



Protocol in the Event of Disruption of Liturgy

This protocol is for parishes targeted with picketing, protest, or attempt to disrupt a liturgy.

A. In the event of a threatened protest:

1. If you have advance warning of a protest, do not hesitate to request police presence to help maintain security.
2. The parish grounds and church are private property. Protestors have a right to free speech and expression, but they do not have the right to block access, distribute flyers, or communicate with your parishioners on your property without prior permission.
3. Prepare ushers and staff for possible protests and disruptions. Consider including the Knights of Columbus in preparations. Discuss procedures in advance.
4. To ensure the safety of vulnerable parishioners and avoid unnecessary confrontations, identify alternative access to your church, away from protestors.

B. If protestors appear at your parish unexpectedly:

1. Call police immediately. Under the Criminal Code of Canada S. 176(2) it is an offence to disturb religious worship.
2. Never engage or debate with protestors. Instruct staff, volunteers and parishioners not to respond to protestors.

C. If protestors disrupt a liturgy:

1. Never engage or debate with protestors. Instruct staff, volunteers and parishioners not to respond to protestors.
2. An usher or staff – not the priest – should courteously ask protestors to sit down. If the interruption continues, call police.
3. Never use physical force. Request police assistance to remove protestors from the church if necessary.
4. Do not continue the liturgy until the disturbance has ended and protestors have departed. Ask parishioners to wait quietly while the protestors are removed. Suggest that they offer a silent prayer for peace, respect for human dignity or religious freedom.