



Prepared in Love: A Guide to Safety & Hospitality in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut

*A Resource for Parishes of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut to Cultivate
Safety, Readiness & Compassionate Response*

This document invites parishes to approach safety as a ministry grounded in love, hospitality, and communal care. It offers practical steps for creating a risk assessment, building a safety team, partnering with local responders, and developing trauma-informed emergency plans.

With a focus on presence over fear, and de-escalation over force, it encourages churches to remain welcoming, compassionate, and alert. Rooted in prayer and pastoral sensitivity, this resource helps congregations prepare for active security threats, not out of fear, but out of love for one another.

The appendices at the end of this guide provide templates, training outlines and sample materials to help your parish develop and implement a plan appropriate for your local context.

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Performing a Risk Assessment

Before creating or updating your parish's *Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)*, begin with a Risk Assessment. This step helps your congregation identify potential hazards, vulnerabilities, and areas for improvement. It is also a valuable opportunity to engage local first responders in conversation, to learn from their expertise, and to deepen community partnerships.

A risk assessment allows your congregation to:

- Identify what types of emergencies are most likely to affect your parish.
- Evaluate the physical, procedural, and human factors that impact your ability to respond effectively.
- Prioritize actions that strengthen safety, security, and hospitality.
- Build shared awareness among clergy, lay leaders, and local responders.

Step One: Form a small group to complete the assessment together.

Include the following in the process:

- Clergy and wardens
- Sexton or building manager
- Children's and youth ministry representatives
- Ushers or greeters
- Safety Ministry Team members
- A contact from your local police and/or fire department
- IT consultant

Performing a Risk Assessment (cont'd)

Step Two: Identify Hazards & Likelihood.

Consider which events are most likely or most impactful for your context.

Hazard Type	Examples	Likelihood (Low/Med/High)	Potential Impact (Low/Med/High)
Medical	Injury, cardiac event, allergic reaction		
Fire/Smoke	Electrical fire, kitchen fire, candle mishap		
Weather/Natural	Snow, flooding, power outage		
Security/Violence	Intruder, disruptive individual, hate crime		
Utility	Gas leak, chemical spill, water main break		
Health/Public Safety	Pandemic, foodborne illness		
Cyber	Hacker/cyber security		

Step Three: Assess Vulnerabilities

Ask the following questions to identify what is working well and what needs improvement:

- Are exits clearly marked and accessible?
- Are first aid kits, AEDs, and Stop the Bleed kits available and maintained?
- Are communication tools (phones, PA system, radios) functional in all spaces?
- Are all volunteers and staff trained in emergency procedures?
- Are children and youth areas protected and supervised?
- Are Safe Church certifications up to date?
- Are there clear procedures for weekday vs. Sunday operations?
- Is landscaping clear to allow visible sightlines from inside and outside the building?
- Are electronic passwords updated on a regular basis?
- Are computer systems backed up?
- Who has a key to the church building?

Performing a Risk Assessment (cont'd)

Step Four: Evaluate the Existing Relationships & Resources

- Have we shared our floor plan and emergency contacts with local police and fire departments?
- Do we have a designated liaison to first responders?
- Have we connected with neighboring churches or community centers about mutual support?

Step Five: Prioritize Actions

Summarize your findings in three columns:

Action Needed	Responsible Person	Timeline for Completion
Example: Replace expired medical supplies	Parish Administrator	Within 30 days
Example: Trim hedges near entrances	Building & Grounds	This Quarter

Step Six: Document & Share

When complete:

- Share your findings with your vestry and congregation.
- Provide a copy to local first responders for feedback.
- Use your assessment to shape or update your *Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)* in **Appendix I**.

Prepared in Love: A Guide to Safety & Hospitality

While we hope never to face crimes of intrusion, hate, or violence, being prepared for such situations is an act of love that allows us to care for one another and create spaces of safety and belonging.

Here are some keys to help parishes become more prepared and empowered.

I. Pastoral Posture & Approach

- Safety is not separate from our faith; it is part of our call to love and protect our neighbors and ourselves.
- Preparedness is a ministry rooted in hospitality, compassion, and community.

Team Approach

Like all ministries, we do not do this work alone. Create a dependable team grounded in prayer, mutual support, and practical training.

II. Building a Safety Ministry Team:

It is helpful for Safety Ministry Teams to consist of the following positions:

Safety Lead: Primary point of contact for safety issues. This position can be rotated to share leadership according to a schedule.

Team 4-6 People: Watchful, trained, compassionate individuals who:

- Are attentive to movement and behavior.
- Are trained in de-escalation, emergency response, and situational awareness.
- Welcome newcomers with presence and warmth.
- Remain alert to those in distress or agitation.

The Safety Ministry can include: wardens, ushers, greeters, children's ministry representatives, sexton, facilities manager, clergy

III. Hospitality as a Safety Practice

Visible, Compassionate Presence

- Maintain welcoming and approachable greeters.
- Practice an "eyes up" posture: alert, not suspicious.
- Use the power of "Hello" to greet everyone warmly and signal awareness.

De-escalation Over Force

- Always prioritize compassion and calm responses.
- Train for behavior recognition, not appearance, to avoid profiling.

III. Hospitality as a Safety Practice (cont'd)

Trauma- Informed Language

- Pair drills with prayer and offer opt-outs for those with trauma history.
- ECCT staff are available to serve as conversation partners and Chaplains during preparation, training and drills.

IV. Planning & Partnerships

Partner with Local Law Enforcement & Fire Departments

- Invite first responders to assess your building and advise on emergency preparedness. It can be helpful to share your Risk Assessment.
- Share building plans and maintain ongoing relationships.
- Inform first responders when a significant planned event is taking place at your parish.
- Many departments offer free or low-cost trainings for faith communities.

Develop & Practice Emergency Plans

- Create or update your **Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) in conversation with local first responders.**
- Share the existence of this plan with your parish through a pastoral letter from your clergy or the warden of your church.
- See Appendix I for a template EOP.
- Practice safety drills.
- Pair drills with prayer and a pastoral response.

V. Training & Awareness

Fostering a Culture of Awareness & Belonging

- Encourage the whole parish to:
 - Greet everyone—especially newcomers.
 - Remain aware without suspicion.
 - Report concerns to the safety lead team and/or clergy with compassion.
- Conduct background checks on staff and review files of recently terminated employees.
- Train ushers and greeters to realize their important role in hospitality and safety.

VI. Children & Youth Safety

Encourage each Sunday School & Youth Group Classroom to have:

- A binder with daily attendance and guardian contact information.
- This binder should be kept near the exit and carried in emergencies.
- Safe Church-trained leader responsible for bringing it to a designated meeting point.

VII. Physical Space & Building Security

Know Your Building

- Identify all entry points.
- Maintain adequate lighting.
- Maintain visible sightlines with landscaping (trim bushes and trees away from entry points and to discourage contraband from being hidden on the property).
- Consider alarms and surveillance systems where appropriate.
- Use signage for:
 - Entry/ exit points
 - First aid stations
 - Assembly locations

XIII. Medical Preparedness

Every building should have:

- An AED (Defibrillator).
- A stocked medical kit.
- Ushers and greeters trained regularly in their use.

ECCT's Technology, Security & Fire Safety and Property Grants are available to help ease the cost.

XI. Responding during an Active Violent Event

Be aware. Stay calm. Respond intentionally.

“Run.”

During moments of violence, the best response is to exit the building as quickly and efficiently as possible. Remember, the nearest exit might not be the most used exit. In this event:

- Belongings should be left behind.
- Help others as much as possible.
- Warn others.
- Call 911 when safe.

“Hide”

If you cannot exit, the next best option is to hide:

- Find a concealed place.
- Barricade doors.
- Stay quiet.
- Silence phones.
- Lock and block doors.
- Turn off the lights.
- Spread out—do not hide in a group.
- Communicate silently with the police, if possible. (Example: use text messaging, put a sign in the window to communicate your location to first responders.)
- Stay in place until police communicate the immediate danger is clear.

“Fight”

Finally, only if “Run” or “Hide” are not options, respond with “Fight”.

- Commit to action.
- Work together.
- Do not be polite.

Use all available items to disrupt the assailant (e.g. throw prayer books, hymnals, purses, chairs, fire extinguishers).

After the Event

- Follow police instructions. Keep hands visible and empty.
- Evacuate as directed.
- Seek professional mental health and spiritual care afterward.
- Contact the ECCT as soon as possible.

X. Ongoing Spiritual Response

- Name gun violence as a spiritual and justice concern.
- Engage in advocacy through Bishops Against Gun Violence (bishopsagainstgunviolence.org) and local initiatives.
- Vote.
 - Pray regularly for peace, safety, and wise leadership (Book of Common Prayer pages 815 and 222-23).

XI. Resources & Support

Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT)

- ECCT Staff are available to:
 - Serve as Chaplains for drills and training.
 - Help connect you with local police/ fire departments.
 - Assist with Emergency Operations Planning.
- Clergy and Family Assistance Program
 - Available to all clergy and lay leaders (episcopalct.org/cfap/)
- Funding support:
 - Security, Fire & Safety Grants (episcopalct.org/technology-security-fire-safety-grant)
 - Property Improvement Grants (episcopalct.org/property-improvement-grant)

Additional Resources

- CISA Active Assailant Template (cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-02/Instructional_Guide_to_the_CISA_EAP_Template_20250204_508.pdf)
- Ready.gov Active Shooter Info Sheet (ready.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/ready.gov_active-shooter_hazard-info-sheet.pdf)
- <https://www.worshipsecurity.org/>

Appendix 1: Emergency Operations Plan Template

The purpose of this Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) Template is to help congregations within the Episcopal Church in Connecticut prepare for, respond to, and recover from, emergencies in ways that express our commitment to the safety and well-being of all who enter our worship spaces.

This document is intended as a **framework** to guide each congregation in developing its own Emergency Operations Plan in **conversation with local first responders**, such as police, fire, and emergency services. These partnerships help ensure that each plan is practical, locally informed, and aligned with community response protocols.

Grounded in the **love of God, neighbor, and self**, this plan understands safety and preparedness as forms of love and welcome. The work of safety preparation is also spiritual work; we pray together, support one another in ministry, and practice “eyes-up” hospitality, staying attentive to one another and to our surroundings.

The goal of this template is to help congregations:

- Clarify leadership roles and responsibilities during emergencies.
- Identify potential hazards and appropriate responses.
- Strengthen communication and coordination within the parish and with local authorities.
- Support the continuity of worship, ministry, and pastoral care before, during, and after a security incident.

Appendix 1: Emergency Operations Plan Template (cont'd)

How to Use This Template

This template is designed to be **adapted** by each congregation to reflect its particular context, facilities, and ministries.

1. **Begin with Conversation:** Start by meeting with your local fire department, police department, and/or emergency medical personnel. Ask them to review your building layout, emergency procedures, and safety practices. Their insights will help ensure that your plan is both practical and aligned with community response systems. It can be helpful to provide them with a ground plan of your building and grounds.
2. **Gather a Planning Team:** Include clergy, wardens, ushers, children's ministry leaders, and others who regularly serve on Sundays and weekdays.
3. **Complete Each Section:** Fill out the outline section by section, identifying your congregation's specific needs, resources, and roles.
4. **Train and Practice:** Review and update the plan regularly, conduct drills when possible, and make sure that key leaders know where to find the plan and how to implement it.
5. **Share and Review:** Keep a copy of the plan on site, share it with local first responders, and send a copy to the Episcopal Church in Connecticut for diocesan reference and support.

This document serves as a living guide that can grow and adapt as your congregation and community change.

Appendix 1: Emergency Operations Plan Template (cont'd)

1. In your own words, articulate the purpose for this plan and its theological grounding.

2. Emergency Leadership Structure (weekday vs. Sunday).
 - a. Make a list of roles, responsibilities, and emergency contact information.

3. Specify which types of emergencies are covered in the following document.

4. List what safety measures are currently in place and what ought to be done to strengthen security and surveillance.
 - a. Consider which doors are to be opened and unlocked at which hours.

 - b. Exits should never be locked from the inside without a push bar to exit.

Appendix 1: Emergency Operations Plan Template (cont'd)

5. In conversation with your local police and fire departments, make a list of emergency procedures/response steps

6. Notification & decision matrix (evacuate/secure-in-place/cancel).

7. Create a floor plan for each room. Note exits, safe rooms, AED/STB kits, shut-offs.

8. Specify duties of Sunday operations (doors, greeters, livestream, offering).

9. Children & Youth safety: Sunday Schools and Youth Groups should have a list of attendees and their emergency contacts. This information should be kept in a red binder near the door. In the event of a security breach, the adult leader should bring this binder to the designated meeting point.

Appendix 1: Emergency Operations Plan Template (cont'd)

10. Communication Protocol

a. Internal: phone tree or group text initiated by whom and to whom?

b. External: coordinate with local emergency responders, notify ECCT.

11. Continuity of worship and ministry plan.

a. How will you maintain sacramental and pastoral care ministry through clergy or lay leaders?

12. Recovery & Review

13. Training & Preparedness Plan

a. How will you train for this plan? (Remember, no parish does this work alone. The Commons Staff are available to serve as Chaplains during security training and preparedness conversations.)

14. Suggested appendices:

- Contact directory.
- Floor plan and emergency kit locations.
- Incident report form.
- Emergency communication template.
- Insurance and vendor information.

Appendix 2: Helpful tips for Usher Training

Ushers are ministers of hospitality. They play a vital role in creating a warm, safe, and compassionate environment for worship. Their presence reflects the intentional invitation of Christ to all, and helps each person to feel they are seen, loved and belong.

The purpose of this document is to outline some common responsibilities of ushers in parishes across the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. It incorporates basic principles of hospitality, accessibility, and safety awareness.

This document is meant to guide congregations in creating their own training appropriate for their specific context, while fostering a culture of belonging and care.

Before the Service

Arrive Early

- Please arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the service begins.
- Make sure you have the correct bulletin for the service.
- Familiarize yourself with the day's order of service and any special instructions.

Prepare the Space

- Confirm that offering plates and bread and wine (if applicable) are set in their designated places.
- Ensure that all walkways are clear, pews are clean, and restrooms are accessible.
- Light, temperature, and sound all contribute to a comfortable atmosphere. Ensure these are set appropriately.
- If the service includes designated presenters, confirm that they understand their role and timing.
- About 10-15 minutes before the service, open the main doors and take your place near them to greet worshipers as they arrive.

Appendix 2: Helpful Tips for Usher Training (cont'd)

Practicing “Eyes-Up” Hospitality, Seating & Safety Awareness

Ushers serve both as hosts and guardians of hospitality. Their attentiveness helps every person feel seen, safe, and welcome. “Eyes-up hospitality” means being fully present, aware, compassionate, and attentive to all who enter the worship space.

- Notice when someone enters the worship space.
 - Look up, smile, and greet each person warmly with a friendly “Hello, welcome!” or “We’re glad you’re here!”
- Provide each person with a bulletin and offer a brief orientation on how to participate in the service by using the bulletin, Book of Common Prayer, or other worship materials. (Remember, every parish has their own style of bulletin. Navigating can be difficult for newcomers).
- Share helpful information, such as the location of restrooms, children’s activity bags, nursery, Sunday School, or youth areas.
- Offer to help with seating, especially to newcomers, those with mobility needs, or families with children. If possible, walk with them and help them find a comfortable place.
- If a newcomer chooses a pew typically occupied by a long-time member, try to notify the long-time member as they enter and ask them to show grace in seating. Do not ask the newcomer to move.
- Be attentive to body language. If someone looks lost, anxious, confused, distressed, or uncertain, approach gently and offer assistance.
- Introduce yourself, and, when appropriate, help newcomers connect by saying things like, “Is this your first time visiting this church?” “Have you ever been to an Episcopal church before?” “May I introduce you to our priest (or wardens, children’s minister, etc.)?”
- Direct newcomers to name tags and introduce them to others.
- Remember names, faces, and stories when you see them again.
- Offer genuine joy when people arrive and gratitude when they depart.
- Every interaction is a chance to communicate, “You are seen, you are loved, you belong.”

Appendix 2: Helpful Tips for Usher Training (cont'd)

Safety Awareness

Hospitality includes ensuring all feel secure and cared for.

- Be aware of which doors and windows are open or unlocked throughout the building.
- This should be part of the parish's Emergency Operations Preparedness Plan.
- Keep entrances and exits within view during the service.
- Remain calm, steady, grounded, especially in moments of distraction or concern.
- Be aware of everyone entering the worship space. If something feels concerning, quietly alert clergy or designated safety personnel.

If De-escalation is Needed:

- Safety (physical and emotional) always comes first.
- Ask a member of the Safety Team, second usher, clergy, or warden for assistance if needed.
- Establish your own presence with the person.
- Remain calm, speak slowly and softly, and keep your body language open.
- Avoid physical contact.
- Listen first; acknowledging the person's concern can ease tension.
- Verbalize the person's response to a state of agitation ("I can see you are...").
- Support the person to feel safe.
- Ask, "How can I best support you right now?"
- Support gentle ways for the person to release some energy (stand up or sit down for a moment, get some fresh air, take a walk....)
- If de-escalation is ineffective or there is immediate safety concern, contact local authorities per your parish's safety plan.

Hospitality and safety awareness go hand-in-hand. Welcoming everyone while keeping worshippers safe affirms love of God, neighbor, and self.

Counting Attendance

Accurate attendance counts help the parish to track participation and prepare for communion

- Count everyone present including clergy, choir, acolytes, children, and those in adjacent spaces.
- Record the total number and report it as your parish procedure outlines.
- Consider using a tally counter to help keep count.

Appendix 2: Helpful Tips for Usher Training (cont'd)

Offering

Prepare for the Offering during the Peace.

- Identify presenters and cue them at the Offertory.
- When the Offertory music begins, the presenters take the gifts to the altar, reverence, and return to their seats.
- Ushers then pass the offering plates down each pew, moving in an orderly manner from front to back.
- Bring the plates to the altar during the Offertory hymn, reverence, and return to your post.

Communion

Ushers help ensure that communion flows smoothly.

- Gently direct rows to the altar rail or communion station in sequence, keeping a steady flow.
- Smile and offer quiet guidance to newcomers unfamiliar with the pattern.
- Allow extra time for those with mobility challenges or who prefer to receive communion in their pew.
- If one side of the rail empties, motion others forward to fill it.
- Ushers usually receive communion last.

After Communion

- Return to the doors at the start of the recessional hymn.
- Open the doors for the procession and prepare to greet people as they leave.

After the Service

- Collect and tidy bulletins, hymnals, and pew materials.
- Ensure that any attendance forms or offering plates are delivered to the designated location.
- Return the space to order for the next service or event.
- Invite visitors to Coffee Hour, give instructions about how to get to its location and what to expect once there.

Thank you!

An usher embodies the heart of Episcopal Hospitality; welcoming all as Christ, helping to ensure that worship is safe, and helping the congregation gather in peace.

Appendix 3: Safety & Security Systems

The following practices represent measures that some parishes within the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT) have found helpful in strengthening safety and preparedness.

Before adopting any new safety or security measure, complete a risk assessment and consult with local first responders—such as police, fire, or emergency management officials—to ensure that each option is appropriate, effective, and sustainable for your congregation’s setting and resources.

- [Ring Security Products](https://ring.com) (ring.com)
- [ReoLink](https://reolink.com/us) (reolink.com/us)
- [UniFi](https://ui.com) (ui.com)
- [SCW](https://getscw.com) (getscw.com)