

SAFETY TACTICS IN YOUR URBAN PARISH

Safety tactics in your urban parish begins with creating a security bubble that encompasses the entire area in which parishioners will park and walk to the church sanctuary, education building or office and continues to safeguard everyone while they are inside our buildings. To increase the probability that an individual **will not be harmed** in this area, we require the use of adequate communication, standard operating procedures, diligent execution of the smallest detail in the plan and the desire to improve the situation continually. Lastly, we want to develop positive and proactive programs that unite the church to the community.

To accomplish the feat, individuals that volunteer for service in an urban setting need to be assessed in their skills that they bring to the church and train in the four areas of security.

Communication
Standard Operating Procedures
Diligent Execution of the Security Plan
Continual Improvement



Figure 1.1 – Neighborhood Outreach

We begin by stressing that communication is paramount to keeping everyone safe. For example, what time does the staff open the church's doors? We do not want families or visitors sitting in their car waiting to enter the church. In the inner city, many homeless males make their living begging for money from individuals who are dressed handsomely and they will approach anyone outside our buildings. This can make our parishioners and visitors very uncomfortable and depending on the actions of our parishioners, the homeless person can respond with anger and violence. By communicating our hours of operation and sticking to them, we can proactively prevent a violent situation. The church staff needs to post service times in the bulletin that are mailed, emailed and handed out to visitors by the reception committee members. Also, by providing a proactive security detachment during our hours of operation will reduce the probability of incidences.

Next, safety plans are discussed weekly among the safety stewards and the information is disseminated to the watchmen who secure the outside of the church campus. The safety personnel act as extra eyes and helping hands to assure that each activity is completed in a safe manner. The church conducts a background check on every adult that interacts with children and that includes the security team. Once an activity is scheduled, such as Vespers or Liturgy, a three person security team should be scheduled for the activity. The individuals can have additional duties, such as teaching class, but they can also have expertise in first aid or lock down procedures.

Here are some procedures that any church would want to have.

1. Background checks for adults working with children
2. Security members responsibilities and guidelines
3. Facility inspection checklist and maintenance schedules
4. Posting of emergency phone numbers, maps and safety notices
5. Procedures for medical emergencies
6. Annual fire and tornado drills
7. Action plans for personal safety

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Once procedures are noted and posted, training begins and since our churches are real time entities, the training can be realistic versus static classroom activity. A good first training activity is to become familiar with the three security zones identified for our urban parish. We can grab two garbage bags, our two way radios and walk the all three zones. The experienced guard acquaints the new guard with the surrounding businesses, the local rental properties and any potential areas of concern. After walking the rounds, we have two filled bags of trash and the area looks welcoming to our visitors, which is paramount to establishing security. The additional positive activities occurring in our zone everyday contributes to the overall sense of personal security in the neighborhood. In our lesson, we concentrate on **proactive** security where successes can be measured and not reactive guarding which focuses mostly on reporting incidents.

We have identified three zones that we watch. Zone 1 is the church campus itself and in this area we are ultimately responsible for the actions of parishioners and visitors. At our church, this includes four buildings, so we are aware of which edifice is in use and how long it will be occupied. Zone 2 encompasses our immediate neighbors. We share street parking and watch out for each other. Almost everyday we have personal interaction with our neighbors and we assist each other in completing daily tasks.

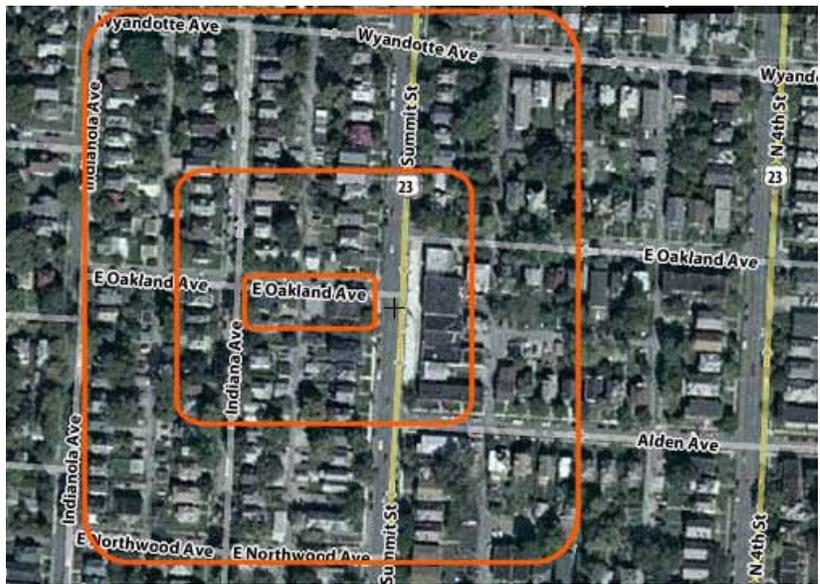


Figure 1.2 – Security Zones

The third security zone exhibits our overall affect on the neighborhood. We use a technique referred to as active patrolling where we pick up litter and broken bottles. A neighbor who is unable to care for their yard can get assistance from a neighbor looking for a small job. The region comprises of nearly 100 houses and we provide the leadership that helps define the district. In our locality, students, church members, visitors, and neighbors feel safe to walk the sidewalks from morning until midnight.



Figure 1.3 – The Corner of Summit and Oakland

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To give us a background of our urban parish, St. Gregory of Nyssa Church is located 3 miles due north of downtown Columbus, Ohio in the northeast quadrant of the Ohio State University (OSU) campus. We are $\frac{6}{10}$ of a mile from the OSU campus, so we worship in an area that is dominated by college rental properties, houses that are owned by university employees and homes occupied by low income residents on government subsistence. In the last decade, we have seen more homeless individuals and families in the locality since the development in the South Campus, Short North and Arena districts that has move them northward from the inner city. Columbus has a population of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million and is the 15th largest city in the United States. Ohio State has 58,000 students enrolled at the main campus. The church is $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the Ohio State fairgrounds and the Columbus Crew stadium, which is the largest dedicated soccer stadium in the United States. We are in the path of large groups of soccer fans walking to and from the stadium on game days. The campus neighborhood is quite diverse and we can expect all ranges of ages and cultures to visit our doors.

To secure the three zones, we have a diverse group of individuals that are tasked with security duties. We have church members, who post themselves at the church before and after the Saturday Outreach activities, before and after Vespers and before and after Liturgy to assist with parking and safe travel. We are supported by neighbors who volunteer their time to assist us in our endeavors and we in turn provide personal, professional and spiritual growth for them. During the week, parishioners and neighbors are encouraged to water the gardens and pick up any rubbish that leaves our corner uninviting. We work with the four businesses directly across the street from the church to have a better neighborhood.

Initially our staff was watching out for trouble, but the fourth pillar of good security is continual improvement and by constant thought and action, we moved in a direction where safety is in every activity. The building committee has replaced many of the stairs built in 1905 with rises that are shallower and offer a wider platform for climbing. Successful proposals were made to the City of Columbus for three handicap parking spots in front of the church and now these are used at every activity. New decorative lamps light the street in front of the church and the maintenance team has installed brighter lights throughout the campus. There is a long term building plan in place along with the In Faith We Grow drive to fund the expansion. These positive steps also assure a safer parish.

The development of constructive and proactive programs that unite the church to the neighborhood is itself risky business. An urban parish could turn away and isolate itself by fortifying the doors and barring the windows. The parking lots can be guarded by armed security forces. This is a choice. One direction or another and both involve risk. One involves loving your neighbor and sharing each other's lives. The other is to close your eyes to the urban landscape and secure your campus. At St. Gregory's, we choose the more positive and proactive route to security. We started the Neighborhood Outreach mission.

The Neighborhood Outreach mission began seven years ago in response to the hungry and homeless people's needs, where the growth of the sports and entertainment industry in the Columbus downtown arena district moved these low or no income people northward. Today, not just the familiar faces or regular parishioners enter our church, but a person who is truly homeless and seeking refuge. At first, this step caused several church members to be uneasy and was a cause for several families to leave the church for suburban safety. Today, the diversity of the worshippers at Liturgy includes all ranges of people. The charities work continues to grow with the parish to help neighbors and provide spiritual leadership and hopeful examples.

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The Neighborhood Outreach Program

Whether we are in worship or mission activity, we follow those security procedures that consistently provide a safety net for all involved. Whether setting up for the days work or just cleaning, two individuals are present when the building is opened. For six full years, we have served the needy in our immediate vicinity by establishing a food kitchen, food pantry and clothing store. By completing seven years of safe operation in 2009 we have grown to assist other agencies in the church and in the community to recognize the importance of the low and no income individual. The previously forgotten are now accepted members of the Christian church and seek to know Jesus Christ.

In our seventh year, we are now opening a second day on Thursday evening to expand the mission. We now work four days of the week, Thursday through Sunday to respond to the needs of the needy. Our Thursday, we begin with a dinner and then we work on any projects that need to provide a more functional church. We estimate that the midweek session will take a few years to build, however, neighbors are happy to see the church open as many days as possible.

We have tapped the resources of the parish that bring a canned good or donate a few dollars a week, but we have been able to accomplish more by providing Panera Bakery and Kroger products to our visitors each week. Our procedures are so predictable that we could be labeled as boring. We open the same time on Saturday morning and close after Vespers on Saturday night. Although the noon meal is the largest of the day, we do provide breakfast and dinner for volunteers who have worked throughout the day.

Each Friday we start by picking up \$400 to \$500 of baked goods from the Westerville Panera Bakery. We wrap each individual product so that visitors can safely handle the food when shopping. The baked goods are located on our north table, opposite the food pantry and distribution is unsupervised since we want to develop trust with the visitors. The last of the Panera product is distributed by Monday morning and nothing is thrown away.



Figure 1.4 – The Panera Bakery

Saturday is our biggest mission work day where access to the food pantry is supervised with one shopper at a time, but two other areas, the bakery and the clothing store are unsupervised. We want to encourage mature attitudes and develop trust with visitors, so we demonstrate trust by letting everyone shop on their own in these areas where we see there are seldom conflicts. We actually have a safer environment by encouraging adult behavior. In areas where we have products of higher values, such as in the food line and food pantry, we follow the rules to the letter. We do not have difficult rules, but those regulations we do have, concentrate on sharing with our neighbor. A favorite activity to build self esteem is to have our group collect items to send to soldiers overseas. They recognize when someone needs their support and well wishes.

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We are currently enforcing the following rules:

- 1. First, we remember that St. Gregory's is God's house**
- 2. Share equally among all the visitors. No seconds until everyone has a chance to eat**
- 3. At meal times, children go first, women second and men last**
- 4. We promote harmony and shun threats or violence**
- 5. No panhandling at St. Gregory's, but approach a mission worker for assistance when in need**
- 6. We expect everyone to participate in whatever way they can**
- 7. There are no sleeping areas on the Church property**
- 8. Personal items cannot be stashed on the Church property**
- 9. Individuals showing evidence of drug and alcohol use are asked to leave**
- 10. Encourage visitors to take food to someone shut in**

Figure 1.5 – Mission Rules

We encourage everyone to share in some sort of volunteering which includes helping to carry the Kroger delivery into the church. Kroger donates \$400 worth of product every Saturday morning and it is delivered to the church just a little after the meal begins. The food store operator manages the volunteers who carry the product into the Annex. At 12:30, the pantry opens and we added the log book to develop a feeling that they are signing for the free items. This helps to develop an order in the process.

Feeding America

For 1 in 8 people in our country, hunger is a reality.



- 35 million Americans don't know where they will get their next meal.
- 9 million of them are children.
- 3 million of them are senior citizens.
- 36% of these households have one or more working adults.
- 42% of these households are in rural and suburban areas.



Leading the Fight to End Hunger in America
For nearly 30 years, The Kroger Co. has helped lead the fight against hunger in the United States.

Figure 1.6 – The Kroger Company

Many of the churches in campus area and throughout the urban area have programs on different days. Some churches provide shelter while others provide showers and clean clothes. With each level of expansion in an outreach mission comes new security concerns, fresh procedures, additional training and learning from our mistakes. Over the years, we have become more resilient to the mission and to the growth. Early years, there is a lack of experience and personnel. With experience and a sense of community, the urban parishioner is more likely to start a literacy course or jobs training program, where years before, there was no interest or expertise.

We allow the leaders in the homeless and low-income community to take leadership roles in helping the elderly and handicapped visitors at the church. Their stewardship sets the tone for newcomers to follow. All during the day, we play music on the radio to help create noise. When someone says something inappropriate the music many times drowns out the comment so arguments are a rarity. Many times the leaders will make the corrections to foul language reminding them they are in a church.

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We begin the meal with the Lord's Prayer and try to use our energy in a manner that demonstrates the words. Daily discussions cover such topics politics, sports, job hunting and church life. If we were a guest from another part of the world having lunch at an urban church, these people would look and sound just the same as anyone we have ever met, except that there is not more than a dollar or two available if we took up a collection.



Figure 1.7 – Sterling is a Community Leader

During the day, when we receive requests, we train the volunteers not to say no, but to always to say yes. For example, if a person wants an extra portion of the main meal, but remember there is a no seconds rule enabling plenty of hot food for two hours of operation. We say yes to an extra side dish or sandwich from the sandwich bar. Never say no but demonstrate a positive response and conflicts dissipate. When a person is caught taking another individual's goods, we have them give the person's items back and we help them find what they need. Constant training results in positive behavior and subsequently a safer environment.

In our endeavors, we average eight volunteers each weekend. Three people work the food line from noon until 2 pm, one person does the Kroger pickup and delivery, one person does the canned good purchase and delivery, one person runs the food pantry, one person maintains the log book, and one person is managing the weekend's work project. If we have extra volunteers, we can direct more projects on the church campus. Both neighbors and parishioners take pride in creating a room or product, so we schedule multiple projects each year to build self confidence and pride.

During a typical year, we maintain or remodel spaces in any of the four buildings on the St. Gregory campus. The Upper Room is one of these projects where volunteers spent thousands of hours in learning and improving in job skills. Many homeless or low income people have taken their improved work ethic and are now working at steady employment and living in an apartment. They set the example for newcomers, who can recognize the achievements of someone in the neighborhood.



Figure 1.8 – Creating a Space to Be Proud Of

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"It's not always easy. We do things now we had not anticipated in the beginning. We fed/feed the poor, but lo and behold, some stick around. They in fact took an active role in preparing the Good Shepherd Educational Center for classes. Ask leaders about neighbors and the completion of the Upper Room. Their sweat, labor and well, yes, expertise makes that room something much better than was in fact originally anticipated. More come to worship, pray at mealtime and do not swear" remarks Fr. Dan Rentel.

Each year, our Neighborhood Outreach mission spends over 3000 hours serving meals, training basic life and employment skills and improving the campus and the neighborhood. We focus on proactive and positive tasks rather than complaining about graffiti and vandalism. When something is broken, we think about how to fix it. When we do not know how to fix it, we begin as a team to learn how to accomplish the task. We share our knowledge and expertise with our visitors and the community. We work closely with the University Area Commission and local colleges in creating relationships that develop understanding and common respect.

The following list shows our ever expanding catalog of projects which build a secure network within a community.

Month	Church Project	Weeks	Tasks
January	Safe sidewalks	4	Snow removal
February	Safe sidewalks	4	Snow removal
March	Spring Cleanup	4	Spring cleanup at the campus and cemetery
April	Gardens	4	Turn gardens and mulch
May	Building Projects	4	Build and install 5 handrails
June	Building Projects	4	4 x 10 Shed
	Campus Cleanup	1	Participate in the OSU Campus cleanup
July	Building Projects	4	Reupholstering 70 chairs
August	Building Projects	4	Painting
September	Sunday School Prep	4	Prepare Sunday School classrooms
October	Sunday School Projects	4	Prepare Sunday School classrooms
November	Bake Sale	3	Make 600 5 oz packages of white and dark chocolate covered pretzels
December	Christmas	3	Obtain and wrap Christmas gifts for homeless

Figure 1.9 – Monthly Projects

Safety is not just peaceful coexistence, but safely walking on clean sidewalks in the winter, having a handrail to hold when needed or providing additional clearances for wheelchairs in the church. We prioritize our work to encourage a safe environment for the children, the elderly and the handicapped. Once the least among our community is safe, the security for them becomes the environment for everyone. In simple terms, help and secure the needy and we help and secure ourselves. Every neighbor can recognize the difference between frivolous building and meaningful architecture. The urban parish that is dedicated to the positive development of the neighborhood gains respect from everyone.

We involve the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), the Engineering Department at Kaplan College and the Computer Networking and Software Development Program at Bradford College in helping us along. The OCF college students from multiple universities in the area will work the food

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line at least one weekend a month. Presently, students at the Kaplan College are developing as built drawings of the Annex and proposal drawings for the elevator project, and have in the past participated in other drawing and actual building projects donating thousands of hours of work over the last decade. Bradford students recently wired each of the six classrooms in the Education Building and Library for network access.

Donations to the program in the terms of valued resources will approach \$60,000 in 2009. More families share their resources and clothing and with the leadership of the Religious Education program, the pantry and clothing store has had the best year. We do not accept government funding but steer individuals towards those agencies that can help them.

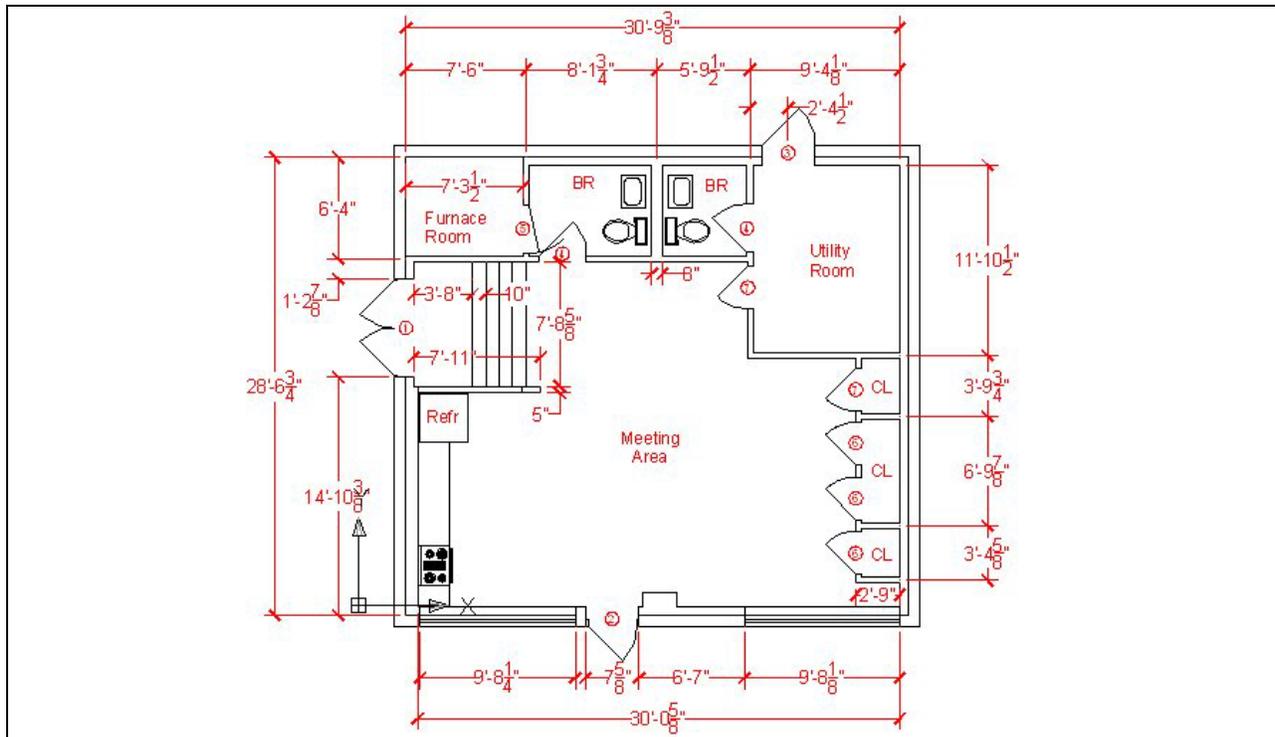


Figure 1.10 – Our Neighborhood Outreach Building

In the connectivity of the neighborhood, the mission affects the larger parish and the parishioners affect the mission. Eventually, neighbors want to join the church and by doing so the line that separated the urban church attended by suburbanites disappears. Today, the neighbors are as familiar as the most regular parishioner. However, we should develop religious education programs for individuals who have great difficulty in reading. These pamphlets can have simpler words but with more adult graphics, so the book does not come across as children's book.

With all good interactions, problems do develop that could involve fighting, an intoxicated visitor, panhandling or injury? We have action plans to deal with incidences. Here are some of the plans an urban church could develop to maintain security.

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Action Plans

Unattended Child

When a child is not with the parent or guardian, the child will be escorted back to their parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian is not located, the church staff will be notified. If the staff is not available, the Columbus Police will be contacted and the child turned over to a police officer.

Fighting

The direct volunteer staff spends many hours discussing nonviolence. We train each staff member to diffuse the situation and more importantly, we create an environment where people have personal space to shop and eat. We monitor and squelch arguments and we promote harmony. However, if a fight ensues, we will break it up and if necessary call the police. A building lock down is appropriate when there is a fight or threats of violence. The mission is prepared to serve all "to go" meals and not allow anyone access to the campus if there is a threat to staff and visitors. In extreme cases, the mission will close.

The Intoxicated Visitor

When observing or being notified that an individual is intoxicated, meet with that person and offer them a take home lunch and food. Explain to them that we do permit inebriated visitors for the meal. Escort the individual to the door and continue with them to the edge of the campus. We will lock the doors on the Annex when there is potential trouble in the area and only admit individuals after they knock at the door. In some instances, the chemically induced individual will return and harass other visitors. We will call the Columbus police and they will remove the person usually with NetCare, an agency that picks up people in this condition and holds them for 24 hours. Until the situation is completely under control, we keep the patrons inside the locked buildings. This situation occurs at least one day a year, so we should discuss the steps with the volunteers on a regular basis.

Panhandling

Homeless people will ask for money, however in many cases refuse any other type of assistance, such as food or drink. In our experience, the same person receiving cash at noon will be drunk by early afternoon. Do not harden our hearts to all pleas, but try to always assist without exchanging cash.

St. Gregory does not allow panhandling in zone 1, which includes all of our exterior areas. The panhandler makes the majority of visitors feel uncomfortable which many times lead to arguments and violence. Tell the person we cannot give them money and offer to them the chance to visit our food line, clothing store and bakery. We do not have any cash money to distribute, however individuals have felt compassion to alleviate the burden of the panhandler. We constantly discourage the corporate act since it is against our policy, but applaud the act of individual charity when two individuals connect.

The Neighborhood Outreach is almost a zero budget mission, where we distribute roughly all donations the same week we receive them. We try very hard not to hoard any supplies, feeling that we would break the confidences of those who know that we distribute 100% of the donations we receive. We carry a very small cash balance and are many times in debt by \$20 or more.

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Medical Emergencies

Whether homeless, elderly or handicap, an individual coming to our parish can have an injury or medical condition requiring emergency response. St. Gregory has written a plan, conducted training, and during multiple incidences implemented actions assisting a person in distress. Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) with the City of Columbus respond and have provided care for the person.

Each year we set goals to meet for the next 12 months. Attempting to educate and bring hope to this segment of the US population is a task set for the Christian church. This level of training requires compassion which is not included in bureaucracy. The urban church is already embedded in the neighborhood and has the strength and expertise to bring hope to the forgotten.

Mission Work that Works

Unemployment around the urban parish hinders the overall growth of the neighborhood. The low level of individual education keeps people from obtaining the experiences they desire. Local, county, state and federal agencies have some affect on special categories within the low or no income group, such as young mothers, but uneducated males stand little or no chance of getting any aid. The urban churches with active programs in Columbus are trying to get the job done. They assist the in developing literacy programs and job training opportunities. In Columbus, without coordination, each urban parish contributing has a program built on its strengths and capabilities. In the 21st century, people realize churches care and take actions and government organizations realize that volunteerism works.

St. Gregory of Nyssa Church lost its need for bars and steel gates by choosing to cooperate within the neighborhood. We do not have armed guards and we do not have any more violence than a suburban church. Once the fear of interacting with low to no income and homeless people was overcome, the church ladies and parishioners of this urban church have become missionaries of the 21st century.

Note from the author. At the end of the lecture, I changed the title of the presentation.

~~Safety Tactics in Your Urban Parish~~

Loving Thy Neighbor in Your Urban Parish