

Emergency Response Planning

*How Congregations Can Respond to the
Most Common Emergency Situations*



Episcopal
DIOCESE OF MICHIGAN

www.edomi.org/erp

September 2022



Emergency Response Planning

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Executive Summary Emergency Response Plan (ERP) September 2022

All Congregations in the Diocese should be prepared for medical, environmental and behavioral emergencies.

- **Medical emergencies** (heart attacks, strokes, falls, allergic reactions etc.)
- **Environmental emergencies** (tornado or other severe weather, loss of power, property damage etc.)
- **Behavioral emergencies** (threats or criminal acts, emotionally disturbed persons, disruptive behavior etc.)

To lessen the impact from these emergencies, all congregations need to develop a cost-effective Emergency Response Plan (ERP) meeting their desired level of safety and security. An ERP is designed to increase the reaction time to a crisis and decrease recovery time in returning to normal activities. The ERP when shared with parishioners will display care for their welfare and assist in their ability to react during a crisis. Congregations may have members with emergency response experience who can assist in the development of a plan. Resources from local police and fire departments or offices of emergency management can also provide guidance or support. A comprehensive Emergency Planning, Response and Recovery Guide to assist in the ERP process is attached.

An Emergency Response Plan (ERP) consists of the following four (4) steps:

- Mitigation
- Preparedness
- Response
- Recovery

Mitigation – Activities to eliminate hazards in advance or to lessen their impact if an incident occurs

The security and safety requirements to prevent or reduce an emergency should be considered when planning any event or changes to church facilities. This upfront activity is the most cost-effective means of protecting members of the congregation and facilities.

- When planning an event, vulnerabilities (medical, environmental or behavioral) should be considered and prevention and reaction plans developed.
- When constructing or planning changes to a facility the design concept should consider Security, fire and life safety requirements.

Preparedness – Actions and initiatives developed prior to an incident

A Risk Assessment of prior or projected medical, environmental and behavior crises and their impact on the congregation should be developed. *See the Risk Assessment Matrix in the attached Guide.*

- The geographic location of the church must be considered as this identifies any external manmade or natural threats and determines the availability and capability of emergency response resources and their respective response times.
- Members of the congregation should be surveyed to determine what background and expertise they can and are willing to provide in an emergency. *A suggested survey form is included in the Guide.*

A survey of the external perimeter and internal configuration of the church should be conducted.

- Determine the capability to secure all external perimeter doors and windows and identify what doors should be open during church services, office hours and locked when unoccupied.
- Determine what interior doors and times they should be secured to enhance the protection of staff, equipment and sensitive information.
- Doors to unoccupied rooms should be locked at all times.
- Determine the adequacy of exterior building, entrance and parking lot lighting.
- Conduct an audit to determine persons still requiring access keys to church facilities and offices.
- Determine the desired level of security procedures during church services and events.
- An AED (Automatic External Defibrillator) should be obtained and placed in a visible and accessible location. With aging members in the congregation incidents of heart attacks are more likely to occur. The American Heart Association notes that at least 20,000 lives could be saved annually by prompt use of an AED.
- Ushers, greeters and other key members of the congregation should receive AED, first aid training and information on how to respond to various emergencies.
- Locations of gas lines, water shutoffs, electrical closets, first aid kits, fire extinguishers and AED should be identified and marked.
- Evacuation routes and location of severe weather shelters should be established and directional signs should be placed at visible locations.
- All exit doors should be free of obstruction and clearly identified.
- The advice of local fire department authorities should be solicited for all fire and life safety issues.

Emergency Response – Reacting to and managing a crisis until it is resolved

A well-coordinated rapid response to an emergency will enhance the security and safety of the congregation and visitors while strengthening communication with public sector responders.

- An Emergency Response Team (ERT) consisting of the Vestry and other supporting members such as finance and church facilities/property should be developed for immediate response to a crisis. The Pastor should be the team leader with other ERT members collaborating in the response and recovery process.
- The emergency response should address and develop procedures for medical, environmental and behavior emergencies.
- Care of injured persons and support of family members or other distressed persons should be a priority.

- Ushers, greeters, and key members of the congregation need information on what action to take in an emergency. Group discussions on how to respond to various emergencies or participation in a tabletop emergency response scenario will also be beneficial.
- Contact telephone numbers or other methods of communication with Diocese leadership, church staff, key members of the congregation, public utilities, local hospitals, non-emergency numbers of police and fire, local public health and social services should be listed in the ERP for easy access.
- Diocesan Council "Firearms on Property or Facilities Operated by a Church, dated June, 2016, should be reviewed.

Recovery – Repairing damage, return to normal operations and recovery of losses

Recovery can begin during the emergency response process with focus on returning to normal operations as soon as possible.

- Assessment of property damage, support of injured persons, needs of congregational members and their families should begin immediately.
- Maintain regular communication with the congregation on recovery status.
- Prior planning to include access to resources necessary in the recovery process are extremely important especially when other organizations may need assistance from the same resources. Prior arrangements with these resources along with alternate resources need to be established.
- Discussion or scenario exercises on how to handle various emergency scenarios by members of the Emergency Response Team will assist in preparing for an emergency, determine weaknesses in the plan and determine what resources are necessary in the recovery process. Representatives from the police and fire can be excellent partners in this discussion.

The Emergency and Response Guide contains additional details and recommendations to assist in the development of an ERP. It also contains suggested resources that can be helpful. The Guide was developed by the task force below, commissioned by Bishop Perry. Please contact Radford Jones, Jerry Miller or Deacon Glenn Morrison for additional information on preparing a plan for your congregation.

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Emergency Response Plan (ERP) September 2022

INTRODUCTION

With the increase in violent incidents across the nation; a number being directed against Houses of Worship, such as the fatal shooting of three parishioners of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Vestavia Hills, GA on June 16, 2022, Congregations in the Diocese should develop an **Emergency Response Plan (ERP)** or review their existing plans.

The following ERP guidelines will assist in developing or updating plans in response to medical, environmental or behavioral emergencies. Members of the congregation with security or law enforcement experience can assist in reviewing or developing a plan. Many governmental jurisdictions have a Department of Homeland Security or Emergency Management Office (EMO) which can be contacted for assistance. Fire departments, law enforcement (local, county, and the Michigan State Police) have personnel trained in emergency preparedness and may be willing to provide assistance. A number of online resources are available, and some are listed under **Resources** at the end of this document.

The demographics of a congregation range from small children to the elderly, each requiring support in an emergency. Elderly members of the congregation are more susceptible to medical emergencies, such as falls, stroke or heart attack. Churches are located in various geographic areas where emergency resources and response times may vary.

In general, a House of Worship is a distinct setting where congregations share a common bond, have an open-door policy and have a predisposition to volunteers. In addition, the inside of the church is considered a religious sanctuary. Traditionally, churches are very inclusive and accepting of individuals and their behaviors. As a result, violence signs may be missed, ignored, minimized or rationalized away (the person is JUST angry, upset, etc.). Posted times of Sunday services and other events, indicating a mass gathering enhance the opportunity for an onsite disruption or attack by a person passing by.

An **Emergency Response Plan** will enhance the protection of church parishioners, its property/equipment, data, and reputation. The plan when shared with members of the congregation will display care for their welfare and enhance their ability to react in a crisis.

A crisis is generally defined as an incident, situation, or threat that cannot be handled in the normal scope of everyday business or activities and will require some form of external assistance or support.

Most disruptions to church activities are minor, short-term and can be resolved with resources within the church. However, there may be a medical emergency, severe weather with significant damage to property or an attack on the congregation where external support and resources are required. Therefore, it is important to establish relationships with police and fire departments prior to any crisis.

During a wide scale disaster, public sector resources may be committed to other areas and in those cases a congregation may need to “stand alone” and utilize many of its own resources to initially respond to the incident. It is therefore important that churches be prepared to respond for a limited period of time in the protection and aid of parishioners. Some 90% of all Presidential declared disasters are weather related, leading to several hundred deaths per year and billions of dollars in damages.

All Congregations in the Diocese should be prepared for medical, environmental and behavioral emergencies.

- **Medical emergencies** (heart attacks, strokes, falls, allergic reactions etc.)
- **Environmental emergencies** (tornado or other severe weather, loss of power, property damage etc.)
- **Behavioral emergencies** (threats or criminal acts, emotionally disturbed persons, disruptive behavior etc.)

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN (ERP)

An Emergency Response Plan consists of the following four (4) steps:

- Mitigation
- Preparedness
 - Assessment of Past and Projected Incidents
 - Security Survey
- Emergency Response
 - Emergency Response Team
 - Resources
 - Awareness and Training
- Recovery

MITIGATION

Mitigation is an ongoing activity and can best be defined as activities to eliminate hazards in advance or to lessen their impact if an incident occurs. Mitigation is the most efficient and cost-effective means of protecting members of the congregation and property.

At the time a project or event is planned consideration needs to be made regarding any security or safety issues. Mitigation can take many forms. For example; offsite storage of critical information and/or backup ensures that the church will be able to maintain business continuity even if their primary record storage source is destroyed.

PREPAREDNESS

Assessment of Past and Projected Incidents

The Preparedness process must begin with an assessment of prior or projected medical, environmental or behavioral emergencies. The following chart illustrates emergencies which have occurred in Michigan and may have impacted various congregations. A discussion within the congregation will be helpful in developing the Matrix.

Local law enforcement and fire departments and if available local or county Emergency Management Offices can provide additional input and should be contacted.

Risk Assessment Matrix

Disaster/Emergency	Description of Incident or Event
Winter Storms	Through the years Sunday services and some events have been cancelled.
Aug. 14 thru 18, 2003 Power Outage	Power outage impacted the East Coast and Midwest when the electrical power grid was disrupted due a computer failure.
Spring Tornadoes	See the following footnote**
March 2020 thru ? – Pandemic Virus	Covid19 Directives issued by the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, State of Michigan and Federal Govt.
Medical Emergency	

**Michigan averages 16 tornadoes each year, but the annual occurrence has ranged from as high as 39 to as low as 2.

A congregation may be located in a rural area or small community where emergency response resources are limited, and the response time may be longer or it may be located in an urban or

municipal area where there are more emergency response resources and respond times may be shorter. The church may be highly visible, located on a transit, high pedestrian or vehicular travel area making it a “target of opportunity” by a disgruntle person. Heavy traffic areas may make it vulnerable to vehicle accidents and a possible accidental hazardous material spill. These conditions must be a consideration when developing an ERP and what internal church resources may be needed until outside emergency responders are on the scene. The plan should also take into consideration the average response time by law enforcement, fire and EMT services.

In an environmental emergency, such as a major tornado, emergency services will be directed to areas with significant damage or casualties. Facilities with minor damage or injuries may have to “stand alone” requiring self-support until outside resources are available. Members of the congregation should be surveyed to determine what background and expertise they can provide in an emergency. **Attachment A - Emergency Resource Survey** can be distributed to members of the congregation through various church communication channels and should be part of the ERP.

Security Survey of Church Facilities

A security review and development/implementation of security policies and procedures must balance requirements for security and safety while considering what is cost effective and appropriate for each congregation. It must be acknowledged there is never absolute or 100% security. Any security and safety program is designed to identify, deter, inhibit, prevent and reduce the impact of an emergency and enhance the reaction and response time.

The security survey must consider times the church is closed and unoccupied or open for worship, special services, church business or utilization by outside organizations. The following areas should be reviewed and evaluate for their importance in enhancing safety and security.

Exterior Perimeter Doors

- A review of all exterior perimeter doors should be conducted to determine if they close properly and can be locked. If not, they should be repaired.
- All exterior doors should be locked when the church is unoccupied.
- During church services and other events exterior doors not used for admission to the church should be closed and locked. Doors should not be propped open. Upon arrival, ushers, greeters or designated persons should conduct a check of those doors to make sure they are locked and emergency exits are unobstructed. The same check should be made at the termination of the service or event.
- During periods of heavy snow accumulation, measures should be taken to ensure that egress can be made through all exit doors.
- Emergency exit doors should be clearly marked as **EXITS**, free of obstructions and easily opened from the inside through a panic bar system. Representatives of the local fire department should be contacted to ensure that life safety issues surrounding emergency doors and evacuation requirements are met.

- The local fire department should be contacted regarding their policy or desire for an outside lock box containing a church entrance key. This enables emergency responders to access the church without destruction to a door etc. when the church is not occupied.
- All exterior doors, except main entrance doors should be identified with a number on the outside and an identical number displayed on the inside. This will assist in identifying a particular location and related doors in an emergency and will help emergency responders to quickly locate the area of concern. Such numbers can be obtained from any office supply store at a reasonable cost.
- All entrance areas and exit doors should have adequate lighting and be free of obstructions.

Exterior Windows

- All exterior windows especially those accessible from the ground level should be locked and secured.
- Ladders or other devices enabling access to above ground windows should be removed and placed in a secure location.
- Upon arrival, ushers and greeters or designated person should conduct a check of all windows to ensure they are locked. The same check should be conducted at the end of the service or event.

Shrubbery and Visibility Restrictions

- Shrubbery should be kept trimmed to enhance visibility from the street and assist in revealing any hidden intruder or attacker. This will also help police when making a property check of the church.

Exterior Building and Parking Lot Lights

- Exterior lighting of parking areas and the perimeter of the church, especially at access doors and entrance steps should be in place and maintained. Lighting is one the best deterrence to crimes and prevention of falls.

Parking Lots

- The pavement areas should be routinely inspected to determine if there are areas needing repair and may cause trip and falls.

Door Key Control

- Key control is an important aspect of perimeter door security and access to interior offices and rooms. It is not unusual that through the years a number of keys have been lost, duplicated or in possession of persons no longer requiring building access.
- An audit should be conducted to determine what persons still require after hour access to church facilities, offices and/or other restricted areas.

- All area access keys should be limited and issued to persons requiring entrance to the church and interior areas of the church such as electrical closets, offices containing financial data/monies, personal information or technical equipment.
- If key control cannot be established consideration should be made to replace locks to entrance doors and other restricted areas in order to obtain proper authorization to those areas.
- Doors to unoccupied rooms should be locked at all times.

Business Office(s) and Office Personnel

- Protection of staff working in offices, who many times are alone is essential. If entrances to the perimeter of the church are open during office hours consideration should be made to secure the interior doors leading into the office space.
- If the office door(s) does not have a window for viewing persons requiring entrance into the office an inexpensive doorbell can be installed to alert office personnel who can identify the person desiring entry.
- Access to critical church data, personnel or congregational information and rooms containing technical equipment or other valuable items should be restricted
- All data should be backed up on a regular basis or sent to a secured off-site location.
- Office personnel should be aware of procedures for handling suspicious packages and mail, telephone bomb threat, suspicious persons and emergency evacuation as indicated under Emergency Response. See suggested procedures in the **Attachments J through K**.
- Office personnel should know various evacuation routes from the office. Evacuation drills are recommended.

Security during Services:

- Houses of Worship are acceptant and welcoming to all persons. However, it should be recognized that a person may attend a service or enter an event with the intent to disrupt or commit an act of violence. Steps should be taken to reduce the opportunity of such acts through early recognition/detection or preventing entry by such person(s). Any security measure or action to slow down the attack will “buy time” for others to evacuate from the danger zone.
- Ushers, greeters and other key congregational members should be alert and have some knowledge in evaluating persons exhibiting unusual behavior which may lead to an act of violence or disruption. **See Attachment B - HELLO Guidelines.**
- Ushers, greeters and other key members of the congregation should receive training in CPR and use of an AED, the need to immediately call 911 and lead emergency responders to the location of the medical emergency.
- Ushers, greeters and other key members of the congregation should program their cell phones to the National and/or local weather alerts. Some communities have an emergency notification alert system for other emergency such as hazardous material spills, accidents, in progress incidents of violence etc. Local law enforcement and fire

departments or county Emergency Management Offices can provide additional input and should be contacted.

- Ushers, greeters and other key members of the congregation need to meet and discuss possible scenarios and how they may work as a team to evaluate and resolve various emergencies.
- Diocesan Council "Firearms on Property or Facilities Operated by a Church, dated June, 2016 should be reviewed.

Other Recommendations

- Location of tornado or severe weather shelters should be identified and marked with appropriate signage. The fire department can provide guidance in the location of such shelters.
- Emergency evacuation route signage should be prominently displayed along with evacuation route diagrams.
- Locations of electrical cabinets, gas line and water shutoffs should be located and prominently marked.
- The local fire department can be of assistance in identifying and suggesting appropriate signage for the above recommendations.
- A Red Cross approved First aid equipment/kit should be obtained and easily accessible at all times.
- An AED (Automatic External Defibrillator) should be obtained and placed in a visible and accessible location. With aging members in the congregation incidents of heart attacks are more likely to occur. The American Heart Association notes that at least 20,000 lives could be saved annually by prompt use of an AED.
- Ushers, greeters, staff personnel and key members of the congregation should receive training in CPR and the use of an AED.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Coordinated emergency response activities will reduce response times to an emergency and enhance the security and safety of the congregation, visitors and other occupants.

Church staff and key members of the congregation along with ushers and greeters should be briefed on the **Emergency Response Plan (ERP)** and, if possible, participate in a critical incident exercise or emergency response scenario discussion. It is important that congregants and other users of the church premises are also familiar with the plan and have easy access to information such as medical, severe weather, active shooter response, evacuation routes, and shelter-in-place procedures and locations. Copies of the plan need to be distributed to key staff members of the church and to members of the Emergency Response Team (ERT).

The plan needs to be reviewed annually and additions or changes made as necessary. The Emergency Response Plan should include the following information. Of course, each

congregation may have particular needs and requirements and the Plan should be developed to meet those needs.

Emergency Response Team (ERT)

The Emergency Response Team (ERT), composed of key members of the congregation should be organized and prepared to mobilize at the time of an emergency requiring support of outside resources. The ERT will provide a structured response to the emergency and ensure timely coordination with public sector responders, Diocese of Michigan and other outside resources. The team will also ensure a coordinated recovery process, enabling the church to resume normal activities as soon as possible. Many lessons were learned during the recent Covid response and should be utilized during formation of the ERT.

The ERT offers the following benefits.

- Defined team member responsibilities
- Appropriate decision making authority
- Speed of decision making
- Effective and fast communications
- Protection of the interests of the Church
- Responsible and prudent crisis management actions
- Written documentary of events, actions and responses
- Accurate ongoing communication with parishioners during the crisis and recovery period

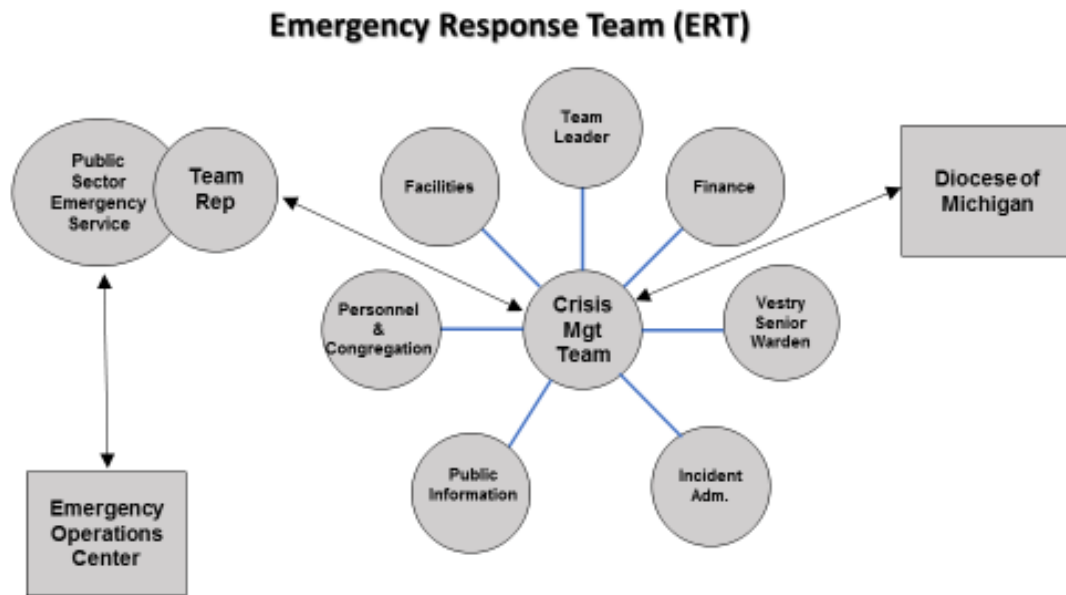
Structure and Duties of the Emergency Response Team (ERT)

The ERT consists of members of the Vestry and other key members of the congregation with responsibilities for operation of the church. The composition of the ERT may be changed to meet the needs of a particular congregation but should include persons responsible for important functions of the church; i.e. facilities/property, finance, communication, liaison with members of the congregation. In a small congregation, members of the ERT may assume multiple responsibilities. **See Attachment C for a suggested ERT structure.** The ERT will designate qualified alternates in the event that the primary member is unavailable. The Emergency Response Plan needs to include the name and contact information (primary home and cell phone number, email or other contact information) for each team member.

Emergency Response Team Organizational Structure and Flow Chart

The following chart depicts the suggested structure and organization of an ERT and its communication with the Diocese of Michigan and the public sector emergency resources of the community, such as Fire and Police and community Emergency Operation Center. This results in good coordination, cooperation and the sharing of information during emergency response

activities. **NOTE:** There is no hierarchy within the Emergency Response Team, as information is shared and prioritized as a team.



3

Emergency Response Team Communication & Meeting Locations(s)

At the time of a perceived danger or indication that an environmental emergency, such as severe weather is eminent, the Team Leader should all ERT members to determine what preparations and actions need be taken. This may occur through a conference call, emails and in some circumstances may require a ZOOM meeting or meeting at a predesignated location.

Each member of the Emergency Response Team should maintain a copy of the Emergency Response Plan and Church Directory at their residence or other location where it is easily accessible during a crisis.

Cell phones and laptops with chargers should also be accessible and brought to the meeting location.

Contact Information

The Emergency Response Plan should contain the following contact information. Even though this information is available through various directories, pertinent contacts should be contained in the ERP for quick and easy access during the emergency. Various website links may be included

in the plan, but a critical incident may experience a loss of electrical power which could last for a number of days and/or disrupt internet networks.

The Emergency Response Plan should include at least the following contact numbers.

Church Related

- Church Staff, Vestry and Committee Leaders names and contact information
- Contact information for organizations using church facilities
- Michigan Episcopal Diocesan Key Persons Contact Information

Police, Fire and Medical Emergency Numbers

- 9-1-1 should be dialed for any medical, police or fire emergency.
- Text 9-1-1 In the event of an emergency when noise may interfere with safety, as in an active shooter incident. The text goes directly to the local emergency communication center. For example:

Text 9-1-1 with a message such as:

“Shooting – St. Philip’s Rochester – Send help”

Police, Fire and Medical Non-Emergency Numbers

The following additional numbers should be readily available

- Municipal or County Health Division
- Michigan Poison Control Center - 1-800-222-1222
- Center for Disease Control - 1-404-639-3311
- EPA Hazardous Waste Hotline - 1-800-621-8431
- National Pesticide Network - 1-800-858-7378
- Trauma and grief counseling services numbers
- Private Security Company to provide facility security as needed

Hospitals

- Addresses and telephone numbers

Utilities Information

- Consumers Energy (gas)
Emergency number is 1-800-477-5050 or local energy company
Account Number:

- DTE Energy (electrical emergency)
Emergency number is 1-800-477-4747 or local company
Account Number:
- Water and Sewer Department
Emergency number:
Account Number:
- Department of Public Works
Contact Number:
Account Number:

Church “Go Kit”

A Church “Go Kit” should contain items essential for holding worship if the church sustains damage or is inaccessible. Another kit should be kept at an alternate site. **See Attachment D for a list of suggested items.**

Emergency Response Scenario Exercises

Members of the ERT should meet to discuss various emergency scenarios. If possible, a facilitated tabletop emergency response scenario exercise should be developed and participated in by key members of the church staff, vestry, ushers, Sunday school teachers, committee chairs and persons in the congregation who have backgrounds which would be helpful in responding to an emergency situation. An exercise can enhance the church’s response to an emergency situation and reduce death and/or injuries to members and visitors and the protection of its property and other assets. It can also identify any deficiencies in the emergency response plan. Such an exercise can be conducted in 2 to 4 hours. **See Attachment E Tabletop Exercises.**

Congregation Emergency Resource Survey

An information form should be provided to members of the congregation to solicit any skills, knowledge or abilities which would be helpful during the time of a critical incident. This repository of information will develop emergency response and recovery resources not only helpful to the church or perhaps the community in a wide scale disaster. The form should be renewed annually and can be included in the annual financial package provided to members and also published in the church newsletter. **See Attachment A.**

Response to Manmade or Natural Disasters

Following are emergency situations and critical incidents which the church might have to respond to and recover from. As experience dictates there may be a need to add to the list of medical, environmental and behavioral emergencies. **See the following attachments:**

- Medical Emergency – Attachment F
- Weather – Attachment G

- Fire – Attachment H
- Active Shooter – I
- Telephone Bomb Threat Procedures – Attachment J
- Suspicious Package - Attachment K

Recovery and Resumption

Recovery issues need to be addressed in advance of an emergency. The recovery plan needs to include contact information of sources able to repair damage to the church and its systems. A successful recovery must quickly determine the extent of damage and what outside resources are required to return to normal operations. Following are some of those concerns:

- What issues need to be resolved?
- How will the injury or death of a congregation member be handled?
- What support should be given to those seriously injured?
- How soon will the church be operational?
- What resources are required in the recovery process?
- Who is responsible for getting the church back in operation?

The Emergency Response Team (ERT) plays an important role in addressing recovery issues in a timely manner.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A - EMERGENCY RESOURCE SURVEY

Church name and Address

Emergency Resource Directory

Name: _____

Address: _____

Cell Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Vocational training or special skills, such as medical, security, computers, mechanical, etc which would be helpful during an emergency situation.

ATTACHMENT B – POWER OF “HELLO” GUIDE



PROMOTING STAFF VIGILANCE THROUGH THE POWER OF HELLO

Freedom of religion and the right to peaceably assemble are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and recognized as fundamental parts of American society. Maintaining their integrity is vital to sustaining the American way of life.

As demonstrated by tragic events across the country, terrorists and other violent extremist actors continue to attempt to disrupt the American democracy, instill fear, and/or cause harm. These adversaries sometimes identify houses of worship as targets of opportunity given their relative ease of access. Keeping these facilities secure while sustaining the open and welcoming environment necessary for peaceful congregation requires a holistic approach to security.

All houses of worship support personnel can contribute greatly to enhancing security by understanding how to identify behavioral indicators and taking precautionary actions to safely mitigate the impacts of a potential attack.

Used effectively, the right words can be a **powerful tool**.

Simply saying "Hello" can prompt a casual conversation with a new person, providing an opportunity to observe and establish a connection. The OHNO approach—Observe, Initiate a Hello, Navigate the Risk, and Obtain Help—enables staff to observe and evaluate suspicious behaviors, empowering them to lower risk and obtain help when necessary.



The OHNO approach describes activities and behaviors that may be suspicious or indicative of criminal activity. These activities may be constitutionally protected and should be reported only when there are articulable facts to support a rational conclusion that the behavior is suspicious. Do not report based solely on protected activities, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or a combination of only such factors.



OBSERVE

To improve overall security and detect potential threats, staff should be aware of their surroundings, and consciously observe and assess others. While the considerations below are not necessarily indications of malicious intent, within appropriate contexts, they can help identify suspicious behavior.

Behavior

Is the person appearing to study security measures in the house of worship? Do they seem to be trying to avoid a camera?

Has the person left their car idling without apparent reason?

Is the person seeming to linger a long time in their vehicle?

Is this person trying to go unnoticed?
Is this person asking about other members or leadership?

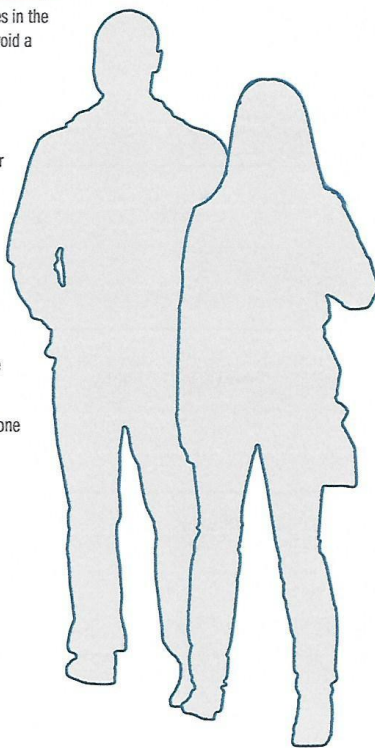
Is this person demanding to speak with clergy or house of worship leadership?

Is this person repeatedly walking in and out of the service or sanctuary?

Is this person attempting to get an usher or someone else to leave the sanctuary with them?

Is this person behaving as a 'lookout,' nervously glancing out of doors and windows?

Is this person standing alone or facing the congregation when others are seated?



Content

Is this person loitering (and not entering the house of worship) without reasonable explanation?

Is this person alone or part of a group?

Is this person familiar with the house of worship? Do they seem to know where they are going?

Is this person familiar to me or anyone in the community?

Is this an appropriate time for a new guest to be at the house of worship? (Is the congregation meeting for a private vs. public event?)

Is this event advertised?

Is the person asking questions about house of worship functions, event schedules, or attendance?

Does the person who has entered seem unfamiliar to all other congregants?

Is the person behaving in some way that is very inconsistent with the norms of the site?

Attire

Is this person wearing unusually inappropriate clothing for the house of worship environment?

Is this person wearing military style gear such as tactical gear?

Is this person appearing to conceal something under their clothing?

Is this person carrying anything that may seem unusual for the surroundings?

SECURITY TIPS

Encourage each staff member to be observant about people and situations in the parking lot, in areas adjacent to the house of worship, and in rooms and hallways inside, both before, during, and after services and activities. For instance: Are there unaccompanied bags? Are other doors locked that should be open? Are doors propped open that should be closed?

Unless there is a legitimate reason for people to remain in halls, rooms and offices, or to stand outside, courteously remind them that the service has started. If there is a reason for concern, courteously remind the person that the service has begun. If there is still a clear security concern, stay present until the individual either enters the service or leaves.

Approaching a person viewed as suspicious has potential risks. In some situations it may be more advisable to report the activity to those with the authority and training to intervene.



INITIATE A HELLO

As staff welcome visitors, a kind greeting with eye contact can make the difference in how a visitor reacts, even if they are angry or upset. This interaction is the essence of the Power of Hello.

Practice the Power of Hello by doing or saying the following:
Tip: These are important questions, and active listening is key.



SECURITY TIPS

If an unknown visitor arrives, be polite, engage in conversation, and steer them to a clearly visible seat.

Without documentation, it is very difficult to prove an incident occurred. Ensure that staff document every encounter they have with suspicious person(s). This information could be used in law enforcement actions or judicial proceedings.



NAVIGATE THE RISK

Observe, consider the context, and mentally assess the situation.

Is everything normal?

Is there something worrying about the situation?



Do they seem to need assistance?

Is there a potential for danger?

The Power of Hello relies, in part, on an individual's ability to detect behavior that would arouse reasonable suspicion of terrorism or other criminal activity. The following indicators warrant prompt reporting.

SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY INDICATORS

- Expressed or implied threats to commit acts of violence or destruction
- Abusive language that a reasonable person might find threatening
- Statements or behaviors indicative of suicidal or homicidal ideations
- Inappropriate statements about harming others
- Exaggerated or violent gestures (e.g., clenching fists or jaws) that could be interpreted by a reasonable person as threatening or intimidating

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ARMED INTRUDER

- Movement like touching a presumptive firearm secured at hips or waist
- Unusual body movements (positioning oneself or moving in a manner to shield a weapon from view)
- Bulges in clothing indicative of a weapon

If staff encounters any individual displaying these tendencies or someone who appears to be armed, they should obtain help, contact law enforcement and notify house of worship leadership immediately.



OBTAIN HELP

Be aware, alert, and ready to summon help. Leverage relationships with local law enforcement for nonemergency notifications. If staff feel threatened, they should calmly walk away and lock the doors, note a physical description of the individual; and call 9-1-1.

When reporting to authorities, consider the five “W’s”:



WHO is doing something suspicious?
What do they look like? What are they wearing?



WHAT are they doing that arouses suspicion?



WHEN did they act suspiciously?



WHERE did the suspicious activity take place? Where is the person now?



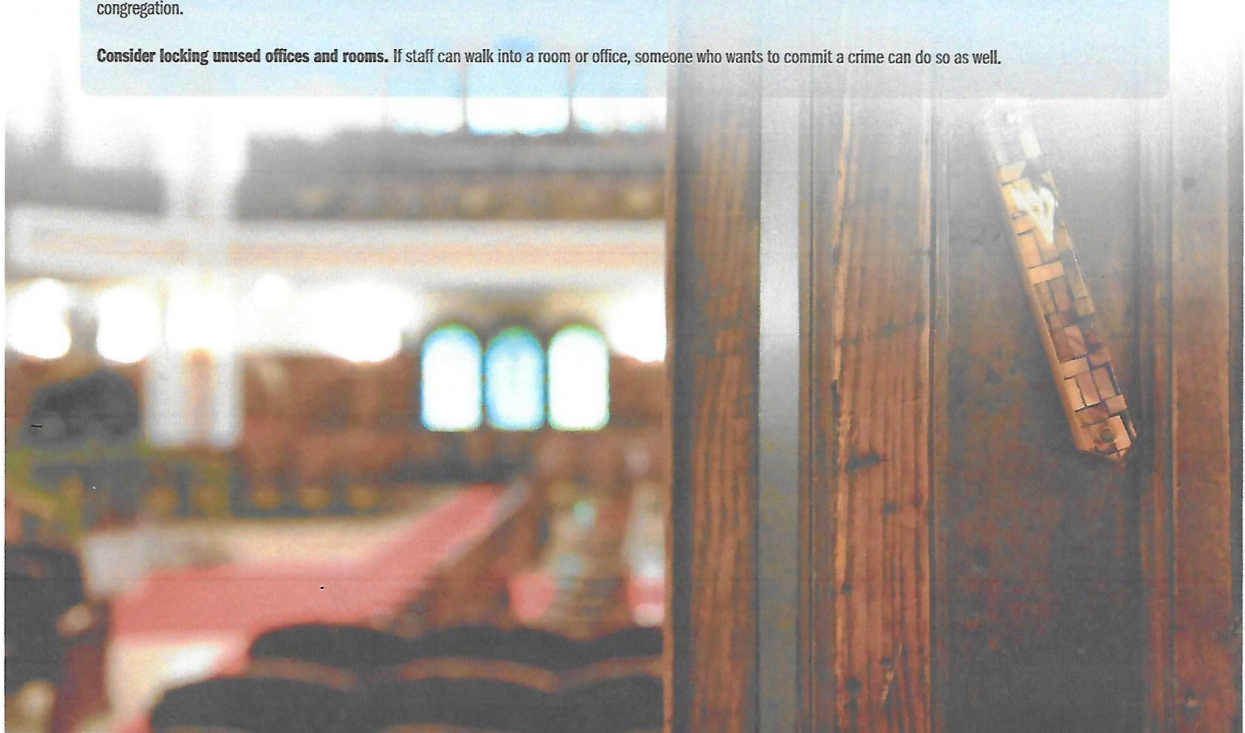
WHY is the person acting suspiciously?
Could they be under the influence of alcohol or drugs?

SECURITY TIPS

Invite local police to tour the facility so that they are familiar with the layout of the facility and associated buildings. Provide law enforcement with floor plans and access to locked and secured areas.

Know how to lock the doors quickly and be ready to do so the moment trouble develops. The goal is to prevent outside danger from coming inside to harm the congregation.

Consider locking unused offices and rooms. If staff can walk into a room or office, someone who wants to commit a crime can do so as well.





INCIDENT RESPONSE BEST PRACTICES

Houses of worship should develop plans and procedures for responding to emergencies. Part of incident planning means developing an easy way for all to report suspicious activity. This includes non-threatening suspicious activity or persons.

Notification Chain Considerations



What should the first greeter who becomes aware of a problem do?



Who will help the greeter, and who will inform/warn the clergy, leadership, congregation?



Who will summon law enforcement?



Who will lock the doors to keep an assailant out, if that is even possible?



Who will guide congregants to safety? How will they do it?

INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

Crisis situations are uncomfortable to talk about—a communication plan can reduce the chaos of an emergency.

- Create a planning team whose key function is to plan for potential crises.
- Develop the plan in partnership with other community groups, including law enforcement, fire department, and emergency medical services.
- Create visuals to display prominently in the building so that members routinely see points of egress and exit, lock-down procedures, and shelter-in-place locations.
- Rehearse emergency plans on a regular basis so that everyone knows what to do in the event of the real thing.
- Shelter-in-place requires everyone immediately find a room with no or few windows and take refuge. All windows, exterior doors, and other openings should be closed and locked.

Consult local law enforcement or the local Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Protective Security Advisor if help is required to develop an emergency action plan.¹

ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE BEST PRACTICES

Houses of worship staff should be well informed of emergency action plans in place to assist congregants during an active shooter incident.

RUN



Encourage congregants to evacuate and leave belongings behind. Call 9-1-1 when it's safe to do so. Follow police instructions.

HIDE



If congregants are unable to get away safely, encourage them to hide, get out of the assailant's view, and stay quiet. Silence all electronic devices. Lock and block doors, close blinds, and turn off the lights. Encourage congregants to spread out or hide separately, and stay in place.

FIGHT



As last resort, congregants will need to be prepared to defend themselves. Commit aggressive actions for ambushing the assailant together with others, using makeshift weapons such as chairs, fire extinguishers, scissors, and books which may distract and disarm the assailant.

¹ [cisa.gov/protective-security-advisors](https://www.cisa.gov/protective-security-advisors) or email central@cisa.dhs.gov



To contact the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA):



[cisa.gov](https://www.cisa.gov)



central@cisa.gov



[linkedin.com/company/cisagov](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cisagov)



[facebook.com/CISA](https://www.facebook.com/CISA)



[@CISA.gov](https://twitter.com/CISA.gov) | [@cyber](https://twitter.com/cyber) | [@uscert_gov](https://twitter.com/uscert_gov)



[@cisagov](https://www.instagram.com/cisagov)

ATTACHMENT C – EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM STRUCTURE & DUTIES

The Emergency Response Team (ERT) consists of the following members and responsibilities. The composition of the ERT may change to meet the needs of a particular congregation. Due to the size of the Vestry or church one person may have to assume several duties. The ERT will designate qualified alternates in the event that the primary member is unavailable. The name and contact information (primary home and cell phone number, email or other contact information).

Team Leader – Priest in Charge or Senior Warden if No Priest in Charge

- Spokesperson for the Church and liaison with Diocesan leadership
- Provide direction to the ERT members and set team actions and review schedule
- Lead ERT in determining group actions and priorities
- Evaluate developments as the incident progresses in order to provide functional guidance and support
- Handle media relations procedures for initial response
- Establish coordination with the public sector

Senior Warden (Or other designated leader)

The Senior Warden of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee and designated assistant will be responsible for activating and administering the following check list:

- Support the Team Leader as required
- Determine severity of the situation in consultation with other ERT members?
- Determine number of people affected? (missing, killed, injured, evacuated)?
- Ensure that all outside resources have been notified and ongoing contact is maintained?
- Coordinate with Personnel & Congregation ERT member to obtain information on persons transported to any hospital
- Establish mechanism to periodically update family members of those who were believed to be in the facility at the time of the incident
- Ensure that all relevant information is properly logged for reference
- Develop special responders from other Vestry members, ushers/greeters and others
- Determine key/capable members of the church to assist in any medical needs
- Draw upon the support of other Vestry members as required

Incident Administrator

The Incident Administrator and designated assistant will be responsible for activating and administering the following check list:

- Maintain a written documentary of events and responses surrounding the incident
- Time reported/when did it occur?

- Number of people affected? (missing, killed, injured, evacuated)?
- Have ALL of the proper authorities been notified?
- Coordinate with Medical Services personnel to obtain information on persons transported to hospital.
- Establish mechanism to periodically update family members of those who were believed to be in the facility at the time of the incident
- Ensure that all relevant information is properly logged for reference

Facilities/Property

- This person should have thorough knowledge of the property, its maintenance and is familiar with power sources, shut off valves, areas prone to flooding, and emergency entrances and exits
- Maintains access to maps and diagrams of the church
- Responsible for emergency supplies, such as: generator, sandbags, batteries, bottled water, flashlights, wet-vacs, mops, etc.
- Ensure that gas and electrical and other utilities are in safe working order and if required, disconnect or shut them off
- Determine what damage the church has sustained
- Contact appropriate resources to respond to damage
- Obtain proper authorization for services performed
- Provide Finance with cost of such services

Finance

- Contact the Diocesan Office and insurance carriers regarding damages and insurance compensation
- Coordinate all costs of damages and repairs for such damages
- Maintain all costs and expenses for repairs and coordinate with insurance carrier regarding reimbursement

Public Information/Communication

- Maintain ongoing contact with members of the congregation to address their concerns
- Coordinate with other members of the ERT in response to requests from members of the congregation and family members
- Handle calls and requests from members of the congregation
- Establish and maintain communication with sheltered congregational members or with those restricted to residence

Congregation and Personnel

- Respond to any press inquiries as directed by the ERT Team Leader and in coordination with the Diocesan Office
- Prepare any written communications to members of the congregation
- Possible Media Inquiries (Both on a local basis and Diocesan inquiries)
- Are there injuries? (Only report what is known)
- Is there damage and how extensive? (Only report what is known)
- Was evacuation required?
- Did the public sector provide a warning?
- How is the congregation doing?
- Where will services be relocated?
- Is help needed and if so, what?

ATTACHMENT D – CHURCH “GO KIT”

The Church “Go Kit” should contain items essential for holding worship if the church sustains damage or is inaccessible. Following is a list of suggested items.

Responsible Person: _____ **Date Verified** _____

- Software and electronic files (back-up)
- Home Communion set and supplies
- Book of Common Prayer
- Bible
- Hymnal
- List of important websites and links
- Insurance Information
- Membership Directory
- List of Important contacts
- Keys to Church
- Copy of Emergency Response Plan

ATTACHMENT E - EMERGENCY RESPONSE TABLETOP EXERCISE

Tabletop Exercise

A facilitated tabletop emergency response scenario exercise (weather, fire, medical emergency, or violent act etc.) should be developed and participated in by key members of the church staff, vestry, ushers, Sunday school teachers, committee chairs and persons in the congregation who have backgrounds which would be helpful in responding to an emergency situation. An exercise can enhance the churches response to an emergency situation and reduce death and/or injured to members and visitors and the protection of its property and other assets. Such an exercise can be conducted in approximately 2 to 4 hours. Local police or fire agencies have extensive experience in developing a tabletop exercise and can be a resource or may want to partner in conducting such an exercise.

What is a tabletop exercise?

- It provides participants in a low stress environment with a scenario involving a simulated emergency situation.
- It is presented in a narrative format, and participants respond to a sequence of events, in segments and problems related to the simulated emergency.
- Following each segment, participants discuss response actions to the simulated emergency. There are no wrong or right approaches as each situation is different.
- It builds teamwork and improves coordination in responding to and recovery from an incident
- It enhances participant's skills, measures response resources and provides discussion and feedback on various response actions.
- It validates or modifies the emergency response plan
- It provides feedback on recovery actions and processes

Discussion Scenario

If a congregation does not want to engage in a tabletop exercise, a weather related, fire, medical emergency situation or scenario can be discussed regarding various response options.

ATTACHMENT F – MEDICAL EMERGENCY

With an aging congregation a medical emergency is the most likely type to occur.

- A member of the congregation with medical knowledge/experience should respond to the person in medical distress.
- If in doubt regarding the medical situation 9-1-1 should be immediately called since time is of the essence in a medical emergency.
- The AED and first aid kit should be obtained and brought to the location of the medical emergency for use as needed.
- A member of the congregation should be directed to meet the first responders in front of the church and direct them to the location of the medical emergency. Prior contact with police, fire including EMT will help in determining the best meeting or “Path Finder” location.
- A member of the congregation should support and provide comfort to any family members present
- If the person is transported to a hospital the family member should be provided with transportation to that location and supported by a church member or until a family member arrives.
- As needed a member of the congregation with the church reverend should remain in contact with the family for any spiritual support or other assistance.

ATTACHMENT G - WEATHER

Ushers, greeters, and other key members of the congregation should program their cell phone to the national or local weather alert system. Instructions can be obtained on the National Weather Alert website or from local, county or state offices of emergency management.

- Tornado/severe thunderstorm **WATCH** means; Be Prepared and weather conditions are favorable for severe weather and/or tornadoes to develop.
- Tornado/severe thunderstorm **WARNING means**; Take Action and severe weather and/or a tornado has been sighted or indicated by radar from the National Weather Service.
 - There is an outdoor warning device that provides a county-wide three minute steady tone alert. The sirens are activated for a TORNADO WARNING (tornado sighted or strongly indicated on radar) or Severe Thunderstorm warnings with 70 mph winds or greater
 - Should a tornado warning occur, all persons should take shelter in the basement where the **SHELTER** signage is displayed

Persons should be discouraged from leaving the building until the all-clear signal has been broadcast. This is particularly important if there is external damage (fallen trees, down power lines etc.) surround the church.

A tone activated weather alert receiver should be considered. This is an indoor warning device that provides a voice broadcast of current weather related conditions.

ATTACHMENT H - FIRE

- Call 9-1-1 immediately
- A person should be directed to meet the responding fire units and inform them of the fire location.
- Initiate evacuation from the church. The emergency exits should be clearly identified and each room has a floor plan identifying the recommended evacuation routes.
- Fire extinguishers should be mounted on the walls with signs located above the extinguisher.
- Fire extinguishers can be used to contain a small fire and a person should not put themselves in danger attempting to “fight the fire.” Remember to call 9-1-1 immediately.
- The local fire department can be contacted for instructions on the use of and under what circumstances a fire extinguisher should be used.
- An evacuation meeting site such as: parking lot, should be identified so all persons attending the service or event can be identified as having safely evacuated the building.

ATTACHMENT I - ACTIVE SHOOTER

Run, Hide and Fight

The Run, Hide, and Fight concept is endorsed by the Department of Homeland Security. Check with local law enforcement agencies regarding their recommendation in active shooter response. Some jurisdictions may recommend other procedures such as ALICE. Follow their recommendation. If a shooter is in the area remember the following:

RUN

- If a safe path is available, have an escape plan in mind. Always try to escape and encourage others to leave with you.
- Be aware of secondary exits in the event the primary exit is in the line of fire or line of sight of the shooter.
- Leave belongings behind.
- When exiting the building, keep your hands up and visible for approaching law enforcement personnel.
- Assist elderly, young children and those with disabilities.
- Move a considerable distance from the church and to a predesignated location.

HIDE

- Hide in an area that blocks the shooter's view, preferably in a room that can be secured.
- Turn out the lights.
- Block entry way by locking or barricading the door.
- Silence your cell phone ring tone, but keep the connection open to first responders in order to pass along information such as: shooter's last known location, description of the shooter, and what type of weapon is the shooter using. If silence is needed text your location and/or the location of the attacker to 9-1-1.

FIGHT

- As a last resort and only if you are in eminent danger.
- With as many people as available make every attempt to incapacitate the shooter.
- Act with physical aggression, using every tool or object possible as a weapon. Scissors, fire extinguishers, and chairs are some examples.

Depending on the circumstances some may be able to run, others must hide, and some will have to fight.

ACTIVE SHOOTER

ALICE Approach (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate)

ALICE may be the preferred active shooter response by the local law enforcement agency or they may have a different operating procedure for such incidents. They should be requested to provide training in ALICE or their preferred response method.

Alert – Is your first notification or awareness of the danger

- Understand the danger
- Make a speedy response to remove yourself from danger
- Know evacuation routes or follow directions

Lockdown - Barricade the room if evacuation is not a safe option

- Barricade entry points to create a semi-secure area
- Communicate with emergency responders via texts or other devices

Inform - Communicate the violent intruder's location and direction in real time

- Provide ongoing or timely information

Counter – Create noise, movement, distance and distraction to reduce shooters ability to shoot accurately

- Should be used as last resort
- Counter is not confrontation or fighting

Evacuate – When safe to do, remove yourself from the danger zone

- Evacuate to a safe area and out of danger
- Follow instructions of first responders

ATTACHMENT J – TELEPHONE BOMB THREAT OR SUSPICIOUS CALLER PROCEDURES

Most bomb threats received by phone should be taken seriously until proven otherwise. Act quickly, but remain calm and obtain information as outlined below. If a bomb threat is received by phone:

- Remain calm. Keep the caller on the line for as long as possible. **DO NOT HANG UP**
- Listen carefully. Be polite and show interest
- Try to keep the caller talking to learn more information
- If possible, write a note to a colleague to call the authorities or, as soon as the caller hangs up, immediately notify them yourself
- If your phone has a display, copy the number and/or letters on the window display
- Complete the following FBI Bomb Threat check list immediately. Write down as many details as you can remember. Try to get exact words
- Immediately upon termination of call, but from a different phone, contact authorities with information and await instructions
- If a bomb threat is received by handwritten note call the local police department.
- Handle note as minimally as possible. If a bomb threat is received by e-mail call the local police and Fire Department.

The same protocols can be used for suspicious or threatening telephone calls.

**FBI BOMB PROGRAM
BOMB THREAT CALL CHECKLIST**

EBCC-X

Questions to Ask

1. When is bomb going to explode?
2. Where is it right now?
3. What does it look like?
4. What kind of bomb is it?
5. What will cause it to explode?
6. Did you place the bomb?
7. Why?
8. What is your address?
9. What is your name?

Exact Wording of the Threat:

Sex of caller _____ Age _____ Race _____ Length of call _____

BOMB THREAT QUESTIONNAIRE:

CALLER'S VOICE:

_____ Calm	_____ Laughing	_____ Lisp	_____ Disguised
_____ Angry	_____ Crying	_____ Raspy	_____ Accent
_____ Excited	_____ Normal	_____ Deep	_____ Familiar
_____ Slow	_____ Distinct	_____ Ragged	_____ If voice is familiar
_____ Rapid	_____ Slurred	_____ Clearing throat	_____ who did it sound like?
_____ Soft	_____ Nasal	_____ Deep breathing	_____
_____ Loud	_____ Stutter	_____ Cracking voice	_____

BACKGROUND SOUNDS:

_____ Street noises	_____ House noises	_____ Factory	_____ Local
_____ Crockery	_____ Motor	_____ Machinery	_____ Long distance
_____ Voices	_____ Office Machinery	_____ Clear	_____ Animal Noises
_____ Booth	_____ PA System	_____ Static	_____ Music

Other _____

THREAT LANGUAGE:

_____ Well spoken (educated)	_____ Foul	_____ Incoherent
_____ Irrational	_____ Taped	_____ Message read by threat maker

REMARKS

Report call immediately to _____ Phone number _____

Fill out completely, immediately after bomb threat Date / /

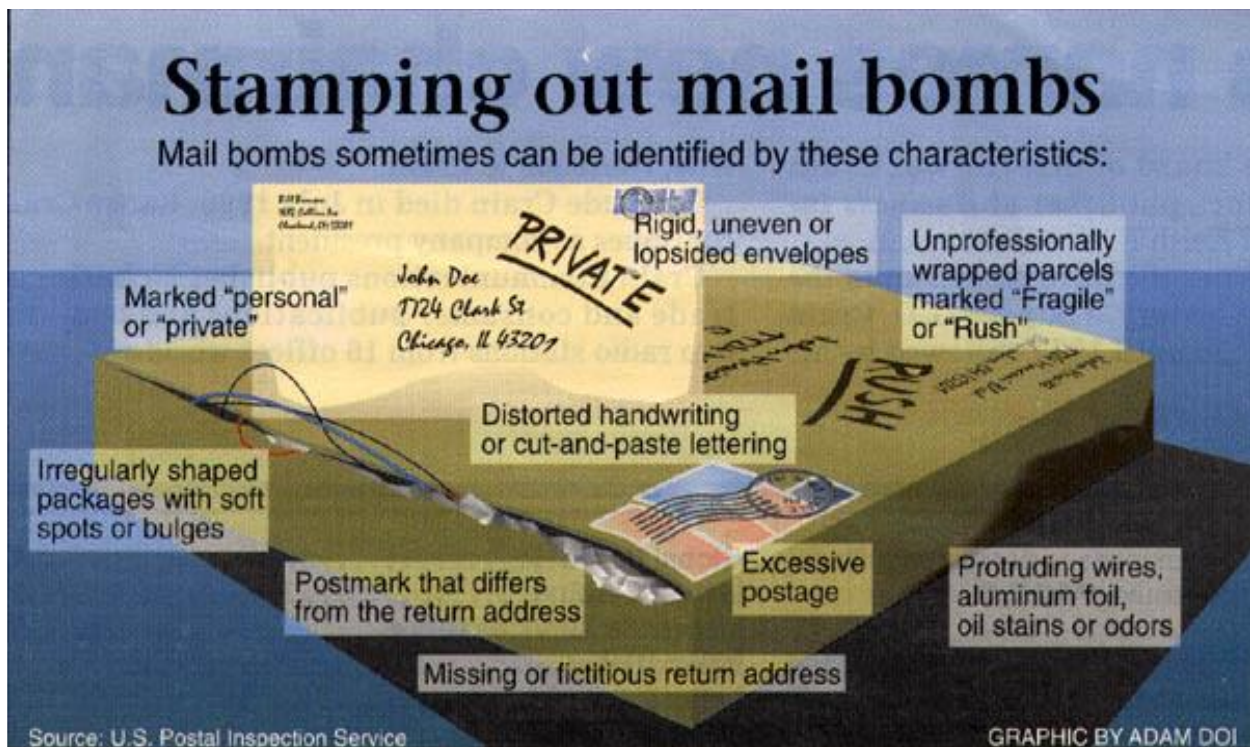
Phone number

Name _____ Position _____

ATTACHMENT K – SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE

If a suspicious package is received do not move it and immediately contact the police and fire departments. See the following picture and bullet points which might indicate a suspicious package

- No return address
- Excessive postage
- Stains
- Strange odor
- Strange sounds
- Unexpected delivery
- Poorly handwritten
- Misspelled words
- Incorrect titles
- Foreign language



RESOURCES

Critical Incident Protocol – A Public and Private Partnership, Michigan State University Department of Homeland Security grant 2003 https://www.michigan.gov/msp/-/media/Project/Websites/msp/EMHSD/Publications/msp-critical__incident_Protocol_8735_7.pdf

Disaster Preparedness and Response, The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas
<https://www.dwtx.org/what-we-do/committees-commissions/disaster-response>

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Guide for Developing High Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship, June 2013
https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Developing_EOPs_for_Houses_of_Worship_FINAL.PDF

Protecting Houses of Worship Event Resource Guide, US Attorney's Office for the District of Colorado, January 2016 <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=790107>

Safety for Faith-Based Events and Houses of Worship
https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/17_0531_NSI_SAR-Faith-Based-Events-Houses-Worship.pdf

House of Worship Security Worksheet and Process Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) <https://www.cisa.gov/houses-of-worship>

MITIGATING ATTACKS ON HOUSES OF WORSHIP Security Guide DECEMBER 2020 U.S. Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency
https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Mitigating%20Attacks%20on%20Houses%20of%20Worship%20Security%20Guide_508_0_0.pdf

Houses of Worship Security Practices Guide Department of Homeland Security May 2013
<https://fedweb-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/fed-91/2/Houses%2520of%2520Worship%2520Security%2520Practices%2520Guide%25207%252023%25202013.pdf>

The Power of HELLO Guide for Houses of Worship – Promoting staff Vigilance Through the Power of HELLO <https://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-91/2/The%2520Power%2520of%2520Hello%2520Guide-19March2021.pdf>

Recommend Best Practices for Security Houses of Worship Around the World, American Society of Industrial Security International 2017

<https://www.asisonline.org/globalassets/get-involved/councils/documents/best-practices-securing-houses-of-worship.pdf>

Episcopal Relief & Development Preparedness Planning Guide for Congregations and Parishes, 2015 www.episcopalrelief.org/usdisasterprogram

Homeland Security Houses of Worship Security Practices Guide, May, 2013 <https://fedweb-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/fed-91/2/Houses%2520of%2520Worship%2520Security%2520Practices%2520Guide%25207%252023%25202013.pdf>

House of Worship – Hometown Security Report Series, Department of Homeland Security, May 2017 <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/FFC/Documents/Toolkit-Documents/Hometown-Security-Report-Series-Houses-of-Worship.aspx>

The Emergency and Response Guide contains additional details and recommendations to assist in the development of an ERP. It also contains suggested resources that can be helpful. The Guide was developed by the task force below, commissioned by Bishop Perry. Please contact Radford Jones, Jerry Miller or Deacon Glenn Morrison for additional information on preparing a plan for your congregation.

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