



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

Rings of Security

In a continued effort to strengthen the safety posture at our parishes and schools, the Diocese of Fort Worth, in partnership with Sabbath Shield Security Consultants, LLC, also known as Guardian Response, is ready to implement the next phase of the multi-staged safety and protection plan for developing a safer local Church. The first phase focused on evaluating vulnerabilities at all our diocesan locations.

The next phase is to recruit and train volunteers to serve on protection teams to work in conjunction with local law enforcement agencies to provide safety and protection at each of our parishes during Mass and other large events.

As you may remember, on November 5, 2017, a gunman killed 26 people and injured 20 others at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. Law enforcement officials responded to the church within four minutes of the time the first 911 call was received—an extraordinarily fast response time in a rural community. Despite this quick response time, the gunman had already slaughtered dozens of worshippers and fled the scene before law enforcement could arrive. The vast majority of attacks like this are complete before law enforcement is able to respond. The recent attacks in New Zealand illustrate that attacks can occur anywhere.

With this in mind, Guardian Response has been developing a comprehensive security and emergency operations plan for our diocese to thwart or mitigate crisis situations before help can arrive.

Phase Two focuses on the recruitment and training of volunteers to take decisive and life-saving action during emergencies until first responders arrive. These volunteer teams will collaborate with local law enforcement to ensure well-coordinated actions in the event of emergencies. A limited number of these protection team members will be approved to carry a concealed weapon after being selected through an in-depth, multi-step vetting process and successfully completing enhanced training and screening. This part of the program is based on the concept of the federal sky marshals program employed to protect air travelers. The armed protection team members will blend in with the faithful and be prepared to deescalate any potential violent situations. They will constitute an additional ring of protection to augment the other rings of protection that will be employed, including the greeting ministry, ushers, and medical teams.

The safety and security of our parishioners is of paramount importance. The vast majority of public mass shootings have occurred in “gun free” zones. Consequently, on the advice of its security experts, the Diocese has removed the gun-free zone signs that were posted in order to avoid the appearance that our parishes are soft targets to those intent on committing violence. However, except for the limited number of designated security team ministry members, the diocesan policy prohibiting the possession of firearms on diocesan property will remain in effect.