

## Church Theft, Burglary and Security Controls

### Ministry Protection Memo

“MPM” is a series on various topics relative to Church and safety. Send your comments and interests to the Northern Illinois Conference.

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Maintaining security at your church is important to the welfare of your congregation and the neighboring community. A good security program also helps reduce claims from break-ins and vandalism. To maintain effective security at your church, the following steps are necessary:

- Identify the loss exposures
- Evaluate the actual risks
- Address each problem according to its potential frequency and severity and within budget restraints and available staff

The following is a general overview of the types of questions that should be asked to identify the loss exposures at your church. When going through the list, keep in mind any previous security incidents, as well as potential incidents.

- » Use good-quality locks (perhaps with double-cylinder dead bolts), solid doors and tamper-proof hinges to make entry into the building difficult and time-consuming. Use panic hardware where required on exits to avoid violating fire codes. However, be sure to use a type that cannot be easily opened from the outside with a piece of wire. Control the distribution of keys.
- » Adequate interior and exterior security lighting is one of the least expensive and yet most effective deterrents of vandalism and break-ins. These lights should be operated by photocells or timers.
- » Keep windows locked. Those which are accessible from the ground or from other buildings should be screened or glazed with burglar resistant plastic.
- » An intrusion detection and alarm system may be indicated. Proper care must be used in the selection to choose both the correct type and good quality. These units may rig a local alarm or signal a remote location, such as the police department, a security service or other residence.



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- » Adequate supervision of all activities and post-use inspections to detect stay-behinds, can also contribute to loss prevention.
- » Since glass breakage is one of the most common vandalism problems, special attention should be given to protecting glass windows. When glass is broken, repairs should be made immediately to prevent safety problems, as well as to discourage further breakage or intrusion. Keeping the grounds free of rocks, bottles or other convenient launching objects is also helpful.
- » Valuable items contained on property should be stored in locked rooms or cabinets. It is recommended that an inventory of all equipment be retained off-premise. To help deter theft, it is also recommended that all computer and AV equipment be engraved with the full church name.
- » Religious buildings often contain expensive fixtures and contents, such as gold and silver vessels and ornaments, paintings and statues, computers and other office machines. These may be tempting to thieves and addicts. Valuable items should be stored in locked rooms or cabinets.

Money should be kept to a minimum and stored in a safe, along with other valuable documents and essential records. It is recommended that an inventory of all equipment be retained off the premises. To help deter theft, it is also recommended that all computer and AV equipment be engraved with the full church name.

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Local newspapers are often willing to help educate the public about the problems of vandalism. Explain to members of the church, the impact of vandalism on cost. All publicity given to the subject should stress positive corrective action; blame-fixing may only make the problem worse.

Since someone is often aware of impending vandalism, or of those who have already caused damage, programs that build pride and educate people about the serious results of vandalism can be very effective. Your congregation can be enlisted to aid in this.

As a rule, an occupied building is less vulnerable to vandalism than an empty one. Keeping the building occupied by using the facilities during the afternoon and night for religious, recreational and educational activities might solve several community problems, as well as decrease the possibility of vandalism. Scheduling custodial work at night may also discourage intrusion.

Following these guidelines will not absolutely prevent a determined intruder from causing damage. Yet, it can go far toward reducing losses from vandalism, burglary, arson and other acts, thus freeing scarce dollars for other programs.

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