

Security Guidelines for Church Meetinghouses

(United States and Canada)

This information is for ward and stake councils only.

1. Purpose

Review the following guidelines to prepare for and respond to security incidents in meetinghouses and other Church facilities. Priesthood leaders' discuss these guidelines in ward and stake councils and develop plans to deal properly with potential incidents according to local conditions.

Do not use these guidelines as a training topic for the entire ward or stake. Instead, in discussions with ward and stake councils, priesthood leaders should emphasize the objective of staying calm and trusting in the Lord for guidance and safety.

Direct any questions about these guidelines or about security incidents to priesthood leaders or to the Church Security Department at 1-801-240-2661 (toll free at 1-844-537-7000). For questions that are not urgent, email the Church's Global Security Operations Center at gsoc@ldschurch.org.

- Lock vehicles in the parking lot. Keep personal items out of sight, including bags and electronic devices such as cell phones, laptop computers, and garage door openers.
- Report suspicious persons in or around Church buildings to priesthood leaders or the police.
- Priesthood leaders conduct interviews only when another priesthood holder is nearby. If the person to be interviewed poses a potential threat, the priesthood leader invites another member of the bishopric or stake presidency into the interview.
- The bishop's and stake president's offices and their clerks' offices are locked when not occupied.
- All ward and stake leaders should know the location of fire pulls and building exits, how to lock interior doors, and the building's emergency procedures.
- Except for sworn law enforcement officers, the Church strongly discourages anyone from carrying weapons into meetinghouses or Church events: "The carrying of lethal weapons . . . within [Church] walls is *inappropriate* except as required by officers of the law" (*Handbook 2: Administering the Church* [2010], 21.2.4; italics added). Priesthood leaders should understand the laws within their jurisdiction. If there are questions about local laws, the stake president calls the Office of General Counsel as instructed in the handbooks.

2. Use Local Police to Deal with Security Incidents

Priesthood leaders and Church members are to rely on local police to deal with security incidents and emergencies at Church facilities. In an emergency at a Church facility in the United States or Canada, call 911 immediately.

After a serious security incident has been controlled, report it to priesthood leaders and to the Church's 24-hour Global Security Operations Center at 1-801-240-2661 (toll free at 1-844-537-7000).

3. Keeping Leaders and Members Safe at Church Facilities

Leaders and members follow these practices to increase their safety at Church facilities:

- Avoid being alone in a Church building. Priesthood leaders instruct members, *especially women and youth*, not to be alone in an unlocked Church building.

4. Preventive Security Practices

Priesthood leaders encourage members to report suspicious items, persons, or behaviors observed in Church buildings and parking lots. Those assigned to greet members arriving at meetings are to be friendly and observant. Suspicious items, persons, or behaviors are reported immediately to priesthood leaders or police as circumstances require.

1. In this document, the term *priesthood leader* refers to the bishop, branch president, stake president, district president, or any of their counselors. The terms *bishop*, *ward*, and *stake* apply also to branch presidents, branches, and districts.

Do not approach suspicious persons sitting or roaming in the building or parking lot alone. Monitor persons loitering around vehicles or remaining in their vehicles for long periods of time during meetings. If a person's behavior becomes disorderly or unacceptable, calmly invite him or her to stop the behavior or leave the property. If he or she refuses to comply, call the police. Priesthood leaders and Church members are discouraged from taking physical action against disorderly persons.

Priesthood leaders encourage members not to leave packages, briefcases, backpacks, or bags unattended in Church buildings or parking lots. Do not touch unattended items that seem suspicious by their composition or placement. If the owner cannot be located, clear the area around the item of people, and notify priesthood leaders immediately. If there is no reasonable explanation for what the item is or why it was left there, report it to the police.

5. Responding to a Disruptive Person in a Church Meeting

If a person becomes disruptive during a Church meeting, be respectful, speak calmly and with self-control, and respect his or her personal space.

Whether the person causing the disturbance remains seated in the congregation, approaches the stand, or stands at the pulpit, approach the person and ask him or her to stop or to leave, or invite the person to meet with a priesthood leader in the foyer. Tell the person that his or her behavior or comments are inappropriate. If the person has been asked to leave but refuses, inform him or her that the police may be notified and he or she may be arrested for trespassing. If the person refuses to leave and continues to cause a disturbance at the pulpit, turn off the microphone and dismiss the meeting. Do not attempt to physically restrain the person unless it is absolutely necessary. (Adapt these guidelines as needed for auxiliary meetings, classes, or other Church events or activities.)

If a serious or dangerous disruption is occurring on Church property, call the police. When the situation is under control, notify your priesthood leader and the Church Security Department.

6. Responding to an Armed Intruder or Active Shooter

6.1 Armed Intruder

If an intruder threatens to use a weapon, comply with the person's demands. Do not provoke the intruder by arguing or acting defiant or confrontational. If the intruder demands cash, including donations, give him what he asks for without hesitation. After the intruder leaves, call the police immediately. When time permits, notify your priesthood leader and the Church Security Department.

6.2 Active Shooter

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

Hide. If you are unable to escape safely, hide out of sight of the assailant's view. Close, lock, and 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. If there is an exchange of gunfire between police and the assailant, everyone in the building is to stay in their barricaded rooms until instructed otherwise by the police.

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, and fight to incapacitate the person. If others are present, organize to defend yourselves and to attack the assailant.