

IMMIGRATION SAFETY PLANNING FOR CONGREGATIONS

In light of the rescindment of Sensitive Areas Memo published on January 20, 2025, **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) can now enter churches to make immigration arrests.** Your congregation can take steps to increase your security and have a plan in place should law enforcement come to your place of worship. Use this guide to help your congregation create a safety plan.

1. Delineate which areas of the building and surroundings are public and which are non-public. ICE cannot enter a non-public space in your building without a signed judicial warrant.

- What is a private space?
 - A private space in which one can have a reasonable expectation of privacy. For example, individual offices in the church have a reasonable expectation of privacy, while the lobby area may not have that expectation.
- If you are in doubt on whether a space is public or private, consider:
 - What kind of events are held in this space?
 - Are these events usually open to the public?
 - If a large public group, such as a group of tourists or a school tour, were to enter the space unwarranted, would this be disruptive?
 - Is it reasonable to post signage ("private area," "no public access," "no entry without authorization") at this area?

2. Designate an authorized person to engage with law enforcement if law enforcement is present.

- Is this person fully trained on standard church procedures?
- Can this person regularly collaborate with church leadership and communicate effectively with community members and visitors?
- Is this person calm under pressure, assertive, and articulate?
- Does this person know the difference between a judicial search warrant, a judicial arrest warrant, and a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) warrant?
- Does this person have or can they obtain an excellent knowledge of what civil rights are entitled to the public when law enforcement is present?
 - For example: Right to remain silent when questioned by law enforcement, right to refuse to sign unknown documents before consulting a legal representative, right to refuse unreasonable search and seizure, etc.

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- You may consider authorizing multiple individuals to engage with law enforcement.
 - One authorized individual may be present on site MWF, while the other may be present on site TTH and weekends
- Have a clear schedule of which authorized person is ‘on call’ on any particular day or time. Also have the person’s cell phone number so they can be contacted if ICE/law enforcement shows up while no authorized person is physically present at the church.
- Ideally the authorized person should be a United States citizen.

3. Plan events accordingly.

- Is the event public or private?
 - For example: Is an NA or AA group open to friends and family of participants? Or is the session meant to provide a confidential space for participants to share freely?
- Can a community event be held in a private area instead of a public area?
 - If yes, how will you direct community members to that area?
 - Will you have volunteer staff who can oversee access to the private area and guide community members to the proper space?
 - Will you use signage to direct community members to the proper space?
 - How will you advertise the event? Will you post flyers around town, or will you send emails/digital correspondence to community members? Will you post on social media?

4. Develop written response policy & preparedness plans.

- What is your visitor access policy?
 - Are areas of the church accessible to the public during some hours and not others?
 - When hosting a public event, can the public only access the part of your facility that is hosting the event, or can the public access other areas of your facility as well?
- How will you train staff to engage with law enforcement?
 - Will you require volunteers to attend mandatory training before an event?