

When it comes to protecting your parish community from the possibility of someone coming in and committing a criminal act, having the right prevention strategies and intervention tactics is key. Here is a condensed version of some of the training given to staff, vergers and acolytes and ushers at St. John's Cathedral in Denver.

### Prevention Strategy: Awareness

#### **THREE KINDS OF AWARENESS.**

##### **1. AWARENESS OF SUSPICIOUS OR QUESTIONABLE BEHAVIORS**

When is it OK to be suspicious of someone?

When their behavior is unusual in the context of the environment in which it is observed. Examples include

- Persons knowingly violating posted or implicit rules
- Persons acting highly nervous, angry, hostile or disoriented; persons apparently under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Persons dressed incongruously for the existing weather conditions
- Persons wearing clothes with writing or symbols that endorse intolerance, violence or hatred
- Persons attempting to conceal anything on and around their bodies
- Persons counter-surveilling staff and volunteers conducting safety and security procedures

When is it NOT OK to be suspicious of someone?

- When the suspicion is not behavior-based, but the result of focusing on only the person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or perceived economic circumstance

##### **2. AWARENESS OF SUSPICIOUS ITEMS AND PACKAGES**

Just like at an airport, any unattended baggage, package or other container should be investigated

- If you think it could be an incendiary or explosive device, get everyone away from around it and call 9-1-1

- It is better to presume a larger blast radius than a smaller one
- Ushers should conduct regular pre- and post-event sweeps of the nave, chancel, narthex and towers to look for such items
- Don't overlook trash receptacles

### 3. AWARENESS OF SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

- Any "strange", threatening or inappropriate written, verbal, telephonic or electronic message relating to the cathedral or a person or people there
- A door or window that has been tampered with or obstructed
- A car parked where it shouldn't be for too long a period of time
- Lights turned on when they should be off, or off when they should be on
- Other evidence of "stay-behind" intruders

Using a mnemonic device may helpful to become more alert and situationally aware. One such device is called the OODA Loop.

“OODA LOOP”

**OBSERVE** People acting agitated or hostile; counter-surveilling; dressed inappropriately; carrying backpacks that might conceal weapons

Suspicious packages and containers in pre- and post-event sweeps, as well as during the a service or other church event

**ORIENT** Be mindful of what is acceptable and unacceptable in the context of the particular environment you are in

Anticipate problems before they can deteriorate further

**DECIDE** How and when and with whom you can fix the problem

**ACT** Be pro-active; have a plan before you need a plan; speak clearly and with authority, use simple language to convey urgency, but not panic

## Intervention Tactics

### **TEAM COORDINATION**

- Plan and practice collaboratively with vergers, acolytes, ushers and staff
- Identify who does what, where and when
- Use the buddy system
- Identify each team member's abilities and limitations
- Identify other persons in the congregation that can be particularly helpful in such situations, such as off-duty law enforcement officers, other emergency responders and medical professionals
- Assign areas of responsibility in a given space

### **WHEN APPROACHING A POSSIBLE THREAT, WATCH THE FOLLOWING**

- Their hands and eyes
- The presence of any weapons (including improvised weapons)
- Accomplices
- Keep in mind your footing and points of ingress and egress
- Evaluate whether persons around the threat should be evacuated
- It is sometimes advisable to isolate and contain a threat

REMEMBER THAT IT IS BETTER TO RESPOND THAN TO REACT. IT IS BETTER TO HAVE A PLAN AND PRACTICE IT BEFORE YOU ACTUALLY NEED IT, THAN TO FIND YOURSELF HIP-DEEP IN TROUBLE AND NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO AND REACT OUT OF FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY.

### To Be and Not to Be

You don't need to be a Kung Fu master to prevail in a tense adversarial confrontation. Be polite and firm. Believe in the rightness of the action you are taking.

