

# Sample Security Guidelines for Places of Worship<sup>1</sup>

*These are sample guidelines intended for consideration by houses of worship in the context of their circumstances. The guidelines should not be summarily adopted by houses of worship without consulting available security resources, and houses of worship should alter and amend the guidelines as necessary to make them workable for their location.*

## **1. Purpose**

The following guidelines are intended to help religious leaders and worshipers remain safe, prepare for, and respond to security incidents at places of worship, religious meetinghouses, and other religious facilities, and at religious entity-sponsored events. Religious leaders are encouraged to discuss these guidelines with congregations as appropriate to address local conditions or concerns.

Leaders should emphasize the objective of staying calm.

Direct any questions about these guidelines, providing security training to congregations, specialized security assignments, or security incidents to your local law enforcement or your DHS Protective Security Advisor (PSA). To contact your local PSA, send an email to [CIOCC.Physical@cisa.dhs.gov](mailto:CIOCC.Physical@cisa.dhs.gov).

## **2. Use Local Law Enforcement to Deal with Security Incidents**

Religious leaders and worshipers should rely on local law enforcement to deal with security events and emergencies at religious facilities and at religious entity-sponsored events. In an emergency, call 911 immediately.

After a serious incident has been controlled, report it to local law enforcement and the Protective Security Advisor (PSA). Notify your Conference of the incident as well.

Following a serious security incident, religious leaders should refer affected individuals to a competent counselor for professional counseling. Religious leaders may inform the worshipers of the security precautions taken pursuant to these guidelines and counsel about additional precautions that may be needed.

## **3. Keeping Religious Leaders and Worshipers Safe**

Religious leaders and their congregations should have a security mindset. The practices listed below will increase their safety.

### **Guidance for Worshipers:**

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted with gratitude from Security Guidelines for Places of Worship provided by Todd Rinchins, Director of Field Operations at LDS Church Security. Used with permission.

- Be aware of your surroundings. Know what belongs and what doesn't belong. If you find yourself in a situation (meeting, interview, activity, etc.) that doesn't feel right, remove yourself from the situation and call the appropriate religious leader or law enforcement.
- Be friendly to those visiting religious meetings; however, if anything out of the ordinary is observed, inform local religious leaders.
- Report suspicious persons in and around religious facility buildings to religious leaders or law enforcement. Focus on the person's behavior, not appearance.
- Avoid being alone in religious buildings.
- Vehicles in the parking lot should be locked. Keep personal items out of sight, including bags and electronic devices such as cell phones, laptop computers, and garage door openers. Avoid being alone in the parking lot.
- When leaving the building, check your surroundings for anything suspicious before returning to your vehicle.
- Do not enter a building that appears to have been broken into or vandalized. Call law enforcement and the appropriate religious leaders to report the incident.
- Do not leave packages, briefcases, backpacks, or bags unattended in religious buildings or parking lots. Report suspicious items to law enforcement and religious leaders.
- Avoid taking photographs in sensitive locations or posting personal information online.
- Know the location of fire pulls, building exits, and the building's emergency procedures.

**Additional Guidance for Religious Leaders:**

- Contact law enforcement or DHS to discuss solutions for specific security needs.
- Conduct one-on-one meetings with caution. If a leader feels the person being met poses a threat, consider canceling the meeting or inviting another adult into the meeting, if appropriate.
- Lock the religious leaders' offices and administrators' offices when not occupied.
- Make sure all computers are logged off or locked when not being used. Do not store passwords in places where others can easily find them (i.e. under the keyboard).
- Develop an Emergency Response Plan. For help, please contact your local law enforcement or Protective Security Advisor (PSA). Ensure that the congregation understands the plan and knows how to respond.
- Ensure proper key control measures are in place and followed. Report lost or stolen keys to religious leaders immediately. A nightly check to ensure the religious building is locked should take place.
- If there is repeated criminal activity at your facility or in the area, consider leaving lobby lights on as a deterrent.
- Any threat to persons or property should be taken seriously and reported to local law enforcement. In some instances, law enforcement can pursue legal means to keep individuals off religious facility property.

**4. Weapons at Religious Facilities**

Consult with local law enforcement and an attorney to adopt policies and practices that adhere to all state and local laws.

## 5. Responding to a Disruptive Person in a Meeting

If a serious or dangerous disruption is occurring on religious property or at a religion-sponsored event, call law enforcement.

If a person becomes disruptive during a religious meeting:

- Be respectful, speak calmly and with self-control, and respect their personal space. Do not touch the person.
- Remember that your response to the situation is likely to be recorded.
- Whether the person causing the disturbance remains seated in the congregation, approaches the leader, or stands in front of the worshipers, approach the person and ask them to stop, leave, or invite the person to meet with a religious leader in the foyer.
- Tell the person that their behavior or comments are inappropriate for this setting.
- If the person has been asked to leave religious property, but refuses, inform them that law enforcement may be notified and they may be arrested for trespassing.
- If the person refuses to leave and continues to cause a disturbance, end the meeting or worship service.
- Do not attempt to physically restrain or remove the person.
- Adapt these guidelines as needed for meetings, classes, or other religious events or activities.

## 6. Responding to an Armed Intruder to Active Shooter

### 6.1 Armed Intruder

If an armed intruder threatens to use a weapon, do not provoke the intruder by arguing or acting defiant or confrontational. If the intruder demands cash, give it to them. After the intruder leaves, call law enforcement immediately. Notify your PSA.

### 6.2 Active Shooter

If an active shooter or other active assailant enters the building, all present should do one of the following, based on circumstances:

**Run.** Flee immediately if a safe path is available. Move quickly to the safest exit and away from the building. Exit quietly, without drawing attention of the assailant. Adults are to ensure that all children are supervised and accounted for. Do not return to the building or to an office or classroom for personal items. Do not carry anything that could be mistaken for a weapon by responding law enforcement.

**Hide.** If you are unable to safely escape, hide out of sight of the assailant's view. If possible, close, lock, and/or barricade the doors to the classrooms, offices or other rooms where you are hiding. Turn out the lights, silence cell phones, and keep low to the floor and away from windows. Everyone in the building is to stay in their barricaded rooms until otherwise instructed by law enforcement.

**Fight.** As a last resort, if there is no time to run or hide, fight back against the assailant. Use anything available as a weapon. If others are present, organize to defend yourselves and to attack the assailant.