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# Place of Worship Security & Safety Guide

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# Introduction

Not too long ago a “place of worship” was considered a safe haven; a place to pray and receive the word of the Lord. Hoke County Sheriff Hubert A. Peterkin advises that “a place of worship should be a place of peace and a safe haven for worshipping away from conflicts of the world.” Today however, crime and violence have become far too prevalent and continue to breach our place of worship doors.

On June 17, 2015, a gunman walked into a Charleston church during a bible study. Before leaving, he proceeded to open fire, shooting and killing nine church members. Shocking as it may seem, we are living in a dangerous time where violent incidents are happening across our great country in schools, movie theatres, military bases and recruiting offices, and yes, our places of worship. Throughout the Old Testament, God depended on his warriors to fight the battles and protect the people (Nehemiah 4:9). How secure is your place of worship? As said by Cleveland County Sheriff Alan Norman, “Together through awareness, education, and action, we can attempt to minimize vulnerabilities and try to ensure the protection of your place of worship and congregates.”

## Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide direction for places of worship regarding reasonable measures of safety to confront the spectrum of threats and emergencies they may face during the hours of worship. It discusses actions that may be taken before, during, and after an incident in order to reduce the impact on people, property, and loss of life.

This publication should not be relied upon as legal advice and is designed as a guide only. You should consult with your own legal advisor prior to implementing a particular plan.

For more information concerning this publication, or to make suggestions as to how to improve this publication, please contact the North Carolina Sheriffs’ Association at (919) SHERIFF (743-7433).

# Prevention

## Place of Worship Planning and Oversight Committee

1. Who: Pastoral staff, elders, deacons, key congregational members (i.e. law enforcement personnel, EMS, fire, military, lawyers, counselors, doctors).
2. Goal: To provide a forum for developing, implementing and continually refining a planning process to address the safety needs of your place of worship before, during, and after a critical incident.
3. Objectives:
  - a. Complete a security risk assessment to include the facility, policies and procedures, business practices, and operations.
  - b. Adopt a security plan.
  - c. Assemble a security team and appoint a Security Team Leader to implement the plan.
  - d. Coordinate training and education for the congregation.

## Security Risk Assessment of your Place of Worship

1. Who: Sheriff, local law enforcement, fire and rescue, and private consultants.
2. Goal: To assess the existing risks, threats and vulnerabilities of your place of worship including:
  - a. Facility;
  - b. Staff and volunteers;
  - c. Congregation demographics;
  - d. Childcare protection protocol;
  - e. Surrounding community threats;
  - f. Communications (internal and external);

- g. Policies and procedures; and
- h. Handling of money during worship services.

## Place of Worship Security Plan

1. Who: Place of worship security team, in collaboration with government entities that have responsibility in the plan, including first responders such as sheriff, police, fire, EMS.
2. Goal: To adopt a basic plan of operation before, during, and after a critical incident in a place of worship during a time of worship.
3. Framework:
  - a. Basic facility security measures should include:
    - Facility blueprints
    - Cameras and alarms
    - Locked and unlocked doors and windows
    - Exterior lighting
  - b. Establish the role of the security team before, during, and after a critical incident including duties such as:
    - Communications (internal and external)
    - Preparation drills
    - Role of greeters
    - Perimeter and parking lot monitoring
    - Placement of security team members in facility during time of worship
    - Childcare protocol
    - Duties during a critical incident:
      - 911 call
      - Coordinate evacuation or lockdown procedures
      - Confront the threat
      - Managing the safety zones
      - Point of contact (POC) with first responders
      - Assist first responders
  - c. Establish an evacuation procedure
  - d. Establish a lockdown protocol

- e. Adopt a Crisis Intervention Stress Management (CISM) strategy
- f. Analyze congregation demographics (i.e. number of children, senior citizens, people with disabilities, people with criminal backgrounds such as sex offenders)
- g. Implement a firearms policy that specifies who, if anyone, can or cannot carry a firearm into a place of worship. The available options are:
  - Allow all concealed carry permitted persons to carry concealed handguns on the premise, if not otherwise in violation of the law (i.e. if the church is on school grounds).
  - Restrict the concealed carry of handguns to only designated personnel who are lawfully able to possess a firearm on the premise.
  - Prohibit all persons from carrying firearms, open carry or concealed carry.
  - Allow any person who can lawfully possess firearms to carry them openly on the premise.

Note: North Carolina General Statute § 14-415.11 authorizes the church to post signs, as any other private property, prohibiting the possession or carrying of firearms. But, if not otherwise posted, anyone who has obtained their concealed carry permit under North Carolina General Statute § 14-415.24 may carry on church property, unless possession of the firearm is otherwise prohibited by law (e.g. if the church is on school grounds). Similarly, a church would have the authority to allow firearms to be openly carried on the premise so long as the possession of firearms is not otherwise prohibited by law (e.g. if the church is on school grounds).

Special circumstances:

- If church services are held on any school property (public, charter or private), the law governing the possession of firearms on school grounds (North Carolina General Statute § 14-269.2) would apply.
- If circumstances require a school program to be held on church property, the law governing the possession of firearms on school grounds (North Carolina General Statute § 14-269.2) would apply to the area where the school program is taking place because this would be a curricular or extracurricular activity sponsored by a school. Other areas of the church property not being used for the school program would continue to be regulated by the church authority as set out in the “Note” above.

- If a religious organization operates a school and a church is also located on this property, then the law governing the possession of firearms on school grounds (North Carolina General Statute § 14-269.2) would apply.
- If a church operates a daycare on church property, the church (being private property) may choose whether or not to allow firearms on the premises.

These prohibitions on carrying firearms on school property do not apply to:

- A weapon used solely for educational or school sanctioned ceremonial purposes, or used in a school approved program conducted under the supervision of an adult, whose supervision has been approved by the school authority;
- Fire fighters, emergency service personnel, North Carolina Forest Service personnel, detention officers employed by and authorized by the sheriff to carry firearms and any private police employed by an educational institution, when acting in the discharge of their official duties;
- Those persons exempted by N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-269(b), such as law enforcement officers;
- A armed armored car service guard; or an armed, courier service guard, when acting in the discharge of the guard's duties and with the permission of the college or university;
- A armed security guard while on the premises of a hospital or health care facility, located on educational property, when acting in the discharge of the guard's duties with the permission of the college or university;
- An employee of a school who lives on the campus and has a concealed handgun permit may keep a handgun in their private residence;
- A person with a concealed handgun permit, or who is exempt from obtaining a permit, can have a handgun in a closed compartment or container within the person's locked vehicle or the handgun can be in a locked container securely affixed to the person's vehicle. The person may also possess the concealed handgun on his/her person while in the locked vehicle on school grounds. It would be lawful for a concealed handgun permittee to remove a handgun from a vehicle on school grounds if done so in response to a life threatening situation; or
- A volunteer school safety resource officer when acting in the discharge of official duties.

## Training and Education Strategy

1. Identify the audience:
  - a. Staff and volunteers
  - b. Congregation
  - c. Community
  - d. Collaborative partners (i.e. sheriff's office, local police, fire, EMS, etc.)
2. Determine the delivery method:
  - a. Presenters
  - b. Presentation style
  - c. Materials (i.e. handouts, PowerPoint, etc.)

Note: Always protect the confidentiality of sensitive information. Share sensitive information only on a “need to know” basis.

## During the Incident

### Security Team Leader Activates the Security Plan

1. Designated person calls 911.
2. Lock down or evacuate the sanctuary depending on the threat.
3. Lock down or evacuate the childcare area depending on the threat.
4. Set up and manage safety zones.

### FBI “Active Shooter” Protocol Plan:

1. Run:
  - a. Follow instructions of the security team.

- b. Use escape routes identified by the security team.
  - c. Leave personal belongings behind.
  - d. Proceed to safe zones identified by the security plan and as directed by the security team.
  - e. Take others with you if possible, but do not stay behind if others will not go.
2. Hide (lockdown plan):
    - a. Lock and barricade doors.
    - b. Close and lock windows; close blinds.
    - c. Turn off all lights.
    - d. Silence electronic devices.
    - e. Remain silent.
    - f. Remain in place until given an all clear by the security team or first responders.
3. Fight (confronting the shooter: a last resort): Try to disrupt or incapacitate the shooter by using aggressive force and items around the area, such as fire extinguishers or chairs.
  4. Safe zones (identified in the security plan): Designated security team members must manage and control safe zones until first responders arrive.

## Interacting with First Responders

Law Enforcement's first priority must be to locate and stop the person or persons posing the threat and they will not stop to help the injured. Law enforcement officers may not be able to distinguish the "good guys" from the "bad guys".

Congregates and staff, including the security team members, should be trained to do the following when first responders arrive:

- a. Follow all commands such as getting down on the ground, dropping all objects (including cell phones) from hands and putting hands in the air.

- b. Clearly identify yourself verbally.
- c. Once identified and cleared, the security team should meet with first responders and provide as much information as possible (ie. location of safe zones, last known location of the threat, facility access points and childcare location and access).

## **The Aftermath**

### **Place of Worship Security Team**

1. Brief first responders upon arrival.
2. Continue to manage safe zones and assist first responders as directed.
3. Identify a place of worship spokesperson to address the media and public along with the first responder media spokesperson.
4. Coordinate all activities with first responders.

### **First Responders**

1. Assume command of the critical incident.
2. Treat and transport injured individuals from crime scene and safe zones to medical facilities.
3. Initiate the investigation.
4. Interview witnesses.
5. Preserve the crime scene.
6. Coordinate continuing activities of the security team.
7. Appoint a designee to communicate with the media. Include place of worship media spokesperson.
8. Debrief with the place of worship security team after the threat is over.

## Reunification Plan

1. Identify a safe location separate from distractions (including the media and general public), for family members trying to reunite with their loved ones.
2. Provide family members with timely, accurate, and relevant information.
3. Be prepared to speak with family members about what to expect when reunited with their loved ones.
4. Ensure effective communication with those that have language barriers or need other accommodations, such as the hearing impaired, etc.

## Crisis Intervention Stress Management (CISM):

1. Security plan should include a CISM strategy.

“What is CISM? CISM is a comprehensive, integrative, multicomponent crisis intervention system. CISM is considered comprehensive because it consists of multiple crisis intervention components. CISM interventions range from the pre-crisis phase through the acute crisis phase, and into the post-crisis phase. CISM is also considered comprehensive in that it consists of counseling which may be provided to individuals, small groups, large groups, families, organizations, and even communities.”

The seven core components of CISM are defined below:

- a. Pre-crisis preparation. This includes stress management education and crisis training.
- b. Disaster education for staff, congregation and community.
- c. Defusing. This is a structured small group discussion provided within hours of a crisis for purposes of assessment.
- d. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) refers to the "Mitchell model" (Mitchell and Everly, 1996) 7-phase, structured group discussion, usually provided 1 to 10 days post crisis, and designed to mitigate acute symptoms, assess the need for follow-up, and if possible provide a sense of post-crisis psychological closure.
- e. One-on-one crisis counseling or psychological support during and after the incident.
- f. Family crisis counseling.
- g. Follow-up and referral for assessment and treatment, if necessary.

A Primer on Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). George S. Everly, Jr., Ph.D., C.T.S. and Jeffrey T. Mitchell, Ph.D., C.T.S. The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. 2010.

2. Security Team Leader or designee should activate the CISM strategy immediately.

### Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP):

1. Is your place of worship still accessible after the critical incident?
2. Consider a temporary relocation of your place of worship, if needed.
3. Analyze the impact of the critical incident on place of worship leaders, staff, and congregates to assess their ability to continue their duties (see CISM above).

### Planning and Oversight Committee Review of the Critical Incident:

1. Review all reports filed by the Place of Worship Security Team and first responders.
2. Adjust security plan based on reports and lessons learned.
3. Update security plan and conduct new training.
4. Provide copies of the new security plan to all first responders within the community (i.e. sheriff, police, fire, EMS).

## References

[A Primer on Critical Incident Stress Management \(CISM\)](#). George S. Everly, Jr., Ph.D., C.T.S. and Jeffrey T. Mitchell, Ph.D., C.T.S. The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. 2010.

Burke County Sheriff's Office: Church Security and Safety

Cleveland County Sheriff's Office: Letter to House of Worship Leaders and Congregates

Colonial Baptist Church: Security and Safety Start Up Information

Edgecombe County Sheriff's Office: A Guide to Church Safety

FBI Critical Incident Response Group: Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operation Plans for Houses of Worship

Halifax County Sheriff's Office: Church Watch

Haywood County Sheriff's Office: House of Worship Security Training

Hoke County Sheriff's Office: Safety and Security Training (Protecting your Place of Worship against Violence)

Mooresville Police Department: House of Worship Security Training