



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Safety in Detroit for the 2015 ELCA Youth Gathering
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Next to communicating the gospel and practicing our faith through service and learning, the number one priority of the ELCA Youth Gathering is keeping young people and adults safe while in Detroit. To that end, the Gathering's Safety and Security Planning team, one of fourteen planning teams, works with Churchwide legal and risk management staff, as well as law enforcement professionals from the host community to draft a risk management plan. That plan takes into account the risk management plans of the different facilities occupied by ELCA youth and adults, including, but not limited to, the Cobo Center (convention center), Ford Field, hotels and service sites. Youth Gathering volunteers and staff are trained in accordance with the plan. We also ensure that the adult leaders who accompany congregational groups are familiar with the basic safety plans by mandating training as part of the registration process. Outside of the Gathering community, the Safety and Security team conducts briefings with local law enforcement regularly during the planning cycle and throughout the Gathering. All law enforcement and public safety systems are on alert and aware of our presence. They know where our people are at all times.

At a recent meeting in Detroit, I was privileged to tour the Command Center for Project Lighthouse in the Chase building in downtown Detroit. The Chase building is one of 19 buildings in Detroit's Central Business District purchased and maintained by Dan Gilbert, a major investor.

In 2012, an umbrella entity called Rock Ventures was formed to provide operational coordination, guidance and integration of Gilbert's portfolio of companies, investments and real estate. Rock Ventures staffs the Project Lighthouse Command Center, and is a beautiful example of how the private sector has stepped up to partner with public law enforcement to protect the downtown core. Detroit PD, Michigan State PD, Wayne State PD, FBI, Homeland Security, Border Patrol and 30 private entities like Rock Ventures together form the Project Lighthouse. <http://www.downtowndetroit.org/lighthouse/> The organizations that make up the Lighthouse Project share surveillance video, and information from their respective uniformed patrols, some armed and some not. They meet monthly to review issues, and prepare for events being held downtown. The Youth Gathering's Safety and Security Team will coordinate with Project Lighthouse to promote safe movement throughout the city. It was valuable to learn that through the public/private collaboration exemplified in the Lighthouse Project, a person's movement can be tracked across downtown Detroit. I watched film of a person being tracked by the cameras on the Renaissance Center, who was then picked up by cameras on one of Dan Gilbert's buildings, and then showed up on the cameras on another building, and was then picked up by a camera on Ford Field, and on and on until the person was apprehended. Whether one thinks about such surveillance as Big Brother watching or as a necessary security protocol, there will be

surveillance by professional security staff monitoring the downtown core.

When the service sites are identified, we will work on the protocol for securing them. Some will be outside of the city's core, and some will be in suburbs. Our Safety & Security Team works with municipal law enforcement wherever we are, and they also hire private security where needed. We have recently started to explore the possibility of utilizing the Guardian Angels organization or other security as a deterrent presence if needed. It is unclear yet if that is something we will pursue. As part of our Risk Management Plan we have a list of "must haves" for each service site. That list includes restroom facilities, a water source, and security. In essence we form our own Project Lighthouse by partnering with the sites, hiring private security if we deem that necessary.

In addition to what I have outlined above, our Safety & Security Planning Team is responsible for a group of people who are trained to staff our own 24-hour call center called the "Information Line." That call center is staffed starting Saturday July 11, when groups attending MYLE and DAYLE may be traveling to Detroit, through Tuesday, July 21, after the Youth Gathering. The number for the Information Line is printed on participants' wristbands. Each call is logged and we pride ourselves on follow through. The Information Line staff connect directly with other Gathering leadership should that be necessary. We have a system that includes person-to-person transference of information, as well as access to mass texting capabilities and the use of other media to relay information.

The Safety and Security Team is also responsible for a cadre of medical professionals. The head nurse coordinates with every hospital in the host community, and designates specific hospitals that are equipped to serve emergencies adequately. The head nurse has, in the past, recruited an emergency room physician, an ELCA member, whose employer/hospital assumes liability for his/her service to the Youth Gathering. If necessary, s/he will offer advice and counsel. The head nurse or one of her staff or RNs follow up on every person who is transferred to the hospital. They have a protocol for alerting adult leaders, and parents, of any concerns. We even connect with hospital chaplains so they are aware of our presence.

Finally, the Safety and Security Team has a specific security detail, ELCA volunteers who are trained by former NYPD personnel who now serves as head of security at a major educational institution in New York City. These volunteers monitor the community mostly while in the stadium setting, and assist local law enforcement with movement across major intersections.

While we can't control every situation, we do try to prepare for every scenario, and staff accordingly. We work tirelessly to create a safe environment for ELCA youth and adults, and provide suggestions for walking routes and proactive behaviors that support a safe experience in the host city. We need the adult leaders who accompany youth to take responsibility and follow our direction. If they do that, we will be able to focus on our mission of providing an experience through which youth and adults will learn that through Word and sacrament God raises us up together, in Christ by the power of the Spirit, and sends us into the world together to love and to serve.