

Diocese of Des Moines
Crisis Management Planning

Introduction

The Diocese of Des Moines recognizes the fear that some feel about security in our churches. Mass shootings, including some at churches, and the attention they cause in our 24-hour media world bring the issue close to home and we might wonder about the safety of our houses of worship. According to the Center for Homicide Research, there were only 147 church shootings between 2006-16, and the reality is while these high profile shootings are horrific because of who and what they target, they are relatively rare. Comparatively, each year there are hundreds of tornados and tens of thousands of structure fires effecting our churches and causing far more danger. Melanie Tyree, Risk Control Specialist of Catholic Mutual Group put it this way:

In the United States, there is a substantially large number of Catholic churches holding Mass, and other activities, multiple times per day. These parishes have experienced very few violent intruders and no mass shootings. The odds of never experiencing such a tragedy are in our favor, as attacks on our parishes are a statistical anomaly.

Parishes are at a much greater risk of experiencing a medical emergency, a weather event or even a fire. The point being, while it is good to have a plan and be prepared for a violent intruder, we should be prepared to respond to all emergencies and not let fear of an attack cause us to overlook all of the elements of being good stewards of our church.”

It is important to be realistic about these dangers as we seek to address them through good planning, preparation and training.

It is also important to stay committed to our long-standing culture of being welcoming communities and our Evangelizing mission. Jesus teaches us in John 13:34-35 to love one another just as he loves us so that others may witness that we are disciples of Christ. This teaching is given further clarity by *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council when the mission of the Church is defined as both social and spiritual: a sign and an instrument for our union with God, and the unity of all humankind. The Church, therefore, seeks to imitate Christ’s love for humanity by opening wide its arms to welcome all those who wish to seek out Christ.

The Diocese of Des Moines sees as its mission – in light of the above – to love and serve the people of Southwest Iowa. Our diocesan Churches and facilities are in one accord with this mission and are places of welcoming for everyone who wishes to enter to seek our Lord. Yet, we are also fully aware of the reality and challenges we face in a world filled with brokenness, which could lend itself to physical dangers for those gathered in these spaces. Many have contacted the bishop and spoken with diocesan staff about this reality. With this in mind, we have engaged a process to develop protocols to provide safety measures for our Church buildings and diocesan facilities.

Consultation

The diocese is responding to parish and school concerns by forming two consultative groups to engage the issues: the Crisis Management Task Force and the Ad Hoc Security Committee.

The Crisis Management Task Force is a group of parish leadership chaired by Fr. Ray McHenry, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish, and includes Waukee police Chief John Quinn, other

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current and retired police and fire station officers, priests and lay parish leadership, and an insurance representative. This committee has identified a two-fold objective.

- 1) To create a “Crisis Management Action Plan” template for use across the diocese. Action Plans will be consistent with State of Iowa mandates for our schools. The Crisis Management Action Plan will address these three areas, in the order of anticipated occurrence:
 - a. Health Emergencies Action Plan
 - b. Natural Disaster/Weather Action Plan
 - c. Active Shooter/Intruder Emergency Action Plan

Essentials and areas of flexibility for each Action Plan will be identified for parish and school implementation.

- 2) Concurrently, funding is available for a temporary Project Director to assist with the rollout of this initiative throughout the Diocese of Des Moines.

A second ad hoc security committee comprised of professionals such as Chief John Quinn, Des Moines police chief Dana Wingert, Major Alan Tunks, Melanie Tyree of Catholic Mutual, Fr. John Ludwig, and diocesan attorney Frank Harty have provided six security measures for all parishes and schools of the diocese:

1. Declare all campuses a “weapons free zone” with active peace officers in their official capacity exempt from any ban on weapons. This exemption includes off duty officers but not retired officers.
2. Signage should be posted declaring that the campus is a “weapons free zone” and language should be included in parish and school policy.
3. Hiring law enforcement officers to provide security at liturgies must have the specific permission of the bishop. This does not include those hired for traffic management.
4. Ushers are an important ministry in the church and they will have an important role in a crisis management plan. Training on how to react is important and should include instructions to have a phone available to call 911. Off duty officers should not be asked or scheduled to be a safety officer during liturgy.
5. Parishes should utilize the same doors for both entering and exiting the Church for liturgies. These should remain unlocked during the services while paying attention to any “out of the ordinary” participant. Other doors can be locked throughout the service and only used for exit in emergency situations.
6. The diocese is to hire a project manager to coordinate the effort to assist each parish develop a crisis management plan that meets consistent guidelines approved by the bishop. This position will organize training efforts, be available for assistance, create and implement an oversight plan.

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Tentative Timeline

Present: Committee refinement of Crisis Management Plan; recruiting project director

May 8: Consultation of the Crisis Management Plan with the diocesan Finance Council

May 10: Consultation of the Crisis Management Plan with the Presbyteral Council

May 31 deadline: Crisis Management Action Plan template submitted to Bishop Pates; hire a project director

June – July 2018: project director takes lead in guiding the Action Plan through Diocesan Review and Approval; schedules regional meetings for rollout in August and September 2018; helps parishes and schools identify leadership for their implementation.

August – September 2018: Hold regional meetings; parish and school implementation begins

September 2018 – April 2019: Formation of Action Plans throughout diocese

April 30, 2019: Deadline for implementation

Approved by:

Diocesan Finance Council 5/8/18

Presbyteral Council 5/10/18