



Building Security

Deliberate acts causing loss – theft, arson and malicious damage – often occur when no one else is around. The more secure your property is, the harder it is for this to happen.

Perimeter security

It's important to find the right balance between openness and security for your Church. The more secure the property is, the safer it becomes.

SOME PRACTICAL MEASURES TO CONSIDER:

- consider installing security cameras
- keep the building itself in good repair (making sure there are no 'weak areas')
- ensure any fencing is in good condition
- use a good quality lock to secure the gate
- fit deadlocks on all external doors
- fit key-locks on all opening windows
- remove the keys when the building is unoccupied
- ensure lighting is adequate and fully operational

Make someone responsible

Unlocked buildings make easy targets for arsonists and thieves. Each night, someone needs to take responsibility for locking the doors and windows. Ensure that lights and heating appliances have been switched off. This could be a staff member, or someone living nearby.

If the Church is being used by a group – a play group for example, or a community group, the person in charge of the group must take responsibility for locking up. If they don't have a key, they must make appropriate arrangements for the building to be secured.

Each Church is different. What is appropriate for one Church may not be for another. Church administrators should be aware of the issues, assess the individual needs of their Church and have a system in place that works for them. A system that minimises the risk of theft or arson.

Keys to Church-owned buildings

Keeping track of Church keys can be confusing, but it is important. Ministry teams and congregations change all the time. Keys are often passed on to others unofficially or not returned. Unfortunately, each time this happens, the risk of theft increases dramatically.

Key registers

A key register is a great way to control access to buildings. One person, possibly the Church administrator or a deputy, needs to have responsibility for issuing keys and monitoring their use. A responsible senior administrator should maintain the register. Consult with a locksmith when you set up the register – their advice can be extremely valuable.

THE REGISTER WORKS LIKE THIS:

- introduce a master key system
- one senior person retains the master key
- individuals only get keys to the areas they need – for their work
- records are kept, so the administration knows who has which key
- the register is updated whenever new keys are issued
- charge a refundable deposit that can encourage the return of keys
- all locks are changed every five years or so, and keys are re-allocated.

Additional security for special equipment

Reduce the temptation. High-value property that is reasonably portable and readily marketable makes a tempting target for thieves. These can include sound systems, laptops, musical instruments, portable electrical goods and power tools.

Keep items like this in a lockable room or shed – and only allow access by authorised people. Musical instruments and audio equipment should not be left in worship areas during the week or between services.

It is common for thieves to return to Churches after an initial break-in. They assume it will be as easy to break in the second time. They wait until the Church's insurance policy will have provided new replacements for what was stolen. Then they return.

Church-Watch programs

Church-Watch is well worth considering. This is a natural extension of the very successful neighborhood watch schemes. Church-Watch helps to substantially reduce the chance of burglary or malicious damage.

They are worth considering if your Church is left unoccupied for long periods during the week. It is easy to draw up a roster from the congregation to keep an eye on the property.

Security systems

Security systems provide extra peace of mind. However, because there are usually many people who use the Church, it can be difficult to install a system that will provide maximum protection. This is made harder if the Church has a complex layout. It is best to obtain advice from reputable experts before making a decision.

Different alarm equipment offers different levels of protection.

Local Alarm

This alarm simply features a siren at the premises. This sounds for a limited period when a break-in is detected. The alarm is a deterrent and works best if there are people within hearing range who are willing and capable of dealing with a break-in. This type of alarm is not recommended for Churches.

Dialler Alarm

Like the local alarm, this alarm has a siren on the premises. It also includes a dialler. This device dials a nominated telephone number (usually that of a security company) using your telephone line. This ensures the alarm will not go unnoticed.

Secure Monitored Alarm

This alarm includes regular pulsing from the alarm system installed at the Church. Any interruption to the pulsing triggers an immediate notification to a security company.

It is important to remember, an alarm system does not prevent burglary. It only notifies you if a break-in occurs. The best security systems are monitored. This allows for a faster response from qualified professionals.

Lighting

Good quality outside lighting is a good way to discourage vandals and burglars. Lighting should be robust and out of reach. This makes it harder to be damaged or broken. It's worth paying extra for a good system. The cost of constantly replacing cheaper, easily broken lighting soon adds up.

While security lighting will increase the size of the electricity bill, it will also reduce the likelihood of burglary, arson and vandalism.

As an extra precaution, the exterior of your property should be free of visual obstructions and excess foliage – anything that can hide potential intruders.



Security cameras

Cameras can discourage theft and vandalism. They also assist police in their investigations, but they can be expensive.

An effective, integrated security camera system needs to be tailored to the particular needs of your property and your people. Placement of cameras may lead to accusations of invasion of privacy and must be handled sensitively. It's best to engage a professional security organisation in consultation with the Police.

Security patrols

Like a Church Watch program, security patrols are a good way of showing that your Church is being watched. The patrols visit your site on a regular basis (at night, and when the property is unattended) to check all entry points. Ensure the security visits and patrols are not predictable. This makes it even harder for potential intruders to monitor the timing and avoid detection.

Protecting stained glass windows

Stained glass windows are fragile and easily broken. They are frequently targeted by vandals and can also be accidentally broken – by hail stones for example, or by people using the Church property.

Leadlight or stained glass windows can be protected with stainless steel grills or polycarbonate sheeting. If you use polycarbonate sheeting, allow sufficient ventilation. This stops the window space overheating and melting the lead components. The sheeting should be regularly cleaned to prevent the build-up of condensation and rot.

Remember to use a glazier or a builder who has experience with stained glass windows and Church buildings.