



The New Moment

July 30, 2018

Parish and Institutional Security

Dear Priests, School Administrators and Deacons:

The Diocese of Des Moines is aware of the fear some feel about security in our Churches in light of mass shootings in a relatively few churches. Our 24-hour media world brings the issue close to home though the actual events are rare in occurrence.

As we design an institutional safety plan, it is imperative to remember that we are welcoming communities. At the heart of our identity is hospitality in the spirit and love of Jesus.

A Crisis Management Task Force, chaired by Father Ray McHenry, has been meeting over the past several months. A template is being developed that will assist each parish/school/institution to craft its own plan to address health emergencies, natural disasters and fires, intruders and active shooters and others wielding various weapons. A process is being developed to assist each parish and school in this endeavor.

Another group consisting of Waukee Police Chief John Quinn, Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert, along with Major Alan Tunks also of the Des Moines Force, Melanie Tyree of Catholic Mutual, Father John Ludwig and diocesan attorney, Frank Harty have gathered and provided consultation and expertise from their professional perspectives.

As a result of the work of these two groups, safety measures guided by the following directives will be implemented in the parishes/schools/institutions of the Diocese:

- 1) Declare each parish/school/institution campus as a **weapon free zone** with only active peace officers in their official capacity exempt from any ban on weapons. This exemption includes off duty officers but not retired officers. Each school in the State of Iowa is mandated to be **weapon free** per Iowa Code Chapter 724.6. Current Code law provision, 716.7 allows private property owners the right to declare their properties **weapon free**.

- 2) Signage needs to be posted to identify a parish/school/institution campus as a **weapon free zone**. The Diocese of Des Moines will review the different options for signage, provide it, and cover the expense.
- 3) The retention of law enforcement for security at liturgies must have the specific permission of the bishop. This is not applicable for those hired for traffic management.
- 4) Ushers are an indispensable ministry in the church and play a key role in crisis management plan. In this capacity, the usher should have adequate training, ready accessibility to contact 911 and equipment available to respond to health emergencies.
- 5) For liturgies, parishes should utilize the same doors for entering and exiting. These specific doors should remain unlocked during the services. Attention should be paid to anything “out of the ordinary.” Other doors, ordinarily locked for entry, can remain so during liturgical gatherings.

The diocesan Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Finance Council, which manages risk provisions for the diocese, have thoroughly reviewed the preceding points and have approved them.

Based on the counsel of these two bodies, I am asking each parish/school/institution to create an **Emergency Operations** plan that incorporates the foregoing five steps. Funding for this plan is being provided through our insurance carrier. The diocese, with this funding, hired a temporary project director, Jane Colavecchi, to assist each parish/school/institution to develop its specific plan. She will be in touch with our communities in the days ahead to provide direction to develop an “emergency operations planning team” for each entity.

I appreciate the cooperation of all with the foregoing. It is my conviction that the proposal addresses safety concerns but retains our essential identity as “welcoming Communities” in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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The Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines

cc Business Managers and Safety Coordinators