

# **Catholic Mutual.. "CARES"**

## *Church Security*

### *Perimeter Security*

*Based on law enforcement findings, an active shooter typically does not decide one day they are going to attack a church, school or large event. This is a process that may involve years of issues or disturbances with this individual which leads them to their actions. These are thought out and planned attacks by scoping out locations. Given the importance of perimeter security, it is crucial that you provide the appearance of your property to be well secured. As you can see by the recent school, church, and large event shootings, these were all well planned over time by the shooter finding such easy targets. Keep the importance of perimeter security at the forefront of your safety/security plan and do not give an open invitation for an attack on your property. Churches have always been a sanctuary for those in need of refuge. These are uncertain times and it is important to recognize the potential for threats at your parish. As part of your overall church safety and security program, the following procedures should aid you in reducing the potential from harm at your church events.*

*"A prudent person sees danger and takes precautions."*

#### Awareness

We often talk about having "situational awareness." It is important that one does not become complacent in their everyday responsibilities. Be observant of your surroundings when arriving at the church for Mass or other events. Always look for signs of disturbances and investigate them immediately. If property such as security cameras, windows/doors, etc. are found damaged, don't always assume it is was vandalized just for the thrill of doing so. It could be a precursor to a break-in or active shooter situation at some point. Report these damages and concerns and replace/repair immediately if they pose a security issue for the buildings and people on your property.

The following are best practices to consider for your perimeter security plan. If feasible, conduct a security assessment of the exterior of your church prior to and/or during Mass and other events. As part of your safety/security plan, monthly assessments of the following should be considered:

- Parking lot(s)
- Doors
- Windows
- Landscaping
- Lighting
- Neighbors
- Other structures

## Exterior Security Assessment

### Parking Lots

Research has determined that over 60% of all mass shootings begin in the parking lot. The parking lot(s) and exterior of your parish should be the focal point for early detection and delay of a potential threat and/or active shooter. Are parking lots and buildings easily visible from the streets? Do you have landscaping which prohibits the view of the church and lots from the streets? Do you have adequate lighting? Your assessment should determine if you need to make your church more visible to help deter the potential of a threat or other criminal activity at your parish.

- During arrival and departure of parishioners, be vigilant and survey the parking areas for unusual activity and/or vehicles that might appear out of place. Keep in mind that although Mass or your event has ended, that does not mean your threat level has diminished. When necessary, communicate your suspicions to the safety team as quickly as possible. Never hesitate to contact law enforcement if you have suspicions.
- It is important to have greeters and other capable individuals as part of your safety team surveying the parking lot while parishioners are arriving for Mass or other events. Part of your training should focus on individuals capable of identifying the signs of any potential threat and suspicious behavior such as:
  - Nervousness
  - Anti-social tendencies
  - Strange attire
  - Body language
  - Confused look
- During Mass, conduct a minimum of one walk-around of the parking areas and exterior of building(s). Look for people inside vehicles as you may need to encounter them to inquire their purpose of being on the property. If uncomfortable in doing so, never place yourself in harm's way. Always contact law enforcement to be on the safe side of your decision making.
- Conducting these walk-arounds can also be seen as a deterrent for someone who may be considering an attack. Being visible to the public also offers a sense of comfort knowing your church is concerned for their safety.
- Consider having a vehicle with a "Safety Patrol" emblem on it and drive through the parking lot making yourself visible. Have the vehicle visible at your entrance(s) or front of church while parishioners are arriving and leaving Mass.
- Partner with your local law enforcement agency to inquire if they could afford an officer to be in the area/parking lot prior to, during, and/or after Mass. They may not be able to send an officer although, it might be possible they could provide a patrol car absent of an officer to be available in your lot during that time.

## Doors

Does your church have doors that can be properly secured? Are there any points of weakness with the potential of easy access to the interior of the church by unauthorized persons? Your findings based on your assessment may require improvements or replacement of doors to provide proper security during church events and after hours. It is important to note if you are updating or replacing doors, the door and/or locking mechanism must comply with all fire codes.

- We recommend that during Mass or other events, all secondary doors should be locked/secured to prevent access (*so long as this is not a fire code violation*). If the main entrance to the church cannot be locked during Mass, we recommend that it be safeguarded by your team/staff for individuals that may be considered a threat. These main entrance doors should be locked immediately if you have determined there is a threat.
- Conduct an examination of the doors. Ensure they can be properly secured after Mass or your event has started. It is important to note that persons with criminal intent are usually not spontaneous and their actions are such as to *"scope out"* your property before they act on their intentions. (For example: *criminals are known to place a pebble/stone at the foot of the door giving the appearance it is closed/secured; however, this is enough to prohibit the latch to engage. In addition, they may place tape over the latch for this same reason.*)
- Always, for all security reasons, you should have a Key Control Policy in place to ensure the protection of your property and all who enter. An open door policy is no longer conducive to today's society. When the church and other buildings are not in use, you should consider having them locked at all times if this does not interfere with other prayer vigils needed by anyone.
- If you have glass doors, you may want to consider the installation of safety and security window film. This film acts as a deterrent and can reduce intruder access by up to 1½ minutes. Although it does not "prevent" an intruder access, it allows ample time for you to initiate your emergency action plan and allow more time for a law enforcement response prior to access. Please consider watching this two minute video to learn more about providing safety to your church. (*It is important to know that CMG does not endorse this particular brand of product, it is merely for your consideration as part of your security assessment on your property.*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96x2tO9Xuxw>

## Windows

Do windows pose an issue at your church? Are they accessible from ground level?

- Inspect the windows for signs of damage. Look for tool markings, pry marks, cracked glass etc. that may be an indication of an attempt to gain access. Criminal intent may be to enter the church in an inconspicuous area and time without detection.
- Ensure that all windows open/close properly and they possess adequate locking mechanisms.

## Landscaping

Landscaping can add beauty to your property but can also be a refuge for an intruder. Make certain it is well maintained so that it does not allow hiding places for a threatening person. Does your landscaping (i.e. boulders, trees, bushes, etc.) hide windows or block view of your entrances? If so, these are invitations to an intruder who may consider your church an easy target. As part of your perimeter security assessment, you will need to identify these potential issues and modify to eliminate these concealing areas.

- As you conduct walk-arounds of the church prior to and during Mass, search behind these locations for persons or signs of disturbances such as indications of someone sleeping or hiding in the area.
- If it is not feasible to remove questionable landscaping, consider reducing their size by trimming the vegetation allowing increased exposure to your windows and doors.

## Lighting

Do you have adequate parking lot and exterior building lighting?

- Lights for the parking lot and exterior of the building should be illuminated during nighttime hours at all times.
- Although a violent act/active shooter is unlikely during nighttime hours, with exception of evening Masses, this can act as a strong deterrent to a predator and portray the image that your facility has a great sense of security in place.

## Neighbors

A neighborhood wants their community to feel and be safe from harm. Consider developing a Neighborhood Watch Program as part of your Safety/Security Ministry. Your local law enforcement agency can assist and develop your program specific to your community.

If one is already in place, look for ways to enhance it with respect to the current culture on the need for security at our churches.

- Reach out to the adjacent neighbors that border your property. Ask if they would consider being your eyes and ears for suspicious activities around the property during and/or after events.
- Consider providing an email address for these neighbors to report instances that may be occurring on your property either during events or after hours. Provide them a contact name/number to report unusual activity around the church.
- Either audible alarms and/or strobe lights installed on the exterior of your buildings could also be a deterrent and notify neighbors of an intrusion. Individuals with a threatening plan seek out easy targets and could be “staging” their attack based on the security or lack of security at your parish.

### Detection – Deter – Delay

**Detection** – Early detection of a threat is a key element to the safety of all who enter upon your property. If a potential threat can be detected early, you have a much greater chance of neutralizing it. Qualified and trained individuals who can identify suspicious signs of behavior should be strategically placed at your entrances and parking lot. Keep in mind, if a threat is identified, your lockdown procedure and emergency response plan should be activated immediately.

**Deter** – If the situation allows, there may be an instance where you will need to confront an individual to determine their intentions. If this can be accomplished in a safe manner, the mere fact that you are addressing the individual may in fact deter them from committing any acts of violence. While engaging someone, you should be able to respond calmly and effectively as to keep control and de-escalate any potential high emotional conflict. If there is no opportunity to verbally engage individuals, making eye contact with them can also be a deterrent to someone with ill intentions.

**Delay** – Your safety plan should include locking of all doors during Mass. If this is not possible for Mass or other events, your plan should include emergency lockdown procedures to help delay the intruder. If a threat is imminent, lockdown procedures need to be activated immediately. Seconds save lives and anything you can do to delay an attack will help reduce the potential for harm.

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