



CRIME PREVENTION

The most common crimes committed against places of worship are burglary, theft, criminal damage and arson. Most are preventable by the adoption of simple, often inexpensive measures based on common sense. The subject is closely related to Fire Safety (>251) and Insurance (>861). The Congregational & General Insurance Company has produced guidance entitled 'Safer Places of Worship' in which considerable helpful advice is offered on the subject of crime and arson prevention. A copy of this can be obtained from the company direct (01274-700700) or online at www.spow.co.uk. The company has an additional campaign entitled 'Church Alert', which is dedicated to minimising the risk of metal theft: www.churchalert.co.uk. English Heritage has updated its guidance on the subject of theft of metal from church buildings, and this can be found on their website: www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/theft-metal-church-buildings or by ordering a booklet from them (0870-333 1181/customers@english-heritage.org.uk).

Churches are strongly advised to take this matter seriously and give thought to establishing a crime prevention strategy. This can be done by appointing one individual to act as your coordinator to put your aims and objectives into practice, with the input and support of the whole congregation. Your coordinator will review security and crime prevention precautions at your church building(s); establish and maintain contact with your local Crime Prevention Officer, and be a contact for any neighbourhood watch scheme.

In developing a crime prevention strategy, your aim will be to remove any opportunity to commit a crime. A review of the present arrangements along with the local Crime Prevention Officer and the Fire Prevention Officer will be essential. Their expertise will help to compile a risk assessment of your building(s) and identify aspects needing attention that you and your members may not have noticed. Any review will need to consider the following.

Perimeter and Grounds

- Ensure the walls/hedges are regularly maintained. If your boundary walls/hedges are kept to no more than four feet high, you will benefit from natural surveillance by local residents and passers-by. Loose, broken stonework or other debris will not be readily available as ammunition for thieves or vandals. If there are trees present, ensure that any branches are removed up to a height of five feet to prevent climbing. Regular maintenance of grass, shrubs and trees not only ensures easy surveillance but has a deterrent effect itself.
- Gates should be maintained and locked whenever possible. Double gates will allow vehicular access to assist criminal activities, so they must be locked when not in use. Multiple access points may be both unnecessary and difficult to control, and creation of one common entrance could make security easier. Gates, hinges and padlocks should be of sound quality and checked for damage and deterioration.

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- Outbuildings should always be kept locked and any windows obscured to conceal contents. If possible, avoid wooden sheds for storage of items of value. Fit a chain and padlock to ladders. Ensure that locks, fittings and padlocks are of good quality and door hinges are mounted internally.
- Notice boards are essential to provide information about activities and access. Do not advertise your members' personal details too fully. Limit the information to a couple of names and telephone numbers to be contacted for information, and ensure the details are reviewed and updated.
- The theft of heating oil is also on the increase. Ecclesiastical Insurance provides guidance on reducing risks associated with this on their website: www.ecclesiastical.com/Images/2310%20OilTheft-commercial%5B2%5D.pdf.

Exterior of the building

- Anti-climb paint can be applied to drainpipes. Barbed wire or other deterrents can be attached, to prevent access to low level roofs or onto fixed ladders/fire escapes, although care must be taken to prevent accidental injury. Barbed wire may only be attached to roofs which are more than 8 feet above ground level. 'Smart water' can be applied to metal and is traceable – more details are to be found in the guidance notes on prevention of metal theft referred to above. A warning sign will highlight the presence of these measures.
- Points of entry can be numerous. Review the situation – in consultation with the Fire Brigade – and limit to as few as possible. Ensure doors, frames and locks are good, strong quality. Hinges should be concealed if possible or at least mounted on the interior side of the frame. Locks wherever possible should be mortise deadlocks. Old door locks can be supplemented with mortise deadlocks or internal bolts. A reputable locksmith could be consulted for advice and you will benefit from his expertise.
- Windows are common points of entry for criminals and regularly subject to vandalism. Ensure their protection by adding external barriers of laminated or toughened glass, polycarbonate sheeting or wire mesh grilles. Fit internal locks to windows that open. Provide curtains/blinds to conceal contents.
- Exterior lighting is an excellent and relatively inexpensive deterrent. Electronic timers, photoelectric switches and automatic detectors are readily available. Care must be taken in fixing both lights and sensors so that they are not accessible to damage.

Interior of the building

- Items of exceptional value – either monetary or historical – can be replicated so that the originals can be safeguarded by storage in a local bank or museum, from which they can be retrieved for special occasions.
- Theft from offertory boxes is the most common crime. Remove the opportunity by regularly emptying the box and if possible install a metal wall box with flush-fitting metal front.

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- Most items of value can be marked using a variety of means: ultraviolet, engraving, ceramic, branding. In addition an inventory, professional description or photographic record may be taken. These will assist in identifying and returning stolen goods. Post signs advertising the fact that all items have been security marked.
- Create one internal secure area which is kept locked. This can accommodate a safe and provide secure storage for valuable items. An alarm system for this one area could be relatively inexpensive.

General Good Practice

- Never leave keys in locks
- Never 'hide' keys on the premises
- Never leave internal secure areas/rooms unlocked even when the building is in use
- Nominate as small a number of responsible people as practicable to be key holders
- Establish procedures to ensure premises are locked and secure when vacated
- Keep attractive, easily portable equipment in locked cupboards when not in use
- Ensure key holders know how to react on discovery of a crime or an intruder and consider personal safety by trying to ensure two people are on the premises
- Encourage all church users to be alert and observant – a minor act of vandalism or theft is most likely to herald a more serious attack
- Keep in touch with your local Crime Prevention Officer and Fire Prevention Officer for up to date advice relevant to the circumstances of your building(s) and criminal activities and trends

New Buildings

Contact your local Crime Prevention Officer, who should be able to put you in touch with one of their Architectural Liaison Officers. Much can be done at the design and construction stage of a new building to limit crime.