

Catholic Mutual... “CARES”

Church Security

In the wake of many recent tragedies, mass shootings and other violent acts have become all too familiar. Our churches are not immune from shootings and other violent attacks. Yet the data suggests churches are not any more or less likely to be sites of violence in the U.S. What we should not do, is let these acts of terror cause us to be fearful of gathering with our fellow worshippers. The Church can develop and implement plans to keep your property and, more importantly, all of God’s children safe from harm. Among your other ministries, your parish could develop a Safety and Security Committee to address potential violence.

Awareness and Prevention

Our world has dramatically changed and nowadays, tragic acts of violence have become a daily occurrence. As such, it is unlikely we will be able to prevent a shooting at our churches. Therefore, here are a few strategies you should implement to lessen the potential for an incident and make your Mass safer. Keeping in mind that seconds save lives, any action you can plan and prepare for will be helpful.

Locking Doors

- Five minutes after Mass has started, all entrance doors should be locked (*if not a fire code violation*). If there is a late arrival to Mass, the usher can manually allow entrance. If this step is too challenging at this time, a good start would be to lock the doors during the week for school Mass. Entrances directly from parking lots, along with the narthex, should be monitored by an usher or designated individual at all times. Unfortunately, to keep our churches safer, we can no longer maintain the theme of an open campus. It provides an all too easy setting for a shooter and our mindset must change on this. Fifteen to twenty years ago, our schools were unlocked and opened for anyone to walk into. We would never consider unlocking our schools today. We should hold these same principles for all places of assembly including our churches.

Easily Identifiable Ushers

- Ushers and other designated individuals providing security assistance should be clearly identifiable and wear some type of visible insignia representing who they are. This insignia should be large enough to see from a distance and, could be designed to give the appearance of a badge. When standing outside of the church, and clearly visible, this could be a deterrent to a potential threat. It is a must that all ushers are equipped with cell phones to make an emergency call when necessary or to communicate to other ushers of any concerns. It may benefit to have ushers carry a loud horn that could be sounded if a threat turns real. Not only will this alert everyone in the congregation, it may also distract the intruder.

Perimeter Security

- It is important to provide a high level of perimeter security to the church before, during, and after Mass. Perimeter security will provide early detection of a threat and reduce the potential for harm to the congregation. This consists of having ushers frequently walk the exterior of the church before and during Mass. This is especially true if you have wood/solid doors with no means of visual observations to the exterior. If the weather is intolerable, a vehicle placed up front by the church entrance can be utilized by the usher to maintain surveillance.

Example: *If an usher is outside the church and an individual is approaching (after Mass has started and looks/acts nervous/suspicious), the usher can immediately notify the other ushers/staff of what is occurring. Thus, giving you an upper hand to contact emergency responders and activating your plan in a timely manner if needed.*

Cell Phones

- Cell phones *must* be a part of your emergency response procedure. Every usher and church staff should have on themselves a cell phone to immediately contact law enforcement in the event of a threat. No one person should be assigned to call 911, it should be done so by anyone that is available to do so. These phones should be programmed such that one single button dials 911 in an effort to expedite the call.

Clearly Marked Exits

- Anticipate the fact that many people in attendance in the church may have never visited your location before. Look at and consider improved signage at exit doors and/or pathways to quickly evacuate people when necessary. Preventative measures should be taken such as ensuring your hallways and pathways to exit doors are not obstructed with tables, storage, etc. Hardware on doors should be inspected regularly to ensure the panic bar is working properly and the door opens freely with minimal effort. Consider the fact you may have to repair/replace some doors. Ensure all possible routes are clearly labeled, especially exits that are not always clearly visible. Consider large exit signs for improved visibility.

Threat and Course of Action

It is important to understand there is no simple formula for survival in a threatening situation. Although, a survival mindset will give you a much stronger foundation upon which you can base your decisions and actions.

- When a threat is identified, any and all ushers/staff that are available should call 911 immediately and give specific details to the event occurring. Examples include identification of the shooter(s); ethnicity, clothing, type of weapon(s), location of threat, etc.

- When a person poses a threat, it may be necessary to confront them if the situation allows. This should be done as a team approach whereas someone is already calling 911 to report their suspicion while someone else is assessing the situation. If you are uncertain whether to call 911 or not, it's better to call to let law enforcement be readily available and able to assess the threat level.
- When necessary, activate your plan for quick emergency egress from the church. Ushers and staff should direct the mass of people out of the building as quickly and safely as possible.

Catholic Mutual DOES NOT allow arming employees or volunteers as part of your safety/security plan. If necessary, hire active law enforcement or a professional and qualified security company to provide security ensuring the company is insured for the use of firearms.

To have an effective safety/security team and an overall presence of safety in the church, you should develop a sense of “situational awareness.” Become aware of your surroundings and do not let complacency rule. People often believe “it will never happen” to them. It’s time to change that mindset and develop new procedures to prepare for a situation “when” it happens and not “if” it happens. In the event of a threat, having no safety/security plan in place creates chaos and fear. With a plan in place, there is structure and organized actions.

Catholic Mutual Group offers an excellent active shooter training scenario and training geared for our schools. This information could also be useful for you to construct your plan for the church and other parish buildings. You may access this training on our CMG Connect platform at www.CMGconnect.org.

We also have a CARES document labeled “Active Shooter Emergency Response.” This can be found at www.catholicmutual.org. Click Member Login, enter your *Username* and *Password*, Select the Risk Management Info icon, Property, and then Emergency Preparedness.

Another helpful tool to utilize is Catholic Mutual’s *Emergency Response Procedures App* for cell phones and tablets. The instructions to download this app can be obtained from previous correspondence with your Arch/Diocese and/or by contacting your Claims/Risk Manager or Loss Control Representative.

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/publication/active-shooter-emergency-action-plan-guide#>

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact your Risk Management Representative at Catholic Mutual Group.