

Church Security and Crisis Planning Guidelines **Archdiocese of Milwaukee**

The guidelines and recommendations contained in this document were developed to assist parishes in formulating appropriate security and crisis planning measures. These guidelines and recommendations do not represent an exclusive course of action, and should be considered by parishes in light of the unique characteristics, locations, and facility designs of each parish.

In the wake of recent mass shootings and other violent acts, it has become clear that our churches are not insulated from indiscriminate or targeted violent acts. In response to these new challenges facing the Church, we recommend that your parish establish a Safety and Security Team (hereinafter “SST”) to address potentially violent situations in addition to events such as severe weather and medical emergencies.

The role of the SST is to develop and implement plans to address the safety of your parishioners, guests, staff, clergy, and physical property. The following are suggestions and strategies for the SST to consider in the development of your parish’s Church Security and Crisis Plan. Attention to, and inclusion of, the following strategies can help your parish construct a robust and effective plan.

Composition of Safety and Security Team

- When constructing the SST, parishes should consider including the following individuals: a member of local law enforcement, the pastor, parish director or clergy assigned to the parish, a member of parish maintenance (whether staff or volunteer), a parish usher, the director of religious education, and a medical professional. Involving the pastor, parish director or clergy in the development of crisis and security planning is important because of his or her administrative responsibilities to the parish and important role in communication to parishioners. When selecting a clergy member, it is advisable to choose a priest or deacon who is regularly present at most Masses.
- It is suggested that the actions and decisions of the SST be recorded and shared with all team members. Ultimately, a written document encompassing your parish’s Church Security and Crisis Plan should be created, and the plan should be shared with all staff, clergy, volunteers, and parishioners.

Getting Started

- It is suggested that the first action of the SST should be to walk the interior and exterior of the church as a group, focusing on potential points of entry and possible vulnerabilities. The team should create detailed site and floor plans which identify all points of entry, fire exits, stairways, utility shut-offs, and electrical panels. These plans can then be used by the team to develop responses to various forms of crises. Once completed, a copy of the plans should be given to local law enforcement.
- Consider recruiting and training security volunteers to assist the SST during Mass and events at the church. These volunteers must be adults, and may be ushers, greeters, or other parishioners.

Security During Mass and Events at the Church

- If the church has multiple entrances, the number of entrances that remain open and unlocked after the start of Mass or an event should be minimized as much as possible. If possible, a greeter or usher should be positioned at each entrance that remains open after the start of Mass or event. Please remember to be conscious of late arrivals to Mass and events. If possible, consider positioning a security volunteer outside the church before and during Mass to watch for developing situations outside of the church.
- IMPORTANT NOTE: When minimizing the number of open and unlocked entrances, please ensure that entrances that also serve as fire exits are only locked to people coming in from the outside, and remain operable for any person already inside the church attempting to exit. All exit doors should remain accessible and operational in case of the need for a quick exit.

Training Security Volunteers

- It is suggested that the parish contact local law enforcement to ascertain whether on-site training is available for the SST and security volunteers. If local law enforcement is not able to provide this type of training, such training may be offered by private security firms.
- Consider having security volunteers wear a visible badge with a photo identifying who they are. This badge should be large enough to see from a distance as it will be important in coordinating your Church Security and Crisis Plan in a crisis situation.
- Consider having security volunteers carry walkie-talkies for quick and easy communications among one another.
- Recommend that security volunteers carry cell phones, as these devices are important in case of the need to make outside calls.
- Consider having security volunteers carry an air horn that can be sounded in case of emergency.
- All security volunteers should be trained as to the location of all exits and the locking/unlocking procedure for each entrance and/or exit door.

NO Armed Security Volunteers

- Except for members of active law enforcement, Catholic Mutual DOES NOT allow armed employees, clergy, or volunteers as part of any safety or security plan, regardless of the concealed carry or open carry weapons laws in Wisconsin or in local municipalities.

Hired Security Guards

- It is acceptable for a parish to utilize active law enforcement, who may or may not be armed, whether paid or volunteer, to assist with church security. It is also acceptable to hire a professional and fully licensed security company which has insurance for its use of firearms to provide security for your parish.

Cell Phones

- Cell phones are a necessary part of any emergency response procedure, especially your parish's Church Security and Crisis Plan. All parish staff members, members of the clergy, and security volunteers should carry a cell phone in order to be able to place an emergency call in the event of a threat.
- 911 procedures are suggested to be a part of your parish's security plan. For example, no single person should be assigned to call 911 in the event of a threat. Calls to 911 should be made by any person who is available to do so. Additionally, cell phones can be programmed such that one single button dials 911.

Clearly Marked Exits

- It is suggested that all exits be clearly marked. Please keep in mind that many attendees to Mass or events at the church may be first-time visitors. Consider utilizing exit signs at each exit point, and ensure that all exit signs are clearly visible from different angles and positions within the church. In addition, remove obstacles from hallways and aisles leading to exit doors to facilitate a quick evacuation in the event of an emergency. Possible exit routes should be clearly labeled, especially exits that are not always plainly visible.
- Hardware on all doors should be inspected regularly to ensure the handle or panic bar is in proper working order and that the door opens and closes freely with minimal effort. A routine maintenance and repair program will assist with identifying issues and problems in need of correction.

Resources

- Catholic Mutual Group offers an active shooter video training scenario and crisis training geared for our schools. This information could also be useful in constructing the plan for the church and other parish buildings. You may access this training on the CMG Connect platform at www.cmgconnect.org.
- There is a risk management document labeled "Active Shooter Emergency Response" which can be found at www.catholicmutual.org. Click "Member Login", enter "0065mil" for username and "service" for password. Select the "Risk Management Info" icon, then click "Index A" or enter "Active Shooter" into the search bar.
- Another helpful tool is Catholic Mutual's *Emergency Response Procedures App* for cell phones and tablets. The instructions to download this app can be obtained by contacting your local Catholic Mutual office.
- These links to the Department of Homeland Security could be utilized for your training purposes:
 - <https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/33007/>
 - [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Developing EOPs for Houses of Worship FINAL.PDF](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Developing_EOPs_for_Houses_of_Worship_FINAL.PDF)
 - <http://www.dhs.gov/publication/active-shooter-emergency-action-plan-guide#>
- Should you have additional questions or concerns, please contact your Catholic Mutual Group Milwaukee service office at 262-255-6906. Thank you.