

Security Systems: Do They Really Deter Crime?

Security systems have recently become more accessible to the average consumer—and therefore to churches, schools, and other Episcopal institutions of any size in any location. Some offer do-it-yourself installation options that cut down on expense. Most give users the ability to select features, such as security cameras, motion lights, glass-break sensors, and more.

Leaders of Episcopal institutions understand how important it is to protect their property and the people who are a part of their community. Will having a security system in place assist in those efforts?

Target Selection by Criminals

According to a University of North Carolina at Charlotte Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology survey of burglars <https://airef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BurglarSurveyStudyFinalReport.pdf>, alarms make a significant difference in target selection.

The survey found that “...indicators of increased security (alarm signs, alarms,...and outdoor cameras or other surveillance equipment) was considered by most burglars when selecting a target,” with “[a]bout 60% of the burglars indicat[ing] that the presence of an alarm would cause them to seek an alternative target altogether.”

If your institution is located in an isolated or high-crime area, or if there have been recent signs of increased criminal activity (such as vandalism), a security system may help to deter criminal activity on your property.

Make it obvious that your church property has a security system installed in order to steer criminals away. Put up signs that state that an alarm system and/or security camera is in use. If you opt to install outdoor cameras, make them visible. Hidden cameras do not communicate to criminals that they are being recorded.

Consider How Criminals Think

Take a walk around your facilities. As you do, put yourself in a criminal’s mindset by looking for hiding places, ways to escape, proximity of other people and buildings, and easy points of entry—all of which are factors in target selection.

Think about consulting with an expert, such as a representative from your local police department, who can point out weak points in your property security. This will help you determine which security system components—if any—are necessary for your church.

Be mindful about sharing security system information with community members. Only give disarm passcodes to leaders and those who need to access the building at odd times when leaders may not be present. Change the passcode regularly.

Local Regulations and Fees

Your local government may have regulations associated with security systems. For example, in some areas, you may be required to register your alarm system with your police department and pay an annual fee.

You may also discover that your local police department charges a penalty fee for false alarms. You may be required to pay this fee after a certain number of false alarms have occurred, or after every false alarm; it depends on your local laws.

A security system may dissuade criminals from targeting your property. Do your homework to figure out what you need and what local laws require—and keep your property and people safer in the process.