



National Churchwatch

Protecting Church Communities

# National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

## Counter Terrorism Advice for Churches



The Catholic Church in Saint – Etienne-du-Rouvray

Helping Faith Communities to Worship Safely

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### An escalating problem

*“The attack on Catholic Church in Saint – Etienne-du-Rouvray, near Rouen (on the front cover of these guidelines) in July 2016 was a reminder that churches can be a target for terrorists and all Places of Worship need to give some thought to what they can do to reduce the risk of this occurring in their church. I recognise that it is impossible to achieve absolute security in churches due to the way that they operate but I hope that the following advice will be helpful in reducing the risk to as low as practicable. I want you to be aware, not paranoid.”*

**Nick Tolson**

Director, National Churchwatch

#### Introduction

On July 26<sup>th</sup> 2016 Father Jacques Hamel, an 85 year old Roman Catholic Priest, was saying mass with a couple of nuns and two elderly parishioners in the pretty church of the village of Saint – Etienne-du-Rouvray near Rouen, France when two men walked up to the altar during the service. The two men grabbed the elderly priest and forced him to his knees. They then started to film themselves speaking in Arabic and shouting "Allahu akbar" ("God is Greatest"). Father Jacques began to struggle and one of the men slit his throat, killing him.

The other man then stabbed one of the elderly parishioners who tried to intervene, seriously injuring them.

One of the nuns managed to escape and called the police. The French police responded quickly and surrounded the church within a short period of time. The two men then ran out of the church and were shot and killed by the police. The Islamic State Group made the claim that two of its 'soldiers' had carried out the attack.

#### Could a similar attack happen here?

The official answer is, *"Of course it could, but there is no evidence that any attack is planned against any church in the UK"*.

This does not mean that churches should not be thinking about this difficult issue.

Attacks in churches during services are, in fact, surprisingly common. There have been cases of congregation members attacked with axes and even firearms. In 2009 a man was shot and killed by police brandishing a firearm on the steps of Guildford Cathedral before an Advent Carol Service.

Many clergy and churchworkers can tell stories of drunks or people who are mentally ill disturbing a service.

The good news is that counter terrorism precautions will also reduce the risk of a disturbance and have the added bonus of keeping your congregation safe.



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### Preparation

Every church is different and the risks associated with your church need to be considered individually, however, there are some aspects to security that are common to all churches. There is some excellent advice with regard to physical security available from your local police and your insurance company. This booklet will not go into depth about the physical security available for your church but it will mention some common physical security items that you may like to consider when thinking about Counter Terrorism and/or the personal safety of churchworkers, worshippers and visitors.

### CCTV – Every church should have some.

Put good quality CCTV in your church to cover both inside and outside the entrance. CCTV is an essential tool for the police when trying to trace any offenders after the event. It is much more reliable than a human witness and is simple to use. A couple of cameras and a recording device are not expensive. Every church should think about a budget for CCTV. The cost can be less than £200 for a simple outside camera linked to a Smartphone app, and up to many thousands of pounds for a CCTV system remotely monitored. For most churches the price will fall somewhere in between. If your initial costing (*having consulted with an expert, usually from your Insurance Company*) is too expensive, do not abandon the idea of CCTV, go with a lower specification and look to find money to upgrade as soon as possible. There are many grants available from Statutory and non-statutory organisations.

### Entrances

Only have one entrance where people can enter and leave the building before, during and after the service and when open for visitors. Ensure that the door is able to be slammed shut should someone approach with obvious criminal intent (*ie carrying a knife or other weapon*). Make sure when the door is slammed shut it can be immediately and strongly secured without the need of a key. (*ie a strong bolt or yale type lock*) Other doors should be able to be opened from the inside and be used as escape routes should people need to evacuate the church. Consider an audible alarm being fitted to these doors so that if one is opened unexpectedly it will alert people inside the church.



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### Personal Attack Alarms

Every church should have a system where a churchworker can call for assistance should someone come in and cause a disturbance or worse. Again, these systems do not have to be expensive. There are many lone worker alarms that are available where a call centre is called when the alarm is activated. This means they can send the most appropriate assistance be it the police or someone else. The most likely emergency is a churchworker falling and injuring themselves rather than someone coming in with a gun, but the response is the same, you need help. Looking on the internet under 'Lone Worker Alarms' will show you the sort of alarms that are available. This is especially important in churches where there is not a good phone signal. You will not need to use the personal attack alarm very often but when you do need it, you need it to work! Think about the alarms that older people have in their homes in case they fall, it is the same technology. If you do put in a personal attack alarm then make sure that you instruct your churchworkers when to use it. Sometimes people are reluctant to call for assistance, it is better to call and find that the police or others are not needed, than to leave it too late and get trapped in a difficult situation.

### Security Awareness

Everyone who attends the church regularly, whether to work or worship, should be briefed on security awareness, and what to do if they see something suspicious. It should be part of the general risk assessment of the church which would include fire safety and first aid. It is a good idea to have a meeting once a year with the relevant people to go through the latest advice. If something occurs elsewhere in the country which you feel may affect the risk to your church then hold a special meeting to reassure people. Remember to include people such as flower arrangers, grave diggers, gardeners and other casual labourers who come to the church. Also remember to include groups that may use your church or hall such as youth groups, choirs or other non-religious groups.

You should have a robust system of reporting suspicious activity or items. Nominate someone to be responsible for security. Brief people to call 999 if they feel there is an immediate risk to the church or people using the church, otherwise they should be encouraged to report the incident to the person responsible for security. This can be done by having a book to record incidents (make sure the book is kept secure and confidential) and/or encourage people to text or otherwise communicate their concerns. Never disregard their concerns or make fun of them as people need to be confident that they will be taken seriously if they report anything.



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### Challenging Suspicious People

It is possible that people who wish to commit a terrorist offence will visit their target to assess the building and any security measures within it. It is also true that people who wish to commit a burglary or other crime may do a reconnoitre to see where everything is. Often these people will act in a suspicious manner asking questions about security or behaving in a way that raises the suspicions of members of the church. If this occurs brief people to challenge these people. It does not have to be done in an aggressive way, it can be a genuine approach to see if they need any assistance. Almost every time there will be a completely reasonable explanation as to why someone is acting suspiciously. However, should the person who is challenging the suspicious person still not be happy with their response then they must record the incident, noting the time especially so that the CCTV can be checked by the person responsible for security. If they feel that there is an immediate risk to the church or people in the church then the people must be encouraged to ring 999 immediately. It is better to get the police to respond and find out that the people are innocent, than to miss a criminal or terrorist who is planning an attack. Emphasise to your staff that their personal safety is paramount, and if the person reacts aggressively then they are to back off and get assistance from the police or other appropriate persons.

### Disturbances during Services

Most disturbances that occur during a service are related to drunkenness or mental illness rather than by terrorists. The actions that are taken at the point of entry to the door are vital in ensuring a good outcome.

People who are about to commit an offence will often behave in an unusual manner. In the worst situation terrorists will often not care about concealing their weapons as they know the police will respond, but they also know that they have some time (*10 minutes or even longer*) before the police arrive. The job of the person on the door is to delay any offenders (*including those who are not terrorists*) so that the police can arrive and deal with them.

Always have someone on the door of your church welcoming people into the building during service who can close the front door in an emergency. Make sure that someone is stood by the door before, during and after the service, whilst the congregation is present. Make sure that person knows what to do once they have closed the door. (*for example, alerting the police and the church leaders that there is an immediate risk at the door, leading an evacuation or pressing a personal attack alarm*)



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### **Disturbances during Services (continued)**

Should a disturbance occur during a service from within the congregation then it needs to be clear who should deal with it. Do not ignore it. Do not just carry on whilst a couple of people try and deal with it. Everyone knows there is something going on, stop the service and deal with the incident. In the vast majority of situations the risk is low and you will not need to evacuate, but you will need to get the police to deal with it. Make sure that someone is responsible for calling the police should an incident occurs. Do not rely on other people. It is better the police receive ten calls than not receiving any.

If someone produces a weapon during a service (*and this will usually be a knife or blunt instrument*) then you will need to get people out of the church. Do not let them just sit there and watch what is going on. They are at risk, it only takes seconds for someone to stab a large number of people as we have seen in various attacks around the country. Think about how you would get the congregation out. This is especially important in larger churches where the children may be separated from their parents in a Sunday School. It is normal for parents to rush and get their children to safety. How you evacuate is related to your Fire evacuation plans. The same process would happen if there was a fire in the church.

It may be that you need to print a small note that in the event of an emergency children from the Sunday School (or other club) will be taken to a particular point outside the church where they can be collected by their parents. The Youth Leaders should have been briefed to this effect, but they should also be briefed that if they feel that the collection point is unsafe (for example if someone is discharging a firearm or running around outside with a knife) then the Youth Leaders must take dynamic action to protect the children. Put simply, this means that they will take the children to a safe place (which may be a nearby shop, or area away from the church) and they will then contact the police to tell them where they are. Obviously the safety of the children is paramount, and understandably the parents will be frantic.

When parents arrive to collect their children and especially when the Youth Leaders are trying to get the children to safety, the parents should be asked to stay with the group until the all clear is given by the police. During an incident, especially if there are casualties, the emergency services will be trying to clarify who is safe and who is missing. If you have managed to keep the group together this will be vital.

Accept that there will always be confusion and consternation should you have to evacuate. People will often not follow directions and disobey instructions. You can only do your best. Encourage, cajole and reinforce that you know what to do and a majority of people will be glad that someone knows what they are doing.



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### **General Advice for keeping safe during a Terrorist or other violent incident.**

Most assaults on churchworkers, whether by terrorists or not, have involved knives or physical assaults. Assaults by offenders using guns are exceptionally rare, and although the chance of this happening should not be ignored, it is a lesser risk.

In the UK, since 1996, eight members of the clergy have been murdered. All of them were killed with knives. This means that the offender was able to get close enough to the member of the clergy to stab them with a knife. The key to not being stabbed (or physically assaulted) is distance. If the offender is further away from the victim than their arm length and the length of the knife, then the victim cannot be stabbed.

**Distance** - The first consideration when deciding on the most appropriate response to someone entering a church with a knife or behaving in a threatening manner, is how to maintain a good distance between them and yourself. The simplest thing and the best self-rescue move is to walk away from the offender. The further you are away, the safer you are. If someone has a knife or blunt instrument you do not want to stay in their presence. There are always exceptions to this, perhaps there are other people around or children, then you will need to make a decision. However, just because someone does not appear agitated or aggressive, if they are carrying a weapon, they have to be dealt with by the police. Get someone to ring 999 immediately, do not delay. Ensure this is done.

Evacuate people immediately if you feel people are at risk. Remember, it does not take long for someone to injure a large number of people. Quite a few people will freeze when something unexpected happens, it is vital to get them moving. Give very simple instructions, "Leave the Church, use that entrance" and point them towards the entrance that is clear. Do not be embarrassed about asking people to move, if they refuse, move on and tell someone else to move. Usually once one or two people start leaving then others will follow. Everyone will know what is going on as you are only going to evacuate if there is something very obvious going on. There will probably be shouting and screaming going on.

If there is only one offender then it is important that you act assertively. If people are leaving and he is shouting threats but is far away then keep going, do not stop. If, however, there are two or more offenders then it is more likely to be a planned incident. It is even more important to get people moving in this situation, if it is appropriate.



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### General Advice for keeping safe during a Terrorist or other violent incident. *(Continued)*

**Thinking about the worst** - If someone enters your church (or anywhere else) then you have to respond quickly and appropriately to give you the best chance of survival. It does not matter whether they have a pistol, a rifle or a machine gun. A firearm will kill a large number of people very quickly.

### Government Advice

#### RUN



Run to a place of safety. This is a far better option than to surrender or negotiate. If there's nowhere to go, then...

#### HIDE



It's better to hide than to confront. Remember to turn your phone to silent and turn off vibrate. Barricade yourself in if you can. Then finally and only when it is safe to do so...

#### TELL



Tell the police by calling 999.

### More Detailed Advice

#### Reaction to an incident

Trust your instincts. If you see someone you are not happy with then react to them. It may be that they are carrying some sort of weapon, it may be that they are behaving in a strange way. If you are worried then react. This may mean talking to them to see if they are a risk, it may mean getting away if they are an obvious risk (ie they are carrying a knife) The main thing is to react. Do not ignore them and do not think it will probably be alright. Take action.

#### Time

Time is critical, the quicker you react the less time an attacker has to cause injury to you or to react themselves.



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### More Detailed Advice (*Continued*)

#### Get Help

Your absolute priority is to get yourself to safety and then to call for help. If someone is acting in a way that has made you feel at risk (*whether or not they are armed*) then the people who need to deal with this are the police. However, you must get yourself and others moving towards safety at the same time as you start calling for help. Usually this means dialling 999 and asking for the police. Remember that if you are unable to speak you can ring 999 and open a line. The operator will be able to hear what is going on and they are also usually able to track your phone. It is better, however, to give them the address of where you are and a quick description of what is happening. That will get the police on their way so that if you are unable to further communicate you know that help is on its way.

#### Distance

The best place for people to go when a very serious incident occurs, especially when it involves firearms or a knife, is as far away from the offender as possible. This means getting people away from the immediate vicinity of the offender immediately. Do not wait for other people who are nearer, get out and run to a safe place, as far away from the offender as possible. If you can, help other people who may need assistance. Remember that the offender may be walking or driving around attacking people. Get off the street, get into another building, call the police, wait for the police to arrive. If you are sure that the offender is coming nearer to you then run again, and repeat until you are sure you are safe.

#### Motion

Do not sit still during an incident. If you need to escape start moving as soon as possible. It is far harder to hit a moving target than one that is stationary. As we have seen in recent incidents, people have tried to hide under tables and other objects and have hoped that the gunmen do not see them. The brutal truth is that by not moving you are giving the attacker more time to find you. It has been shown that an attacker will usually pick the easiest target and that is one that is not moving rather than someone getting away.

#### Do not run in a straight line

It is an old line from the movies but it is absolutely true. It is much harder to hit someone changing direction frequently and using concealment and/or cover at different times.



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### More Detailed Advice (*Continued*)

#### Concealment and Cover

Concealment is where you are able to hide from an attacker but it does not offer any protection from gunfire or explosions.

Cover is where the attacker cannot see you but you have the added benefit of a physical barrier between you and the attacker.

Examples of Good Cover are ;

Substantial Brickwork or Concrete;

Engine blocks of vehicles;

Base of large live trees;

Natural ground undulations.

Bad cover examples are;

Internal partition walls;

Car Doors;

Wooden Fences;

Glazing.

Remember, bullets and explosions can travel a long distance and can penetrate doors, walls and vehicles. Car doors do not offer protection to the type of firearms that terrorists have been using. The thicker and better build the cover, the safer you will be. However, always think about the proviso that distance from the attacker is the best defence. Treat cover as temporary, move if you can, get to safety.



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### Getting Advice

There are many places to get great security advice. It is important that you get specialist advice that is relevant to churches. A good start would be to get a security survey of your church by your Church Insurer is a good place to start, most of them offer a free security survey and it is worth taking them up on this offer. They are particularly useful when seeking advice on the physical aspect of security, the locks, bolts, burglar alarms etc.

The police also provide free security surveys and are very good at advising on the particular risks in your area. They can also offer the very latest counter terrorism advice which is being updated all the time in response to particular threats.

All of this advice is free and should therefore be used by all churches to ensure they are as safe as possible.

It is also good to get together with other Places of Worship of different denominations and different Faiths and talk through some of the local security issues that are common to all. These meetings should include the local police and council who will bring particular skills to any meeting. Communication is a key part of tackling crime and terrorism, the more groups you communicate with then the more your understanding of the issue grows. It is also a great idea to see how other Places of Worship are dealing with these issues. They may already have some good practice in place and you may be able to adapt it for your building.

### References for this Publication

Counter Terrorism Protective Advice for Places of Worship (2009), National Counter Terrorism Office, London

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/stay-safe-film>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recognising-the-terrorist-threat/recognising-the-terrorist-threat>





## About the Author



Nick Tolson is the UK's leading expert in Personal Safety for Churchworkers and Church security. He is the Director of National Churchwatch and is the Christian Representative on the Places of Worship Security Panel of the Counter Extremism Directorate at the Home Office.

Nick is the author of *"The Complete Security Book for Churches"*, (*"The Pocket Book of Personal Safety for Clergy"*) and *"ClergySafe"*. He has written many national newspaper articles, on TV & radio and is a regular contributor to Security Professional Magazine.

In 2007 Nick published *"The Clergy Lifestyle Theory"*, an academic work looking at the reasons for violence against clergy and some essential recommendations for dealing with it. It is now being used as a good example of the practical application of criminological theory by Universities around the UK.

Nick is a Fellow of the Winston Churchill Trust and spent time in the United States of America studying how they deal with crime in Places of Worship.

As a former police officer Nick has assisted Dioceses and other church organisations in investigating issues such as hate letters, e mail abuse and other sensitive crimes that often involve church members. He gives advice on conflict management and methods of dealing with internal issues that are potentially criminal.

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