

# **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. Awareness is critical in your efforts to help minimize the risk of an active shooter situation. As such, here are a few strategies you should implement to lessen the potential for an incident and make your Mass and events safer. Keeping in mind that seconds save lives, any action you can plan and prepare for will be helpful.*

### **Locking Doors**

- If you are unable to provide a watchful eye for each entrance door, please consider securing these doors (*if not a fire code violation*). 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 a member of your Safety/Security Team 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 open 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.

### **Safety/Security Team Members**

- Some of your Safety/Security Team members 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 members of the Safety/Security Team are equipped with cell phones to make an emergency call when necessary and/or radios to communicate to other team members any concerns. It may benefit to have team members 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 team members 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 observation to the exterior. If the weather is intolerable, a vehicle placed up front by the church entrance can be utilized by the team member to maintain surveillance.

**Example:** *If a team member is outside the church and an individual is approaching (after Mass has started and looks/acts nervous/suspicious), the team member can immediately notify the other team members of what is occurring. The result is giving you a faster response to contact emergency responders and activating your plan in a timely manner if needed.*

### **Cell Phones and Radios**

- Communication devices *must* be a part of your emergency response procedure. Every team member should have 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 so 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 leading 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 to enhance your security. 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 persons 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 or not to call 911, it's better to call so law enforcement can be readily available and able to assess the threat level.
- When necessary, activate your plan for quick emergency egress from the church. Team members should direct the crowd of people out of the building as quickly and safely as possible.

***Catholic Mutual strongly recommends that employees or volunteers not be armed as part of your Safety and Security Plan. An armed employee or volunteer acting as security may not be protected under the diocesan insurance program; thus exposing them to great personal risk should they be involved in an active shooter situation. Rather, we strongly recommend hiring armed security firms and/or active law enforcement whom require training and carry professional liability insurance.***

***In the event Professional Armed Security is not obtained, anyone acting as armed security as a volunteer or could be construed as a volunteer; should obtain personal firearms liability coverage from a qualified carrier for their own self-defense coverage.***

***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 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](http://www.CMGconnect.org).

We also have a CARES document labeled "*Active Shooter Emergency Response*." This can be found through CMG Connect or on our website by clicking on Member Login, enter your *Username* and *Password*, Select the Risk Management Info icon, Property, and then select the Security tab to find the Active Shooter Emergency Response document as well as several other security documents to assist you.

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 also 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)

<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.

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