

Dear St. Stephen Parishioners,

In our continuing effort to strengthen the safety and security of our parish and of our parishioners, St. Stephen Catholic Church has implemented a multi-staged safety and security plan. While we realize that there are now certain inconveniences, we appreciate your cooperation in this matter.

The first phase focused on creating a security team consisting of current and retired law enforcement members and to task the team with defining and carrying out decisive and live-saving actions during emergencies until first responders arrive. In addition, the security team completed the process of evaluating the vulnerabilities of our buildings and has created a security plan that will address them.

There are specific steps to the plan:

1. Creation of the church security plan. This plan includes tightening church security, scenario-based planning, working in conjunction with diocese policy, and involvement of local law enforcement.
2. Development and creation of a church security team. Current church members who have a public safety backgrounds have been selected for this team. This team meets regularly to discuss church safety and security.
3. Church-wide security training. The security training plan is implemented in two stages. The first stage involves specific training to members of various church ministries, i.e. Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, Ushers, Altar Servers, Deacons, and Greeters. The second stage involves providing Security Awareness Sessions to all parishioners. These sessions include information on why a plan has been created and how parishioners can partner with church leaders to help ensure church safety.
4. Controlled hours of operation. Our church buildings have designated public hours of operation times and that someone is in the building anytime doors are unlocked. The plan addresses when employees and volunteers are in the building and avoiding scenarios of being alone in the buildings.
5. Keyed Entrances. External church doors, such as the side doors to the church and to the parish hall, will now be locked. There are specific times when these doors may be unlocked and it will be at the discretion of the church pastor. Church buildings are used by many different people so there is a need to control who is entering the building, where they are entering, and who has keys to the building.
6. Lock-down procedures. Lock-down procedures are in place in the church buildings. These procedures determine the best approach to protecting parishioners in the event of a threatening or unsafe situation.
7. Parishioner Communication. The church communicates to parishioners to make sure they are aware of new security measures. These communications are made public not only to inform, but to alert those who may intend harm that the parish is informed, aware, and ready to act accordingly.

The security plan will be routinely audited and reviewed to establish a periodical check to make sure the plan is continually improved.

The safety and security of our parishioners is of utmost importance, especially in light of recent disturbing events that have occurred in churches. St. Stephen Catholic Church is committed to a comprehensive security and safety plan that mitigates or thwarts a crisis before help arrives. Today's churches must simply be prepared for a variety of threats and emergencies. It is our hope that you have been provided with information that will help prepare for potential security challenges.

Sincerely,

Fr. Mike and the St. Stephen Security Team