

# Protecting Our Parishes

## Security and Theft Deterrent – An Emerging Issue Facing the Church

Today, we continue to see an increase in theft and vandalism at our churches. Almost weekly, we discover that another theft or vandalism has occurred. Church security issues are becoming a reality for our parishes. Church properties are often a target of crime for many reasons, with the crime generally occurring when church buildings are unoccupied and/or unprotected. Churches are oftentimes open to the general public for religious worship all day long, thus allowing unsupervised access to the facilities on our church property.



It is vital that we secure our valuables and implement recommended practices contained herein to deter theft and vandalism.

Security begins with educating and informing our parishes of the various theft deterrent practices we may incorporate to protect our financial assets in order to deliver our religious services. Therefore, we have listed some areas to consider for protecting your parish.

### General Awareness Training

It is essential for your parish employees and staff to become familiar with theft and vandalism deterrent strategies that must be employed to fight crime. There are many things each of us can do to prevent crime so as not to become a victim. Training for your parish staff is available free of charge by contacting your local Police Crime Prevention Division.



### Parking Lot Crime Deterrent

Church parking lots are an easy target for thieves. Due simply to our parking lot design, easy in and easy out, is a target for criminal elements. An educational program can be easily employed, as discussed above, to minimize parking lot crimes. Personnel must be made aware that leaving valuables in their car, in plain view, is an invitation to criminals. All items should be secured and out of view from the passer-by. Things such as money, GPS systems, cell phones, packages, purses, etc., must be removed. Even mounting hardware for GPS systems and cell phones can be an invitation to criminals that a device might be hidden within the car.

A well-lighted parking lot is, in itself, a crime prevention method. Personnel working after hours should be aware of their surroundings during the nighttime. Personnel working alone after hours should be minimized. When leaving the building after hours, use the buddy system. If you feel unsafe, return to the building and call the police. They will be happy to escort you to your vehicle. It is always best to be overly cautious than to become a victim of crime.

### Building Security Lighting

One of the best crime deterrents is a well-lighted building at night. Lighting around entrances and other facility access routes is essential in crime prevention. Lighting should be bright enough so you can easily recognize a person from 15 feet away. Other areas must be lighted well-enough so a person can be seen from a nearby road.



### Intrusion Alarm System

Intrusion alarms, commonly referred to as burglar alarms, are recommended for installation in churches and schools. Intrusion alarms complement basic security measures in deterring theft and burglary. Infrared detection systems are oftentimes a good system to consider when installing security equipment. Intrusion alarms should be installed in the entrances/exits, parish hall, rectory, schools, sacristy and other areas where valuables are stored. There are many types of alarm systems and services that can be tailored to your specific needs and budget. You can contact a locally recognized alarm company such as ADT, or any other established security company. These companies usually offer a no-obligation, risk-assessment evaluation of your parish.

### Key Control Program

Key control is critical to the overall security of your church. Key control programs consist of establishing who has access to your church and to what buildings and offices they have access. It is important that a key control program be used to complement intrusion (burglar) alarm systems and video surveillance systems, where appropriate.



Use restricted keys, which are provided through a locksmith and prevent unauthorized duplication. Restricted keys are of such a design that they cannot be duplicated without special manufacturer's assignment and authorization.



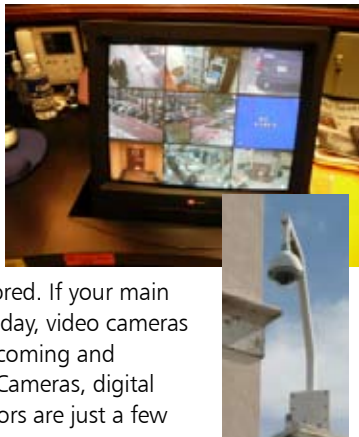
Separate the business office, petty cash, records, and computer areas through use of separate locks; keyed differently from the open access areas. Minimize the number of master keys issued. Establish a sign-in and sign-out key control log.

Cipher (combination) locks and key card locks can provide added security and access control within your facilities.



## Video Surveillance Equipment

Video systems can help deter theft and vandalism of church property and can provide local police departments with important evidence that can be used to apprehend criminals. Video cameras can be installed on the exterior of the church property and can record activities in various areas where valuables are kept or stored. If your main entry doors are unlocked during the day, video cameras can also be used to monitor people coming and going in the vicinity of those doors. Cameras, digital video recorders, software and monitors are just a few components available.



Video surveillance systems can be tailored to your specific needs and budget. Video cameras and buzzer locks are highly recommended for small parishes that have only one receptionist or secretary working alone.

## Property Control



A property control program includes a list of all tangible property, such as valuables paintings, sculptures, silver platters, and religious statues. In addition, this inventory would include all audio and video equipment, as well as all computer systems. The inventory must list all items, including make, model and serial numbers.

More importantly, each piece of equipment must be etched with your name, or labeled with tamper-proof labels, identifying the equipment as belonging to your parish. In addition, it is a good practice to photograph valuables. Photos will greatly assist the police in identifying your property if a theft should occur.

## Environmental Design

Environmental design can be as easy as trimming bushes and shrubs around your facilities to a height of four feet, minimizing hiding places for would-be criminals, to engineering design of new churches that takes into account security by design. Other environmental designs to consider:



- Use one-inch dead bolt locks on exterior doors and inside doors that require a higher level of security.
- Door hinges must be located on the interior side of doors.
- Make sure that doors fit snugly and that lock plates are installed so the dead bolt is inaccessible.

- Do not have easy access to roofs, such as climbable gates and fences.
- Windows should have good quality locks and, if possible, burglar resistant glass or hurricane-rated glass.
- Safeguard air conditioning systems and copper components by enclosing with a fence and installing security lighting.
- Never leave spare keys hidden outside of buildings.
- Maintain a good quality safe that is securely bolted to the floor or other building structure.

## The Human Element

The human elements, our people, play an integral role in securing our parishes. All the financial investment in technology, burglar (intrusion) alarms, door locks and other security devices become worthless if the doors are left open or the alarms are disabled. The human element is the most critical protection layer of our church. We rely on our parishioners and employees to support our security efforts and ask each person to consider the following:

- Security, in general, is the responsibility of all employees and volunteers of the Church.
- The physical security can benefit the most from the many eyes and ears of all employees and volunteers. Be vigilant and report anything unusual.
- Do not let people in the door that do not have a visitor's pass or are unknown to you. Simply provide directions to the person as to the proper entrance.
- Employees must exercise extra precautions when going on break, lunch, or leaving for the day, since this is time when our attention is diverted on other matters and we may leave the door open or allow unauthorized entry to unknown persons.
- Contractors and vendors should have some type of pass and identification. Even if they have been there before, employees should not assume that the contractor will be back.
- If your Church has burglar alarms, ensure they are routinely used and tested. NEVER DISARM BURGLAR ALARMS. For problems, contact the vendor to repair.
- If your Church has a video surveillance system it must be tested and inspected on a routine bases. The surveillance system must be recording the proper date and time stamp. Inspect for camera positions daily.
- Make sure all doors and windows are locked when leaving the facility for the day.
- Designate someone to be responsible for securing the facilities and conducting a walk-through in the specified area.

**Security is only good as the human element involved.**

