

Vandalism: Prevent and Eradicate It

You want your church to be a vibrant part of your community and a source of pride—from its congregation to its physical appearance. So protecting your property from vandals is part of maintaining it.

Maybe your church is located in an area where graffiti and broken windows are all too common. Or perhaps you are in a neighborhood where vandalism is rare. Even if no one has ever defaced any part of your building, it can happen anytime and anywhere, whether you are in an urban or a rural setting, an affluent or economically-challenged region.

The good news is that there are steps you can take to diminish the risk of vandalism:

- Keep landscaping neat and trimmed and avoid planting large bushes or shrubs that could serve as cover next to doors or windows.
- Set up outdoor lighting and point it away from buildings to make it easy to spot vandals and intruders.
- Lock gates, doors, and windows when few people are on the property.
- Place protective screens over valuable stained glass windows.
- Consider setting up a security system with motion-activated cameras.

Take Care of Damage Immediately

These recommendations will help you lower your risk of vandalism, theft, and other types of crime. But unfortunately, no matter how carefully you follow them, someone could still easily damage your property.

If an act of vandalism does occur, remove or repair the damage right away. Some people think it's pointless to remove spray paint or make other nonessential repairs when the problems might recur. Taking immediate action, however, demonstrates that vandalism won't be tolerated. You may have to repeat the repair and clean-up process a few times, but the message will likely sink in, and the vandals will usually move on.

Cleaning up or repairing damage also discourages other criminal activity, such as break-ins and theft. When people see that your property is well kept – and that security measures are in place – they are less likely to risk committing criminal acts. It's also a good idea to file a police report; after all, vandalism is a crime. Call in a report to your insurance company as well.

Get Involved in the Community

If vandalism happens at your church, it might be an indication of a widespread issue. Consider organizing a small group of volunteers to increase community awareness and pride by cleaning up graffiti and picking up litter in other parts of your neighborhood.

Vandalism can be dispiriting to a community, not to mention a nuisance to cope with, but following these recommendations can decrease the likelihood of your having to deal with it at your church.