

From the Claims Desk: Thwarting Church Thieves

Maybe it's their inclination to see the good in human nature, but many church leaders believe that sacred spaces are less likely targets for theft. Unfortunately, that level of trust may make those spaces especially vulnerable.

Sam Carucci, Vice President, Claims, for the Church Insurance Companies, says a theft even happened in his own church recently. "The thief broke through a locked basement window," he reports.

Sam offers the following actions church leaders can take to lower the risk of theft:

1. **Lock away portable valuables.** "Make sure valuable items that can be easily carried are locked up or put away in places that aren't easily accessible," Sam advises. "Most thieves don't linger and look for valuables. They grab what they can and get out quickly."
2. **Be aware of a thief's process.** Sam is not suggesting that clerics profile new visitors to the church, but, he says, "people do case the location to see what could be taken, and the best ways to enter and exit quickly. So keep an eye out for unfamiliar people behaving suspiciously."

If you think that someone might be planning a theft, step up your walk-throughs throughout your property. You might also consider contacting law enforcement to report your concerns, and to request more-frequent patrols past your property.

3. **Make a schedule for open hours.** Churches often leave their doors open during the week so people can come in to pray and contemplate. But churches may be fully staffed only during weekend services, thereby leaving the building's contents unsecured the rest of the week.

Think about how your organization can best strike a balance between an open-door policy and allowing visitors to enter the church only during specified times. Discover the most popular visiting times by putting out a guest book and checking it at intervals. You may decide to lock the church at times when fewer (or no) people are likely to visit.

4. **Put in place a "nosy neighbor" policy.** Have staff or volunteers on site whenever the church is open. Encourage them to walk around the facilities to keep an eye out for any odd behavior or situations that seem amiss. "Constant monitoring may sound like an expense, but having someone there can prevent both property damage and theft," Sam says.
5. **Have boundaries.** Thieves may pass themselves off as participants in church events, and then wander off to pilfer church valuables. Make sure that groups using your space stay in approved areas.
6. **Price surveillance options.** Not every church can afford **surveillance cameras**, but Sam states that they can be helpful—both in terms of theft deterrence and helping authorities identify and capture the perpetrators if a theft does occur.

What to Do If Something Happens

Following these suggestions may decrease the likelihood that your religious organization will be the target of a theft. But no matter how careful you are, theft can still happen.

Should a theft occur at your organization, call local authorities and Church Insurance <https://www.cpg.org/global/about-us/about-cpg/church-insurance> right away. A Church Insurance representative will help guide you through the claims process.