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Police officers respond to reports of an active shooter at Villanova University in Pennsylvania, Aug. 21, 2025, in this screen grab taken from video. (OSV News/ABC affiliate WPVI/handout via Reuters)

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Villanova, Pa. — August 22, 2025

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An active shooter at Villanova University reported late afternoon Aug. 21 was a "cruel hoax," a university official said less than two hours after the initial scare that led to a campus lockdown.

"There was no active shooter, no injuries and no evidence of firearms present on campus," said Villanova University president and Augustinian Fr. Peter Donohue in a statement obtained by OSV News. "While that is a blessing and relief, I know that today's events have shaken our entire community."

Villanova University alerted students at about 4:30 p.m. of an active shooter on its suburban Philadelphia campus, with school officials advising its community to move to a secure location and lock or barricade doors.

A message on the school's website advised those on the campus to stay clear of John F. Scarpa Hall, a hub for its Charles Widger School of Law that includes classrooms and its law library.

A post on X showed students running from an outdoor Mass on the university's Rowen Campus Green near Austin Hall as faculty, students and their family members received an alert of an active shooter on campus.

According to the university's website, Aug. 21 was the university's "Opening Day" on its new student orientation schedule, which was to include an opening Mass at 4:15 p.m. ET to be followed by a family picnic. Orientation was to continue through Aug. 24, with classes set to begin Aug. 25.

John F. Scarpa Hall is located an 11-minute walk across campus from the site of the Opening Day Mass.

Amid the active shooter alert, some 15-20 people took shelter in the main building of the Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, which is located across the street from the campus.

Madonna Sutter, director of advancement and communications for the province, told OSV News during the lockdown she had been leaving work when the alert was issued and was "with a bunch of Villanova students and parents who fled campus, and we're sheltering in the provincial offices now."

She said that Augustinian Prior Provincial Fr. Robert Hagan had texted her to "just stay inside."

In an Aug. 21 X post timestamped 4:52 p.m., the Radnor Township police department said they were "on location" at the university for the report of an active shooter, and that "all nearby residents and students are asked to SHELTER IN PLACE" at this time.

"All further information will come from the Office of the Superintendent of Police," said the post.

At 5:47 p.m., the police department posted an update, stating that its officers and assisting units were continuing to clear buildings, with "NO reported victims" at the time. The message directed those sheltering in place to stay put "UNTIL A POLICE OFFICER GUIDES YOU."

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At approximately 6:20 p.m., NBC10 Philadelphia reported Donohue's statement that the alert had been cleared. Villanova University also posted an alert on its website, stating, "The campus is all clear. You no longer need to shelter in place. "

In an Aug. 21 X post timestamped at 6:22 p.m., Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro called the matter "products of a cruel swatting incident — when someone calls in a fake threat to induce panic."

Noting that "swatting is illegal," Shapiro said he had directed the Pennsylvania State Police "to work alongside their partners and use every tool at our disposal to find the person or people who called in this fake threat and hold them accountable."

Shapiro added, "I know today was every parent's nightmare, and every student's biggest fear. I'm profoundly grateful no one was hurt, and thankful to all members of law enforcement who ran towards reports of danger to keep Pennsylvanians safe."

A Catholic institution founded by the Augustinian Order, Villanova University is located 12 miles west of downtown Philadelphia. It is notably the alma mater of Pope Leo XIV.

In a letter sent to the Villanova community, Donohue apologized to Villanova's first-year students and their families.

"This is not the introduction to Villanova that I had hoped for you," he said. "And while I cannot do anything to relieve the unrest that you are feeling right now, I can offer a prayer. As generations of Villanovans know, this prayer is how I close Orientation Mass each year. Since we were interrupted today, I would like to offer it now. Whomever you are with, I ask that you reach out to them and repeat after me."

The message included the following prayer: "May God bless you and protect you. May your heart and mind be united in faith so that you may be able to love wisely, work creatively, laugh heartily, and live honestly. May you use your education to bring justice and peace to the world, for the benefit of our human family and all of God's creation. And may you know that you are loved. Amen."

"I am sure there will be more questions in the coming days and weeks," Donohue continued, "and we will share as much information with you as we can, but for now, I am thankful that everyone is safe."