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Police with a K9 unit sweep the neighborhood following a shooting Aug. 27, 2025. A shooter opened fire with a rifle through the windows of the school's church and struck children celebrating Mass during the first week of school, killing two and wounding 18 people in an act of violence the police chief called "absolutely incomprehensible." (OSV News/Reuters/Ben Brewer)

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Miami — August 28, 2025

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A security expert told OSV News that parishes and churches can take several key steps to reduce the threat of attacks such as the deadly Aug. 27 shooting during a school Mass at Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis.

Activities such as Mass and other faith-based gatherings mark a time of "unique vulnerability," said Craig Gundry, vice president of special projects for Critical Intervention Services, a Florida-based security consulting firm that has been providing complex risk solutions for corporations, international government organizations, schools, hospitals and other entities.

Gundry — who specializes in protection from terrorism and mass violence, and who has trained over 5,000 security professionals globally — told OSV News that a key preventative measure is having "armed security or a contract police officer active outside of the building, ready to respond in the event that some kind of shooting should commence."

He admitted that "money is quite often the obstacle," but said that "having an on-site armed response capability is huge."

In the case of the Minneapolis shooting, an officer or security guard on patrol outside the church might have made it possible that the tragedy "could have been interdicted when the attacker was observed approaching the building, or at least very quickly thereafter."

He also stressed that "we want to make sure we have effective controls on access into the building" while services or events are taking place.

Gundry noted that "congregation halls" and similar religious or community structures "pose some very unique concerns, because quite frequently it is impractical for people to escape quickly, and quite frequently there are inadequate other internal safe refuge areas."

A survivor of the Annunciation shooting told Fox 9 in Minneapolis that the attack was "super scary," since he and his schoolmates had "never practiced" active shooter drills in the church.

"We've only practiced it in the main school," fifth-grader Weston Halsne, who had a friend injured in the shooting, told the news outlet. "So we really didn't know what to do. We just got into the pews, and he (the attacker) shot through the stained-glass windows."

"When we have a school building, we have classrooms that hopefully have been upgraded to a degree of intrusion resistance, so that once they're locked and secured, a gunman cannot effectively get into those rooms without significant effort," Gundry said.

Gundry — who has not yet fully analyzed the Minneapolis shooting, details of which are still emerging — said that with media reports stating the shooter fired from the exterior, through church windows, "one of my first recommendations would be upgrading all of those exterior windows with the use of properly attached anti-shatter film."

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That film should also be "opaque in order to disguise the appearance of anybody inside of the building."

Even in newer buildings with "fixed pane" windows, such transparency is important, he said.

Parishes can "leverage the presence of ushers" and parking lot attendants, while making sure they have effective communications," to enhance security, said Gundry.

Ideally, parishes and schools should aim to install electromagnetic locks on doors that allow a "one-button press by a security team member to lock the entire building down," he said.

Gundry said that many security elements — such as installing window film and locking doors — can be implemented without making kids in particular uncomfortable or afraid.

In their assignments, said Gundry, school resource officers should "have the tactical prowess and the capabilities of a grizzly bear, but at the same time the personality and interpersonal communication skills of a teddy bear."

He also urged schools and parishes to move from a "reactionary" to an "expert" approach to their security — since, he said, "unfortunately, we do live in a time that necessitates" that.

In a statement issued shortly after the Minnesota shooting, Pittsburgh Bishop Mark Eckman — who lamented the "horrific violence that shattered what should have been a holy moment of grace" at the church — said his staff was already taking a pro-active strategy.

"Here at home, our Diocesan Director of Safety and Security, Wendell Hissrich, continues to actively monitor developments and to remain in close contact with law enforcement," said Eckman. "Our schools remain vigilant, and followed established safety protocols today, as they do every day. We are grateful for the professionalism of our administrators, teachers, and staff who work each day to keep our children safe."

Speaking to the media Aug. 27, Hissrich said that having heard about the shooting, he immediately contacted law enforcement counterparts to confirm the tragedy, especially amid recent hoaxes such as an unfounded Aug. 21 active shooter alert at Villanova University just outside Philadelphia.

Following that, Hissrich said he reached out to some 24 school officers in the diocese and asked for their "extra vigilance throughout the school system," with local law enforcement offering to add extra patrols around the schools as the Minneapolis shooting details were clarified.

Hissrich said his office had been providing training to administrators, teachers and "in some cases students," admitting that while some efforts were "at the infancy," he was pushing to "increase the infrastructure with cameras and monitoring systems in the schools."

High schools have conducted active shooter drills "especially after ... swatting incidents," referencing a term used to describe false emergency calls.

In his statement, Eckman said prayer "in moments like this" must also "move us to action, to comfort the grieving, to bring healing to the wounded, and to be voices for

peace and the sanctity of every life."

This story appears in the **Minneapolis church shooting** feature series. [View the full series.](#)