

# Saint Hilary School empowers its staff and enhances safety

**Adopts rugged phones and Verizon Push to Talk Plus (PTT+) for emergency communication**



It was every school administrator's nightmare. Several years ago, a suspicious intruder, possibly armed, appeared on the quiet campus of Saint Hilary School—a Catholic K-8 school in Tiburon, California. Teachers and students followed safety protocols and local police arrived quickly. Ultimately, the crisis was resolved without incident—but it was an eye-opening lockdown experience. “We’re located in an “it-could-never-happen-here” kind of neighborhood, but we realized that we were vulnerable,” recalls Dr. Marie Bordeleau, the school’s principal. “And we recognized that there was a real gap in our emergency communications on campus.”

To fill this gap, Dr. Bordeleau began strengthening the school's defenses with new fencing, strategically placed video cameras and a more secure entrance to the school—all while preserving the open, welcoming feel of the K-8 campus, which is nestled in a residential area above the San Francisco Bay. “Emergency preparedness and student safety is a big part of leading a school today,” said Dr. Marie Bordeleau. “Unfortunately, it’s not part of the initial training that you get as a school administrator.”

Ultimately, the presentation by the Archdiocese of San Francisco's emergency preparedness and safety coordinator provided the answer—a right-sized solution that seemed effective and appropriate. Acting quickly, Dr. Bordeleau

contacted Verizon and Saint Hilary School became the first school in the Archdiocese—and one of the first private schools in the U.S.—to adopt a state-of-the-art Verizon Push to Talk Plus (PTT+) solution.

Now each of Saint Hilary School's 35 staff members carries an unobtrusive Kyocera flip phone (one of the many PTT+ device options offered by Verizon) with them at all times during school hours—ready when needed and always connected. Verizon Nationwide provides reliable connectivity throughout the campus and beyond, while Verizon PTT+ enables every staff member to speak with individual colleagues, groups within the school, the local police, or other critical contacts—all with the push of a button.

Saint Hilary School reserves use of the new solution exclusively for emergencies, not day-to-day calls, to avoid communication clutter and to ensure that when these phones ring, it's time to listen—and put emergency response plans into action.

“

**Emergency preparedness and student safety is a big part of leading a school today. Unfortunately, it's not part of the initial training that you get as a school administrator.”**

**Dr. Marie Bordeleau**  
Principal, Saint Hilary School



## The challenges

### Modernizing communication for a small campus

For years, communication on the Saint Hilary School campus meant an old-fashioned PA system, controlled by the school office. “If a teacher in a distant classroom noticed something suspicious, they would have to call into the office, then the office could respond and make an announcement to the whole school,” Dr. Bordeleau recalls. “So, there was always a delay.”

Teachers and staff members often resorted to using their personal cell phones to communicate across campus or during field trips. This interim solution helped, but posed privacy and security issues, as well as putting the burden of communication on school personnel. A possible solution, traditional walkie-talkies, didn't seem appropriate to Dr. Bordeleau, since they were bulky, obtrusive—and potentially seemed like overkill. The idea of teachers toting walkie-talkies throughout Saint Hilary's picture-perfect campus just didn't seem like the right path forward.

“We clearly knew it wasn't the best system,” says Dr. Bordeleau. “But we hadn't found the right alternative yet.”



**We had a lot of questions about how the devices worked but our Verizon rep was wonderful and took the time to explain everything to us.”**

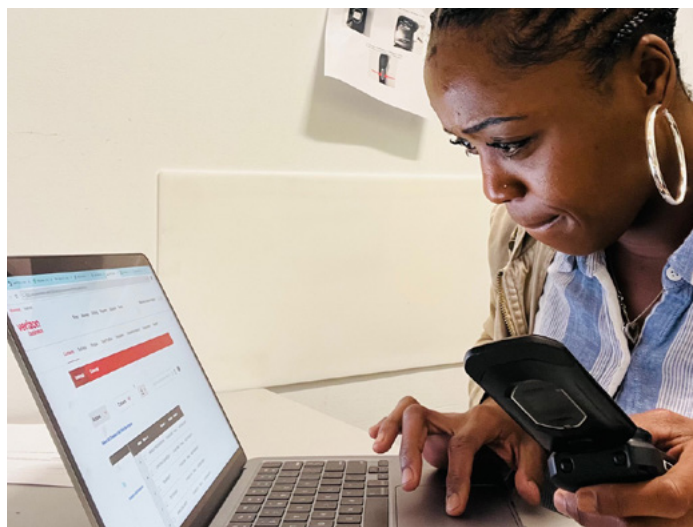
**Dr. Marie Bordeleau**  
Principal, Saint Hilary School

## The solution

### Bringing push-to-talk convenience to emergency communications

When the school's local Verizon team demonstrated the Kyocera DuraXV Extreme+, an ultra rugged flip phone, Dr. Bordeleau and her team liked what they saw. The Kyocera device is compact, virtually indestructible, extremely reliable and easy to use. “We had a lot of questions about how the devices worked,” says Dr. Bordeleau, “but our Verizon rep was wonderful and took the time to explain everything to us.”

The Verizon team provided an advanced, complete emergency communication solution that would be easy for the school to deploy and for staff members to use. It includes all of the



elements necessary to ensure reliable communication during emergencies:

- **Verizon Nationwide:** Verizon's reliable wireless solution provides high-performance connectivity throughout the Saint Hilary School campus and far beyond.<sup>1</sup>
- **Verizon Push to Talk Plus (PTT+):** Verizon's popular mobile application enables instant, reliable voice communication with a single contact or a group—all with the push of a button. A simple portal makes device management just as easy.
- **Kyocera DuraXV Extreme+ flip phones:** These devices weigh less than seven ounces and are dustproof, waterproof and shockproof and are designed to simplify PTT+ with loud speakers, a large dedicated PTT button, and a powerful battery. All staff members have a dedicated device that they keep with them at all times during school hours.

The Verizon team collaborated closely with Saint Hilary School to implement the new solution. They worked with the school's IT coordinator, Desiree Vaughn, to label each phone with the user's name and pre-program the school's contacts—including key individuals and groups. These contacts include local fire and police, as well as the Archdiocese emergency preparedness and safety coordinator—who also has a phone assigned to him. The set-up process took about an hour.

When Dr. Bordeleau and her team presented the devices to the school during a staff meeting, the reaction was overwhelmingly positive. “At the beginning, everyone was just pushing buttons and playing with their flip phones,” Dr. Bordeleau recalls. “We were really glad that the Verizon team was there to help teach everyone how to actually use their phones.” Fortunately, the Kyocera flip phones are remarkably simple to use, enabling even the most technophobic user to quickly gain a working knowledge of how to select a contact and connect with them via voice—in seconds. To keep their phone with them and within reach, users can choose a belt-mount option, a shoulder harness, or a strapped pouch that resembles a small purse.



## The benefits

### Increasing emergency preparedness

The new Verizon solution provides Saint Hilary School with an emergency communication solution that combines high reliability with low visibility—serving as an unobtrusive, just-in-case solution while day-to-day learning continues ahead. Here are just some of its benefits:

- **Greater school safety**

The goal of the new Verizon solution is clear—greater safety for its students and staff during emergencies. “Emergency preparation is a journey, and we’re constantly looking for new ways to make our campus safer,” says Dr. Bordeleau. “But I think that our school is safer with the new Verizon system in place.” Reaction from the school community—which was informed of the school’s adoption of the new system via principal talks and newsletters—has been very positive. “Having the solution in place is very helpful to our parents, who are naturally very concerned about school safety,” says Dr. Bordeleau. “They’re thrilled that we have the push-to-talk devices and very supportive of what we’re doing to increase safety.”

- **Fast, reliable push-to-talk voice communication**

Voice, versus text or emails, empowers all users to be heard if or when the unthinkable actually happens—a campus intruder, an imminent natural disaster, a lockdown or evacuation. Dr. Bordeleau described the benefits of real-time voice delivery in a brief handbook that she wrote and distributed to the school staff:

Unlike traditional messaging systems where there may be a delay in message delivery, Push to Talk provides instant and live voice communication. This feature is crucial in situations where immediate response is required, such as emergency situations, when seconds can make a significant difference.

Fast and direct, voice communication gets attention when it’s needed most.

- **Clear, reliable communication within the campus and beyond**

The reliable Verizon network provides exceptional connectivity on campus and beyond. The Saint Hilary School campus is relatively small, but long and narrow—encompassing classroom buildings, a church and a rectory. The Verizon solution provides efficient campus-wide communication capabilities to all staff members. Even those in buildings on the outer edges of the campus can communicate quickly—when and if necessary. Off campus, the Kyocera flip phones can also be used for communication during field trips. And in the event of an evacuation or other school-wide relocation, the solution would enable staff to coordinate movement—and ensure safety.

“

**Emergency preparation is a journey, and we’re constantly looking for new ways to make our campus safer. But I think that our school is safer with the new Verizon system in place. Having the solution in place is very helpful to our parents, who are naturally very concerned about school safety.**

**Dr. Marie Bordeleau**  
Principal, Saint Hilary School

- **Quick connection to emergency responders**

The Verizon solution enables all staff members to communicate with emergency responders quickly, without having to locate and enter the number for local fire or police departments. One press of the flip phone’s push to talk button connects them to emergency personnel. During an actual emergency, responding officers would know what’s happening before arriving on campus.

- **A right-sized solution**

As a smaller school, Saint Hilary School didn’t need an elaborate or expensive solution. It needed reliable, state-of-the-art emergency communication at the right price. The simplicity of the Verizon solution and relatively low number of flip phones reduced the overall cost. And by reserving use of the system for emergencies only, the school’s ongoing connectivity charges are lower than if the phones were in day-to-day use. The cost of the school’s safety and emergency preparedness package—including campus improvements and the Verizon solution—was covered by contributions by school parents at a recent school fundraising auction.

- **Reassurance for prospective families**

In addition to the current parent community, prospective families have also responded positively to the Verizon solution. “I give tours to families that visit our school,” says Lidiette Ratiani, director of marketing, advancement and admissions at Saint Hilary School. “The fact that we’re paying such close attention to the physical security of our campus—and that we’ve invested in the Verizon solution and new emergency phones—is a great capability that prospective parents really appreciate. It’s not a selling point, of course, but in a time when school safety is top of mind, it’s reassuring to know that we’re prepared.”

## The future:

### Inspiring other schools

As the first school in the Archdiocese of San Francisco to adopt the Verizon solution for emergency communication, Saint Hilary School serves as proof that the solution integrates seamlessly and operates effectively in a private school context. Dr. Bordeleau's message to similar schools? "I'd recommend these devices and the Verizon solution to any school," she says. "It's so much better than using walkie-talkies. And it has capabilities that let you respond quickly to any potential emergency."

#### Learn more

To learn more about how wireless connectivity can help with campus safety, contact Verizon at 844-825-8389 or visit [verizon.com/K12](https://www.verizon.com/K12)



Neither Saint Hilary School nor any of the persons quoted herein were compensated in whole or in part for participating in this case study.  
© 2024 Verizon.

