



WEAPONS AT WORSHIP

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1

CREATE A CLEAR FIREARMS POLICY

“Not having a firearms policy is not an option. Ambiguity can lead to confusion, liability, and deadly outcomes.”

2

ARMED CONGREGANTS MUST BE TRAINED

“Do not assume state-permitted individuals are sufficiently trained. Organizations should require training that goes beyond legal minimums.”

3

CONCEALED CARRY SHOULD BE STANDARD

“Open carry can disturb the sanctity of a worship space. Concealed carry — with clear restrictions — is best practice.”

4

ARMED SECURITY IS NOT A SECURITY PLAN

“Armed individuals should be the final layer of a broader strategy. Alone, they do not make a facility secure.”



WEAPONS AT WORSHIP

COMMON QUESTIONS

Q

**CAN OUR ORGANIZATION
BAN FIREARMS EVEN IN A
CONCEALED-CARRY STATE?**

A

“Yes. In most cases, your policy can be more restrictive than state law — if properly documented and communicated.”

Q

**WHO SHOULD BE ALLOWED
TO CARRY WEAPONS IN
OUR CONGREGATION?**

A

“Policies should distinguish between personal defense and assigned security roles. Only individuals who meet clearly defined criteria should be permitted.”

Q

WHAT IF WE DON'T KNOW WHO'S CARRYING?

A

“You are liable. Without a policy, you are permitting it by default — a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ approach invites confusion and risk.”

Q

**SHOULD WE REQUIRE
ARMED CONGREGANTS TO
IDENTIFY THEMSELVES
DURING A CRISIS?**

A

“Yes. Law enforcement may request visual markers like sashes or hats so responders can quickly identify who is a threat — and who isn’t.”



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NOTABLE QUOTES AND STATISTICS

”

LEGAL RISK

“If you know people are carrying weapons and you intentionally don’t make a policy, your policy is that people can do whatever they want.”

Thomas Baugher, Community Security Director,
Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee



SECURITY PHILOSOPHY

“Security isn’t just about responding to threats; it’s also about preempting them.”

Kerry Sleeper, Deputy Director, SCN

POST-OCTOBER 7 DATA

“From October 7 to year-end 2023, SCN received more incident reports than in the entire previous year.”



WEAPONS AT WORSHIP

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR LEADERS

1

DEFINE ROLES WITH PRECISION

“Congregants armed for personal defense should be clearly instructed that they are not tasked with protecting others.”

2

VETTING IS AS IMPORTANT AS TRAINING

“Even well-known members of your community must undergo background checks and psychological assessments.”

3

BUILD AROUND LAYERED SECURITY

“Use threat assessments, greeters trained to identify suspicious behavior, and immediate law enforcement notification protocols as your first line of defense.”

4

INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN MATTERS

“Security plans should be created collaboratively — involving board members, clergy, and community representatives to ensure shared responsibility.”

5

DON'T SKIP RECERTIFICATION

“Set expectations for semi-annual or annual retraining to maintain readiness and reduce legal exposure.”



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CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP STEPS

1

MAKE A DECISION — DON'T DELAY

“Failing to set a policy invites danger. A thoughtful decision, even to ban firearms, is better than no decision at all.”

2

COMMUNICATE THE POLICY

“Transparency builds trust. Once a policy is set, communicate it clearly to members, law enforcement, and visitors.”

3

EVALUATE AND REASSESS

“Threats evolve. So must your policy. Use after-action reports, training reviews, and external audits to continuously improve.”

4

INVEST IN TRAINING

“Training is perishable. A well-documented program is not just good practice — it’s legal protection.”

5

CONSIDER THE FULL SPECTRUM OF FORCE

“Firearms aren’t the only option. Less-lethal tools — sprays, batons, tasers — should also be evaluated and governed by policy.”



WEAPONS AT WORSHIP

SHOULD OUR SYNAGOGUE
ALLOW FIREARMS?

Q

DO WE REALLY NEED A FIREARMS POLICY?

A

Yes. Not having a policy is, in effect, a policy — one that leaves your organization exposed to confusion, liability, and risk. Every institution must make an intentional decision and document it clearly.

Q

**CAN WE BAN FIREARMS
EVEN IF STATE LAW
ALLOWS CONCEALED
CARRY?**

A

In most states, yes. Private institutions can typically impose stricter rules than state law allows, but this must be done with appropriate legal language, signage, and counsel.

Q

**IS IT SAFER TO ALLOW
TRAINED CONGREGANTS
TO CARRY WEAPONS?**

A

Not necessarily. Without formal oversight, even trained individuals can present risks. SCN emphasizes that ad hoc or informal approaches may do more harm than good.

Q

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING SHOULD BE REQUIRED?

A

At a minimum: firearms safety, judgment-based use-of-force training, de-escalation, and basic first aid. Ongoing recertification and documented training are essential.

Q

**HOW SHOULD WE
COMMUNICATE OUR
POLICY TO THE
COMMUNITY?**

A

With transparency and engagement. Use forums, listening sessions, or surveys to educate and gather input. Policy decisions should reflect both security needs and community values.

WHAT'S YOUR POLICY?

READ THE FULL WHITE PAPER

This is not a simple yes-or-no question. SCN's white paper helps leaders weigh the legal, moral, and operational realities of armed congregants in Jewish spaces.

[https://www.securecommunitynetwork.org/
resources/weapons-at-worship/](https://www.securecommunitynetwork.org/resources/weapons-at-worship/)

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