

September 11 provided many lessons

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=921#more-921>

It seems like yesterday that I began writing for the Tulsa Beacon just days after the 9/11 attack. This is the first article that I wrote for Charley Biggs was for the October 10, 2001, issue.

Though I have learned much about the root cause of that attack, Islam, I can't say that my opinion has changed much, if any, since then. Here's the article, titled "Churches Concerned About Safety," edited just a bit for length:

"Since the tragic attacks in New York and Washington, there has been little talk about how safe we are in our churches, but I would bet that many of us are thinking the unthinkable, 'what if my church is attacked?' I think we have all learned from recent events that we can no longer say with certainty that "it will never happen here".

"Our churches are no different than any other place where large groups of people gather together.

"Since terrorists seek to achieve maximum destruction and to kill as many people as possible, eventually a church may be targeted. This is especially true, because our current breed of terrorists not only hate Americans, they hate Christians. The insidious thing about terrorism is that the public at large never knows where the next strike will be. Small churches should not assume that they are any less prone to attack than large churches.

"On the other hand, the odds of your congregation being attacked is very small. There are simply too many of us, not enough of them, and more attractive, high-profile targets. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be prepared.

"Since the bombing in Oklahoma City, there have been studies done to determine how to make buildings safer against bomb attacks. Since a large percentage of the deaths in Oklahoma City were caused by the immediate collapse of the building and by flying glass, these studies have concentrated on how to 'harden' the building to resist the pressure wave caused by the explosion.

"The attack on the World Trade Center was much different. Since the stairways at the levels of impact were apparently destroyed, many people died because they could not safely bypass the fire to go down.

"It was remarkable that so many people did escape.

"The terrorists undoubtedly hoped to topple the building by ramming it. Instead, the building stood long enough for many to escape. As far I am concerned, the architects and engineers who designed that building deserve enormous credit for the many of the lives that were saved.

“Unfortunately, our building codes are not designed to protect a building against the kind of massive strikes that we witnessed on September 11th. If they were, the vast majority of buildings would be too impractical and expensive to build. If a terrorist has the means and determination to completely destroy a building, there is little you can do to stop him.

“Most of these attacks are, for the most part, survivable. Damage, injury and loss of life can be minimized if you are prepared.

“A good place to begin is to simply make certain that your building meets current building codes. It is disturbing how many churches I have seen that don’t meet even the most basic codes.

“These codes are actually written to protect people, not buildings. The primary goal is to maintain a safe means of egress intact long enough for everyone.

“Making certain that your church building meets code will be very beneficial should any disaster occur, but should more extraneous methods be used for protection?

“This will depend upon the risk factors that exist in each individual case. For example, churches with large areas of glass or that have multiple-story buildings may want to evaluate whether or not it is feasible to “harden” their buildings.

“There are many other things that we can do to make our churches less prone to attack and more resistant to damage. Some of these involve making changes to our infrastructure, which will take some time, but others can be implemented immediately. In either case, by reducing weaknesses, you reduce the chances that a terrorist will choose your church as a target.

“The bottom line, though, is that the church should not become so acutely occupied with security and fortification that our mission is compromised, that we become introverted, or that we become suspicious of visitors. With proper planning, our churches can be fortified without looking frightening.

“Our community and the world needs Jesus Christ just as much now as before the attacks, and it is up to American churches to make certain that our mission goes on undiminished. Every congregation should see that their facilities are safe, inviting and user-friendly so that the church can continue to grow and thrive.”

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