

Church Security

The general designs and function of a church or place of worship makes general security more complicated but a great deal can be done at modest expense.



The modern criminal is able to take advantage of the traditional church as a building that is open for prayer and worship or for sightseeing at all times.

Even when churches are locked when not in use the graveyard can provide ample cover and is surrounded by low walls, which assists the thief to avoid detection and gives him confidence.

Today, criminals have become specialists with a genuine, and often good, knowledge of church furnishings and their value, including the disposal of art or church antiques to the wanting-trade for these items. The rise in value and the increase in demand for these items have made church property a target.

What ever you do, DO NOT adopt the attitude "it will never happen to us." The criminal may not come from your community, he may come from the other end of the country.

Remember – the responsibility lies with us all

The interior security

Ideally the church should be locked at all times unless a responsible person is present. A notice can be displayed indicating from whom a key can be obtained.

Many churches do not wish to undertake this measure as the church is the focal point of the community and parishioners wish to come and go as they please.

If this is the case, measures must be taken to reduce the risk and minimise loss in the event of your church being targeted by the thief.

Measures should include:

- Locking your church at night.
- Small valuable items should be stored away in a locked vestry, cupboard or safe when not in use during the week.
- Altarware – wooden or base metal substitutes should be displayed and the originals locked away. They can be returned for services and events.
- Antique furniture and other valuables – consideration should be given to discreet chaining to floor and wall. This may not deter the determined thief but may be sufficient to prevent the opportunist criminal.
- Valuables should be kept in a safe or a strong room when not being used for a service.
- Valuables, including communion plates, which are not in regular use should be deposited in the bank.
- Keys should be kept by a responsible person or in a secure place away from the church.
- The vestry should be secured by good quality locks and bars at the windows. All locks should conform to BS 3621, or higher, specification.
- All property should be photographed and a log kept. This needs to be stored in a safe place away from the church. All photographs must have a ruler or 50p coin in the picture to indicate size.
- The offertory box should ideally be emptied daily. A notice should be displayed on the box indicating this.
- Vulnerable stained glass windows can be protected externally by polycarbonate sheet.
- Be vigilant and report anything suspicious to the police at the time.

Although the number of church crimes is relatively low in comparison to other crimes, the effect on the church community is just as devastating.

The exterior

Hedges

Remember that the best form of hedging for a barrier is one that is thick and difficult to penetrate. Choose something like hawthorn, privet, holly, yew, laurel etc.

Roof and fall pipes

Places of worship are normally irregular in shape and design. Access to the roof is normally relatively easy due to for e.g. cast iron fall pipes. Anti-climb paint could be applied to fall-pipes not less than eight feet from the ground. This is a type of paint that does not dry and is very slippery. Barbed wire and anti-climb devices can also be fitted to fall pipes. Advertise the fact that you have used these methods, it will be a good deterrent.

Sheds and outbuildings

Most places of worship have a shed or outbuilding with tools and machinery. Such a building may contain ladders or power tools that are valuable to the criminal as a direct gain and also to attack other premises, the church or buildings close by. Sheds and outbuildings should be well secured.

Lighting

The use of effective security lighting is very important, particularly for isolated buildings, for the following reasons:

1. To illuminate vulnerable areas on the vertical surfaces of buildings in order that it will reveal anyone attacking the building, for example, trying to force an entry, mounting drainpipes or moving onto a roof area.
2. To reveal an intruder in an unlit area between a floodlit building and an observer's position.
3. To enhance the aesthetic appearance of your building.

Cellars

Where possible, access to cellars should only be via one entrance within the church building. All other entrances should be permanently bricked up. Where this is not possible, doors should be secured internally. Any retained entrance to a cellar should be given special attention with good quality frames and five lever deadlocks.

External doors

- Large items stolen from churches are invariably removed via a door. It is equally important, therefore, to ensure that, when locked, they cannot be opened from the inside. Mortice deadlocks are the most effective means of ensuring this.
- All doors should be substantially made with strong hinges and effective frames. The strength of a door is only as good as its frames and hinges. Again, good maintenance not only improves physical security but also acts as a deterrent.
- Locks should, in all cases, be thief-resistant mortice deadlocks to a minimum of BS 3621. Many old locks currently fitted to church doors are inadequate with relatively simple internal mechanisms, which will not defeat the professional criminal.

Intruder Alarms

Intruder alarms are often dismissed as being too expensive, too much trouble and inappropriate for use in a church. It is strongly suggested that this option be considered in detail for the following reasons:

- The presence of an alarm system is very often sufficient to deter the would-be criminal even before beginning to plan the crime.
- An alarm substantially reduces the time available to the criminal to commit the crime.
- A good quality alarm system is surprisingly cheap and very cost-effective. Often the cost is less than that of other security devices.
- Systems can be designed to the requirements of individual buildings or areas within to reduce the instances of false calls and minimise costs.

Alarm systems have various means of activation, from making/breaking electronic circuits on doors and windows, to sophisticated but surprisingly inexpensive movement detectors. Alarm systems can sometimes entitle you to a reduction in insurance premiums.

Please check with your insurance company before you go ahead as they may wish to make certain stipulations.