

Violence Prevention Tips for a House of Worship



- **Inform Your Congregation**

Your security manager and staff are not the only ones who need to know what to do during an emergency. Each member needs to know that the protocol is for everyone to find an emergency exit and escape as quickly as possible. Some ways to inform the congregation are: announcement period during service, bulletin, visitor packet or handouts distributed as people arrive.

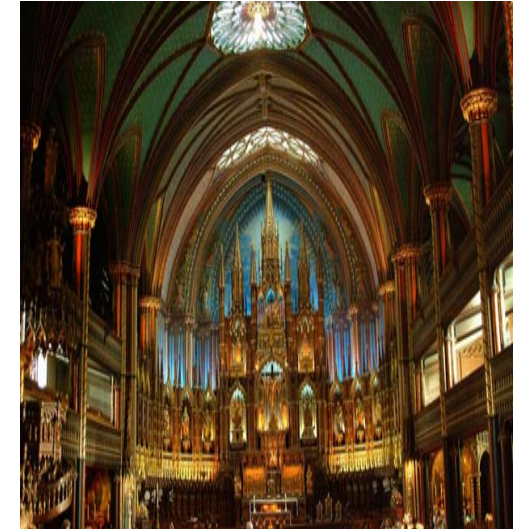


Fort Worth Police Department

350 W. Belknap St.
Fort Worth, Texas 76102

Non-Emergency 817-335-4222
Emergency 9-1-1

REPORT ANY SUSPICIOUS
PERSON, VEHICLE OR
ACTIVITY TO THE
FORT WORTH POLICE
IMMEDIATELY



Emergency preparedness for houses of worship used to mean having a plan for responding to fires and severe weather. Today they must also be prepared to deal with crises created by violent people.



While such events seem unthinkable, they are happening with increasing frequency in houses of worship. There are things you can do to be proactive in preventing and/or preparing for the unexpected.

- **Form a Team to Assess Risks**

Consider what could happen during service times. Designate a member of your staff as security manager. The manager will be accountable for developing, implementing, reviewing and regularly updating your violence response plan.



- **Coordinate With Others**

Your security manager should talk with first responders (police, fire, EMS), emergency managers, community organizations and others about how you can prepare for violent incidents and properly respond to them.



- **Develop a Plan**

Creating a violence response plan involves assessing your house of worship, determining how to respond, and practicing what to do if it happens. Training is critical and should be included in this plan. Conduct communal and staff training, drills, role-playing and regular refresher exercises.




- **Improve Building Security**

During your assessment, have law enforcement conduct a security survey of the building. Based on the results of that survey:



1. consider modifying your building so that it can provide secure, locked havens for the people inside.
2. video cameras serve as a deterrent as well as record crucial information for apprehending and prosecuting a criminal.
3. consider installing panic buttons or silent alarms that locks doors and/or alerts authorities to an emergency situation.
4. ensure that all entrances to your building are monitored; no one should enter the building unseen.
5. minimize the number of open entrances to your building (consistent with fire codes). Minor inconveniences may result in major security benefits.
6. have designated persons to monitor the parking lot throughout the times of worship. Report any suspicious persons or vehicles to local law enforcement.
7. have emergency phone numbers readily available.
8. use the security devices you already have. Ensure that security devices are turned on and functioning, that outdoor lighting is working and that windows and fence lines are kept clear.
9. seek assistance from police for any person who exhibits mentally unstable behavior or makes threats to harm themselves or others.

- **Establish Protocol**

1. **Communication:** How will you communicate that there is a threatening intruder in the building and people need to evacuate? Solutions include public address systems, cell phones or using designated people to deliver the message to various parts of the building. In addition, designate someone to notify local law enforcement immediately.

2. **Evacuation:** How will people leave the building and where should they go if this can be done safely? When developing your violence response plan, determine escape routes, designate where people should meet after evacuating from the critical area and assign people to monitor that everyone who can get out. Have a buddy system for persons with disabilities. Post the evacuation routes and procedures throughout the building.
3. **Responsibilities:** Who will do what? Create a wallet size list of all persons on and off site who will be involved in responding to a crisis situation. Note their responsibilities and their 24-hour telephone numbers. Keep this information up to date.
4. **Training:** How will you ensure that every one knows what to do in a crisis situation? Provide general training regularly to make sure that new people know what to do and that experienced people remember their roles.
5. Regularly review and practice what you intend to do during and after an emergency situation with drills, exercises and role-playing. Ask someone from an emergency response agency to observe the drill and offer advice for improvement. Repeated practice helps people remember their roles and remain calm during an actual crisis.