

Layered Security Safe Guarding Your Weekly Worship

Office of Risk Management
January 2026



Protecting Your Parish and School Community

Much like a dart board, security for your parish needs to be layered from the outside, inward, with your congregation being the bullseye.

The goal is to protect the bullseye from ever being reached!



ARCHDIOCESE
of BALTIMORE



[Chaos unfolds during mass inside Staten Island church](#)



Foundation for Protection of Your Community

- Parish leadership, clergy, staff and lay members, must come together and establish security and safety as a fundamental need and objective of the location.
- Ownership of this effort must rest with the leadership of the location and as needed rely on the support of community members to assist with carrying out the plans to ensure safety measures are in place and executable.



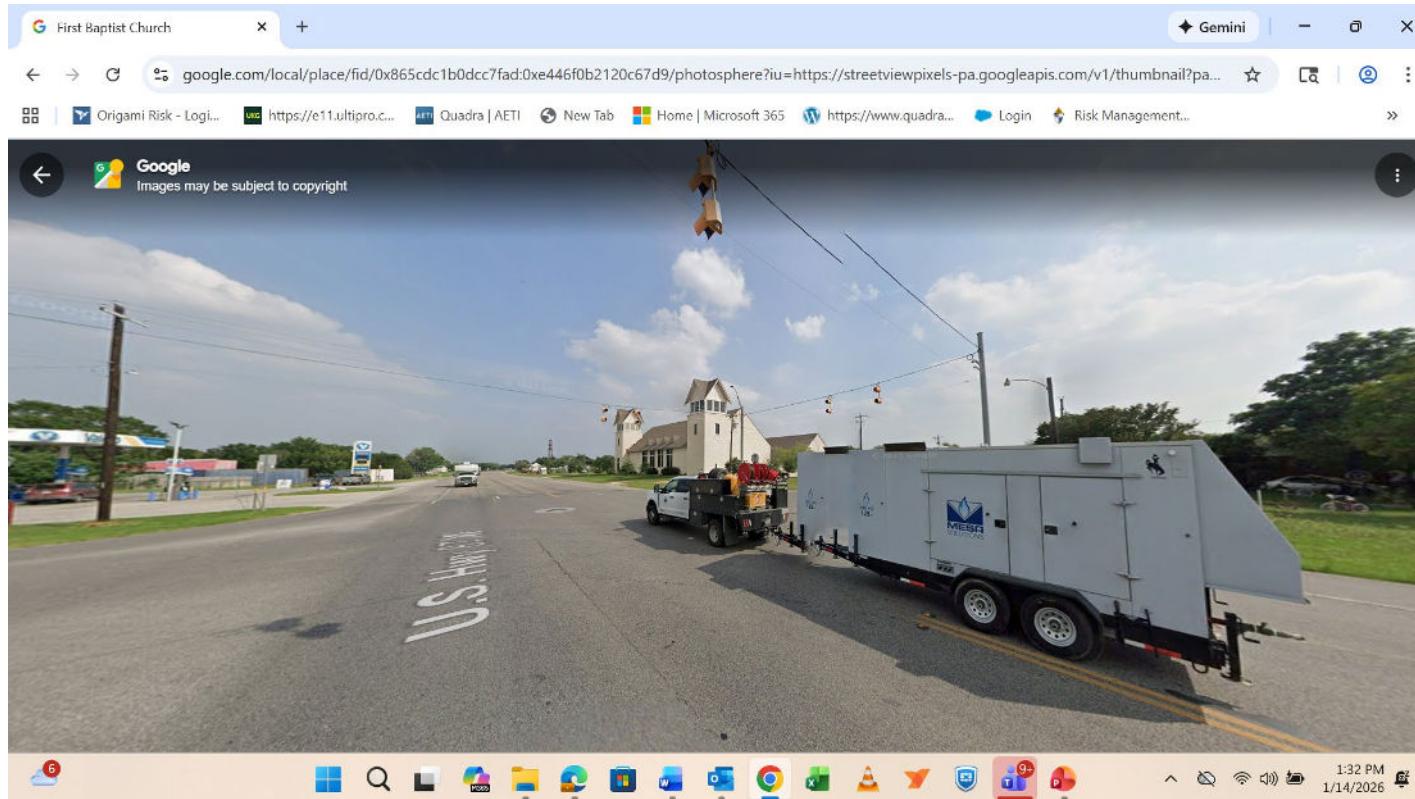
Key Contributors

- Clergy
- Greeters
- Sacristans
- Lectors
- Fire/EMS
- Mental Health Workers
- Emergency Management Personnel
- Staff
- Ushers
- Altar Services
- Law Enforcement
- Physicians/Nurses
- Local first responders



Layer One of Layered Security

Securing the Perimeter of the Structure



SUTHERLAND SPRINGS, TEXAS



Securing the Perimeter of the Structure

- Measures should be taken to surveil all entrances and exists that will remain open during services.
- Surveillance should be occurring throughout the entire service.
- This can be done either via assignment to “staff” or camera surveillance.
- Staff assigned to manage the entrances must have the ability to promptly lock down doors if threat observed.
- Staff must have a means to communicate to gathering as to implementing the lockdown and to move away from windows and doors through which shooter may observe individuals inside.



Securing the Perimeter of the Structure

- Consideration should be given to implementing a parking lot security monitors with means to communicate with individuals inside to lock down as needed or report other incidents when assistance is needed.
- Consideration should be given to locking some of the doors after mass has started.
- For locked doors, signage should be posted indicating that for the sanctity of the mass, please use the main entrance.
- Ensure individuals are tasked with immediately contacting 911.



Threats Occurring From Within the Sanctuary

Active Assailant Weapons of Choice

- Long Gun 33%
- Shot Gun 15%
- Handgun 73%
- Knives/Straight Edge 39%



*Rockefeller Institute

How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Foundational Components of Safeguarding the Sanctuary

- Use of Greeters, Ushers, Sacristans and Other **Public Facing** Ministry Members
- **Resource Support** in the form of current or retired law enforcement, medical providers and mental health workers.
- Ensure a means by which the front facing ministry members, support resources and clergy leading services have the means to communicate with one another.



How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Public Facing Ministry Members Training

Provided Training on “**Power of Hello**”, Situational Awareness and Behavioral Threat Assessment

The “Power of Hello” lies in its ability to build connections, reduce isolation, and create positive environments by acknowledging someone's presence, fostering trust, and opening doors for communication, which benefits mental well-being and even security by disrupting anonymity and encouraging engagement. It's a simple, universal gesture that signals value, kindness, and readiness for interaction, benefiting both the giver and receiver by improving mood and creating a sense of community.

[Employee Vigilance - Power of Hello | CISA](#)



How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Public Facing Ministry Members Training Resources

Resources to Protect Your House of Worship

<https://www.fema.gov/faith-resources>

Protecting Houses of Worship Event Resource Guide

<https://www.hSDL.org/?view&did=790107>

Safeguarding Houses of Worship

https://www.justnet.org/resources/Houses_of_Worship.html

Praise & Preparedness Initiative

<http://www.praise.ga.gov/>



FEMA



How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Public Facing Ministry Members Training

Houses of Worship Security Practices Guide

<https://www.illinois.gov/ready/plan/Documents/>

DHS Houses_of_Worship_Security_Practices_Guide.pdf DHS Community Engagement, Outreach, and Training Resources

<http://www.dhs.gov/community-outreach-and-training>



How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Public Facing Ministry Members

- Ensure that members of public facing ministry know their resource personnel for each mass.
- The lead usher, sacristan or responsible designee should be prepared to immediately notify the needed resource person should the need occur.



How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Resource Support to Public Facing Ministry Members

- Parishes should seek individuals with current or prior law enforcement, medical providers including doctors and nurses and mental health workers.
- Such professionals should be asked to register to attend particular masses and to sign in upon arrival at mass.
- Much like scheduling a lector, server or Eucharistic ministry, parish should make a practice of having these designated individual available as often at possible at mass.
- When signing in for their designed mass, ensure the appropriate front facing ministers have a means to notify these individuals and where they are located in the sanctuary.

How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Resource Support Ministry Members

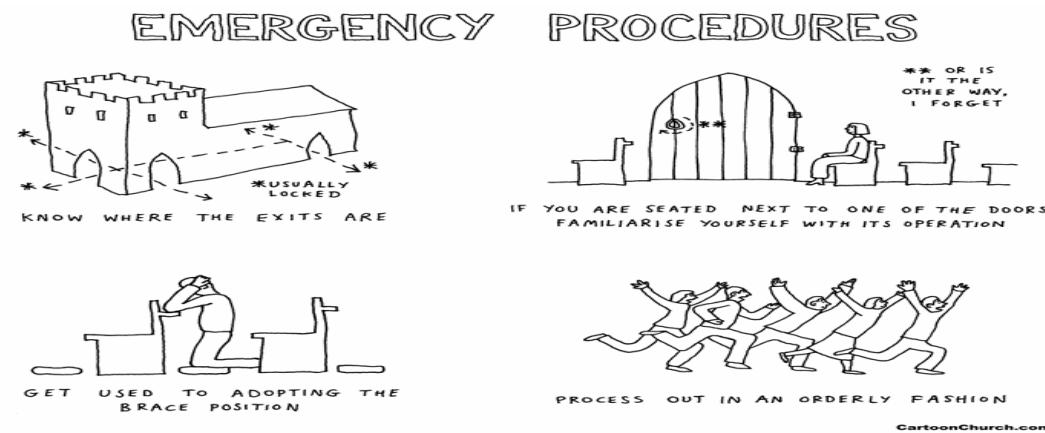
- With regard to law enforcement resource personnel, it is the decision of the parish leadership as to whether or not those individuals are permitted to be armed or not.
- The key so as to remain complaint with AOB policy, any designee to be armed must either be a current law enforcement members in good standing or a retired individual in good standing and having the appropriate LEOSA credentials.
- They must also have on them their credentials in the event there is occur which requires them to identify themselves to authorities
- If the decision is made to have armed member of the congregation local law enforcement must be put on notice.



How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Other Training

Members of this ministry, both front facing and support ministers, should receive training on the basics of responding in the event there is a need to evacuate, lock down or shelter in place.



How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Other Helpful Tips

- Parishes are encouraged to make announcement at the beginning of mass that if an attendee needs anything or has a question or concern to speak with an usher.
- This is a key component of see something/say something
- Members of the front facing ministries, particularly ushers, should remain up and about the sanctuary surveilling the sanctuary throughout the entire mass and be prepared to respond if needed.
- Share your mass schedule with local first responders
- Invite first responders, even while on duty, to attend services.



How Best to Safeguard the Sanctuary

Recruiting Ministry Members

- How a parish recruits members for these ministries is a parish-based decision. Some parishes have recruited by making public requests, others by individual asks and some with a combination based upon the needs of the ministry.
- To assist with recruitment, individuals should be encouraged to become members of these ministries in the various roles with the incentive that as a member of the parish ministry, they are considered volunteers of the parish and as such should an incident occur and should a claim be made against them, they will be protected under the parish's liability insurance as an agent of the parish.
- Whereas, someone who is a spontaneous volunteer, will not be protected in the same way as an actual volunteer.



Safeguarding Your Sanctuary

