-ups — seem to end up at churches which presents the possibility for volatile situations,” he said. “Many church workers aren’t familiar with how to handle someone who becomes aggravated or what to do in a situation that gets out of hand. This course is to give people information to make wise decisions and equip them with the resources to organize within their own church and devise their own plans for security practices.”

Although Capt. Downum understands that some people’s faith may make them uncomfortable with increasing security measures or practices, the program does not ask people to sacrifice their beliefs for their safety.

“What we’re offering churches is a solution that addresses safety and security preparation without compromising the core mission of the church, which is to provide an atmosphere of comfort, refuge, worship, and learning for those who enter the church walls and (church) events,” he said. “We know that some people may be comfortable with changing their practices at church for the sake of (increased) security, but there’s a difference between being a martyr and being a victim.”

The training is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, June 5, at Memorial Heights Baptist Church, 1500 W. Will Rogers Blvd. in Claremore.

The cost is \$10 to cover lunch which will be provided.

Participants must call Memorial Heights at 341-5952 to reserve their spot.

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