

Houses of Worship - Balancing Purpose and Security

Houses of Worship must balance being open and welcoming to all with protecting against criminal occurrences. It is essential that security complement the faith-based mission.

Plan

- Identify a room(s) in the building that can serve as a safe room(s) if a shelter-in-place or lockdown situation occurs.
- Ensure it has a solid core/metal door with a deadbolt lock.
- Ensure it has a telephone or other means of communication.
- Ensure the room has adequate food, water, trauma first aid kit or supplies (include tourniquet, chest seals, gauze etc.) as well as a restroom facility or improvised restroom capability.
- Consider including additional items that can be used to secure a door (i.e. rope or straps for self-closure mechanism).
- Establish an off-site rally point in case of emergency evacuation.
- Seat volunteers and/or ushers strategically throughout the congregation (i.e. in the balcony, near exits) to observe and react to suspicious activity.
- Utilize volunteers to monitor entrances before, during and after services.

Prepare

- Assign personnel tasks during a lockdown situation, including:
 - Closing and locking exterior doors.
 - Closing interior doors to add more barriers.
 - Sweep facility and direct people into the lockdown room.
 - Consider additional site specific tasks.
- Maintain a USB drive or file with maps or blueprints of the building; staff, congregation and volunteer roster; specialized considerations that may exist on the site (such as a day care center), etc. for law enforcement.
- Identify an individual to serve as a primary point of contact for law enforcement.
- Practice emergency lockdown and evacuation drills regularly.
- Consider providing training to staff and volunteers on such topics as personal safety and workplace violence.

Proactive Strategies

A comprehensive security plan begins with purpose and intention. Designating a group of congregation members to evaluate and create a policy and plan centered on security and crisis response is fundamental.

- Coordinate with Law Enforcement/Crime Prevention for a Security Assessment.
- Ensure that safety and security concerns are addressed timely and in a coordinated manner.
- Partner with Law Enforcement/Crime Prevention to provide additional training to staff, volunteers and congregation members.
- Foster a culture of communicating suspicious activity, “see something, say something.”

Additional Resources

<https://www.dhs.gov/publication/dhs-faith-based-guidance>

