



# CRIME & VIOLENCE IN THE CHURCH

*A Handbook for Churches*



**United Methodist Insurance**

Property & Casualty Coverage for Your Ministry

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



*CRIME & VIOLENCE IN THE CHURCH: A HANDBOOK  
FOR CHURCHES*

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# Crime & Violence in the Church: A Handbook for Churches

*“Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”*

(Psalm 34:14)

Churches are sanctuaries, places where people can go to perform good works and to further their spiritual journeys. But, because churches exist in the real world, it would be naïve to think that crime and violence couldn't breach their doors.

As the United Methodist Church's *Book of Discipline* states, “We assert that God's grace is manifest in all creation even though suffering, violence, and evil are everywhere present. The goodness of creation is fulfilled in human beings, who are called to covenant partnership with God. God has endowed us with dignity and freedom and has summoned us to responsibility for our lives and the life of the world.” (§102, 2016 *Book of Discipline*)

Part of doing good for your church, part of pursuing peace, is accepting the responsibility to create a safe environment for those who come to worship with you.

## What this book contains

This e-book is meant as a resource and a guide for church leaders who want to protect their flocks from the possibility of crime and violence. Although it is impossible to shore up your church to the

degree that nothing bad could ever happen, it is important to take certain steps to help minimize the risk of violence and crime, which appear in many forms.

In the first section of this book we will look at ways that violence can manifest in the church and discuss how to identify potential situations and secure your house of worship. We'll examine how you can begin a safety ministry and steps you should take to protect your church and build security.

Arson, theft, fraud, domestic disputes, vandalism, and violent attacks are some of the scenarios we will address in the second section, providing you with concrete actions designed to safeguard both your property and your people. We'll provide you with resources that you can utilize to build your own safety plan.

It is essential that church leaders recognize threats and that they take them seriously. Planning for the possibility of crime and violence will allow you to strike a delicate balance: maintaining a safe environment and remaining a community gathering place, open to those who need it.

## Peace of mind, peace of heart

One important part of what you can do to bolster your church community's sense of safety is ensuring that you have adequate insurance in place. Insurance is there just in case something does happen. It allows you to rebuild and heal.

It is our hope that the information contained in this e-book will allow you to feel safer – and be safer – in your ministry, so that your

church can truly be a sanctuary. It is written in Isaiah 60:18: “No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.” We wish you that kind of safety, security, and peace of mind.



# Ways to Take Action and Step Up Security

When they hear about violence happening in or around churches in the news, clergy and laypeople begin to worry: What would happen in my church if someone were to launch an attack?

Church leaders understand that it is their responsibility to develop a security plan that takes multiple scenarios into consideration. After all, the church should be a place where anyone can go for spiritual sustenance. If there's a question of safety, then it becomes impossible for houses of worship to fulfill that promise.

Here are some concrete steps that can be taken toward building a plan that will help keep those who participate in church activities safe.

## 1. Form a response team

It is likely that there are individuals on your roster who will be able to respond appropriately in the event of a violent attack. That could include former military, or those currently involved in local law enforcement. People with a medical background could also be helpful in unexpected violent situations. You can learn more about how and why to form a response team [here](#).

## 2. Assess risks and bridge the gaps

Local law enforcement can be helpful when it comes time for you to assess the physical risks of your church property. Ask them to come to your property and do a walk-through to see where there

are weak points in your security. Follow any recommendations they offer, which could include reinforcing windows and keeping doors locked during times when church activities occur.



**Consider how you will increase security during times of activity, and what kind of security is needed during times when no one but the pastoral and administrative staff is on the premises.**

## 3. Make a plan

Combine the information you receive from law enforcement with sound recommendations from those on the response team. Have someone from your insurance company review your church's coverage should any violent and/or criminal acts occur on or near your property.

Consider how you will increase security during times of activity, and what kind of security is needed during times when no one but the pastoral and administrative staff is on the premises. You might consider holding only certain "open" hours and locking the doors during services. You might require that response team members act as ushers during services, and that they are posted at the doors while services happen.

It's important to remember to stay within local and state laws as you make your security plan.

## 4. Be prepared to evacuate (or to shelter-in-place)

Depending on the nature and location of violent attacks, it is possible that you will need to quickly evacuate church members – or that you will need to lead them to an area in your church where they can safely shelter-in-place. More information about evacuation and sheltering-in-place can be found in our [Disaster Preparedness e-book](#).



**It's important to remember to stay within local and state laws as you make your security plan.**

## 5. Take advantage of technology

Security cameras are now less cost-prohibitive than they ever have been in the past. Church leaders can easily purchase and install these cameras. Footage can be used to identify behavioral anomalies among people who approach the church property. For example, if you install a camera at the church's doors, and someone approaches who is visibly intoxicated, you would be able to see that before letting (or deciding not to let) the individual in to the church.

## 6. Share your plan with church members

Everyone who is involved in the church, no matter how peripherally, is concerned about these issues. Communicate your plan to church members, so they will know what to do in the case of a violent attack, but also so they can participate in church activities with a clear mind and an open heart, no longer clouded by worry.



# When an Open Door Lets in Danger

One of the most difficult aspects of preparing for the possibility of violence is coming to terms with the fact that an open door policy could invite dangerous people into the church. Church leaders want the church to be a welcoming place, accepting of those who wish to be a part of it.

So, how can they differentiate between someone who seeks guidance and peace and someone who may want to cause harm?

## Identifying people who pose a threat

Dangerous people can sometimes be identified on sight; for example, they might be carrying weapons. But, sometimes the identification of someone who might pose a threat can be more difficult.

You may know certain people who have exhibited bizarre or threatening behavior in the past, or know of reasons why people may be angry with church members, clergy, or even the church in general. Be wary of those people.

For example, a couple may be locked in a bitter custody battle, with one part of the couple seeking vengeance on the other. They may know that they can approach or even attack their former spouse during services if the door is left open for anyone who may wish to come in. Or, it is possible that someone who was fired from a position within the church returns during a busy event to get even.

It's also possible for a person to be situationally dangerous. A church member who struggles with addiction and falls off the wagon could act erratically. A mentally ill church member may have stopped taking their medication, which changes their behavior drastically.



**How can you differentiate between someone who seeks guidance and peace and someone who may want to cause harm?**

Other potentially dangerous people could find a way into the church through outreach ministry. The dinner your homeless coalition serves could mean increased contact with people who could become aggressive.

This is not to say that churches should stop or limit outreach or prevent people from coming in to the church based on appearance. Those on the safety or security team should instead be on the lookout for odd or menacing behavior that comes from those who could potentially pose a threat.

If the potentially violent person is known to you or your congregation, you may have heard of or seen instances of:

- Brandishing weapons
- Assault threats

- Domestic abuse or attempted kidnapping
- Violent crime, such as arson or burglary
- Hate speech or verbal tirades

Take these behaviors seriously and understand that the person who exhibits them poses a potential danger to your church community.

## More subtle signs of potentially dangerous situations

Not everyone who poses a threat to the church will show obvious signs that they are dangerous. The signs can be subtle.

For example, someone may come into church services wearing bulky clothing or keeping his hand in a large bag; this could be a sign that they are secreting a weapon on their person. You may also observe that someone – or more than one person – is not paying attention to services but is looking around for exits and appears to be nervous. That person may be on a reconnaissance mission for something to be carried out later.



**Not everyone who poses a threat to the church will show obvious signs that they are dangerous.**

## How to react if a potentially dangerous person is in your midst

Do not touch a person who could be dangerous. Instead, communicate to people who pose threats that they should leave, using calm gestures and language. Be firm but respectful, and explain any rules that the person may be breaking. Don't allow for argument, but don't trigger confrontation that will escalate the situation. In some cases, it is possible simply to tell the person that they need to leave, or the police will be called.

Sometimes, it is easier to remove church members than to remove a person who poses a threat. For example, if someone is yelling from the front of the church, ushers should begin to have church members file out the back doors quickly and quietly and disperse.

Because these situations are often fraught with tension, it is of paramount importance that those responsible for approaching potentially dangerous people are well-trained and know exactly what to do. Consult with local law enforcement to learn of training opportunities in your area.

## Churches can face legal action

Many church leaders find it difficult to turn away anyone who comes in to the church – but it is important to remember that it is possible for churches to face legal action if they fail to act in a dangerous situation.

On the flip side, churches may also be liable for any physical injury caused if, for example, an usher tried to physically remove a person



they had deemed to be a threat. The same could go for defamation of an individual if someone is misidentified or publicly accused of something untrue.

It's a difficult line to tread; that's why it's important to have conversations, make plans, and engage in training before a situation occurs.



## Why Your Church Needs a Safety Ministry

Churches can be vulnerable places, especially during services when many people gather together, all concentrating on one point of interest away from the doors. An on-site safety team can help to prevent a wide variety of potential criminal activity – not just extreme situations, such as an active shooter.

A safety team can provide extra peace of mind and keep issues, such as theft from vehicles in the parking lot, from happening. They can form a watch unit to prevent arson, as another example. These same individuals can be trained to be resources in whatever scenario church leadership has determined could occur in your church.

### Form your teams

Put out an open call among church members. Clearly state that you are seeking people who have skills and knowledge that can be useful in case of emergency or in crime prevention.

People who might be of use on the response team include former or current members of the military and people with law enforcement, security, or a medical background. Other people who could help on the safety team include teachers, who may be of service during training, and people with an insurance background, who can help church leaders assess risk as they prepare for potential criminal situations. Attorneys can also be helpful, as they can be a good resource for ensuring that your organization adheres to local and state ordinances.

## Get local law enforcement involved

Don't attempt to go it alone. Use the resources that are available in your community, such as local law enforcement.

Contact your police station and arrange to have a representative come to your premises to perform a risk assessment. You can then learn the different areas of your church buildings that could be vulnerable to criminal activity and make adjustments, such as adding lightning, or trimming shrubbery to increase visibility at night.

Share your plans to form a safety team with the police officer and take the advice he or she provides to you. If your safety team will also be acting as your response team, in case a crime occurs during services or a church-sponsored event, they will need training. Local law enforcement may provide training for such groups or may be able to recommend a company or individual who would be a good training resource.



**Use the resources that are available in your community, such as local law enforcement.**

By getting law enforcement involved in your safety initiative, the police will have a clearer idea of your property in case something does happen that needs intervention.

## Conflict resolution

Safety and response teams aren't about muscle and intimidation. Instead, those involved in your safety ministry should be trained in the art of conflict resolution, with the goal being that every altercation results in a peaceful outcome.



**Team members should refresh their training periodically.**

Get a professional involved who can work with your team members, running through simulations and role-playing, so that everyone understands how to approach different situations.

Team members should refresh their training periodically, either through small workshops throughout the year or with an annual comprehensive training session.

## Communicate and plan

Make sure you cover as much ground as you can by creating a written criminal activity plan that outlines how team members should react in a wide variety of situations. The second part of this

book discusses several potential issues that a church could face. You may find that you have other issues you'd like to add to your plan.

If an incident occurs, get together with your safety and response teams to discuss what happened, whether appropriate procedure was followed, and what could have gone better. Adjust your written plan to incorporate what was learned from your experience.

Keep the lines of communication open: Share the teams' philosophy and purpose with church members. That way, they will know who to approach if they suspect that criminal activity may occur, and they will also know who to turn to if something unexpected happens.

Members of a safety and/or response team can act as emergency preparedness ambassadors for your church, assisting in a variety of ways. Increasing protection for your church property and church members can help everyone feel more secure.



## Securing Your House of Worship

As you make preparations to secure your church, consider where threats come from and recognize that a criminal act doesn't have to be perpetrated by a stranger. It's possible for one church member to attack another church member, for example. It's possible for an employee of many years to embezzle funds, as another example.

When you create your safety plan, consider that you need to develop ways to help protect people, possessions, and property. A comprehensive safety plan considers any criminal activity that could occur in your house of worship.

If that seems daunting, start by doing something small and then adding new details to your security plan gradually.

### Limit access

For some, it will be difficult to consider taking the step of limiting access to the church. After all, a church is supposed to be a sanctuary for any who wish to enter. But in order for the church to be a safe place, it is now advisable for church leaders to respond to risks and limit access.

You can do this by making sure all points of entry are secured when no one is present, as well as limiting the number of open doors and windows during an event or services. If you do not already maintain a list of those who have keys to your premises, create one now. It's possible that many people have access to the church who do not really need it.

An alarm system can also curb criminal acts. Some alarm systems include cameras, which can be helpful in apprehending criminals in case something does happen.

If you are under direct threat of violence – for example, if a church member has a restraining order against someone who has followed her into church in the past – consider placing greeters at open doors. Make sure those greeters are trained so that they know what to do when they do suspect someone of planning a criminal act. It's imperative that people who act in this capacity for the church can defuse tense situations rather than escalating them.

You may consider limiting access within the church, as well. Lock doors to business offices or other rooms that are not in use during church services, for example. Someone from your safety team could do rounds periodically to make sure that no one is in areas where they shouldn't be. This person could also check locks on windows and doors to make sure they have not been tampered with.

And, remember that there's another way for criminals to access your church: through cyber crime. Adopt best practices, such as using strong passwords that are not displayed and are frequently changed, as well as using virus protection.

## Make your exterior inhospitable to crime

Walk around your church premises' perimeter to identify areas that could work in a criminal's favor. For example, do you have large bushes or shrubbery located beside the front entrance? If so, someone could use those bushes as cover to break into the church, or to surprise someone at the entrance.

Install lighting around the buildings as well as the parking lot and play areas. Depending on your church's layout and location, it may be a good idea to install a fence or a gate to prevent people from going onto church property unless they have a reason to do so. Motion detectors can also deter criminal activity. Lights and cameras can both operate based on having been activated by motion.

If you feel you need extra help identifying what to do to secure the exterior of your church premises, invite local law enforcement to do a walk-through with you to point out where an extra lock might be needed or lights should be installed.

Finally, it's crucial for your church to have an emergency preparedness plan, so you know what to do in case something happens that requires you to evacuate or shelter-in-place.



# 10 Things Churches Can Do to Help Protect their People from Violence

These practical action steps will help you to create an environment where safety comes first.

## 1. Create a communication plan

If a crime does occur on or near your premises, how will you communicate with church leaders and members who are not on site? Put together a communication flow chart: For example, if something happens when not very many people are on the premises, have a plan for who should communicate with church leaders to let them know what's going on. Think about the best way to communicate: If it's a large-scale emergency, texting works best because it's less likely to overwhelm mobile phone carrier networks.

If your church has a large campus – or even more than one building – how will you communicate with those who are not in the area where the event is occurring? You may use a PA system or text messages to inform others on your campus or warn them to stay away from a particular area.

Create a check-in system. All people who are on the premises should know how to communicate that they are okay or that they need help. There may be one or two people that church leaders designate as check-in contacts.

## 2. Communicate with those outside your immediate church community

It's a good idea to designate numerous people who will call emergency services in case of a violent event. That way, you will avoid a situation where everyone thinks someone else has called. Those assigned to make the call could be people who serve on your safety or security team.



**Don't just plan for the possibility of an active shooter.**

Do you have a plan in place to communicate with families of those affected by the event? Who will reach out to those individuals to share information? It's important to consider that different situations may warrant different communication plans.

And, you may also consider assigning the role of public relations to a church leader who can effectively communicate with the media.

## 3. Build your safety team

We discussed the importance of creating a safety team earlier in this book. These individuals can help in a variety of ways in order to attempt to prevent a crime from occurring, but they can also be helpful during or after an event has occurred. People on the safety team can facilitate communication, for example, as well as acting as ushers or greeters to keep an eye out for suspicious activity.

## 4. Build your response team

Those people who make up the response team should have some experience in the military or law enforcement, so they know how to react in case of an emergency. It's possible that your safety team and your response team may consist of the same people.

Make sure your response team is well trained, particularly in the art of communication and de-escalation of stressful situations.

## 5. Get to know local law enforcement

Invite local law enforcement for a tour of your facilities. They may be able to offer advice on some changes you can make to secure your premises.

And, if someone on your police force has toured your property, they will likely be better able to respond in case they are called out to halt a criminal act in progress. You can also provide the local station with blueprints of your property in case they are needed.

## 6. Make a comprehensive plan

As you plan for the possibility of crime or violence on church premises, imagine what could possibly occur. Don't just plan for the possibility of an active shooter. Think about other possibilities. For example, an armed person could enter the church with the intent to rob people during services. Or, a victim of domestic violence could be at an event at the same time as her abuser, and an altercation breaks out. Vandals could throw rocks at your valuable stained glass windows.

Think about how you will work to prevent a wide variety of scenarios – and what you will do in case each of those scenarios does occur. Record your plans for prevention and response and disseminate that information to your safety team. Consider making these plans public for church members to peruse and offer suggestions.



**Consider labeling different buildings on your premises to make them easier for responders to find quickly.**

## 7. Secure events, including services

Think about the ways in which people can access your buildings during events. Lock side and rear doors of the church building after an event has begun to funnel latecomers through the front doors. Place greeters at doors who can let in or turn away people who attempt to get into events. Don't leave unused areas unlocked, and discourage people from wandering away from where the event takes place.

## 8. Increase exterior visibility

Cut down any vegetation that could be used as cover, especially around building windows and doors. Install lighting so that no one needs to take a path through a dark area. This includes parking lots and play areas.

## 9. Signage and labeling

If it is necessary for emergency services to respond to something that has occurred at your church, make it as easy as possible for them to locate the area where they are needed. Put up visible address numerals and plaques indicating your church's name and denomination.

Consider labeling different buildings on your premises, as well. For example, put a plaque on the building that you use for childcare, designating it as such. That way, you can tell a dispatcher to send an ambulance to a certain building, and it will be much easier for responders to find quickly.

## 10. Keep improving and changing

If something does happen, or if you find out new information, modify your plans to include what you've learned.

While there is no way to completely secure church members and property from being affected by crime, taking these steps will go a long way toward increased safety.



## Preparing a Church Emergency Plan

If staff members came in to the church and discovered that some valuables had been burglarized, would they know what steps to take? If a visibly intoxicated stranger took over the pulpit from the pastor and started yelling, would anyone know what to do? If employees discovered that their computer files were no longer accessible because they had downloaded ransomware, would they know how to rectify the situation? If the police came to the church and arrested your youth pastor for sexual misconduct, would you know the best way to proceed?

We all hope and pray that nothing bad ever happens to our church or anyone associated with it. We would like to think that if anything were to happen, everyone would know exactly what to do. But sadly, many churches have no plan to respond to an emergency at the church. As a result of not having a plan, the response is often inadequate or will even compound the original problem, making the situation worse.

For the safety of the congregation, church leaders should seriously consider taking time to develop a church emergency preparation and response plan. Here are some very simple steps to consider in the development of such a plan. Churches should check with/involve local law enforcement agencies when putting a plan together.



## Team development

Every church should have a safety ministry. Those who work in this capacity evaluate every aspect of programming, facilities, and resources to determine if they are safe and secure. They will be responsible for everything from prevention and inspections to training and oversight.

As a part of that larger ministry, an emergency preparation and response team should be formed. Depending on the size of the organization, you may either choose to make the emergency response group a part of or the same as the safety group. The important piece is to bring together a group of people that can spend the time to educate themselves, organize and develop a plan, and carry out the functions needed in the event of an emergency.



**Select team members who can give the time it will take to make this ministry grow and thrive.**

Make sure that everyone who is a part of the teams understands that leadership is fully supportive of this project. It is often a good idea to select one church leader who will act as the head of the security and emergency preparation teams.

You do not need a team of hundreds; however, the following

positions should be considered (some may be combined) depending on the size of your congregation:

- Team Coordinator and Assistant Team Coordinator
- Board/Leadership Representative, Staff Representative, Membership Representative, Youth Representative, Children's Area Representative, Senior Services Representative, Volunteer Representative
- Facility Management
- Medical Representative
- Prayer Coordinator
- Spiritual Support Coordinator

Select team members who can give the time it will take to make this ministry grow and thrive. A safety ministry may take on issues that encompass security from any angle, including everyday problems, such as basic property repairs that could prevent injury.

But, when you set up a safety team for crime prevention, consider the makeup of the team, so that it includes people who will be helpful in a time of crisis. People with military or law enforcement training would be assets on a response team for crime prevention, for example.

## Education and identifying the issues

After your teams are formed, you will want to help them understand issues that could negatively impact your ministries. Be prepared: This may take some time. However, by relying on such organizations as the Red Cross, FEMA, and web sites such as [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), you will be able to quickly identify not only the



wide variety of conflicts that might happen, but also those more prevalent in your geographical area.

As you identify which events your organization should prepare for, remember to consider how you will safely navigate all stages of events: before, during, and after. And, remember that you are not only thinking about criminal activity that could occur during services; you also need to plan for the possibility of issues occurring during less busy times and on all areas of church property.

The three areas you will want to consider are:

### ***Internal events***

Those events that happen either at your church or to your people (staff, members, volunteers, children, etc.). They may include such events as death, injury, threat, robbery, or abuse.

### ***Community/regional events***

These events happen within your vicinity, but may not impact you directly. They would include such occurrences as an active shooter within another area of your town.

### ***National events***

A terrorist attack, elevated Homeland Security Advisory, or having your members travel to offer aid and assistance are some of the events that could be considered national emergencies. Your team will want to brainstorm and identify all incidents and emergencies that they can think of.

## **Plan your responses**

Once identified, your team will want to discuss an appropriate response for each issue. Many will be similar. The responses often will be a page or less. Others may be more detailed. You will want to identify people within your congregation that could make up a response team. You will also want to identify those people and organizations outside of your congregation that will be valuable during an incident (e.g. attorney, denominational officials, other care providers, etc.). Consider the needs of all age groups and those in your congregation with special needs.



**Consider how you will safely navigate all stages of events: before, during, and after.**

## **Put it in writing**

Once you have assembled this information, put it in writing. This is the most time-consuming part of the plan, but also the most important. What you put in writing becomes your plan; it will act as a foundation and invaluable resource for responding to an incident. It is best to view the plan as a series of principles and practices. Never develop a plan and place it on a shelf somewhere; it will not help you there. Review it regularly and revise as needed.

This is also a good time to compare and contrast the security systems available on the market in order to select one that suits your organization's needs. For example, many systems now offer the ability to integrate with smart devices; is that something that will be helpful to you or is it unnecessary? Will you need cameras? Window sensors? If you have created a written plan that encompasses all or most of the possible scenarios that could occur in your community, that information will be helpful to you as you choose the right security system.



**What you put in writing becomes your plan; it will act as a foundation and invaluable resource for responding to an incident.**

## Communication

Share the plan with staff, volunteers, and members. Let them know you have developed it out of a sense of care for their well-being as well as the entire community. Help them understand that by developing this ministry your congregation will be better able to respond to catastrophic events. Use small group settings and other creative ideas to communicate the plan.

## Practice/implementation

You will never know how good your plans are unless you practice them. Conducting periodic drills will help you see holes in the plan or areas that need to be modified. This kind of practice keeps security top of mind, as well as ensuring that everyone knows what to do in a variety of situations that involve criminal activity.

## Evaluation

Finally, after you do a mock drill or event, evaluate and revise as appropriate. Discuss who did what and how they did it, solicit feedback, and address concerns. Keep the plan flexible. If you do have an actual event that you respond to, always conduct a debriefing to evaluate how the response went and what revisions need to be made.

You may be fortunate enough never to suffer a life-changing event in your congregation. However, you want to be prepared to react if something does occur. Also, you never know when your congregation may be called upon to assist and provide care and resources in the event of an emergency across town or across the country. Wouldn't it be great to have the confidence to know that your church would be ready to respond almost instantly?



# Preventing Violence in Churches: Arson

Many church leaders have begun making plans for dealing with violent criminal behavior because of recent church shootings. It's sensible to plan for this type of behavior, but there are many other ways in which criminal activity touches the church and its people. For example, arson is more common than an active shooter situation.



**Slightly more than half of fires at churches are caused by arson.**

## 51% of church fires started by arson

An average of 103 fires per year were started by arson at houses of worship between 2000 and 2015, according to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives' U.S. Bomb Data Center's [Bomb Arson Tracking System](#). Slightly more than half of fires at churches are caused by arson, according to the Pew Research Center.

## Arson watch: like neighborhood watch

You've heard of neighborhood watch programs. Arson watch programs are based on the same model. One of the most important things to do to prevent violent crime at your organization is to build a relationship with emergency services. That way, they will know your plans and routines and can be on the lookout for anything out of the ordinary that might occur.

You may also enlist volunteers – perhaps those who are on the response team or church members who live nearby – to keep an eye on the property when no one is on site. Those volunteers may coordinate to drive by the church during times when it is unoccupied. Be aware of criminal activity that has occurred recently in your community and increase surveillance accordingly.

## Other arson deterrents

*1. Exterior and interior lights:* A good way to prevent crime of any kind on your property is to ensure that it is properly lighted. If your church's exterior is lighted, it will be more difficult for someone to sneak onto your property without being seen. Interior lights also deter criminal activity because they give the illusion that someone is there.



**Make sure you have a smoke alarm on every floor of every building on your property.**

2. *Locked windows and doors:* Churches are just as vulnerable to crime as other properties, so make sure all windows and doors are locked in your facilities. Make it a nightly practice that someone checks the doors and windows before leaving the property unoccupied.

3. *Manicured landscapes:* Overgrown bushes and trees – particularly those close to the building and near doorways – can obscure clear lines of sight. Arsonists and other criminals take advantage of that cover to perpetrate their crimes undetected. Trim trees and bushes and keep gardens neat to help prevent arson.

## Sprinkler systems and smoke alarms

Make sure you have a smoke alarm on every floor of every building on your property. Test the batteries regularly to ensure that they are in working order. You may also consider installing a sprinkler system, so that fires – accidental or arson – get put out right away. If you do have a sprinkler system installed, make sure that you get it inspected and maintained regularly.

No one likes to think about the possibility that a person may purposefully set a fire on church property, but it happens. Take steps to help reduce the likelihood that it will happen to you.



## Active Shooter Prevention: Form a Response Team

Houses of worship should be sanctuaries. While that is true in the hearts and minds of the clergy and church members who attend, support, and guide the church, churches have also recently been the target of active shooters.

Many church leaders feel overwhelmed at the additional responsibilities of preparing for and securing the church against an active shooter situation. But, church leaders also recognize that they have a moral duty to lead and protect their church members.



**People who have served in the military, medical professionals, and law enforcement officers all are good candidates to serve on your response team.**

## Build a response team

Ushers can serve as a first line of defense against violence during services, if they are properly trained. If someone unfamiliar – or someone who is known to be troubled – approaches the church, and his or her body language or appearance seems odd, ushers may deny them entry to the church and even potentially alert local police.

Those well-trained ushers can be one part of your response team. To form this team, survey your church's roster and determine which members would be most useful in an active shooter situation or other violent scenario.

People who have served in the military, medical professionals, and law enforcement officers all are good candidates to serve on this team. You may consider hiring a professional crisis management consultant to train response team members, so they know what to look for, and how to react.



**Find out how law enforcement will respond if there is a shooter in your building.**

Keep in mind that a response team should know what to do before, during, and after a criminal event has occurred; they are not just there to spring into action during times of crisis. In fact, it's best if this team is well-trained in the art of de-escalating potentially fraught situations.

## Consult with local law enforcement

Find out how law enforcement will respond if there is a shooter in your building. Pre-planning on both sides – your church and law enforcement – means that both organizations will be better prepared should a shooting occur.

Provide police with information about your property and buildings. This information will allow them to act quickly and decisively should the situation dictate that their intervention is needed. You may provide police with photos of and keys to the facilities and information about how and where to shut off utilities.

And, if your church has received any threats – or if there are church members, volunteers, or community members who have acted suspiciously or have an active restraining order against them by church members – let police know right away.

You can consider local law enforcement to be part of your response team. They may also be helpful in training church members who will act as your internal response team.

## Inform church members

Inform church members that you are planning for the possibility of an active shooter attempting to gain entry to the church. Every church member can contribute to vigilance, and if they know who to approach if they see reason for concern, your organization's security will be strengthened.



# Active Shooter Situation: Run. Hide. Fight.®

Sometimes, you can do everything right, and the worst possible scenario still happens. If you are hosting an event and an active shooter situation occurs, this is the guidance from the Department of Homeland Security: Run. Hide. Fight.®



**Get out of the area where the shooting is occurring as quickly as you can.**

## During an active shooter situation

### Run

Get out of the area where the shooting is occurring as quickly as you can. Don't worry about your belongings; leave them behind. Don't try to be a hero, and don't look for the shooter. If you can help people escape along the way, do so, but get out of the area whether or not others are following you.

Once you have escaped, call emergency services to let them know as much as you can about the situation, including describing the shooter, where the shooter is on church property, and the weapons the shooter has/is using.

Tell others in the area what is going on in order to prevent them from entering the area where the shooter is.

### Hide

If you cannot escape, then hide. Stay in an area where the shooter cannot see you, and where you are covered if shots are fired in your direction, and remain quiet. This includes silencing your phone (including vibrate) and any other devices you may have with you. But, keep your phone on, so that you can communicate with law enforcement silently, if possible, either through text messaging or social media.

If you are in a different room than the shooter, blockade the doors and lock them, close window coverings, and turn the lights off. Though you may want to be near others at this harrowing time, it's better to hide separately because that makes it more difficult for the shooter.

Do not leave your hiding spot until law enforcement has told you that you may do so.



**If you cannot escape, then hide.**

## Fight

This option should be your last resort. The Department of Homeland Security says to “[c]ommit to your actions and act as aggressively as possible against the shooter.” Use whatever is on hand as weapons that you can throw to “distract and disarm the shooter.” Examples include chairs and fire extinguishers. If you must fight, “[b]e prepared to cause severe or lethal injury to the shooter.”



**The option to fight should be your last resort.**

## After an active shooter event

There can be a lot of confusion directly after the event, and armed law enforcement may do things like push people to the ground or use tear gas to keep people safe. It is also possible that they will not know exactly who or where the shooter is, initially.

Do what you can to keep confusion to a minimum by keeping your hands visible and empty, and taking care of yourself. Follow instructions and stay calm. Don't make sudden motions or approach officers; just do what they say to do.

Once the situation is under control, and you know that you are safe and uninjured, you may help others. If no medical emergency services are on hand, and you know First Aid and CPR, use your skills. It's also recommended that wounded people be put on their sides and kept warm, if they are unconscious.



### Avoid Deny Defend

*CRASE, the Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events, is a training course built on an Avoid Deny Defend® strategy for those caught in an active shooter situation. The idea behind Avoid Deny Defend is similar to Run. Hide. Fight.*

**Avoid:** Stay away from the shooter

**Deny:** Keep the shooter out of your location by denying access

**Defend:** If you are in a situation where you are directly threatened, you have the right to defend yourself and your life

*Run. Hide. Fight.® is a registered trademark by FEMA. For more information about the program, visit their [website](#).*



# Active Shooter Situation: Train and Prevent

Prevention of active shooter situations takes a lot of preparedness and planning. It's worth it to mitigate the risk of such a devastating event ever occurring at your church.

To prepare the physical space, consider the following:

- If an active shooter were to open fire in various areas in your facility, such as the sanctuary or the rec room, what are the evacuation routes that church members can take? Are there at least two evacuation routes from each area used for public events? Does everyone who participates in church activities know about all of the evacuation routes? It's a good idea to post evacuation routes in high-traffic locations.
- Involve law enforcement so they understand the layout of your facilities. Encourage them to be a part of your internal training, and allow them to use your facilities for their own training. And, put floor plans by entrances and exits.

## Recognize and prevent active shooter situations from developing

Around half the time, an active shooter is someone known to the community they've targeted. To help prevent an active shooter situation from developing, make sure that the church workplace is respectful and doesn't tolerate any kind of violence.

Those responsible for human resources activities should perform background checks as required by the Safe Sanctuaries® program and screen applicants rigorously by doing tasks such as checking

references. They should also create procedures for reporting any violent behavior or indicators of violent behavior among staff and volunteers.

A partial list of indicators of potential violent behavior includes:

- Increased alcohol use or drug use
- Withdrawal and unexplained absences
- Strong reactions or resistance to policy changes, violation of policy
- Outbursts and unstable responses, paranoia
- Talk of serious personal problems and past violent incidents
- Expressed empathy with violent offenders

And, before you distribute security codes, keys, or personal information about other employees or volunteers to new hires or volunteers, take them through a probationary period to determine if sharing those things is necessary or advisable.



**Post evacuation routes in high-traffic locations.**



## Prepare staff and volunteers for the possibility of violence

Those in leadership positions should have access to floor plans, keys, and security codes, as well as personnel lists and contact information, just in case those items are needed.

Crisis kits should also be created and stored throughout the premises. Radios, floor plans, emergency contact information, First Aid kits, and flashlights are items that could be included. Let employees and volunteers know about the existence and location of these kits.

You may already have trained your response team to remain calm and lock and barricade doors or help evacuate church members during an active shooter situation. If you do not have a population large enough to create a response team, you may consider appointing certain church leaders to act in their stead.



**Crisis kits should be created and stored throughout the premises.**

And, be sure to consider those with special needs or disabilities who may be a part of your community. It's necessary that they will be able to evacuate or shelter-in-place as safely as any church member.

Make sure that employees, volunteers, and church members know what to do after an active shooter situation has occurred. For example, you should select a few rendezvous points for individuals to check in and indicate their safety. They could also check in electronically, through text message or social media.



# How to Serve Your Community in an Area with Gang Activity

Your church may be located in an area that is afflicted with gang violence and dangerous criminal activity. If you're unsure whether gangs exist in your area, there are some ways to identify gang activity. For example, you may see members who dress similarly, or have certain tattoos that show their affiliation with a certain gang. You may also see graffiti done in a specific style or "tags" of the gang name or symbol written with permanent marker or spray-painted in areas where the gang is active.

## Church members at risk

Your younger church members may be at risk for joining a gang, or some of your church members or members in the surrounding community may already be active in a gang. To help keep youth away from gang activity, some organizations create programs or activities that give young people something to do after school and on weekends.

For example, you might have unused space that you can convert to a rec room with a video game system and pool table for teenagers. If you have a gym or outdoor recreation area, you can also open these areas at specific times for young people to come and play sports.

Make sure you also appoint a pair of adult supervisors (who have been background checked and have gone through a rigorous screening process) to be there when the teenagers have access to these spaces. This can be an extension of your regular youth ministry.



**Your younger church members may be at risk for joining a gang.**

An after-school tutoring program can be integrated with this program, so that young people can do their homework and then have some unstructured but supervised recreation time.

## Combat unemployment with job training

You can hold job training programs or community service opportunities that demonstrate that there are alternatives for gang activity. Because unemployment is often a factor that leads to gang membership, teaching young people practical skills that they can use in the work force helps them see another path and raises their self-esteem. Recruit volunteers to help with these programs.

Find out what kind of skills community members are interested in developing. For example, learning computer programming could be something that young people can see will have a direct effect

on their future lives. Make sure that these job skills programs aren't too dry and contain elements of fun; otherwise, it is unlikely that youth will attend.



**Teaching young people practical skills helps them see another path and raises their self-esteem.**

## Work with law enforcement

Communicate with your local law enforcement to find out what you can do to help. They may have suggestions that cater specifically to your area and the community members you serve. Law enforcement may help you with the programs you create, either by spreading the word about the activities or by helping you with ideas. They may also provide you with guidelines for creating safe spaces within your church facilities for young people and for the volunteers who serve them.

## How Domestic Abuse Affects Churches

Domestic abuse isn't something that is contained within the home of the abuser and the abused. This violent act can cross over into other places where the victim, the perpetrator – or both of them – spend time. In fact, according to statistics from 2016, about 35 percent of murders that occurred on church property were due to domestic violence or personal conflict.

## Protect the victims

It's important for churches to stand up for and protect victims of domestic abuse, regardless of whether there's a chance that aggressors may bring their violence onto church property.



**There will not always be visible bruises or other physical signs of abuse.**

Domestic abuse is dangerous, and a significant number of people experience it: One-third of women and one-fourth of men have experienced physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner, and for one-fourth of women and one-seventh of men, that violence has been severe.

Not every victim of domestic violence will approach church leaders

to tell them about their experiences. Many people experience shame or fear in this situation. There will not always be visible bruises or other physical signs of abuse. Pastors can act as leaders to demonstrate the church's negative stance on domestic violence by preaching against it or bringing in guest preachers to address the issue.

Although the sanctity of marriage is important, it is also crucial that church leaders create a safe space for abuse victims to be able to reach out for help. That can be done by reacting with empathy: believing the victim, not minimizing that person's experience, not blaming the victim, and recognizing that person's physical safety is of the utmost importance. That means not encouraging a victim of domestic abuse to stay in the abusive situation – even if that victim is married to his or her abuser.



**Domestic abuse can cross over into other places where the victim or the perpetrator spend time.**

If church leadership does become aware of a domestic violence situation within their church membership, they should protect the victim. This can be done by providing financial help or alternatives for housing, helping the victim file a restraining order, listening and supporting the victim, and more.

It's possible that pastors or other people on staff are mandated reporters in your state; consult with legal counsel to determine the laws in your area pertaining to domestic violence.

## Prepare for escalation

Part of your written plan for protecting your church members from experiencing violence or criminal activity should include the scenario of domestic abuse spillover. If a restraining order has been filed against a church member's partner, uphold it. For example, if the victim is attending services, and the abuser approaches the church entrance, have your safety or response team prohibit the abuser from entering the church.

There may also be domestic abuse that victims never bring to your attention. Watch for the way that couples in your church interact; you may not see overt signs of domestic abuse in some situations, but you may see threatening gestures or looks, harsh words, and even instances of physical intimidation that occur during church activities.

Train your security team to recognize and intervene when arguments break out between members of the congregation, especially if it seems that they are likely to turn violent. Violence can escalate quickly, so make sure that your safety team has been well-trained and knows what to do to defuse the situation.

# What to Do if You Receive a Bomb Threat

Troubled people will sometimes make bomb threats to public locations, including churches. Sometimes these threats are just that – threats – and there is no bomb. But, all bomb threats should be treated seriously. Here is the protocol to consider.

## If you receive a threat over the phone

Most bomb threats are made over the phone, but it is possible for threats to appear in other ways: by letter, email, or even graffiti, and in person. If you receive a bomb threat, stay calm, and immediately notify emergency services and local law enforcement.

If the threat is made over the phone, don't hang up, not even after the caller does. Whoever receives the call should signal another person to let them know what is going on, so that they can call 911. The person who answered the call should ask questions and keep the caller talking to extract as much information about the situation as possible. Write down what the caller says or, if permitted by state law, record the call.

What the caller says can help law enforcement to figure out the threat level of the situation. For example, if the caller offers only vague or implausible details, it is possible that they are making the threat in order to be disruptive. But, if the caller provides many specific and realistic details, then there is a higher risk that there may be a bomb on the premises.

## If you find a suspicious item

Because many people come in and out of a church, they may leave possessions behind inadvertently. But, you may find an item that seems out of place or deliberately hidden, which qualifies as a suspicious item. "Generally anything that is Hidden, Obviously suspicious, and not Typical (HOT) should be deemed suspicious," according to the Department of Homeland Security.



**If the bomb threat is made over the phone, don't hang up, not even after the caller does.**

Don't touch any suspicious item. Instead, immediately call emergency services or law enforcement. If the suspicious item is found at or around the same time your church receives a bomb threat, immediately evacuate the facilities and call 911. There may be multiple suspicious items – which could be bombs – placed around the premises, so be sure to evacuate all buildings, not just the building where the suspicious item was found.

## Give instructions to staff and volunteers

Staff and volunteers should know what to do in case they find a suspicious item or receive a bomb threat. Appoint a church leader – perhaps a member of the safety or response team – to act as



the point person during the activity that follows a threat or the discovery of a suspicious item. That person would be responsible for making sure that emergency services has been notified and that evacuation has been thoroughly carried out.



**You may find an item that seems out of place or deliberately hidden, which qualifies as a suspicious item.**

It is also important that the general population of church members know how to evacuate quickly and calmly, in case a threat ever occurs during church services. Run drills and adjust your evacuation plan as necessary. An evacuation plan can be used in any number of emergency situations.

## After you receive a threat

Follow whatever procedures that law enforcement recommends. Often, you will need to evacuate the buildings while authorities assess the situation and perform a search. Once the buildings have been evacuated, church leaders should keep those buildings on lockdown until they receive instructions from law enforcement.

Do not re-enter buildings unless law enforcement has indicated that they are clear of threats and safe.

## Understanding and Preventing Cyber Attacks

Hackers have a variety of motivations: Some want information, some want money. And, churches may have both of those things.

For example, in 2011, St. Ambrose Cathedral in Des Moines, Iowa, was the victim of a cyber attack. The hackers stole more than \$680 thousand that had been collected to help homeless and abused women.

Churches may keep member lists with addresses or employee lists with Social Security numbers. They may have personal data, including healthcare and financial information, on file for members. If someone obtains that information, it could potentially be misused. When data breaches occur, it can lead to internal losses or liability claims from members whose information has been stolen and misused or released.

When a church is the target of a cyber attack and subsequent data breach, it must take certain steps to comply with privacy laws. Anyone whose data is breached may have legal obligations to notify all the people who are affected and possibly create a call center and offer credit monitoring services, depending on the nature of the information that was leaked.

## Not just data breaches and stealing funds

Cyber crime is not just about hackers breaching an organization's system to find and release or use lists of information. Some hackers

will trick users into clicking on a link or opening an attachment that downloads malicious software onto their computers. The software locks users out and holds their files hostage until they pay the hacker. This is called ransomware. This situation happened at First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Michigan, in 2014.



**Ransomware locks users out and holds their files hostage until they pay the hacker.**

Users might also receive an official-looking email that asks them to provide something, such as a bank account number, only to learn that the email was a fake, and they gave away important information to a hacker, who then can steal their identity. Or, they might receive a desperate message from a church member who needs money wired to them immediately. After sending the money, they discover that the church member's email had been hacked, and the money was wired to a criminal instead.

Churches can be tempting targets for hackers because they may lack sophisticated security. As churches use the internet to reach more people, they are at greater risk. Most people believe that the rewards of using the internet for outreach and convenience are greater than the risks posed by hackers. But, it is important that organizations protect themselves, too.

## How to stay safe

Train anyone who uses church computers to make good choices. For example, everyone should know not to click on a link in an email from someone they don't know. Users should not provide personal information to someone they don't know either. Tell users about potential threats, such as ransomware, so they can be wary of suspicious requests.

It's a good idea to come up with some basic computer use policies, which could include users not writing down passwords on notes stuck to the monitor and choosing passwords that are difficult to hack. Do not give low-level users administrative access on their computers.



**Come up with some basic computer use policies, such as not writing down passwords on notes stuck to the monitor.**

And, if you haven't upgraded your computers or software in a while, then your organization is at greater risk. Consider purchasing new equipment and software regularly. Anti-virus and malware software are especially important to keep up-to-date. Install updates for both software and operating systems when they are made available. Back up your files and keep a copy of those files in the cloud or on a portable hard drive off-site. Protect your WiFi network by using a firewall.



Hackers are clever and continuously change tactics to access information and funds. Keep abreast of developments and threats, so you can share information with any people who use church computers.



## Crime and Dishonesty within the Church

It's a sad thing to contemplate, but some criminal activity comes from within the church walls: Church members and employees can sometimes be involved in criminal activity while working or worshipping at your church.



**Embezzlement or theft of church funds can create a crisis of confidence: Will funds donated be used for the intended purposes?**

That's why it's important for churches to build a plan that protects church contributions and other funds. This plan should include information on proper money-handling.

The existence of large amounts of cash collected during services may tempt persons facing financial difficulties to “borrow” some money. Embezzlement or theft of church funds can create a crisis of confidence: Will funds donated be used for the intended purposes?

Those handling church funds should be bonded, and background checks should be run on individuals entrusted with managing financial assets and church revenue.



## Keeping collection funds safe

The collection should never be left with just one person. Two people who do not have a prior relationship – and are not related – should be involved with each stage of the process. If the two individuals do have a relationship, it should be devoid of incentives for collusion. And, different people should be involved in each step of the process: collection, counting, stowing, and depositing.

One person should count while the other observes, and then the observer should recount while the original counter observes. The offering totals should be recorded in ink (or digitally) on a cashbook sheet and initialed and dated by both counters.

Funds should be kept in a safe and should not leave church premises unless they are being taken directly to the bank for deposit. If your church does not have a safe, use the “two-lock” method: Place the funds in a locked cabinet, drawer, or closet within a locked office. No one should ever take church funds home.

Deposit slips should be made out in duplicate following the bank’s instructions. Both individuals responsible for making the deposit should reconcile the cash and checks to the deposit slip and initial the copy of the deposit slip and duplicate tape of checks.

Finally, churches should count any cash or checks that come in the mail according to the [finance guidelines from Discipleship Ministries](#). There should always be two unrelated people present whenever money is being handled.

A pre-numbered duplicate receipt book should be used for money turned in or delivered. An original receipt should be given to the

person delivering the money and the duplicate should remain in the receipt book. This makes auditing a simpler process.

All accounts should be reconciled by someone who does not have check-signing authority, and all checks worth \$1,000 or more should be countersigned.



**Different people should be involved in each step of the money-handling process.**

## Audits of church financial books

Even if you follow all of the rules, it’s possible for embezzlement or theft from within by a director, trustee, staff member, or volunteer to occur. That’s why audits matter.

Some churches conduct their own internal audits; however, The Book of Discipline mandates an annual audit by an outside firm. This will raise the accountability level and help prevent potential illegal activity from going on over an extended period of time. The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) provides a [Local Church Audit Guide](#), which provides information about each step of the auditing process, from selecting an outside CPA to be your auditor to tax reporting requirements.

Fidelity Liability Insurance is designed to help protect your church from certain financial effects of dishonesty, fraud, and forgery both from those within your church community and people outside your church.



## Prevent Theft in the Church

Thieves can take many forms; they aren't just masked men breaking in after dark. Theft from churches may take place during broad daylight and familiar people may be the perpetrators.

Employees with money troubles, visitors, maintenance staff: anyone who has access to work areas may be a thief. In fact, "the U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that 75% of employees steal from the workplace and most do so repeatedly."

Thieves may do something such as taking an unattended purse or wallet, office supplies, or equipment, such as laptops. They may also commit identity theft if your church stores information, such as Social Security numbers, that would allow them to do so.



**Employees with money troubles, office visitors, maintenance staff: anyone who has access to work areas may be a thief.**

## Guidelines for stopping theft

1. Identify potential thieves before they have access to your information and valuables. Perform background checks on potential employees and anyone else who will be in the church unaccompanied. Check references, and screen applicants

thoroughly. Keep visitors to sensitive areas of the church, such as offices, to a minimum. People who do not ordinarily work in the office should only be there if invited by an employee for a specific reason. Do not leave visitors unattended.

2. Train your employees and volunteers to make good decisions. For example, if someone is working alone in the church at night to finish a project, that person should lock the doors and keep his or her belongings secured if they must leave for any reason.



### **Check references, and screen applicants thoroughly.**

3. Make sure that the physical space is secure. Can you lock doors? Who has keys to the different areas of the church? Do the keys to the office open other doors in the church and vice versa? Does everyone who has a key need a key? You may also determine that you need increased security, such as an alarm system or motion-activated surveillance cameras.

4. Make it more difficult for thieves to case your property. If someone walks around your building on a reconnaissance mission to identify targets and points of entry, what will they see? Pull blinds and lock up valuables, such as technology (iPads, etc.). If your church leaves its equipment in plain sight, a thief may think of it as an easy target.

5. Use extra security on valuables. Cable locks, metal shelves that lock and are secured to the ground, secondary deadbolts on rooms that house valuables: All of these can act as deterrents for thieves.

6. Don't provide cover for thieves. Keep landscaping neat and avoid planting large bushes, trees, or shrubbery close to the buildings. Make sure the outdoor areas surrounding the facilities are adequately lighted, and consider using an alarm system, which may or may not include camera surveillance. Shatter-proof glass on doors and windows on ground floors adds another layer of protection. Depending on the way your property is laid out, you may also consider fencing in your buildings.

Some thieves think of churches as easy marks for theft. They don't expect churches to have policies or physical safeguards in place that will prevent theft. Defy their expectations, and your people and property will be safer.



# Prevent Copper and Aluminum Theft

Why do thieves want copper and aluminum? Scrap metal can be worth money. Many jurisdictions are now attempting to limit scrap metal sales to make copper and aluminum less of a target for thieves.

In the meantime, your air conditioning units, ventilation systems, heaters, gutters, electrical wiring, and pipes may be at risk, particularly if you control buildings that seem to be (or are) vacant. Thieves may get a couple of hundred dollars for taking your scrap metal – and it could cost you thousands of dollars to replace or repair what was stolen.

## How to protect your church property

Many of the precautions to consider to help prevent copper and aluminum theft are useful in preventing any kind of theft:

- Increase lighting, especially around HVAC systems or any areas that are under construction
- Direct security lighting away from the building because that draws attention to the lighting instead of the building
- Consider the use of security cameras near system sites and construction areas
- Install alarm systems, cages, or fencing around and over HVAC systems
- Disguise copper by using PVC piping shells

- Consider replacing copper where you can, such as gutters that could be made of galvanized steel
- Secure rooftop access, so thieves will not have the ability to work unseen
- Work with local authorities by reporting any oddities that you may witness
- Have local authorities drive by your church more often if copper and aluminum thefts are happening regularly in your neighborhood
- Educate neighbors and your congregation about suspicious activity, cars, or people in the area



**Thieves may get a couple of hundred dollars for taking your scrap metal – and it could cost you thousands of dollars to replace or repair what was stolen.**

- Keep up with vacant buildings' landscaping, add external lighting, and fence off areas that seem that they could become an area where people loiter
- Patrol past or check on vacant buildings regularly
- Walk around all buildings on your church campus and make note of anything that seems off, which could include damage to doors or window frames or to fencing around HVAC systems
- Remove graffiti right away because it could be evidence of gang activity

- Don't store anything of value outside the main buildings on your property
- If you are hit by copper or aluminum theft, don't let your guard down; thieves will sometimes target the same property multiple times



**Secure rooftop access, so thieves will not have the ability to work unseen.**

It's a lot less expensive to manage the risk around copper and aluminum theft than it is to deal with the fallout. Taking a few steps toward mitigating risk could discourage thieves and give you peace of mind.



## Vandalism and Vacant Buildings

We discussed how vacant buildings can be a target for copper and aluminum theft. Other kinds of vandalism and theft may also occur at vacant or unoccupied buildings, especially if owners don't take precautions to mitigate risk. Because of that, insurance policies often reduce or eliminate coverage when a building has been vacant (and/or unoccupied) for a designated time period, such as 45 or 60 days.

Vandalism that churches may experience includes graffiti, broken windows or equipment – even arson or squatters. Experiencing vandalism is troublesome because it requires repairs, which can be costly. Worse, vandalism left unchecked could mean much more than costly repairs. Left unrepaired, evidence of vandalism can increase crime in your neighborhood, decrease your property value, or affect your church's reputation.



**Vandalism left unchecked could mean much more than costly repairs.**

## Improve security and add deterrents

Walk the perimeter of your buildings during daylight and at night to identify places that could be targets for vandals. For example,

are your stained glass windows protected by screening or plastic sheeting? Is there adequate lighting in all areas? Is your landscaping kept tidy and trimmed so that it cannot provide a screen for someone attempting to deface or damage your property? Do you use unbreakable security glass?



**One of the goals – of graffiti especially – is for the damage to be seen by others.**

If it appears as though it is difficult to get onto your property unseen, that will deter vandals. Lighting and security alarms and cameras work in the same way. You may also consider hanging signs or plaques that indicate that there are cameras and alarms in place.

And, if vandalism does occur, immediately repair, replace, or paint over the work of the vandal; one of the goals – of graffiti especially – is for the damage to be seen by others. If you see vandalism in action, report it right away because vandalism is a crime.

If vandalism is a problem in your neighborhood at large, consider organizing an event for clean-up. Church members could spend an afternoon painting over graffiti, sweeping up broken glass, or making small repairs. This could become a regular monthly event that sends a signal that vandalism isn't tolerated in your area.

## Be mindful of vacant building security

If your church does have a vacant building – even if it's only temporarily vacant due to a construction project – be extra mindful of security.

Consider installing temporary fencing to make it more difficult for vandals to access the building and any construction equipment that may be stored on site. Keep exterior lights on at night and set up timers for interior lights to give the illusion that the building is occupied. Keep up landscaping and continue to use your security alarm and camera systems. Drive by and check on the property regularly. Communicate that the building is vacant with local authorities and request that they send patrols more frequently while it is unoccupied.

If it is clear that someone is looking after your property, vandals will be less likely to strike. Ordinarily, they are looking for easy targets, so they can do damage quickly and get away without impediment.



# Additional Resources for Churches

In this book, we have outlined a number of different scenarios your church community could experience, and we have offered some suggestions for how to prepare and deal with these possibilities. We have attempted to provide a wide array of scenarios and guidelines, but there are many other resources that churches can use to build or bolster their crime prevention plans.

Here are some of those resources:

**Resources to Protect Your House of Worship:** This guide from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) gives churches information about protecting faith-based venues, as well as resources from federal partners. This page includes webinars, trainings, and guidelines for testing your emergency plans.

**Safety and Security Assessment Pack:** This packet is available for a small fee from Building Church Leaders. It can help you determine just how secure your church property is and identify and strengthen weak points.

**Crime Prevention for Houses of Worship:** This book will help you develop awareness and formulate a response to crime, as well as helping you to determine how you can prevent it.

**An Overview of the Guide for Developing High-quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship:** This webinar features a number of presenters with expertise in a wide variety of areas.

**Developing High Quality Emergency Operation Plans for Houses of Worship:** This FEMA document “introduces houses of worship to a new approach to planning.”

**Active Shooter: What You Can Do:** This online course from FEMA will help participants recognize potential violence indicators and know what to do in case of an active shooter incident.

**Homeland Security Active Shooter Preparedness:** This resource provides booklets, pamphlets, posters, pocket cards, and more, all dealing with active shooter preparedness.

**How to Prepare for and Respond During and After an Active Shooter Incident:** This FEMA brochure gives a concise and detailed account of how to prepare for and deal with active shooters.

**Run. Hide. Fight.®:** This video, created by the City of Houston, demonstrates how to survive an active shooter event.

**Protecting your Church from Crime and Violence:** This book contains chapters written by experts that will assist you in such activities as identifying risks, choosing security systems, and educating your congregation.

# References

The following references, in addition to internal source materials and those sources linked to and quoted from in this text, were used in the creation of this e-book.

Ways to Take Action and Step up Security: “10 Action Steps Every Church Should Consider Regarding Security.” American Pastors Network

When an Open Door Lets in Danger: “Drawing the Line on Danger.” Christianity Today International

Why Your Church Needs a Safety Ministry:

- “7 Reasons Your Church Needs a Safety and Security Team.” Church Leaders
- “The Dream Team: Establishing a Church Safety Committee.” ACS Technologies

Securing Your House of Worship: “Recommended Best Practices for Securing Houses of Worship around the World for People of All Faiths.” Houses of Worship Committee

10 Things Churches Can Do to Protect their People from Violence:

- “4 Effective Methods to Prepare for Gun Violence at Church.” Christianity Today
- “Churches and Gun Violence: 7 Practical Preparation Tips.” Ministry Matters
- “5 Ways to Protect your Church.” Christianity Today

Preparing a Church Emergency Plan:

- “Preparing a Church Emergency Plan.” United Methodist Insurance
- “Developing High Quality Emergency Operation Plans for Houses of Worship.” FEMA

Active Shooter Situation: Run. Hide. Fight.®:

- “Active Shooter.” Ready.gov
- “Active Shooter.” Ready Navy
- “Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE) Train the Trainer Course.” Alerrt

Active Shooter Situation: Train and Prevent: “Active Shooter: How to Respond.” Department of Homeland Security

How to Serve Your Community in an Area with Gang Activity:

- “Gang Violence: How the Church Can Help.” Huffington Post
- “6 Ways Christians Can Help Stop Serious Youth Violence.” Premier Gospel
- “Anti-gang Strategies.” National Institute of Justice
- “Understanding and Avoiding Gangs.” DC Metropolitan Police Department

How Domestic Abuse Affects Churches:

- “Why Domestic Violence in the Home Endangers Your Church.” Christianity Today
- “What Leaders Can Learn from Violent Incidents at Churches.” Christianity Today



## What to Do if You Receive a Bomb Threat:

- [“Department of Justice Bomb Threat Guidance,”](#) Department of Homeland Security
- [“What to Do – Bomb Threat,”](#) Department of Homeland Security

## Understanding and Preventing Cyber Attacks:

- [“Five Cybersecurity Measures Not-for-Profits Should Take Now,”](#) Lane Gorman Trubitt
- [“Cybersecurity,”](#) Ready.gov
- [“How to Protect your Computer,”](#) FBI.gov

## Crime and Dishonesty within the Church: [“Local Church Audit Guide,”](#) General Council on Finance and Administration

## Prevent Theft in Church Workplaces and Schools:

- [“How to Prevent Office Theft,”](#) Buildings.com
- [“Preventing Theft in School Environments,”](#) Markel

## Prevent Copper and Aluminum Theft: [“4 Prevention Measures for Reducing Theft at Vacant Properties,”](#) Lockton

## Vandalism and Vacant Buildings:

- [“10 Steps to Prevent Vandalism,”](#) Trust Security and Fire Watch
- [“Preventing Vandalism,”](#) Los Angeles Police Department
- [“3 Ways to Protect Against Vandalism,”](#) Buildings.com

# Glossary

**Alarm/security system:** A system that protects your property when no one is on the premises

**Arson:** When an individual or individuals purposely sets a fire to cause damage to property

**Audits:** When someone outside of an organization checks over the financial records to ensure there are no anomalies, discrepancies, or theft

**Avoid Deny Defend®:** Training course created by the Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events

**Background checks:** Searches into individuals’ past history performed before they take on responsible positions at an organization

**Community/regional events:** Events that happen within your organization’s vicinity that may not impact you directly

**Conflict resolution:** A course of action that de-escalates conflict so that the parties involved can come to a peaceful resolution

**Criminal activity preparedness plan:** A comprehensive written plan created by an organization that includes plans for each possible criminal scenario that could occur on or around their premises

**Cyber crime:** Crime committed over the internet, such as identity, data, or money theft

**Domestic violence:** Violence that occurs within the home or between two people who are intimately involved

**Drills:** Practice for disaster-related scenarios, such as evacuation

**Embezzlement:** When an individual who is associated with an organization takes funds intended for use within the organization

**Emergency preparedness plan:** A comprehensive written plan created by an organization that includes plans for each possible emergency scenario, including weather-related disasters

**Evaluation:** When a group of people assesses a process or procedure to determine its efficacy

**Gang violence:** Violence committed by people associated with a criminal group

**Internal events:** Events that happen either at your organization or to your people

**Mandated reporter:** Individuals who are legally required to report suspected abuse to authorities

**Money-handling:** Process of fund intake in an organization

**National events:** Events that happen on a national scale, such as a terrorist attack

**Open door policy:** When an organization leaves its doors open for members of the organization and the community to be able to use their space

**Points of entry:** Any window, door, or other way in which someone might enter a building

**Professional security:** A trained individual or team who are paid by an organization to provide security

**Response team:** An internal team created to respond to criminal activity

**Risk mitigation:** A process by which risks are identified and changes are made to minimize them

**Run. Hide. Fight.®:** Procedure created by the Department of Homeland Security for response during an active shooter situation

**Safety team:** An internal team created to prepare for emergency situations and mitigate risk

**Security team:** A team trained to provide security in order to prevent or respond to emergency criminal situations

**Signage and labeling:** Any indication that helps individuals to better identify places or items

**Suspicious items:** A hidden item that is not typically found on an organization's premises

**Vandalism:** When an individual purposely damages property

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