

Protest / Demonstration / Disruption

Purpose (what this protects)

Churches are increasingly facing disruption that is **not “active shooter”** and not “random.” It is often **intentional, public-facing, and designed to provoke reaction**—especially near service start times, entrances, or livestream visibility.

This handout exists to help churches:

- preserve **worship continuity**
- protect **children’s areas and vulnerable people**
- prevent **escalation + reputational harm**
- respond in a way that is **calm, documented, and legally defensible**
- avoid turning volunteers into “enforcers”

The goal is **measured, incremental engagement**: control space, reduce chaos, and escalate only as needed.

1) How to Think About It (the operating frame)

Most protest/disruption situations are won or lost in the first **90 seconds**.

Your win condition is not “winning the argument.”

Your win condition is:

- **calm continuity**
- **controlled access**
- **clean documentation**
- **early handoff**
- **right level of response**

The best response looks boring.

2) The 3-Tier Response Ladder (measured engagement)

This keeps the team from jumping straight to force, confrontation, or chaos.

Level 1 — Observe + Stabilize (default)

Trigger: protestors present outside / disruptive presence begins / agitation rising

Aim: preserve calm, reduce uncertainty, protect entrances

Actions:

- Move key volunteers into assigned posts (no clustering)
- Begin quiet documentation (timestamp, location, behavior)
- Maintain normal hospitality posture to congregants
- Communicate internally using plain language updates
- Verify children's wing is secured and staffed

Do not: argue, film aggressively, posture as law enforcement, escalate tone

Level 2 — Engage + Redirect (measured verbal contact)

Trigger: disruption approaching entrances, blocking access, shouting at guests, filming, attempting entry

Aim: create distance + reduce disruption without creating a scene

Actions:

- A single designated communicator makes contact (not a crowd)
- Use short scripts, not debates
- Redirect to a boundary line (sidewalk edge / parking lot boundary)
- Request compliance once, calmly, with a clear next step
- Maintain coverage on doors and interior pathways

Do not: grab signs, touch people, "win" the moment, get pulled off position

Level 3 — Escalate + Transfer (trespass / safety threshold)

Trigger: forced entry, assault, threats, blocking entry/exits, sustained refusal to leave private property after directive

Aim: immediate safety + legal clarity + clean handoff

Actions:

- Notify leadership and law enforcement
- Execute a controlled access plan (lock doors, interior reroute)
- Shift volunteers from engagement to containment + observation
- Preserve worship continuity as priority
- Continue documentation for official reporting

Do not: improvise force, detain people, chase, or “handle it” internally

3) Roles for a Disruption Event (simple, repeatable)

These roles keep the team from becoming a reactive mob.

A) Door / Threshold Lead

- Stays at the main entry
- Controls access decisions
- Communicates with Interior Lead

B) Interior Continuity Lead

- Protects sanctuary flow + service continuity
- Coordinates a calm response inside
- Flags any vulnerable persons (children, elderly, special needs)

C) Children’s Wing Lead (non-negotiable)

- Ensures doors are controlled
- Confirms check-in integrity
- Keeps parents from self-deploying into panic

D) Documentation Lead

- Captures objective details for follow-up:
 - time, location, behaviors, exact words used
 - who directed what
 - escalation timeline

- If law enforcement becomes involved, provides clean summary

E) Pastor / Staff Liaison

- Protects pastoral clarity and decision authority
- Ensures care response occurs when possible
- Maintains tone: calm, measured, spiritually grounded

Small church note: 1–2 people may cover multiple roles. If so, prioritize:

Children’s Wing Lead → Door Lead → Interior Continuity → Documentation

4) Volunteer Scripts (short, calm, legally clean)

Script 1 — Boundary + Redirection (outside)

“Hey — you’re welcome to be here peacefully, but you can’t block entrances or disrupt people coming in. If you stay on the public sidewalk and keep the entrance clear, we’re good.”

Script 2 — Private Property + Trespass clarity (measured)

“This is private property. You’re welcome to remain off the entrances, but you cannot remain here if you’re interfering with access. If you don’t move back now, we will involve law enforcement.”

Script 3 — Attempted entry (threshold)

“You can’t enter right now. You need to step back. If you don’t, law enforcement will be called.”

Script 4 — Filming / provocation

“You’re free to record. We’re going to keep the entrance clear and continue our service.”

Script 5 — Disruption inside (immediate stabilize)

“Come with me for a moment — we’re going to step over here so the service can continue.”

Script 6 — Pastoral care handoff (if appropriate)

“We want to care for you. Let’s move to a quieter place and we’ll get someone to help.”

Key rule: No debates. No theology sparring in the moment. No arguing facts.
Just boundaries + redirection + escalation pathway.

5) Children's Ministry Hard Lines (do not bend)

If any disruption is occurring outside, the children's wing becomes **locked posture**:

- Children's check-in remains strict
 - No ad hoc parent access without verification
 - No unescorted hallway movement
 - Children's volunteers do not leave post to "help"
 - If parents are panicking, the team gives a clear instruction:
"We're securing the children's area right now. We will reunify in an orderly way if needed."
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6) Trespass Threshold (practical clarity)

A disruption becomes a *trespass/safety event* when someone:

- enters areas they are told not to enter
- refuses to leave private property after being directed
- blocks entrances/exits
- threatens or intimidates individuals
- attempts forced entry
- interferes with service operations
- targets children's ministry pathways

At that point:

The church stops managing it internally and transfers it.

7) Communication Protocol (so you don't create panic)

Internal updates should be short and specific:

- “Two individuals outside main entrance filming.”
- “Entrance remains open. Children’s wing secure.”
- “Door lead engaging. No escalation yet.”
- “Service continues. Monitoring.”

External statements (if needed later)

Use a simple, consistent line:

“We’re committed to worship without disruption. Our team followed clear safety procedures and coordinated with appropriate authorities.”

8) What NOT to do (this is where churches lose)

- Do not “form up” or crowd the entrance
 - Do not mirror aggression or take bait
 - Do not try to physically remove protestors
 - Do not publicly argue or “win the moment”
 - Do not send untrained volunteers to confront
 - Do not ignore it and hope it disappears
 - Do not allow children’s areas to become exposed
 - Do not let the service become the battleground
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9) Weekly Layer (Monday–Saturday)

Preventing the next Sunday from being improvisation.

Minimum improvements:

- Establish 1–2 law enforcement points of contact

- Create a one-page “disruption response” handout for ushers
 - Add a rehearsal scenario quarterly:
 “Protestors at entrance 4 minutes before service start.”
 - Define who can issue a trespass directive
 - Define who calls 911 and what they say
 - Ensure livestream team knows how to protect the broadcast
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10) The Readiness Huddle tie-in

The Sunday readiness huddle every week is a **readiness check**, not fear-based, just clarity:

- “Any known concerns today?”
- “Children’s wing coverage confirmed?”
- “Door roles assigned?”
- “If disruption happens: observe → redirect → transfer.”

This turns chaos into posture.

11) 911 Call-to-Dispatch Phrasing (Church Disruption / Trespass)

1) Disruption at entrance (not yet violent)

“Hi, my name is ___ and I’m calling from [Church Name] at [address]. We have individuals outside our main entrance who are disrupting people entering for service. They are yelling and interfering with access. We need an officer to respond to prevent escalation.”

If asked what you want:

“We need assistance keeping our entrances clear so people can enter safely.”

2) Blocking entrance / refusing to clear entryway

“We have individuals blocking our entrance and preventing people from entering. This is creating a safety concern. We need law enforcement to respond.”

3) Private property / refusal to leave (trespass threshold)

“These individuals are on private property and have been directed to leave. They are refusing to leave. We are requesting an officer for a trespass situation.”

If dispatch asks:

“Yes — we have clearly told them they must leave private property, and they have refused.”

4) Attempting to enter the building / forced entry

“We have someone attempting to force entry into our building. We need officers immediately.”

Add if needed:

“They are pulling on doors / trying to push past ushers.”

5) Disruption inside the building (disturbance)

“We have an individual inside our building causing a disturbance during a church service. We need an officer to respond and assist with removal if necessary.”

6) Threats made (verbal threats / intimidation)

“A person is making threats toward staff or attendees. We need an officer to respond immediately.”

If asked what threats:

“They stated: ‘ ___ ’.” *(quote exact words only)*

7) Assault / physical contact

“We have an assault in progress at our church. We need immediate response and medical assistance.”

8) Child area concern (restricted access attempt)

“We have a person attempting to access our children’s area without authorization. We need an officer to respond immediately.”

(This gets attention fast without oversharing.)

What to say if dispatch asks “Are there weapons?”

Only answer what you **know**, not what you fear. Do not speculate.

Best phrasing:

“Unknown at this time.”

or

“No weapons seen.”

What to say if dispatch tries to downgrade it

If they say it sounds “non-emergency”:

“Understood — we are requesting law enforcement because access is being obstructed and we need it documented. This is escalating and we need an officer present.”

What to say if they ask “Do you want them arrested?”

Don’t get locked into that.

“We want them removed from private property and we want this handled safely and professionally.”

The 10-second “perfect call” template (memorize this)

“This is ___ at [Church Name], [address]. We have a disturbance/trespass situation at our entrance during service. They are [blocking entry / refusing to leave / attempting entry]. We need an officer to respond.”

Documentation Lead: what to write down during/after the call

- time you called 911
- dispatcher name or call ID (if provided)
- exact behavior observed
- exact phrases you used (“directed to leave private property”)
- time officer arrived / badge name if offered
- outcome (left voluntarily / removed / report made)

Non-Emergency Call Scripts (Law Enforcement Liaison / Planned Presence)

1) Pre-event awareness call (Saturday or early Sunday)

- Use this when you've heard there *may* be a demonstration.
 - **“Hi, my name is ___ and I’m calling from [Church Name] at [address]. We’re holding services tomorrow at [time]. We’ve received information that there may be a demonstration or disruption near our entrances. Nothing is happening right now, but we wanted to give a heads up and ask if increased patrol presence is possible around our start and dismissal windows.”**
 - **If asked why you’re calling:**
“We’re trying to keep access clear and prevent escalation. We want to handle this responsibly and early.”
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2) Request for extra patrol during service window

- **“We’re requesting a patrol drive-by between [time range], particularly near our main entrances and parking areas, just to help keep the environment calm and safe for families arriving.”**
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3) If demonstrators are outside but peaceful (no trespass yet)

- This is the perfect “early documentation” call.
 - **“Hi, we have a peaceful demonstration occurring on the public sidewalk near our property at [address]. No violence and no direct threats at this time, but we want this documented and we want to ensure it stays on public property and does not block access. Can an officer be available or drive by to discourage escalation?”**
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4) If disruption begins but not yet 911-level

- This is a “we need presence now” call.
 - **“We have individuals outside our entrance who are becoming disruptive and interfering with people entering for service. It has not become violent, but the situation is escalating. We need an officer to respond to keep access clear and prevent further escalation.”**
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5) Clarify trespass authority (policy support call)

- Use this midweek to clarify procedures.
- **“Quick question for clarity: If we have someone on private property refusing to leave after being directed, what is the correct process for requesting assistance for trespass? We want to make sure we handle this correctly.”**
- (This builds relationship and reduces uncertainty.)

6) If you want a law enforcement liaison relationship

“We’re a church trying to strengthen readiness and child protection responsibly. We’d like to identify the best liaison contact for future questions around facility safety, trespass concerns, and service-day disruptions.”

What NOT to say on non-emergency calls

- Avoid language that creates panic or sounds tactical:
 - “We’re expecting violence.”
 - “We might have an active shooter.”
 - “We need security coverage.”
 - “We’re worried about extremists.”
 - Instead use:
 - “Potential disruption”
 - “Demonstration near entrances”
 - “Access concerns for families”
 - “Requesting patrol presence”
 - “Prevent escalation”
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The “If you show up, here’s where to go” clarity line

- **“If an officer is able to come by, our point of contact on-site will be ____, and we’ll meet you at the main entrance / front lot.”**
 - This prevents officers from walking into confusion.
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The on-site “handoff sentence” for volunteers

- If an officer arrives and a volunteer is uncertain what to say:
- **“Officer, thank you for coming. This is private property and we’ve asked them to leave. They’re refusing and interfering with service access. Our staff lead is right here if you need details.”**