



Security for Churches

Churches are subject to becoming the victim of criminal activity in much the same way a residence or business might. Burglary, theft, and vandalism can occur as with any other structure. There are some things that can be done in order to mitigate the possibility of these criminal acts.

Criminals look for targets of opportunity, the easy prey. If a church, home or business appears to have easy access then it is a much more tempting target to a criminal. If that same location appears to be difficult to enter or the criminal thinks they have a good chance of being caught in the act, they will look for an easier target.

Some things that can be done to mitigate burglary, theft and other crimes are:

1. Secure the building.

This includes good deadbolt locks and secure windows. Solid core doors with deadbolts will make entry harder while placing security bars on windows that can be opened, especially those on the back of the building will make it harder for someone to pry them open or break them. Remember that the deadbolt is only as good as the door frame it is installed in, don't forget to reinforce the door frame.

2. Good exterior lighting.

No criminal likes to work in the light. If there is a good chance they can be seen breaking into a location they are likely to pass on trying it.

3. Secure valuables.

A safe is a good investment if money or other valuable items are on site. There are many safes available on the market and they are not as expensive as you might think. There are few criminals out there that have the expertise to be "safe crackers". Keeping the safe itself inside of a "safe room" that has a solid core door and deadbolt locks might help. This safe room might also be used to store larger expensive items.

4. Security System.

A good security system is a strong deterrent. There are many different options available and many companies that offer this service. Motion detectors are probably better than static alarm sensors that only alert when a door or window is opened. Some systems can be set up to record video, and wiring that video recorder up inside the safe is not a bad idea.

5. Key and Code Accountability.

An alarm and other security measures are only as good as the people who are accountable for them. If everyone has access then it won't be long before some friend of a friend or relative of a relative comes for a visit armed with keys and or codes. Restrict the number of people who have access to alarm/safe codes and hold them accountable. Changing these often is not a bad idea either. Have a designated contact person who the police can call to verify that someone has permission to be on the premises.

6. Storage.

The same methods listed above apply for out buildings or storage buildings. Make them as secure as possible and include them on the alarm or security camera system.

7. Fencing.

Keeping the areas of the property where storage buildings or vulnerable back windows and doors are out of public view will hinder a criminal from driving up to them and make it more difficult to gain access.

8. Active Shooters

In recent years the ugly prospect of having an active shooter event has become a reality. Some things that churches might consider to mitigate these events would be to have hired security on site if the congregation is large enough to call for it. If that is not an option then selected members of the congregation could be tasked with being vigilant in keeping watch for suspicious persons approaching or entering the church when services are being held. Selected members of the congregation could be permitted to attend services armed if they are properly trained and have a carry license. Members of the congregation who are law enforcement officers could be requested to attend services in uniform and park their marked police cars in a visible location to provide a presence. Active shooters have generally selected targets that present them with a large number of unarmed people who are unable to defend themselves.

What is listed above are just some suggestions for making your church a less appealing target for someone who would break into it or attempt to cause harm during services. Keep in mind that every building is different and will present both opportunities and difficulties in making it secure. Make the most of what you have and try to think of anything that would make it harder for someone to break in or gain entry with the intent to do harm.

Also keep a good inventory of property. Include serial numbers and descriptions of item, or even photographs. This will greatly assist the police in recovering your property and catching those who took it, if the worst does happen.

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