



Diocese of Western North Carolina

Keeping Churches Safe from Violence

The Diocese of Western North Carolina encourages our churches to develop disaster preparedness plans that address natural disaster, facility risks, and violence against churches. The diocesan website provides a number of resources from agencies including Homeland Security and Episcopal Relief and Development. Your diocesan leadership team offers this short list of guidelines for your consideration as you develop plans related to violence against churches.

1. Establish relationships with local law enforcement and first responders.

Invite them to visit and tour your building so they can become familiar with the lay of the land in the event of an emergency. Many local police will do a free review and make suggestions.

2. Identify your Security Culture

Churches take seriously their call to be an open and welcoming presence in their communities. Different people have different ideas of what that looks like.

Canvass your congregation, vestry, ushers and clergy for their views on security. This will give you an indication of how much they are willing to limit access to different areas.

Common practices among many churches include: keeping rear doors locked with only the front (main) entrance open during services; keeping child care facilities locked; and having a staff person or usher to greet unknown persons at the door. There are many more detailed measures your congregation might consider depending upon its security culture.

3. Assess your security; define areas of risk

Walk your campus with a police officer or a security expert (could be a parishioner) to identify places in need of better lighting, signage, etc. Make a list and tackle those areas of need.

Use your ushers to provide added security. During services, some ushers can be stationed at the entrance to the church while other ushers check the halls of the buildings and around the grounds and parking lots.

4. Create an Emergency Preparedness Plan

Assemble a leadership team to develop the plan. It should include leadership such as clergy, vestry members, and facilities directors. Consider including parishioners with expertise in security and/or law enforcement. Guidelines and a template for how to develop plans can be found on the diocesan website.

5. Communication

Your Emergency Preparedness Plan should include how you will communicate to other staff and key parishioners (i.e. Wardens) during an emergency. Decide who will notify whom and the chain of communication. This is particularly important on churches with large campuses and many buildings. The template created by Episcopal Relief and Development is helpful with this part.

6. Practice your plans with staff and volunteers

For active shooter scenarios, FEMA and Homeland Security recommend the RUN, HIDE, FIGHT model. In short, this means the ideal option is to run and escape. If you can't escape, hide. If you can't hide, fight. These short tip sheets from FEMA and Homeland Security give you more detail about how to improve your chances for successfully escaping, hiding or fighting.

7. Proclaim the Good News

Remember that improved safety and security will allow you to focus on what you're there to do: preach the Gospel; help people grow spiritually; reach out in love; and connect with the community and God.

The Diocese of Western North Carolina is grateful for the work and generosity from the Diocese of Virginia for developing and sharing these guidelines with the wider Church, upon which these guidelines are based.